

Examining Essential Competencies for Tourism and Hospitality Graduates: A Case of Public Leading Universities in Thailand

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate and specify different competencies considered crucial and required to be a good fit for hospitality industry graduates and the industry to come up with recommendations for educators to their future curriculum. The study uses multi-methods to collect both primary and secondary data from different stakeholders; including content analysis, survey, and interviews that match the appropriate sources of data; curriculum, students, educators, and industry managers respectively. The findings highlighted the 15 most important competencies varying from each stakeholder that could provide the hospitality subject educators to improve their curriculum. The result shows that the most important competencies for fresh graduates are language skill, service mind, problem-solving skill, punctuality, and personality. Whereby the educators from leading public universities point out 15 competencies that communications and leadership skills are the most important among all five universities, which is different from the result found in industry representatives' perspectives that shows only communication skill to be the most important followed by teamwork and interpersonal skill.

Keywords: Competencies, Hospitality Industry, Graduates, Curriculum

Introduction

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2016), the tourism sector has created many employments over the past decades. In 2015, the sector directly supported approximately 108 million jobs worldwide. In Thailand, the tourism industry is also considered as one of the key drivers for socio-economic development, especially in the aspect of employment generation (MOTS, 2015). Based on the statistics provided by Thailand's Labour Market Research Division (LMRD, 2016), the unemployment rate in the kingdom is very low. The recent unemployment situation report reveals that in September 2016, only 0.93% of workers are unemployed. The tourism industry undoubtedly generates a large proportion of employment in the country. Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS, 2015) also exposes that approximately 4.45 million jobs or 11.64% of the employments are related to tourism.

In Thailand, the hospitality and tourism careers are seen to be attractive, not only in the aspect of monthly income but remunerable package and welfare. As the labor's demands to work in the hospitality and tourism industry are increasing and positive, educational programs concerning hospitality and tourism in the country are emphasized by the educational providers. Currently, numerous hospitality and tourism courses are offered by various universities across the country to attract the best students. However, designing a program to be preferable for students, and at the same time, to be approachable to the industry is a challenging task (Ring, Dickinger, & Wöber, 2009). Moreover, there is a dissatisfaction from multiple hospitality employers with graduates as their competencies do not blend with what the companies require (Dhiman, 2012). Thus, it is necessary to examine whether the current hospitality and tourism programs offered by Thai universities are comprehensive enough to meet the needs of the industry. Building bond with the relevant ecosystems is also required to meet the industry standard for tourism education (Garcia, Zaguirre & Lopez, 2019). Subramonian (2008) also points out that education quality and competencies can be improved with consistent coordination amongst its relevant circles. It is inevitable that hospitality and tourism curriculum need constant adaptation (Raybound and Wilkins, 2005).

Objectives

This study utilizes the best human resources practices construct introduced by Enz and Siguaw (2000) and a competency model for future hospitality and tourism leaders developed by Chung- Herrera, Enz, and Lankau (2003) as frameworks to draw the outcomes of how hospitality and tourism educators in the universities produce the preferred graduates. It also provides a content analysis of hospitality and tourism bachelor programs from chosen reputable public universities in the country. The results are then compared with the views of educational stakeholder groups, including educators, students, and executives in the industry. Three objectives of this study are identified as follows:

- To determine the underlying competencies for the preferred graduates in hospitality and tourism businesses in Thailand
- To examine whether the current hospitality and tourism academic programs offered in Thai public universities can respond to the industry's requirement
- To compose recommended guidelines for reassuring competency standards from hospitality and tourism courses to graduates in Thailand

Two research questions of the study are stated below:

- What are the most importance competencies for the new graduates entering the hospitality and tourism industry?
- How can the Thai universities produce graduates that fulfill the industry requirements?

