An Analysis of Competency's Connotations and Training Needs Assessment for Travel Agent Managers in Taiwan

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Abstract

This study is based on Chang & Chen's (2023) study of 7 job duties, 46 knowledge (K), 46 skills (S), and 11 attitudes (A) that a travel manager should have. To further explore the sequence of training needs of travel managers, this study used a questionnaire survey to investigate the training needs of 27 supervisors who have been working in the travel industry for more than 20 years and analyzed the results using the IPA method. The study results showed that travel managers' most important job responsibility was risk management, the most frequently used competency was business management, and their priority training need was "quality customer service enhancement". Among them, the most important knowledge Competency and the highest frequency of use are "being able to develop tourism product features"; the most important skills competency is "being able to discuss with colleagues about the key needs of traveler services", and the highest frequency of use is "exploring common traveler service problem"; the most important attitude competency and the highest frequency of use are "being active and positive", and the highest training demand is "improving customer service quality". The most important and frequently used competency is the "proactive approach". Prioritize training needs skills such as "commission and markup structure skills". It is expected to provide a reference for the design of professional training courses for travel agency managers to enhance their professionalism.

Keywords: Competency's Connotations, Competency Analysis, Travel Agent Manager, IPA, Training Needs Assessment

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Introduction

The travel industry plays an important role in the development of tourism. As of December 2023, there were 4,038 travel agencies in Taiwan (Tourism Administration, MOTC, 2023), and competition was fierce. Regardless of the type of travel agency, whether it is consolidated, Class-A, or Class-B, at least one travel agent manager is required to apply for the establishment of a travel agency.

In the travel industry, whether it is a large operator with a large establishment or a small operator with a lean staff, to be innovative in terms of business management (Verreynnea, Williamsb, Ritchiea, Gronuma, & Bettsc, 2019). According to Chang (2013), the establishment of competency standards can serve as standards for education and training to follow and can help companies become learning organizations to enhance organizational competitiveness and individual professional knowledge. Since talents play an important role in the process of industrial development, central industry competent authority must set the competency benchmarks for industrial talents, issue certificates of competency identification, and promote international mutual recognition based on the needs of industrial development following the Industry Innovation Act (IIA).

To understand the analysis of the connotation of professional competency and the demand for education and training of travel managers, the purpose of this study is as follows.
1. To explore the importance of knowledge(K), skills(S) and attitudes(A) in the connotation of professional competencies of travel managers.
2. To investigate the frequency of using knowledge(K), skills(S) and attitudes(A) within the professional Competencies of travel managers.
3. To evaluate the training needs of travel managers in terms of knowledge(K), skills(S) and attitudes(A) within their professional competencies.

Literature Review

To examine two parts, this study compiles pertinent literature and analyzes it. First, the qualifications of travel agent managers and related regulations. Second, the job duties and tasks of past travel agent managers. Third, the analysis of the professional competency of past travel agent managers. The following is a brief description of the above.

Qualifications and Related Regulations of Travel Agent Manager in Taiwan

According to Article 15 of the Travel Industry Regulations stipulated in Article 66(3) of the Taiwan Development and Tourism Regulations, travel industry professionals must fulfill one of the following qualifications, and complete a certification process to be certified by the Tourism Administration, MOTC. According to the tourism industry management rules, a photocopy of the manager's roster and the manager's certificate of completion must be presented to the Tourism Administration, MOTC. According to Article 7 of the Travel Industry Management Rules, for a travel manager to establish a branch office, the branch manager roster and the manager's certificate of completion must be presented to the Tourism Administration, MOTC.

Professional Competencies of Travel Managers

This study covers six competencies required of travel industry managers, including market operation analysis, business development, product development, conflict and risk management, marketing strategy execution, and customer relationship management, based on the competency benchmarks for "Tourism Operations Supervisor" and "Tourism Business Development Manager" announced by the Taiwan Labor Force Development Administration on the Integrated Competency and Application Platform (iCAP). The benchmark covers six competencies required of travel industry managers, including market operation analysis, business development, product development, conflict and risk management, marketing strategy execution, and customer relationship management (Chang & Chen, 2018).This study was further based on the focus group interviews conducted by six academics and experts, and regarding the interview outline and iCAP functional benchmarks, it was found that based on the seven job duties of travel managers, 26 job tasks, 46 knowledge (K), 46 skills (S), and 11 attitudes (A) were developed respectively.

