



Cultivating the aptitudes of vacation ownership management: A competency domain cluster analysis



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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that competencies – collections of knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes – are necessary for organizational success. Yet, not all organizations' successes are reliant on a single set of defined competencies and competencies differ among disciplines, organizations, and industries. Research indicates that the competencies required of vacation ownership management may differ from the traditional lodging segment due to the complexities of the vacation ownership product. Therefore, this study provides a perspective of vacation ownership competency domain clusters. Analyzing data gathered from 331 property-level vacation ownership managers identified consistent competency domain clusters and revealed that the importance and frequency of use of each competency domain cluster varies by type of resort. Further, a surprising result was the discovery of a lack of industry certification among the respondents. This research extends management competency theory to another segment of the hospitality industry and provides practical implications for managers in the vacation ownership segment.

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1. Introduction

The vacation ownership industry remains an underexplored yet significant industry, given its global economic impact of approximately \$118 billion (ARDA International Foundation, 2012); \$70 billion in the United States alone (ARDA, 2014). The vacation ownership industry in the United States is composed of 8.7 million vacation intervals owned by families and individuals from all over the world. As of 2014, there were 1555 vacation ownership resorts in the United States, representing 274,650 accommodations units (Ernst and Young, 2015); however, a content analysis of academic research into the vacation ownership industry revealed that only 92 articles focused on vacation ownership issues (Gregory and Weinland, 2016).

The vacation ownership industry presents unique opportunities for the study of organization and management. For example, in purchasing a vacation ownership interval, buyers acquire either a deeded interest or a right to use interest for real property, which results in a vacation ownership interval consisting of elements of both real estate developments and traditional lodging properties. As a result, management personnel require a blending of

competencies of those normally associated with residential property management and with the service-delivery aspects of hospitality management. Of the 92 articles on vacation ownerships mentioned above, only three concern the management competencies required of vacation ownership managers (Lawton et al., 1998; Upchurch and Gruber, 2002; Woods, 2001). Consequently, the management competencies required for success in the dual-competency-based vacation ownership industry was the focus of this research.

Identification and prioritization of management competencies are of vital importance because competencies can be used to predict organizational success (Homer, 2001; Pickett, 1998). As a result, organizations use competencies in selecting employees to hire or promote and base training programs on desired-competency development (Homer, 2001), trade associations use competencies in developing criteria for industry certifications and designations (Koenigsfeld et al., 2011), and educators use competencies in curriculum development (LeBruto and Murray, 1994). The value of this research is that it extends the existing knowledge concerning management competency theory to an underexplored yet significant and growing industry segment.

The most current analysis of the vacation ownership industry revealed that the lack of trained staff and senior executive development programs was considered a major threat to the future of the industry (Stringam, 2010). This confirmed conclusions drawn from a satisfaction survey of Australian vacation ownership

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owners that found that a lack of management competencies resulted in lower satisfaction ratings than expected (Lawton et al., 1998). Several researchers (Gehrels, 2007; Ipe, 2008; Kay and Russette, 2000; Lashley, 2009; Navickiene and Buciniene, 2007; Tas et al., 1996; Ricci, 2010; Tesone and Ricci, 2005; Tsai et al., 2006; Weber et al., 2009) have explored competencies required of managers in the larger hospitality industry without coming to consensus on a set of competencies required for hospitality management. Fewer (Blayney, 2009; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Ricci and Kaufman, 2007; Yang and Fu, 2009) have examined the management competencies required of the lodging segment of which the vacation ownership industry is a subset (Upchurch and Gruber, 2002). Yet none has developed a specific competency model for vacation ownership managers.

2. Theory

2.1. Management competencies

The literature does not agree on a single definition of management competence (Whiddett and Hollyforde, 2003). Instead, various researchers (Boyatzis, 1982; Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006; Gale, 2004; McClelland and Boyatzis, 1982; Northouse, 2004; Parry, 1996; White, 1959) have proposed various interpretations concerning what elements of behavior they feel are included in the concept. White (1959) coined the term *competence*, defining it as a “gathering of various kinds of behavior. . . all of which have to do with effective interaction with the environment” (p. 317).