Concept theory framework

Hospitality and Tourism Education

Most universities have their exclusive disciplines and selections of academic programs that promote students' abilities and qualities to compete in the labor force. Many academic programs have been developed upon knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), which concern specific key competencies required by the profession (Cecil & Krohn, 2012). Those competencies are commonly required and described by organizations in job descriptions, while job seekers have to demonstrate their capabilities that fit the qualifications to be recruited and join the workforce. Graduates who are well prepared and have the right competencies are most likely to get jobs easier. Cecil & Krohn (2012) suggested that many tourism programs have used a competency-based approach to design

the preferable curriculum that matches the industry's requirement, but students' learning outcome is not widely explored.

However, according to Ring et al. (2009), three sectors involved in the academic curriculum development were investigated and bridged their connection, including, educators, industry, and students. The former study was conducted upon the idea that the ideal hospitality and tourism program curricula should include course works in 7 fields, which are management skills; preparation for the industry; tourism World and industry; transferable skills; IT/e-Commerce/ e-Tourism, sustainability; and future tourism (Ring et al., 2009). Min, Swanger, & Gursoy (2016) also suggested that five key subject areas were commonly included in tourism and hospitality programs, which are internship and industry experience, employment preparation for industry, leadership, hospitality management, and ethics. A similar approach to Ring et al. (2009) was adopted in the current study since it covers more worthwhile subject areas for the program.

In addition, competencies should be integrated and contextualized into a curriculum as an alternative to being taught in coursework (Bath et al., 2004). Spowart (2011) also stated that students can develop their soft skills through work-integrated learning, which is also called co-operative learning. Students who are successfully gain the preferable skills required by the industry are more likely to be recruited and successful in their career path. Therefore, aside from required subject areas as hard skills, soft skills or transferable skills should also be concentrated to design the curriculum. This study also focuses on the linkage between preferable competencies and the academic program curriculum, which involve all stakeholders. Further competencies required by the industry are elucidated.

Human Resources Practices in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

According to Enz and Siguaw (2000), employees are one of the key elements to the success of an organization. To successfully achieve the organizational goal, excellent human-resources practices are required. In 1998, Dubé, Enz, Renaghan, and Siguaw (1999) conducted research concerning best practices in the hotel industry. The findings revealed that human resources management is one of the key functional categories contributing to the success of a hotel firm. Enz and Siguaw (2000) later investigated the best practices

specifically in human resources management. The study exposed five categories of the best practices consisting of:

1. Leader Development
2. Training and Knowledge Building
3. Employee Empowerment
4. Employee Recognition, and
5. Cost Management

The first category, Leader Development concerns the essential skills and competencies required for future hospitality leaders. A comprehensive development program for employees is vital to groom the current employees to be leaders of an organization. Training and Knowledge Building is the second category. It is regarded as one of the vital aspects of human resources management for enterprises attempting to increase performance and enhance service quality. The third category is involved with the practices of Employee Empowerment. It is evident from the success of several hospitality organizations, for example, Ritz Carlton, Marriott, and Hilton that employee motivation through empowerment could result in service improvement and employee retention. Employee Recognition is the fourth category. It is argued that rewards and compensation to the employees can be powerful in terms of performance improvements. Integrating recognition programs into organizational culture could contribute to gaining the satisfaction of the employees. Finally, cost-efficient human resources practice can also be an approach to an organization's competitive advantage. Several human resources techniques can be applied to help reduce operational costs of the organization, for example, work-sharing arrangement by the sales department and customization and training by design to customize service-training classes for employees (Dubé et al., 1999; Enz & Siguaw, 2000)

Relating human resources best practices to the development of hospitality and tourism educational programs, Leader Development and Training and Knowledge Building are found to be relevant. Therefore, this study builds on these two elements to initiate a recommended guideline for hospitality and tourism courses for a hotel and tourism school in Thailand.

