Get it right the first time: using job competencies for positive hiring outcomes in the hospitality industry

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Introduction

The goal of this edited textbook is to showcase, demonstrate, and illustrate the human resources (HR) function within the greater context of hospitality and tourism marketing. It is important to note that HR strengths and capabilities can be a strong factor in the performance of a culture that, in turn, adds greatly to marketing strength and profitability of a hospitality organization. While communication, internal guest focus, leadership, empowerment, and a host of other concepts add to the strength of a culture, hiring right is a “must have” in order for organizations to match internal guest success with their desired external guest satisfaction levels. Those who are adequately matched with competencies, either inherent traits or learned protocols, will help lead our industry venues to be more productive and profitable while leading its employees toward future careers with higher levels of satisfaction.

It is the goal of this chapter to briefly examine and explore the job competency dimension as it relates to HR practices within the hospitality industry. The author incorporates the concept of job competencies into a possible paradigm which will help lead today’s hospitality operations toward a more stable and effective performance level. By using job competencies as effective tools in one’s HR cache, it is the hope that employees will offer higher levels of quality of work while experience higher quality levels of work. Strong cultures with happy staff members lead to stronger performance on the balance sheets. Effective HR managers not only have happy employees, they have happy owners and investors. As an HR manager, tactics and procedures surrounding the concept of job competencies need to be a part of your arsenal.

Hospitality management education at the college level: a brief history

Hospitality is defined as “hospitable treatment, reception, or disposition” by The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2003, p. 601). However, hospitality management is the comprehensive term for the business management disciplines which include the services to travelers, visitors, and even local residents (Walker, 1999, 2004). It is a focus on hospitality management to which this text is dedicated, and specifically, to HR functions and practices within the hospitality industry. Those employed in HR capacities are dedicated to the hiring, training, development, and growth of hospitality employees within organizations of all types and sizes. The number of positions, titles,
and designations within the vast hospitality industry seems limitless. One need only consider the various segments within the overall hospitality industry to understand the challenges facing HR individuals today. A non-inclusive listing of these segments would include such areas as airline, cruise line, destination marketing, theme park, food service, lodging, event planning, and vacation ownership. Each area is a large “industry” within its own right. One shall quite easily realize the need for an ongoing cadre of trained professionals in the hospitality industry.

Indeed, by the year 2005, 7.5 million jobs were directly generated by the travel industry in the United States alone and the payroll for those directly employed in the travel industry was over $170 billion (Travel Industry Association of America, 2006). The high number of employees has led to the need for college-level training of the workforce. Although “the concept of hospitality is as old as civilization itself” (Walker, 1999, p. 4), the offering of a hospitality management degree at the college level is much more recent. The first program was offered by Cornell University in 1922 (Cornell University School of Hotel Administration, 2007). Thereafter, programs appeared at Purdue University in 1926, Michigan State University in 1927, and The Pennsylvania State University in 1937 (Guide to College Programs, 2004).

The increase in worldwide travel from the 1940s to the 21st century and its resultant need for talented employees far outpaced the growth of hospitality education at the managerial level (i.e., baccalaureate degree). The growth of the industry led to an ever-present need for highly educated and well-trained employees in all segments of hospitality management (Guide to College Programs, 2004; Lattin, 1995; Marriott, 2001; Walker, 1999, 2004). As hotelier J. W. Marriott, Jr., remarked in 2001: “Finding and keeping employees has never been easy. But now full employment has converged with a service and information economy making recruitment and retention the most pressing challenge facing American business today” (p. 18).

It took over 50 years for lodging and hospitality management programs at the baccalaureate level to grow to an even moderate number. By the year 1974, only 41 programs offering baccalaureate degrees in hospitality management or hospitality administration existed in the United States (Brady, 1988). The latter part of the 21st century, however, saw a more rapid growth cycle in the number of these degree-granting programs. By 1986 there were 128 baccalaureate-level programs available to future hospitality managers (Tanke, 1986). By 2004, the Guide to College Programs in Hospitality, Tourism, and
Culinary Arts (8th ed.) listed 170 baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in the United States alone. Further, there were more than 800 programs listing either a professional certificate in hospitality management or an associate-level/2-year degree, or both. It appeared that hospitality education offerings were attempting to keep pace with the burgeoning growth in the number of available hospitality management positions.

