

An Analysis of Competency's Connotations for Travel Agent Managers in Taiwan

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Abstract

In order to meet the demands of the shifting operational environment and the demand for human resource training in the travel industry, this study aimed to pinpoint the professional competency's connotations that travel agent managers should have. The purpose of this study was to examine the job duties, tasks, and knowledge (K), skills (S), and attitudes (A) necessary for travel agent manager to carry out their duties. Focus group interviews with 6 experts with more than 30 years of experience in the travel industry were conducted as part of the study. The study concluded that travel agent managers should have 7 job responsibilities, including travel operations coordination, business operations, talent training, marketing activities, customer service, product development, and risk management. There are 26 major tasks, and to implement them, the competency's connotation required includes 46 kinds of related knowledge, 46 skills and 11 attitudes. The competency's connotations provide useful benchmarks for the training or professional advancement of travel agent managers.

Keywords: Competency's Connotations, Competency Analysis, Occupational Competency Standard (OCS), Travel Agent Manager

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Introduction

The travel industry plays an important role in the development of tourism. As of April 2021, there were 3,938 travel agencies in Taiwan (Tourism Bureau, 2021), 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 (Tourism Bureau, 2021).

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 (Verreyne, Williams, Ritchie, Gronum & Bettsc, 2019), expertise and communication coordination, the needs of new skills or services such as social media marketing, cross-media internet marketing (Chaiyoung C. & Krit J, 2015; Pencarelli, T., 2020), corporate, brand, product, online store promotion, raising awareness of the green travel environment (Tom Baum, 2015; World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018) are all facing the challenges of keeping abreast of today's trends.

In addition to managing the travel agency's outbound, inbound, and domestic travel services, the travel agent manager must also coordinate with the government's political, economic, tourism policies (Tourism Bureau, 2021), and under pressure from competition of the industry, the Internet, and marketing channels. According to the study of Ottenbacher & Gnoth (2005), service innovation can improve the quality of a product or service, drive indirect benefits, increase corporate reputation, enhance corporate image, attract potential customers, and strengthen customer loyalty. Travel agent managers are the souls of the travel industry and play a key role. Due to the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic that hit the world in early 2020, the opening of borders is linked to the pandemic, so it is important to upgrade from national tourism and prepare for the opening of borders in advance; in particular, travel agencies should strengthen their ability to be desired by consumers (Chang, 2021).

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 in accordance with the Industry Innovation Act (IIA). 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.

To enhance the competency of travel agent managers and the cultivation of talents, the purposes of this study are as follows:

1. Investigate the essential components of job duties that travel agent managers must exhibit.
2. Examine the essential components of the duties that travel agent managers must carry out.
3. Explore the knowledge (K), skills (S), and attitudes (A) required for the professional competency of a travel agent manager.

Literature Review

In order 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 Taiwan Tourism Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications (Tourism Bureau, 2021). According to the tourism industry management rules, a photocopy of the manager's roster and manager's certificate of completion must be presented to the Tourism Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications. According to Article 7 of the Travel Industry Management Rules, for a travel manager to establish a branch office, the branch manager roster and manager's certificate of completion must be presented to the Tourism Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications. The travel agent manager must be full-time personnel and must not concurrently be in charge of another travel operator.

Duties and tasks of travel agent managers

Based on the literature study on the competency benchmarks of "Tourism Operations Supervisor" and "Tourism Business Development Manager" announced by the Workplace Development Agency, Ministry of Labor (2021) in the "Integrated Competency and Application Platform," (iCAP, <https://icap.wda.gov.tw/ap/faq.php>) the job descriptions and major tasks of travel agent managers are known, and the results are as follows:

Description of duties and responsibilities

Complete and pass the Travel Agent Manager Training Program; adjust and develop products and businesses; enhance quality traveler services; achieve operational coordination and sustainable management in the travel industry.