A Competency Model

McClelland (1973) introduced a competency model to be used as descriptive tools to build human resources capability. Instead of the educators' concentration only developing traditional skills for students at school, for example; calculating, reading, and writing, it is suggested to consider competencies generally required by organizations, such as communication skills, patience, and moderate goal setting. Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) also stated that a competency model is not only useful for hospitality and tourism schools to design their courses; on the other hand, hospitality and tourism students could use the model to craft their future careers. For universities to produce preferred graduates to meet the industry needs, it is important to understand the key competencies of the industry. Thus, seeking to identify the necessary skills and competencies for the future graduates involving the stakeholders; educators, students, and managers from the industry is considered vital (Suh, West, & Shin, 2012). One main reason is that the identified skills and competencies could help the universities to better tailor their hospitality and tourism programs to closely match the requirement of the hospitality and tourism firms regarding human resources recruitment.

Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) investigated the core competencies that senior-level managers expect for future leaders in the industry. The findings revealed that the hospitality-specific competencies that those managers expect can be grouped into eight factors, see Figure 1. The self-management component achieved the highest mean importance score (4.32 out of 5), followed by strategic position, implementation, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal, and leadership respectively. Even though the competencies revealed from Chung-Herrera et al. (2003)'s study exposed important elements the future hospitality and tourism leaders should possess, they were based only on the perspective of the industry leaders. In addition, the competencies discovered tend to be produced as a guideline for those who already have industry experiences and want to become leaders in the hospitality and tourism industry. The important competencies viewed from various perspectives in producing preferable graduates for the industry are not well developed. In this study, the stakeholder's views, including educators, students, and managers from the industry regarding key competencies that the graduates should possess when entering the industry are collected, together with the analysis of the curriculum of tourism and hospitality programs offered in Thai universities. Therefore, the

results drawn from various stakeholder sources are compared and contrasted. It is expected that the findings can be further used as a guideline for improving the hospitality and tourism curriculum in Thailand.

Figure 1: Leadership-competency model for the hotel industry

Factor	Mean	Dimension	Mean
<i>Self management</i>	4.32	Ethics and integrity	4.58 ^a
		Time management	4.28
		Flexibility and adaptability	4.22
		Self development	4.12
<i>Strategic positioning</i>	4.17	Awareness of customer needs	4.39
		Commitment to quality	4.26
		Managing stakeholders	4.21
		Concern for community	3.67 ^b
<i>Implementation</i>	4.16	Planning	4.23 ^c
		Directing others	4.15
		Re-engineering	4.02
<i>Critical thinking</i>	4.15	Strategic orientation	4.24 ^d
		Decision making	4.18
		Analysis	4.17
		Risk taking and innovation	4.03
<i>Communication</i>	4.12	Speaking with impact	4.27
		Facilitating open communication	4.14
		Active listening	4.06
		Written communication	4.06
<i>Interpersonal</i>	4.09	Building networks	4.20 ^e
		Managing conflict	4.07
		Embracing diversity	4.01
<i>Leadership</i>	4.09	Teamwork orientation	4.25 ^f
		Fostering motivation	4.19
		Fortitude	4.14
		Developing others	4.02
		Embracing change	3.98
		Leadership versatility	3.97
<i>Industry knowledge</i>	4.09	Business and industry expertise	4.09

Source: Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), p. 23.

Materials and Methods

Multi-methods were adopted to draw the results of this study. Firstly, a content analysis of hospitality and tourism programs of five reputable and leading universities in Thailand was conducted. As stated by Elo et al. (2014), content analysis is an analytical technique, which data are interpreted in a system including preparation, organization, and interpretation of outcomes. To discover whether the current programs can support students to develop their expected competencies required by the industry, the curricula from tourism and hospitality program offered by 5 leading public universities in Thailand, including Burapha University, Chonburi province in the East; Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai province in the North; Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen province in the North-east, Mahidol University, Bangkok province in the Central; and Prince of Songkla University, Phuket province in the South were treated as the samples, analyzed and compared the program length, curriculum structures, specialized areas, course works, and internship programs. The curricula were collected from online sources provided by the official website of each university. The investigation was emphasized the program orientations and courses offered in the current programs. The findings were assessed and compared with the literature review as well as the findings from other investigations.