Although the numbers are increasing, many senior managers currently employed in the hospitality industry do not possess baccalaureate degrees with specific study of hospitality management (Ricci, Tesone, & DiPietro, 2004). Quite simply, the programs did not exist at the time of study for these individuals.

One observes that in over 80 years since the creation of the first program at Cornell University (Cornell University School of Hotel Administration, 2007) in 1922, hospitality education at the university level has greatly expanded. The true growth occurred mainly since the period 1975–2004 when the number of baccalaureate-level hospitality management programs quadrupled (Guide to College Programs, 2004). While these education offerings have greatly increased in number, the number of available hospitality industry positions has far outpaced the number of course and degree offerings (Travel Industry Association of America, 2006). As either the largest industry worldwide, or one of the largest, depending on defining criteria, the hospitality industry indeed does not have a sufficient number of programs producing future leaders according to the numbers (Guide to College Programs, 2004; Walker, 2004). Even after years of growth in college-level programs, only 8.46% of college campuses offering baccalaureate degrees had a hospitality management degree program during the 2000–2001 academic year (Digest of Education Statistics, 2002).

Additionally, there is great variety among the hospitality programs in terms of their offerings. Curricula differ significantly depending on the hospitality management program’s age, geographic location, specific academic discipline or college within which the program is housed, style of leadership, funding levels, overall goals of the larger university or college, etc. (Guide to College Programs, 2004). Further, there is little consensus in the literature on which type of curriculum design makes for a perfect match based upon industry needs, student needs, and/or educator needs (Brownell & Chung, 2001; Jayawardena, 2001; Woods, Rutherford, Schmidgall, & Sciarini, 1998).

For the HR professional seeking a future manager in the hospitality industry, the variety of college program styles and variances in curricula may be a cause for consternation. Not only are program numbers not sufficient for job offerings, the
program variety makes recruiting challenging at best. Instead, recruiting based on specific job competencies may assist HR professionals in their pursuit of good “matches” for the hospitality industry’s managerial needs. By relying upon job competencies deemed appropriate and useful for the hospitality industry, an HR professional can narrow the variance exhibited by a program’s curriculum, specific training methods and courses, and academic discipline. Reliance upon job competencies may increase the likelihood for success on the part of the HR recruiter in terms of finding suitable applicant matches to the needs of the hospitality industry.

Competency-based education and testing

Criterion-reference education is most often associated with the work of Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl (1956). A meeting of university examiners attending the 1948 American Psychological Association in Boston ultimately led to the development of a “theoretical framework which could be used to facilitate communication among examiners” (Bloom et al., p. 4). Under the leadership of Bloom, the team created a taxonomy. As editor, Bloom assisted in the development of a taxonomy which contained cognitive knowledge levels with which educators could implement various strategies at differing levels, dependent on the level of learning experience of their respective students. Bloom et al. developed a cognitive educational taxonomy with progressing levels of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The opinion of this group was that knowledge alone was the lowest level for an educator to instruct. Students were taught nothing but basic facts using rote memorization. The uppermost level of evaluation would imply that the student not only would know and comprehend the information, but also be able to apply it, analyze it, synthesize it, and make an intelligent evaluation of the material. Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I, The Cognitive Domain (1956) remains a mainstay among the legions of American educators.