Major tasks

1. Develop tourism products and expand business in coordination with dynamic market target management and business analysis for operational development.
2. Identify problems and phenomena in the course of travel industry operations and services, compile them, and establish marketing strategies and risk management.
3. Improve the shortcomings of the travel industry, make immediate adjustments, enhance the management and product business strategies for quality services for travelers, and make recommendations and implement them.

Through the above compilation, the professional competencies of travel agent managers are initially established, covering 6 competencies required for travel agent managers, including the ability to analyze market operations, business development, product development,

conflict and risk management, marketing strategy execution, and customer relationship management (Chang & Chen, 2018).

Professional Competencies

Occupational Competency Standard (OCS) refers to the combination of competencies that should be possessed to accomplish the tasks of a specific occupation or job category developed by the central industry competent authority or the relevant legally entrusted unit, as stated in Article 18 of the Industry Innovation Act. They include the main tasks, corresponding behavioral indicators, work output, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other competency's connotations of the specific occupation or job category. The "occupational competency standard" is the "talent specification" set by the government. They fall under the category of professional competency when it comes to the classification of competency.

Spencer & Spencer (1993) considered "competency" as the underlying characteristic of a person. In the general management ability model, the important competencies that managers should possess are, in order, influence, achievement orientation, the spirit of teamwork, analytical thinking, and proactivity. The important competencies that salespeople should possess are influence, achievement orientation, proactivity, interpersonal EQ, customer service orientation, and relationship building. According to CareerOneStop (2013), competency refers to the ability to apply the knowledge, skills, and abilities related to carrying out the job. It specifically refers to the particular duty competencies that are directly related to the job and objectives and are required to successfully complete the job goals. Professional competency refers to the abilities required for different jobs, and can be subdivided into functional competency, role competency and job competency.

Through the results of the above-mentioned literature, the development of the analysis of the connotation of the professional competency of travel agent managers is an important basis for the research of human resource cultivation.

Method

The study employed focus group interviews. In order to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the content, a total of 6 travel agent managers, experts, and scholars were invited to conduct focus group interviews to confirm the competencies of travel agent managers. The list of experts and their qualifications is shown in Table 1.

The outlines of the expert interviews are as follows:

1. What are the main job responsibilities of a travel agent manager?
2. What are the main tasks of being a travel agent manager?
3. What knowledge, skills and attitudes do you think travel agent managers need to possess?

Table 1. List of experts interviewed in the focus group.

Expert Code	Title and Experience	Length of Service
A	Chairman of a Travel Agency	35 years
B	General Manager of a Travel Agency	30 years
C	Chairman of a Travel Agency	30 years
D	General Manager of a Travel Agency	30 years
E	General Manager of a Travel Agency	30 years
F	General Manager of a Travel Agency	31 years

Results and Discussion

The competency's connotations of travel agent managers

Based on the 6 experts in the focus group interview, the study was conducted with reference to the interview outline and iCAP OCS (https://icap.wda.gov.tw/Resources/resources_Datum_List.aspx), and the results were as follows:

7 Job responsibilities of a travel agent manager

- T1. Travel industry operation coordination and business development
- T2. Business establishment and management
- T3. Recruitment, selection and training
- T4. Marketing campaign coordination
- T5. Quality customer service enhancement
- T6. Tourism product development
- T7. Risk control and crisis management

Based on the above 7 job responsibilities, 26 tasks were developed, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Tasks performed by travel agent managers initiated from their job responsibilities