Concerning other sources of primary data used in this study, they were obtained through three groups of educational stakeholders, which are hospitality and tourism students, university educators, and managers in the hospitality and tourism industry. As claimed by Braun and Clarke (2013), a variety of techniques can be adopted for qualitative research. The benefit of applying qualitative techniques is that the data reveals a richness of information about the feeling, reasoning, and decision process. Even though there is a limitation that data are unable to be quantified, it can be used to clarify the reasons behind the behaviors and actions (Stake, 1995, Simons, 2009, Yin, 2009). In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were applied to inquire about professional knowledge and opinions from the hospitality and tourism educators and managers from the industry. Five university educators and five managers from the hospitality and tourism industry were selected based on a convenient sampling method. Slightly different techniques of the interview were applied to each sampling group. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the educators. However, email and telephone interviews were adopted to obtain data from the industry representatives. The reason for applying different interview

techniques was due to the unavailability of managers for an in-person meeting. Since the hospitality and tourism field of study requires specific know-how and skills, therefore, relevant selection criteria for the university educators and managers is very crucial. The five educators have to be direct graduates in the field and has been teaching subjects that are truly related to the industry existing sectors and departments. For the five managers, they need to be fully employed in high standard employers or hotel brands.

For students, they were recruited from one of the leading universities. They were asked similar questions concerning competencies and skills they expected from the university. However, data from this stakeholder group were obtained through a trained mediator. Twenty-seven students were asked to answer the questions regarding the important competencies and skills for the hospitality and tourism industry, and what the universities could improve in terms of hospitality and tourism courses. After all primary data from the three groups of stakeholders were gathered, they were analyzed and compared with the outcomes of what the universities currently offered in their curricula. Then, the findings were used to compose recommendations concerning how to produce preferred hospitality and tourism graduates in Thailand.

Results

Findings arose from four different sources were discovered and analyzed, including five curricula from five universities; twenty-seven senior students from the leading university; five educators from the related programs; and five staff from the tourism and hospitality industry.

Curriculum

The selected programs are displayed in table 1. All of the programs are offered by the business administration faculty of each university or expanded from the business program, except the program from Chiang Mai University. Different specialized areas are available in each program. For instance; Burapha University offers International Tourism Program and International Hotel Management Program; Mahidol University offers Hotel and Restaurant Management Program, Event and MICE Management Program, and Tourism Management Program; Prince of Songkla University offers Hospitality Management Program (specialized in Hotel Management, Food and Beverage Services Management, and

Convention and Event Management) and Tourism Management Program (specialized in Interdisciplinary Tourism Management, Airline Business, and Travel Services Business Management), etc.

Table 1: Lists of University and Program Name

University	Program
Burapha University	Bachelor of Business Administration in International Tourism and Hotel Management
Chiang Mai University	Bachelor of Arts in Tourism
Khon Kaen University	Bachelor of Arts in Tourism Management
Mahidol University	Bachelor of Business Administration in International Hospitality Management
Prince of Songkla University	Bachelor of Business Administration in Hospitality Management/ Tourism Management

Five curricula provided on universities' official websites were collected and compared. The comparison emphasized curricula's structures, nature of programs, general education, professional courses, free elective, and choice of internship and co-operative learning. As shown in table 2, the majority of programs are international programs, which are conducted in English, excluding the program at Chiang Mai University. The number of units for General Education and Free-elective course are similar among the five universities. However, the number of professional courses at Mahidol University (116 units) and Burapha University (108 units) are slightly higher than other universities. Remarkably, the total units of internship/Co-operative Learning at Mahidol University is outstandingly higher than others, which makes the total units for the program at Mahidol (188 units) become the highest.