Methodology

This study is based on the expert's perception, in-person interview or online video explanation, and through a questionnaire survey, the target respondents are the senior executives or persons in charge of travel agencies that have been awarded the Golden Quality Award of Tourism or listed on the stock market or have served as the education and training committee of the Travel Industry Council for more than 20 years. The total number of questionnaires distributed was 27, and 27 questionnaires were returned. Through the professional quality and practical experience of experts, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of travel managers are explored in terms of their practical application of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes. To analyze the average of the importance and frequency of use of the connotations of the professional competencies of travel managers, the Importance-performance analysis (IPA) was applied to illustrate the distribution of the importance and frequency of use of the connotations of the professional competencies of travel managers by the experts.

Results and Discussion

In this study, the questionnaire survey was used to analyze the importance and frequency of the competencies of travel managers, and the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the distribution of the professional competencies of travel managers. The results were analyzed using the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) to analyze the distribution of the connotations of professional competencies of travel managers. The statistical analysis and frequency of use of the 46 knowledge, 46 skills, and 11 skills that a travel manager should possess were analyzed by 27 experts. In the consistency test, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-Sample Test was used to determine the suitability of the items, and all items reached the consensus of the experts.

Analysis of Experts' Perceived Importance and Frequency of Use of Travel Managers' Job Responsibilities

The results show that the average number of experts' perceptions of travel industry managers' job responsibilities in terms of importance is 4.74 (inclusive) or more, with the top 2 being T7, Risk Control and Crisis Management, T1, Travel industry operation coordination and

business development; the mean number of frequencies of use was 4.39 (inclusive) or above, and the top 2 were T2. business creation and management and T6 tourism product development, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Importance and Frequency of Job Responsibilities of
Travel Managers as Perceived by Experts

Job Responsibilities	Importance (N=27)			Frequency of use (N=27)		
	Average	SD	Ranking	Average	SD	Ranking
T1. Travel industry operation coordination and business development	4.81	.396	2	4.32	.954	4
T2. Business Creation and Management	4.74	.594	3	4.88	.445	1
T3. Recruitment, selection, and training	4.67	.620	6	4.20	1.071	6
T4. Marketing campaign coordination	4.74	.447	3	4.26	.962	5
T5. Quality customer service enhancement	4.63	.565	7	4.51	.903	3
T6. Tourism product development	4.74	.526	3	4.57	.876	2
T7. Risk Control and Crisis Management	4.85	.362	1	4.01	1.328	7

Analysis of Experts' Perception of the Importance and Frequency of Knowledge Competency of Travel Managers

The results show that the top 2 items in the total ranking of experts' perception of the importance of knowledge competency of travel managers are as follows: K40 Tourism product planning and design developing features and content; K38 In order to determine the appropriate selling price. It is necessary to consider the financial operating costs, the profitability rate and achieving a high yield for the tourism industry, and K39 Procedures and appropriate rates for industry commissions and markup in the tourism industry. The top 3 items in terms of frequency of use are: K40 Tourism product planning and design developing features and content; K08 Sources of the suppliers of business context in related industries; K38 In order to determine the appropriate selling price. It is necessary to consider the financial operating costs, the profitability rate and achieving a high yield for the tourism industry, and K39 Procedures and appropriate rates for industry commissions and markup in the tourism industry. (K08, K38, and K39 are in the same row as No. 2.) Details are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Experts' perception of the importance and frequency of
the knowledge competency of the travel managers