Job Responsibilities	Task Description
T1. Travel industry operation coordination and business development	T1.1 Establish a company's operating policy
	T1.2 Plan business development of the company's activities
	T1.3 Conduct related operation activities in accordance with relevant regulations
	T1.4 Tracking Effects and Changes
T2. Business Creation and Management	T2.1 Establish business development relationship in the market
	T2.2 Establish business target partnerships
	T2.3 Integration of industrial resources
	T2.4 Conduct business communication and negotiation
	T2.5 Promote and maintain business relationships
T3. Recruitment, selection, and training	T3.1 Assess competencies and recruitment needs
	T3.2 Establish staff recruitment system
	T3.3 Select suitable employees and get them settled.
	T3.4 Plan and organize training programs
T4. Marketing campaign coordination	T4.1 Plan and organize marketing activities
	T4.2 Perform the roles of public relations
	T4.3 Review and make a self-criticism about marketing activities
T5. Quality customer service enhancement	T5.1 Develop quality customer service
	T5.2 Execute and manage quality service
	T5.3 Continue to improve customer service
T6. Tourism product development	T6.1 Master the market and product positioning
	T6.2 Analyze issues related to product development
	T6.3 Make judgments about sales price and profitability results
	T6.4 Monitor and assess product success
T7. Risk Control and Crisis Management	T7.1 Anticipate and identify risk scenarios
	T7.2 Establish crisis management mechanism
	T7.3 Carry out crisis management

Based on the above 26 tasks, the competency's connotations of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of a travel agent manager are shown in Tables 3 to 10.

According to the competency analysis, the travel agency manager has seven main responsibilities. Each responsibility has a relative task, and the tasks are described in Table 2, with a total of 26 tasks. The knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the travel agent manager to perform these tasks are presented in Tables 3 to 10. They have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to successfully complete these tasks and responsibilities in order to become a competent travel agency manager.

Most of the travel agencies in Taiwan are small companies with 3-8 employees. The personality and service attitude of the manager of the travel agency is very important. For example: crisis management, flexibility, time management and self-growth. According to the functional analysis of six experts, the results show that travel agency managers need to have agreeable relationship, proactive approach and other work attitudes.

Table 3. KS competency's connotations corresponding to the tasks of coordinating and developing the operation of the travel industry initiated from T1 travel industry operation coordination and business development

Task Description	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Knowledge (K)	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Skills (S)
T1.1 Establish a company's operating policy	K01 Global Environmental Issues (climate change, energy supply and demand, water resources, waste treatment, carbon emissions, etc.) K02 Corporate Business Policy and Strategy	S01 Read and interpret regulatory requirements and related documents for the establishment of the travel industry
T1.2 Plan business development of the company's activities	K03 Environmental and social impacts of tourism activities K04 Sustainability considerations for tourism operations (environmentally or culturally special areas and related minimum impact practices)	S02 Communicate with colleagues and stakeholders to consult on environmental and social responsibility issues, and to make visitors be responsible for environmental protection
T1.3 Conduct related operation activities in accordance with relevant regulations	K05 Legal regulations and land management requirements (such as tourism regulations, taxation, finance, etc.)	S03 Problem-solving skills to identify and respond to sustainability-related issues in a timely manner and minimize their impact
T1.4 Tracking Effects and Changes	K06 Collection of information to track environmental and social impacts (observation, measurement results and recording of specific data)	S04 Critical thinking skills to assess potential environmental and social impacts and to provide appropriate responses when holding events S05 Interpret tourism policy trends, market statistics, market preferences, and have reading and writing skills for tourism industry-related information

Table 4. The KS competency's connotations corresponding to the tasks established and managed that are initiated from the T2 business creation and management

Task Description	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Knowledge (K)	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Skills (S)
T2.1 Establish business development relationship in the market	K07 The relationship of the industry structure of the business context in related industries with each other K08 Sources of the suppliers of business context in related industries K09 Distribution and marketing network of business context in related industries K10 Digital marketing for business context in related industries	S06 Evaluate critical thinking skills that affect professional relationships and business negotiation
T2.2 Establish business target partnerships	K11 Negotiation principles, stages of the negotiation process, various techniques that can be applied	S07 Proactively seek to build innovative development skills for business opportunities
T2.3 Integration of industrial resources	K12 The nature of agreements and contracts for travel-related industries and the key elements of cooperation	S08 Calculation skills to evaluate business data and cost structures
T2.4 Conduct business communication and negotiation	K13 Contract terms and obligations, agreement modalities, exclusivity clauses, dispute resolution clauses, contract termination and other key elements	S09 Read and interpret potentially complex agreements, and conditions S10 Develop or participate in the development of formal commercial contracts
T2.5 Promote and maintain business relationships	K14 Legal regulations that affect negotiations and contracts in related industries, such as the Consumer Protection Act, the Part of Obligations of the Civil Code, and travel services contract	S11 Planning of events that contribute to professional relationships and initial event planning and organization skills S12 Participate in the negotiation process and have problem-solving skills to respond to the challenges involved