Table 2: Comparison of Curriculum Structures

Curriculum Structure	Program Nature	General Education	Professional Course	Free Elective	Internship/ Co-operative Learning	Total Unit
Burapha University	international	30	108	6	6	150
Chiang Mai University	Thai	32	99	6	6	143
Khon Kaen University	international	30	96	6	6-9	132
Mahidol University	international	40	116	8	24	188
Prince of Songkla University	international	31	92	6	12	141

According to Ring et al. (2009), seven subject areas should be included in the tourism curriculum, which are tourism world and industry, preparation for the industry, future tourism, sustainability, IT/e-Commerce/ e-Tourism, transferable skills, and business and management. The results of the subject ratio offered in each university are displayed in table 3. Total courses include program core courses and professional courses since general education and free elective courses can be taken from varieties of subject disciplines from other faculties. The programs at Prince Songkla University and Burapha University offer more course works (62 units and 57 units consecutively) since they provide more sub-programs and specialized areas for the specific career paths. The programs at Chiang Mai University and Khon Kaen University emphasize more on tourism world and industry subject area, representing 26.32% and 22.86% of the total course works. The universities that concentrate on preparation for the industry subjects, including specialized areas, are Prince of Songkla University (53.23%), Chiang Mai University (52.63%), and Mahidol University (50.00%). Future of tourism subject area, involving tourism trends and innovations, are offered more at Prince of Songkla University (12.90%), Khon Kean University (8.57%), and Chiang Mai University (7.89%). Very few course works relating to sustainability and IT/e-Commerce/e-Tourism subject areas are offered in all universities, while no sustainability-related course work is presented in the curriculum of the program at Chiang Mai University. The programs at Chiang Mai University and Burapha University offer more course works relevant to transferable skills, which are integrated with the internship, co-operative learning, and other hands-on experience subjects. Business and management subject areas are common in all programs, while Chiang Mai University offers less of such coursework (2.63%). The additional matter found among the sample curricula is the professional language offered by the programs. Burapha University provides 8 extra languages for course works specifically for tourism and hospitality discipline, which are English, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Russia, Bahasa, German, and French. Other programs also offer additional third language courses, while the common third languages are Japanese, Chinese, and French.

Table 3: Comparison of Seven Subject-area Ratio and Number of Professional Languages

	Total Courses	Tourism World/ Industry	Preparation for the Industry	Future of Tourism	Sustainability	IT/eCommerce/ eTourism	Transferable skills	Business/ MGMT	Professional Languages (no.)
Burapha University	57	17.54%	42.11%	7.02%	3.51%	3.51%	7.02%	19.30%	8
Chiang Mai University	38	26.32%	52.63%	7.89%	0.00%	2.63%	7.89%	2.63%	1
Khon Kaen University	35	22.86%	34.29%	8.57%	2.86%	2.86%	5.71%	22.86%	4
Mahidol University	42	9.52%	50.00%	4.76%	2.38%	2.38%	2.38%	28.57%	6
Prince of Songkla University	62	9.68%	53.23%	12.90%	1.61%	3.23%	4.84%	14.52%	7

Students

Twenty-seven senior students from the leading university were participating in the short question survey. The survey, consisting of three questions, was distributed and collected in the classroom. The questions were including 1) what are the most important five competencies needed by the hospitality and tourism graduates in Thailand; 2) what position or which department you want to work for; and 3) is there any particular course you would like a university to offer to be beneficial for your future career?

The results shown in table 4 indicate that, out of 30 competencies that diversely stated by all participants, students believe that the five most essential competencies for the new graduates entering the workforce are language skill, service mind, problem-solving skill, punctuality, and personality, consecutively. Some students are also aware of some other important competencies, such as interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, Knowledgeable, and multi-task. The answers for the second question pointed out that, out of 29 different positions, five popular positions the students desire are reception/front-office, human resource staff, general manager, food and beverage staff, and tour guide. The last question about the suggested course was also varying among students. The course disciplines range from the special interest of the relevant tourism and hospitality topic to personality grooming as well as economics. The top ranks of the most popular suggested courses out of 23 courses are personality development, bartender, business management, and accounting/finance/management. While the fifth of the ranking, which had been suggested evenly, are including event management, food and

beverage/culinary, World history, business communication, human resource, service quality management, and airline business.