Knowledge (K)	Importance (N=27)			Total Ranking	Frequency of use (N=27)			Total Ranking
	Average	SD	Ranking		Average	SD	Ranking	
T1	4.23	.387			3.40	.711		
K01	3.85	.770	5	47	2.53	.963	6	47
K02	4.70	.465	1	9	4.57	.746	5	5
K03	4.26	.526	4	43	3.64	1.13	1	35
K04	4.30	.609	3	41	3.46	1.12	1	41
K05	4.52	.580	2	26	3.46	1.12	1	41
K06	3.78	.577	6	48	2.78	1.22	4	46
T2	4.58	.283			4.15	.592		
K07	4.52	.580	6	26	4.01	.956	5	22
K08	4.59	.501	3	18	4.63	.844	1	2
K09	4.74	.526	1	5	4.44	.802	2	9
K10	4.56	.577	4	21	4.07	1.16	4	19
K11	4.48	.643	8	34	4.01	.955	5	22
K12	4.52	.509	6	26	4.01	1.06	5	22
K13	4.56	.641	4	21	3.83	1.21	8	48
K14	4.74	.447	1	6	4.20	1.17	3	17
T3	4.31	.454			3.55	.703		
K15	4.52	.580	1	26	4.07	1.07	1	19
K16	4.04	.706	6	46	3.15	1.16	6	45
K17	4.37	.565	3	39	3.70	.963	2	33
K18	4.30	.542	4	41	3.58	.761	3	37
K19	4.48	.509	2	34	3.58	1.00	3	37
K20	4.19	.557	5	45	3.21	.914	5	44
T4	4.50	.391			4.03	.662		
K21	4.70	.465	1	9	4.32	.836	1	12
K22	4.70	.465	1	9	4.26	.846	2	14
K23	4.52	.643	3	26	3.89	1.03	6	28
K24	4.37	.565	7	39	3.83	1.01	8	29
K25	4.44	.577	6	38	4.13	.967	3	18
K26	4.48	.700	5	34	3.89	1.13	6	27
K27	4.52	.643	3	26	3.95	1.15	4	25
K28	4.26	.656	8	43	3.95	1.05	4	25
T5	4.64	.390			4.27	.563		
K29	4.70	.465	1	9	4.51	.777	1	7
K30	4.67	.620	2	14	4.38	.942	2	10
K31	4.67	.480	2	14	4.38	.822	2	10
K32	4.67	.555	2	14	4.32	.955	4	12
K33	4.52	.509	5	26	3.76	.877	5	32
T6	4.73	.248			4.44	.455		
K34	4.70	.542	6	9	4.26	1.16	6	14
K35	4.74	.447	4	6	4.51	.778	5	7
K36	4.56	.577	7	26	4.26	1.067	6	14
K37	4.74	.447	4	21	4.57	.877	4	6
K14	4.52	.643	8	6	3.83	1.11	8	29
K38	4.85	.362	2	2	4.63	.708	2	2
K39	4.81	.396	3	3	4.63	.708	2	2
K40	4.89	.320	1	1	4.81	.535	1	1

Knowledge (K)	Importance (N=27)			Total Ranking	Frequency of use (N=27)			Total Ranking
	Average	SD	Ranking		Average	SD	Ranking	
T7	4.60	.399			3.68	.823		
K41	4.59	.572	3	18	3.58	1.20	5	37
K14	4.56	.506	5	21	3.52	1.07	6	40
K42	4.59	.572	4	18	3.64	1.04	4	35
K43	4.48	.643	7	34	3.39	1.08	7	43
K44	4.56	.577	5	21	3.70	1.07	3	33
K45	4.81	.396	1	3	4.07	1.16	1	19
K46	4.63	.688	2	17	3.83	1.21	2	29

Analysis of Experts' Perceptions of the Importance and Frequency of the Skills Competency of Travel Managers

Based on the IPA analysis of experts' perception of the importance and frequency of use of travel managers' skills and their importance and frequency of use, the corresponding skills of their task structure are shown in Table 3. The results show that experts' perception of the importance of travel managers' skills in the competency's connotation of "skills" in the top two items in the total ranking are S26 Able to communicate with colleagues to discuss the key needs of traveler services, S07 Proactively seek to build innovative development skills for business opportunities, S27 Be able to explain the company's key policies and procedures for providing quality service, S36 Proactivity in identifying or actively seeking opportunities for innovative products (S07, S27 and S36 are ranked together in 2nd). The top 2 items in terms of frequency of use were S33 Make self-criticism about frequently asked traveler service questions, S34 Teamwork skills to engage employees in practical traveler service practices and proactively solicit their feedback and opinions, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Experts' perception of the importance and frequency of
the skills competency of the travel managers

Skills(S)	Importance (N=27)			Total Ranking	Frequency of use (N=27)			Total Ranking
	Average	SD	Ranking		Average	SD	Ranking	
T1	4.31	.405			3.53	.892		
S01	4.41	.636	3	31	3.70	1.41	3	31
S02	4.52	.509	1	19	4.01	1.16	1	20
S03	4.19	.681	4	41	3.09	1.28	4	43
S04	4.00	.734	5	45	3.02	1.13	5	44
S05	4.44	.577	2	29	3.83	1.11	2	26
T2	4.55	.345			4.03	.683		
S06	4.52	.580	3	19	4.13	.967	2	16
S07	4.78	.424	1	2	4.63	.708	1	3
S08	4.52	.580	3	19	4.13	1.07	2	16
S09	4.52	.700	3	19	3.83	1.01	6	46
S10	4.52	.580	3	19	3.89	1.13	4	22
S11	4.41	.501	7	31	3.70	1.07	7	31
S12	4.59	.572	2	16	3.89	1.22	4	22
T3	4.36	.423						
S13	4.52	.580	4	19	4.13	.850	4	16
S14	4.59	.501	2	16	4.20	.967	3	14
S15	3.93	.781	7	46	3.27	1.08	5	40
S16	4.04	.759	6	44	3.21	1.02	7	42
S17	4.59	.501	2	16	4.26	.963	2	13
S18	4.70	.465	1	8	4.32	.836	1	10
S19	4.19	.622	5	41	3.27	1.08	5	40