Table 5. KS competency's connotations corresponding to the tasks initiated from T3 talent recruiting, selection and training

Task Description	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Knowledge (K)	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Skills (S)
T3.1 Assess competencies and recruitment needs	K15 Recruitment and selection criteria	S13 Communication skills for conducting interviews S14 Assess staffing needs and develop planning and organizational skills for appropriate recruitment
T3.2 Establish staff recruitment system	K16 Effective recruitment advertisements features	S15 Computational skills for calculating the cost of recruitment advertisements and salary levels S16 Problem-solving skills to determine the lack of job applications and choose to re-advertise or change the recruitment method
T3.3 Select suitable employees and get them settled.	K17 Relationship between job descriptions and selection criteria, how selection criteria are formulated K18 Ways of linking interview questions to selection criteria	S17 Critical thinking skills to assess the abilities, knowledge and experience of job seekers and their suitability for the current organizational culture S18 The team skills of discussing staffing needs with team members and selecting new members who can complement existing members
T3.4 Plan and organize training programs	K19 Roles and responsibilities of recruitment and training related personnel K20 Employment review procedures and human resources policy in its entirety	S19 Write and integrate various documents, including the content of training programs

Table 6. KS competency's connotations corresponding to the tasks initiated from T4 marketing campaign coordination

Task Description	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Knowledge (K)	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Skills (S)
T4.1 Plan and organize marketing activities	K21 The content and structure of the marketing plan K22 Marketing management process and the four P's: product, place, price and promotion and co-marketing, cross-border marketing, etc.	S20 Analyze market trends and marketing plans
T4.2 Perform the roles of public relations	K23 Business context of business alliances in tourism-related industries, including industry structure and relationships	S21 Develop detailed action plans for marketing campaigns S22 Media release and marketing report promotion S23 Analysis and application skills related to digital technology network marketing
T4.3 Review and make a self-criticism about marketing activities	K24 Industry and market knowledge appropriate to the department and organization, including e-commerce options and distribution channel marketing strategies K25 Features, advantages, and practical applications of commonly used marketing campaigns, including advertising, experiences, and social network media K26 Legal issues affecting products and marketing, including personal data protection, specific issues arising from the use of new technologies K27 Ethical considerations for marketing campaigns: including appropriate use of images and text, grading regulations, etc. K28 Sustainability considerations for marketing campaigns, such as reducing waste of printed materials	S24 Analysis and application performance related to digital technology and network marketing S25 Planning and organizational skills to coordinate diverse and unanticipated operational details

Table 7. The KS competency's connotations corresponding to the tasks initiated from T5 quality customer service enhancement

Task Description	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Knowledge (K)	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Skills (S)
T5.1 Develop quality customer service	K29 Principles of quality customer service K30 Roles and Responsibilities of management, supervisors, and operational staff responsible for quality service	S26 Able to communicate with colleagues to discuss the key needs of traveler services S27 Be able to explain the company's key policies and procedures for providing quality service
T5.2 Execute and manage quality service	K31 Implementation methods for providing quality service, including overseeing policies and procedures for traveler service, staff involvement in the development of practical traveler service practices, and assessing feedback from staff and travelers	S28 Discuss and explain the results of customer service checks and the content of documents that will affect related industry trends S29 Research customer service requirements, edit all-around concierge-friendly policies and procedures
T5.3 Continue to improve customer service	K32 Monitoring, measurement and evaluation methods: e.g. customer satisfaction business performance K33 Objectives, elements, and details of traveler service-related regulations	S30 Survey and statistical skills to assess traveler satisfaction S31 Planning and organizational skills to establish plans and periodically evaluate traveler service systems S32 Problem-solving skills to understand systemic customer service issues in order to adjust policies and procedures and improve service quality 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