Table 4: Findings of Important Competencies, Desired Positions, and Suggested Courses Collected from Students

Important Competencies		Desired Positions		Suggested courses	
Language skill	25	Reception/ FO	13	Personality development	6
Service mind	19	HR	12	Bartender	4
Problem solving	11	GM	7	Business MGMT	3
				Accounting/	
Punctuality	10	F&B	7	Finance/Management	3
Personality	8	Tour guide	5	Event MGMT,	2
				F&B / Culinary, World	
				history, Business	
				Communication, HR	
				MGMT, SQM,	
				Airline business	

Educators

The educators from reputable universities in Thailand were interviewed based on the criteria set in the research methods section. Their perception concerning important competencies and skills for hospitality and tourism graduates were revealed and summarized as demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Educator Interview Summary

Respondent Profile	Important Competencies for Graduates	Key Strengths
1. Lecturer, Burapha University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to work as a team - Good problem solving skill and decision making - The ability to work under pressure - Interpersonal skill - Leadership skill 	Work-integrated learning
2. Lecturer, Naresuan University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customer Service skills - Professional knowledge - Cultural awareness - Communication skills - Moral Quotient 	The insertion of hospitality service attitude
3. Lecturer, Mahidol University International College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analytical thinking skills - Adaptability - Creativity - Leadership skills - Emotional stability* 	Language skills and practical training program
4. Lecturer, Khon Kaen University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional knowledge - Communication skills - Human relations skills - Critical thinking* - Leadership skills* 	Professional knowledge and operational skills
5. Lecturer, Chiang Mai University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive attitude towards the service industry - Effectiveness of communication - Emotional intelligence - Teamwork - Technical and Technological skills 	Practical training program and special talent development session

Based on the findings of the interview, the educators shared some common and different perspectives on important competencies. After deducting the repeated items, fifteen competencies that the educators believed they are important were found, also see Table 5.

Considering the most common important competencies, a lecturer from Chiang Mai University expressed her view on the effectiveness of the communication that, “As the students will start their working career in hospitality/service/tourism-related sectors, communication skill is considered as one of the essential elements. When it comes to the real working situation, they need to work with either colleagues or guests. The smooth service delivery comes from good communication among the team. So, I think this is one of the competencies that the student should possess”.

A similar opinion was found from Khon Kaen University's lecturer. He mentioned during the interview that "Of course, they need to communicate a lot with both their guests and co-workers. Miscommunication could lead to wrong behaviors and plans. That's why the graduates need to have a good communication skill". A lecturer from Naresuan University also agreed with this idea.

Comparable to communication skill, the hospitality and tourism educators viewed leadership skill as high importance. As a lecturer from Mahidol University mentioned that, "growing in the chosen career path is desirable for graduates especially, the Gen Yers who aim to succeed in their career quickly or being result-oriented. To demonstrate the potential to be promoted, possessing leadership skills differentiates the talent from the company's labor pool. Since the hospitality industry is labor-intensive, each supervisor or manager is expected to take care of people under their supervision as one of the important duties. Thus, to be able to effectively supervise, lead and listen to other people will be the key factor encouraging the employers to promote the talents to gain the higher position." The lecturers from Burapha University and Khon Kaen University also expressed similar opinions.

Based on the evidence found in this study, communication skill and leadership skill were seen by hospitality and tourism educators in Thailand as the most important competencies in producing the preferred graduates for the industry. Teamwork, professional knowledge, interpersonal skill, analytical skill, emotional intelligence, and positive attitude were individually mentioned by two educators. The rest of the competencies, as shown in Table 3, each was mentioned by one university lecturer.

Industry

The results concerning the expected skills and competencies of the graduates by industry representatives were revealed and summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Manager Interview Summary

Respondent Profile	Important Competencies for Graduates	Challenges for the New Graduates
1. Senior Flight Officer, Bangkok Airways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotional stability - The ability to work under pressure - Positive attitude - Punctuality - Communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adaptability to the working environment and other colleagues
2. Senior Sales and Event Manager, Hilton Hua Hin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guest-oriented - Problem solving skills - Professional appearance - Communication skills - Interpersonal skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attitude towards workplace
3. Sales Manager, Sofitel Bangkok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interpersonal skills - Team oriented - Respectful behaviours - Ability of work long hours - Language skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adjustability to the working culture - Language skills
4. Managing Director, Boarding Pass Tour and Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Honest - Engage and commit to the team - Communication - Human relations skills - Be responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adaptability to the competitive situation at the workplace - Language skills
5. Sales Manager, Novotel Phuket Vintage Patong Beach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teamwork - Punctuality - Negotiation skills - Communication - Ability to work under pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to work under pressure - Working towards goal in a limited timeframe