Later, in 1964, A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook II, The Affective Domain was put forth further developing Bloom et al.’s taxonomy of 1956 (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). This taxonomy featured a hierarchical learning domain based upon the mental processing of a learner that takes place during the course of the overall learning process. In this taxonomy, the lowest level was receiving; the student is simply “willing to receive to attend” (p. 176) to stimuli. Moving upward in the
taxonomy simply receiving is next followed by responding to then valuing to organization and, lastly, to characterization. In this viewpoint, educators were asked to focus on the mental states and processes of a learner versus the cognitive or knowledge focus which comprised the initial handbook and its cognitive domain (Bloom et al., 1956). Hence, in *Handbook II*, the educator is encouraged to move from simply having a learner attend to his or her stimuli being demonstrated to higher levels where students have characterized their own personal values about life, the universe, etc. Students’ attitudes and ideas are assumed to fit into a pattern of internal consistency. The individual has a fully encompassed mental thinking system within himself or herself rather than strictly focusing on facts and knowledge given from an outsider.

Moving into the latter part of the 20th century, educators have moved more toward a criterion-based learn process. Information and material is presented to the student or learner dependent on where one is learning from within the broader structure of a taxonomy. The testing and giving back of expected knowledge and/or the ability to synthesize knowledge and make overall evaluations is quite evident in today’s classrooms. In 1958, McClelland, Baldwin, Bronfenbrenner, and Strodtbeck first proposed looking at talent in society and began to query whether individuals should be tested on specific talents, competencies, or personal ability criteria versus standardized measures of intelligence. To this group of researchers, standardized measures of intelligence appeared vague and unreliable. Their treatise, *Talent and Society* (1958) was largely ignored and overlooked by the educational community of the time as IQ and other standardized measures were still considered the mainstay (McClelland, 1973).

McClelland (1973) vehemently opposed the use of general intelligence and fervently pushed for competence testing. His argument centered on the fact that the testing movement (standardized) was so ingrained in American society that it would take many years to change the system. His research discussed bias against certain socioeconomic groups when tested used standardized methods; however, his report further stated that generalized intelligence testing showed dubious reliability and validity when predicting future business success or general life success for individuals (McClelland). His objective was to “review skeptically the main lines of evidence for the validity of intelligence and aptitude tests” (p. 1). He went so far as to say that most of the general public in the United States was left unaware that intelligence measures were unrelated to most “any other behaviors of importance—other than
doing well on aptitude tests” (p. 2). Instead of testing for how well one would perform on an intelligence measure (i.e., IQ test), he instead suggested the notion of testing for specific job competencies, otherwise known as criterion-based testing. McClelland clearly championed criterion-based testing when he remarked: “If you want to know how well a person can drive a car (the criterion), sample his ability to do so by giving him a driver’s test. Do not give him a paper-and-pencil test for following directions, a general intelligence test” (p. 7).

Challenged by the instructional community for many years, McClelland (1994) continued his ongoing fight to promote the efficacy of criterion- or competency-based training and education. His more recent research demonstrated that scores on standardized tests, especially intelligence measures, had very little connection, if any, with future success in one’s life. Instead, these measures were useful in predicting future scores on other such standardized examinations. Under McClelland’s (1973, 1994) paradigm, competency-based education would be worthy for retail store managers, taxi cab drivers, railroad engineers, or teachers. Indeed, one could assume that hospitality managers would also benefit from training and education specific to the field of hospitality management.

The mantra purported by McClelland (1973, 1994) for over 20 years pushed forward the notion of education for specific and necessary competencies, dependent on the specific industry or job function on hand. McClelland (1994) suggested designing tests that would measure “threshold competencies” (p. 68) whereby trainers could design examinations with minimum scores to test for specific job positions and duties. In his development of a competency testing measure for the Civil Service Commission in Massachusetts, the resultant instrument correlated significantly with the specific criterion needed for a job as a human service worker (HSW). He identified a “cutting score on the test battery that would ensure that most of the people at that score or above would be classified as ‘outstanding’” (p. 68).