Table 8. KS competency's connotations corresponding to the tasks initiated from T6 tourism products development

Task Description	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Knowledge (K)	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Skills (S)
T6.1 Master the market and product positioning	K34 Market trend studies K35 Products and services among competitors	S35 Assess market segmentation and positioning S36 Proactivity in identifying or actively seeking opportunities for innovative products
T6.2 Analyze issues related to product development	K36 Develop products and modes of services, including brand management and product packaging design K37 Launched destination features and target markets	S37 Planning and organizational skills at all levels of executing the coordination of product development
T6.3 Make judgments about sales price and profitability results	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. K39 Procedures and appropriate rates for industry commissions and markup in the tourism industry	S38 Calculation skills for completing complex budget costing S39 The calculation skills for different commissions and markup structures S40 Evaluate the profitability of multiple product options
T6.4 Monitor and assess the success of products	K40 Tourism product planning and design developing features and content	S41 Oversee and assess problem-solving skills for product development

Table 9. KS competency's connotations corresponding to the tasks initiated from T7 risk control and crisis management

Task Description	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Knowledge (K)	Corresponding Competency's Connotations regarding Skills (S)
T7.1 Anticipate and identify risk scenarios	K41 Risk management principles and guidelines	S42 Communication and reading and writing skills for consultation and negotiation, risk management and stakeholder engagement
T7.2 Establish crisis management mechanism	K42 Risk management strategies K43 Risk management policies and procedures K44 The overall operation of the organization	S43 Implement the crisis management action plan organized and established by the Travel Quality Assurance Association and the Travel Agent Association S44 Organizational and management skills for planning and implementing risk management processes
T7.3 Carry out crisis management	K45 Things that affect actions required by the travel industry, including terms and conditions, refund requests, cancellation fees, liability for travelers' insurance and management obligations, etc. K46 Insurance category content and insurance companies	S45 Problem-solving and innovation skills for seeking viable ways to manage identified risks S46 Assist in insurance claims communication and negotiation

Table 10. The competency's connotation, A, that a travel agent manager should have

Attitude (A)

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- A01 Agreeable relationship
 - A02 Proactive approach
 - A03 Integrity and honesty
 - A04 Self-management
 - A05 Stress tolerance
 - A06 Team awareness
 - A07 Responding to unknown conditions
 - A08 Self-confidence
 - A09 Discrete and attentive
 - A10 Flexibility
 - A11 Curious and open
-

Conclusions and Limitations

This study proposes the analysis of the competency's connotations of travel agent managers, which can provide a regular rolling review of the immediate competencies that travel agent managers should possess; it can also provide schools and travel associations with ways to handle the application of training units in the future development. As suggested by the experts, in response to the changing market environment, the introduction of technology into tourism, and the rise of innovative services, travel agent managers need to pay special attention to enhancing their professional competencies in the application of digital mobile technology and tools, such as internet technology, social media, and the ability to use innovative technology, in order to actively transform digitally. This study is limited to the analysis of the competency's connotations of travel agent managers in Taiwan. It is suggested that future comparative studies with travel agent managers in other countries can be conducted.

In this study, we analyzed the competency's connotations of travel agency managers through document analysis and six experienced experts, and the final results identified 7 major responsibilities, 26 tasks, 46 knowledge, 46 skills and 11 attitudes. The results of the study were compiled from the opinions of these 6 experienced (over 30 years of experience) experts. Therefore, it is possible that the results of the functional analysis would have been different had other experts been involved. This is the greatest limitation of this study. As travel agency managers in Taiwan have multiple responsibilities and tasks, we expect that future tourism bureaus will take the functional items developed in this study seriously. It is hoped that these functional items will be used as a source for future training for travel agency managers or on-the-job training for current managers.

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