Researchers (Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland and Boyatzis, 1982) used the term to discuss the collection of individual knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes necessary for organizational success. Parry (1996) treated competencies as individual skills, attitudes, and knowledge, but he limited competencies only to those which measurably affect job performance. Further, Parry asserted that individual managers may improve their performance through training and development programs intended to increase competence when compared to established standards for a specific position with a specific organization (Parry, 1996). Northouse (2004) embraced a more skills-based definition, suggesting that personality traits and attitudes fall outside the realm of competencies. While Boyatzis and McClelland, Northouse, and Parry agreed that competencies are a collection of individual traits, they each had a different interpretation of what Ipe (2008) termed *soft-skills*, which she defined as “customer focus and people skills” (p. 8).

Prahalad and Hamel (1990) considered the collective competencies needed within an organization and coined the phrase *core competencies*, suggesting that unique combinations of competencies aid organizational and personal success. In their definition, a *competency* is a collection of associated skills as opposed to being individual elements. This coincides with Gale (2004), who considered competencies to include “a holistic concept involving the integration of attitudes, skills, knowledge, performance, and quality of application” (p. 145). Ipe (2008) used the phrase *core competencies*; however, she treated competencies as individual elements and distinguished the most important competencies from less important ones by referring to the major competencies as being *core competencies*. Competencies have also been defined as the link between personnel development, e-learning, and knowledge sharing within organizations (Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006). This definition supports a more collective view of competencies.

In 2013, three different perspectives concerning competencies emerged within the literature: competencies as characteristics of individual workers, competencies as characteristics of the interactions between individuals within an organization, and competencies as a link between organizational needs and education

(Garavan and McGuire, 2001; Kalargyrou and Woods, 2011). While these three perspectives are closely linked, this research adopts the common theme that a competency is a characteristic of an individual manager, and is any individual element of knowledge, skill, ability, attitude, or personality trait that affects job performance. This research relies on literature to identify the specific competencies required of managers within the hospitality and lodging industries, and further bundled competencies into domain clusters for the purpose of surveying managers. Therefore, competency theory must be examined.

2.2. Competency theory

The theory concerning management competencies began in the area of behavioral psychology and scientific management before the term *competency* was coined. Taylor (1911), commonly considered the father of scientific management (Rothwell and Lindholm, 1999), and Henri Fayol, a contemporary of Taylor, established the foundation of competency theory built upon by later researchers (Boyatzis, 1982; Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006; Gale, 2004; Katz, 1955; McClelland and Boyatzis, 1982; Northouse, 2004; Parry, 1996; Sandwith, 1993; White, 1959). However, Katz (1955) first focused on the specific skills that supervisors demonstrate in completing their responsibilities and identified three distinct domains of skills that influence a supervisor’s ability to supervise effectively: the technical domain, the administrative domain, and the conceptual domain. Competency domains link similar tasks together (Pickett, 1998), allowing a more orderly use of specific competencies.

Technical competencies relate to the vocational activities required in specific organizations (Meyer and Semark, 1996). For example, a supervisor in a bakery might be required to have the specific skills associated with the proper operation of the company’s ovens. This specific skill would be different for a supervisor in a different bakery with a different type of oven. Administrative skills are associated with the human aspects of leading a group of employees, as well as the skills associated with being a member of a larger organization wherein one is led by others (Katz, 1955). The administrative domain includes skills associated with communication, motivation, cultural differences, and teamwork (Hofrichter and Spencer, 1996). The conceptual domain includes the skills associated with developing strategies for organizational success and the decision making skills associated with following those strategies (Katz, 1955).

Building on the work of Katz, Boyatzis’ (1982) sought to identify the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that would predict success in specific roles of management competency. This research supported the earlier work by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980), who reported that multiple levels of success are achieved in competency development. However, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) proposed a five-level scale for measuring competence: novice, experienced beginner, practitioner, knowledgeable practitioner, and expert. This suggested that an individual develops each competency in a progressive manner (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1980). Boyatzis (1982) used a two-tiered approach: threshold and superior, indicating that “a threshold competency is a person’s generic knowledge, motive, trait, self-image, social role, or skill which is essential to performing a job, but is not causally related to superior job performance” (p. 23). Superior competencies were those additional competencies that enabled a worker to excel (Boyatzis, 1982).

Beginning in the mid-1980s, researchers in the industry used the conclusions drawn from competency studies for “the basis for decisions about hiring, training, promotions, and other human resource issues” (Parry, 1996, p. 48). This led to the identification of different types of competencies. For example, managerial competencies related specifically to those competencies that resulted

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