Based on the interview results, the managers revealed diverse competencies that they expected from the university graduates. After combining the similar items, fifteen competencies that the hospitality and tourism managers perceive as important were exposed, see Table 6.

Like the educator's perspectives, communication skill was the most important competencies viewed by the industry representatives. As mentioned by a Senior Manager from Hilton Hua Hin that, "Communicating effectively both in writing and speaking is necessary. It is not only important when we have to communicate with clients, but with other colleagues". The Managing Director of Boarding Pass Tour and Travel also agreed with this as she said during the interview that, "In the tour operating business, if we wrongly communicate, we might lose our customers. It is an important aspect that an employee in this industry should have. A senior officer in the airline industry and a sales manager from ACCOR group also had similar views regarding communication skill.

Teamwork and interpersonal skill were perceived as equally important by the hospitality and tourism managers. Each skill was perceived as important by three industry representatives. The rest of the important competencies can be seen in Table 6.

Conclusions and Discussion

Following the research objectives, this study has discovered valuable evidence to answer the research questions, which are 1) what are the most important competencies for the new graduates entering the hospitality and tourism industry; and 2) How can the Thai universities produce graduates that fulfill the industry requirements?

The findings captured from the interviews from both educators and the industry sector revealed that there are some common competencies expected from new graduates mentioned by both stakeholders, see in table 7. For instance, communication skill, teamwork, interpersonal skill, and emotional intelligence/stability. In terms of communication skill, both educators and the industry sector mentioned that it includes the proficiency of third language skill as well as how well the graduates can receive, understand, interpret, and send out the message. Interpersonal skill is suggested since they are important in the workplace, especially in the hospitality environment, where staff is encouraged to participate and interact with guests or customers to deliver services. Professional knowledge is what the educators expected from graduates as they should attain relevant knowledge useful for their careers while they were in the program. The competition in the hospitality labor force is quite intense and the turnover rate is high. Therefore, appropriate knowledge and training background is essential for the graduates and all job seekers.

Those common competencies are mostly considered a transferable skill. According to Ring et al. (2009), transferable skill is concerning lifelong learning, creativity, critical thinking, as well as a social skill. Therefore, this skill can be developed throughout individuals' lives and can be inside or outside the classroom (Bath et al., 2004).

Interestingly, educators brought up the leadership skill issue, while the representatives from the industry sector did not mention it. From the educators' perspectives, leadership skill is important since it can lead to the work performance and the proactive personality of the graduates, which they believe is important for the recruitment and future career path.

Table 7: Summary of Important Competencies and Skills from Educational Stakeholders

No.	Educators	Freq	Industry	Freq
1	Communication Skill	3	Communication Skill	4
2	Leadership Skill	3	Interpersonal Skill	3
3	Teamwork	2	Teamwork	3
4	Professional Knowledge	2	Working under Pressure	2
5	Interpersonal Skill	2	Positive Attitude	2
6	Emotional Intelligence	2	Punctuality	2
7	Analytical Thinking	2	Emotional Stability	1
8	Positive Attitude	2	Problem Solving Skill	1
9	Working under Pressure	1	Professional Appearance	1
10	Technological Skill	1	Adaptability	1
11	Problem Solving Skill	1	Flexibility	1
12	Ethical Behaviour	1	Honest	1
13	Cultural Awareness	1	Negotiation Skill	1
14	Creativity	1	Accountability	1
15	Adaptability	1	Language Skill	1

Apart from the suggested competencies from educators and industry sectors, students also carry different opinions on what competencies they believe are important for them when they enter the workforce. Students perceived language skill as the key competency needed for the employees. Thus, they tended to concern more about the second or third language rather than other components of communication skill. They identify language skill and communication skill as the different competencies, dissimilarly from the former two stakeholders. Other competencies are also considered as transferable skills, including service mind, problem-solving skill, punctuality, and personality. Correspondingly, these competencies were suggested by educators and industry sectors as well, but not the primary concern. More attention regarding the competencies suggested by two stakeholders should be brought into students' awareness to enhance students' distinctions and their work performances.