Popham and Husek (1969) discussed competency-based learning as well. The remarked that “a criterion-referenced test is used to identify an individual’s status with respect to an established standard of performance” (p. 1). Individuals are compared with some established competency rather than with other individuals as would an IQ type of examination. As the reader, you can envision an admissions director of a university or college wishing to possibly see where an applicant falls in comparison to other applicants on a norm-referenced or criterion-referenced examination such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Yet, a hiring manager for a hospitality
company would more probably want to know whether or not an applicant possesses specific knowledge, ability, or values (competencies) as demonstrated on a competency-referenced measurement tool.

Future managers and leaders in industry are often now subject to competency-based testing. It appears to have come of age. A review of literature indicates that job competency testing is used to determine a good match for future employees in a wide variety of industries. A non-exhaustive list includes: trucking (Mele, 1993), banking, sports, parcel delivery, emergency road service (Jaffee, 2000), tour operators, restaurants (Agut & Grau, 2002), and club management (Perdue, Woods, & Ninemeier, 2001). Weatherly (2004) went so far as to say that “work now requires more knowledge and skills than ever before” (p. 1). Job competency testing is a more exact method to locate successful and appropriate employee matches. Similarly, Taylor (2004) stated “Now that the economic tide is slowly turning, forward-looking companies are employing the use of tests to identify core competencies and specific behaviors they’re looking for in new hires and future leaders” (p. G1).

Competency-based training and testing certain appears a viable resource for those seeking future hospitality employees, managers, and leaders. In comparison to more traditional norm-referenced testing of general intelligence, one can create testing focused and targeted for the specific needs of today’s hospitality industry.

The hospitality industry and job competencies

“Although the selection and training of good administrators is widely recognized as one of American industry’s most pressing problems, there is surprisingly little agreement among executives or educators on what makes a good administrator” (Katz, 1955, p. 33). The above statement from Katz is as current today as it was in the middle of the 20th century. In his seminal work, Skills of an Effective Administrator, Katz discussed migration toward a more competency or skill-based competency approach when recruiting and selecting executive talent. Instead of general personality characteristics or traits, one should instead focus on what these individuals could do in terms of their job abilities or skills. A skill would be something able to be taught, learned, and comprehended—not inborn as a personality characteristic (Katz).

Katz (1955) suggested a “three-skill approach” (p. 34). These three basic skills were technical, human, and conceptual.
Technical skills are most important at the lowest levels—specialized knowledge. Human ability is useful at all levels within an organization—in today’s business jargon this is referred to often as interpersonal skills. Conceptual skills would be used at the highest levels of management. This skill set includes the ability to integrate and think globally. Katz broke ground on initial researcher focus in terms of skills or competencies for executives.

Stull (1974) commented, “Through practice and research, management work is being identified, classified, and measured. As a specialized skill, management work is transferable, can be taught, and can be practiced in terms of recognized principles and an emerging common vocabulary” (p. 6). Throughout the 1970s, a competency-based learning and testing system for hiring talent emerged in the literature. The first known hospitality industry competency-based study was conducted in Las Vegas, NV by Sapienza (1978). Hotel executives were invited by Sapienza to “assess the outlook in terms of what industry leaders think hospitality students ought to study” (p. 12). While naïve in its format and deployment, it was nonetheless a bold step forward into the realm of competency-based testing for hiring in the hospitality industry. In this primitive study, course titles from the University of Nevada’s College of Hotel Administration were listed and managers considered executives by the researcher were asked to rank order the course listings in terms of importance using a Likert-style five-point continuum. Competencies, then, were inferred indirectly through the ranking of the course listings. Confinued geographically to Las Vegas with a convenience sample of 30 participants, the study was quite limited in its usefulness; nonetheless, it was a valiant step forward in terms of competency-based education and testing within the hospitality industry. Indeed, Sapienza only considered these recommendations as expert opinions. Reading this article today indicates that many of these so-called opinions still remain highly regarded competencies for tomorrow’s hospitality leaders.