Skills(S)	Importance (N=27)			Total Ranking	Frequency of use (N=27)			Total Ranking
	Average	SD	Ranking		Average	SD	Ranking	
T4	4.38	.418						
S20	4.63	.492	1	15	4.20	.850	1	14
S21	4.33	.620	4	35	3.76	1.09	4	29
S22	4.33	.555	4	35	3.46	1.02	4	35
S23	4.37	.565	3	34	3.46	1.12	4	35
S24	4.41	.636	2	31	3.83	1.01	3	31
S25	4.19	.622	6	41	4.13	.967	2	44
T5	4.60	.353						
S26	4.85	.362	1	1	4.57	.746	3	4
S27	4.78	.424	2	2	4.57	.746	3	4
S28	4.33	.620	8	35	3.83	.903	8	26
S29	4.67	.480	5	14	4.01	1.06	6	20
S30	4.48	.643	6	27	4.13	.967	5	16
S31	4.33	.620	8	35	3.76	1.09	9	29
S32	4.44	.577	7	29	3.89	.802	7	22
S33	4.78	.424	2	2	4.81	.535	1	1
S34	4.78	.424	2	2	4.69	.661	2	2
T6	4.64	.318						
S35	4.70	.465	3	8	4.44	.802	3	9
S36	4.78	.506	1	2	4.44	1.03	3	8
S37	4.33	.679	7	35	3.83	1.11	7	26
S38	4.70	.465	3	8	4.32	.836	4	10
S39	4.52	.580	6	19	4.32	.955	4	10
S40	4.70	.465	3	8	4.57	.746	1	4
S41	4.74	.447	2	7	4.57	.746	1	4
T7	4.54	.359						
S42	4.30	.669	5	40	3.33	1.13	5	39
S43	4.48	.700	4	27	3.52	1.25	3	34
S44	4.52	.580	3	19	3.46	1.12	4	35
S45	4.70	.542	1	8	3.89	1.31	1	22
S46	4.70	.609	1	8	3.39	1.34	1	38

Analysis of Experts' Perceptions of the Importance and Frequency of the Attitudes' Competency of Travel Managers

The results showed that the top 2 rankings in terms of the importance of "attitudes" in the competency of travel managers were "A02 Proactive approach" and "A06 Team awareness". The top 2 in terms of frequency of use were "A02 Proactive approach", "A01 Agreeable relationship", "A03 Integrity and honesty" and "A04 Self-management" (A01, A03 and A04 are ranked the same as No. 2), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Experts' perception of the importance and frequency of
the attitudes' competency of travel managers

attitudes(A)	Importance (N=27)			Frequency of use (N=27)		
	Average	SD	Ranking	Average	SD	Ranking
Total	4.79	.224		4.57	.369	
A01 Agreeable relationship	4.74	.526	7	4.81	0.535	2
A02 Proactive approach	4.96	.192	1	4.88	0.446	1
A03 Integrity and honesty	4.93	.267	3	4.81	0.535	2
A04 Self-management	4.81	.396	6	4.81	0.535	2
A05 Stress tolerance	4.89	.320	4	4.69	0.661	6
A06 Team awareness	4.96	.192	1	4.75	0.605	5
A07 Responding to unknown conditions	4.67	.480	9	4.07	0.963	10
A08 Self-confidence	4.70	.465	8	4.38	0.822	8
A09 Discrete and attentive	4.85	.362	5	4.69	0.661	6
A10 Flexibility	4.67	.480	9	4.38	0.822	8
A11 Curious and open	4.52	.580	11	3.95	1.049	11

Expert's Analysis of the Importance and Frequency of Use of Travel Managers in Competency's Connotations by IPA

Regarding the evaluation of the connotation of the professional competency of travel managers, the mean value of the importance of 27 experts was 4.54 (X-axis), and the mean value of the frequency of use was 3.97 (Y-axis), and these two points were used as the midpoint to cross the X-axis and Y-axis, and then the mean value was calculated and cut into four regions as shown in Fig. 1.