Table 8: Summary of Important Competencies and Skills from Students

Students	Freq
Language Skill	25
Service Mind	19
Problem Solving Skill	11
Punctuality	10
Personality	8
Responsibility	7
Interpersonal skill	6
Emotional Intelligence	5
Positive Attitude	4
Communication Skill	3
Open-minded	3
Diligent	3
MGMT Skill	3
Cross Culture	3
Professional Knowledge	3

This study provides practical implementation for educators and universities in Thailand. Most of the sample of tourism and hospitality programs in Thai universities have provided comprehensive and useful subject areas for the students, according to Ring et al. (2009), including management, job preparation, tourism industry, transferable skills, IT, sustainability, and future tourism. More attention should be bought to sustainable and IT-related subject areas since only a few courses are available, while those are the upcoming trends of the tourism industry. This study has discovered that additional language course tailored for hospitality and tourism career is necessary as mentioned by all stakeholders. Therefore, the international program is advantageous, while the educators should consider providing third language courses, besides English, to meet the industry's trends and needs, for example, Chinese, Japanese and Russian.

Following the findings, McClelland (1973) suggested that aside from knowledge students attain from classrooms, educators' should emphasize more on competencies requisite by the industry as well. Those competencies are, for instance, communication skills, emotional intelligence (McClelland, 1973), critical thinking, communication, interpersonal, leadership, etc. (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003). One of the best practices in human resources management is training and knowledge building (Enz and Siguaw, 2000). This could be applied to the academic program to develop preferable competencies and



prepare graduates for the hospitality industry and workplace. More units or longer duration of intensive training courses, internships, and cooperative learning required by each program are recommended. This is also in line with Spowart (2011)'s suggestion. Moreover, more attention regarding the competencies suggested by two stakeholders should be brought into students' awareness to enhance students' distinctions and their work performances.

In conclusion, it is necessary that a hospitality and tourism curriculum development should integrate several perspectives from educational stakeholders, including industry, educators, as well as students. The academic part should be attentive to the trends, changes, and requirements of the industry. Besides, educators should also guide students on what they could literally gain from the program for their future careers and consider the shifting of students' choices of education trends as well.

Conclusion

This research aims to investigate the desirable competencies required by the industry and how Thai universities produce graduates that fulfill the industry requirements. From the findings, it reveals that in the potential graduates' point of view; the most important competencies are language skill, service mind, problem-solving skill, punctuality, and personality where the results differ in the educators and industry insiders' perspectives. Practical implementations have been recommended for educators and universities to improve their future curriculum to match with the industry focus. However, the current study has some limitations. Firstly, the limitation of time is challenging for the researchers. A piece of worth wide information and samples could be collected and analyzed if a longer period of study time was available. Secondly, fewer samples of curricula from a small number of universities in Thailand were chosen as the samples. Therefore, the findings might not be able to generalize to other universities in other locations.

Furthermore, convenient sampling was employed in the study, which could lead to some biased results, for example, the study used the senior students from only one leading university as the samples, etc. Lastly, only five leading regional public universities in Thailand were treated as samples. Therefore, the findings can represent only the common indications for universities in a specific country. The results might not apply to

programs provided by private universities in Thailand or universities in other regions of the World.

Future research should determine the limitations, which are times, samples, convenient samplings, and the public universities. More samples should be acquired from both public and private universities in Thailand. In addition, the study can be conducted in other countries or investigate the excellence model for the current topic by comparing programs between different countries. A larger number of samples in every process is recommended.

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