Based on the results of IPA, experts perceived that knowledge (K), skills (S), and attitudes (A) are important and frequently used in the training needs of travel managers.
1. Area A-Continuous training, totaling 44 items.
2. Area B - Priority training, totaling 11 items.
3. Area C - Delayed training, totaling 41 items.
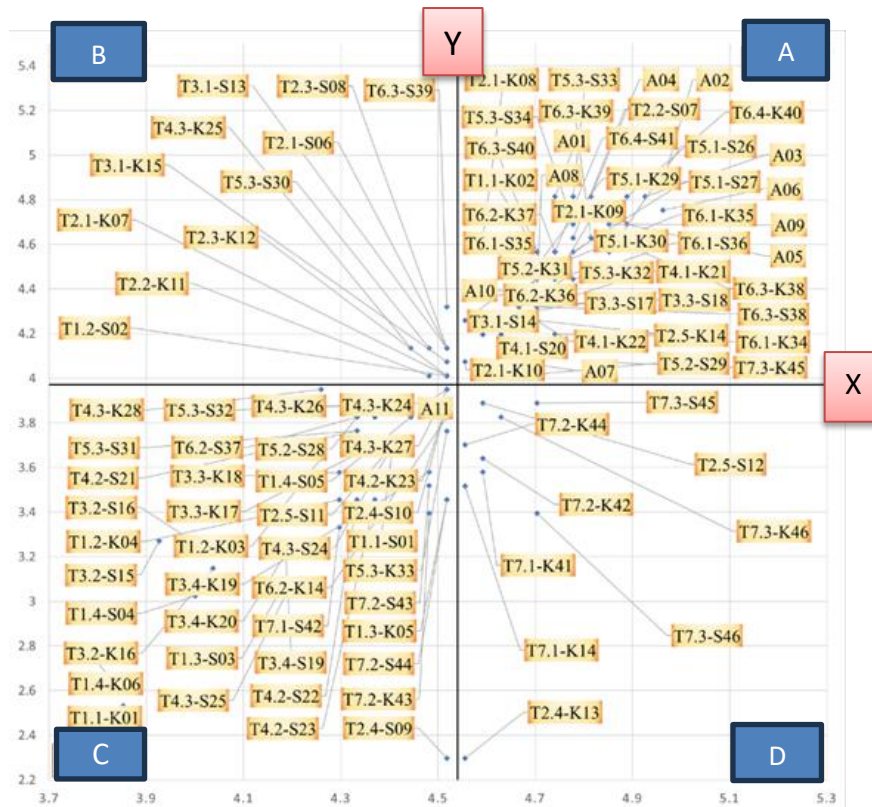4. Area D - Secondary training, total 9 items.

Figure 1: Experts' perceived importance and frequency of use of travel managers in competency's connotations

The top 11 training priorities are, in order, as follows: S39 The calculation skills for different commissions and markup structures; S08 Calculation skills to evaluate business data and cost structures; S06 Evaluate critical thinking skills that affect professional relationships and business negotiation; S13 Communication skills for conducting interviews; S30 Survey and statistical skills to assess traveler satisfaction; K25 Features, advantages, and practical applications of commonly used marketing campaigns, including advertising, experiences, and social network media; K15 Recruitment and selection criteria; K12 The nature of agreements and contracts for travel-related industries and the key elements of cooperation; K07 The relationship of the industry structure of the business context in related industries with each other; K11 Negotiation principles, stages of the negotiation process, various techniques that can be applied; S02 Communicate with colleagues and stakeholders to consult on environmental and social responsibility issues, and to make visitors be responsible for environmental protection.

Conclusion

The top three knowledge competencies in terms of importance are 1. tourism product planning and design development features and content. 2. To determine the appropriate selling price, it is necessary to consider the financial operating costs, the profitability rate, and achieving a high yield for the tourism industry. 3. Procedures and appropriate rates for industry commissions and markup in the tourism industry. The top three skills competency in terms of importance are: 1. Be able to communicate with colleagues to discuss the key needs of traveler services; 2. Proactively seek to build innovative development skills for business opportunities; 3. Be able to explain the company's key policies and procedures for providing

quality service and proactivity in identifying or actively seeking opportunities for innovative products. The most important attitudinal competency is to be a proactive approach.

The top three knowledge competencies in terms of the frequency of use are 1. Tourism product planning and design developing features and content; 2. Sources of the suppliers of the business context in related industries; 3. To determine the appropriate selling price, it is necessary to consider the financial operating costs, the profitability rate, and achieving a high yield for the tourism industry. The top three skills competency in terms of the frequency of use are: 1. Make self-criticism about frequently asked traveler service questions; 2. Teamwork skills to engage employees in practical traveler service practices and proactively solicit their feedback and opinions; 3. Proactively seek to build innovative development skills for business opportunities. The most frequently used attitudinal competency is to be a proactive approach.

The top three training priorities competency's connotation is: 1. The calculation skills for different commissions and markup structures; 2. Calculation skills to evaluate business data and cost structures evaluation of business data and cost structure calculation skills; 3. Evaluate critical thinking skills that affect professional relationships and business negotiation.

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