Guglielmino and Carroll (1979) replicated the earlier work of Katz (1955) by looking, instead, at skills necessary for mid-level managers. Whereas Katz focused on the executives, Guglielmino and Carroll focused on the skills that would be even more important for those recruiting out of college and university programs. Their findings “provided a clear indication that there appears to be a definite hierarchy of management skills [sic] in the development of an effective manager” (p. 342). Their findings were similar to Katz in that conceptual skills were the most important at the highest levels of management.
with technical skills most important at the lower levels of management.

The work of Mariampolski, Spears, and Vaden (1980) emphasized hospitality competencies specific to food service managers. “Despite the large number of institutions offering programs in hospitality management—and the continuing debate about what subjects hospitality curricula should emphasize—the authors’ literature search uncovered no competency statements developed specifically for food-service managers” (p. 77). It is interesting to note that even in 1980 the authors felt that there were a large number of institutions offering programs in hospitality management, yet no consensus on hospitality competencies. Using a sample of past executives from the National Restaurant Association (NRA), the authors identified three broad competency areas almost identical to those discussed by Katz (1955) two and a half decades prior. These competencies included: knowledge/technical, attitude/human/, and ability/conceptual.

The first overarching effort at competency study in the hospitality industry was focused in the lodging arena by Tas (1983). In agreement with previous studies (Guglielmino & Carroll, 1979; Katz, 1955; Mariampolski et al., 1980) human relationship or interpersonal skills were deemed not only important, but essential. Tas stated “no previously prepared instrument is suitable for the collection of data needed for this study. Hence, a multi-stage endeavor is used to develop the appropriate instrument” (pp. 31–32). Hence, a job competency skills assessment for future lodging managers was born. Seven distinct competency categories emerged: accounting procedures, hotel sales and promotions, housekeeping, hotel front office, personnel (now termed HR), food and beverage, and managerial responsibilities (pp. 32–33). “The study sample was composed of 229 hotel general managers with active members in the American Hotel and Motel Association. A total of 75 (33%) general managers returned the instrument” (p. 82).

Tas (1983) found that hotel managers rated the importance of job competencies different and made suggestions for competencies useful in hospitality management curricula at the university level. Consistent with previous studies (i.e., Katz, 1955) conceptual competencies were considered the least vital among entry-level managers. In 1988, Tas expanded his work. He now looked at whether or not specific area competencies had been attained by his sample. As evidenced in the literature of the time, an exhaustive list of specific competencies was nowhere to be found. Tas remarked, “Unfortunately, a specific list of these competencies has not been compiled before now” (p. 41). Having developed an initial list of 70 competencies that “might
be needed by hotel-manager trainees” (p. 42), Tas eventually narrowed the list to 36 after using expert review panels.

Using a stratified format, Tas (1988) administered the categorization to members of the American Hotel and Motel Association. Tas used the following scale: 4.50 importance or higher on a 5-point Likert-type scale would translate to an essential competency for a would-be hotel-manager trainee. A considerably important competency would have a score on the same scale from 3.50 to 4.49. Those scoring 2.50–3.49 would be considered moderately important. Any item scoring lower than 2.50 would not be deemed a core competency whatsoever. “Six competencies were deemed essential for hotel-manager trainees. These six attributes center primarily on human-relations skills” (p. 43).

Getty, Tas, and Getty (1991) furthered the attempt to study hospitality industry practitioner requirements and desires for new hires in terms of job competencies. “The researchers used a research instrument developed and validated by Tas (1983)” (p. 395). In this study, employers rated their general satisfaction level with hospitality management graduates using the 36 competencies identified in the former study by Tas (1988). The purpose of the Getty et al. study “…was to assess the quality of the graduates based upon their level of competence in their current management positions and thereby determine if the program’s [hospitality management program] mission is being met” (p. 394). As in previous studies by Tas (1983, 1988), human relations, knowledge, and ability competencies were deemed the most important. Getty et al. discussed that “to a large extent, the academic program is meeting its mission by providing students with the competencies deemed important by managers” (p. 397).

Rutherford (1987) examined specific competencies for the role of a chief engineer within a hotel operation. His findings identified not only the evolution of the chief engineer role within the hospitality industry, but the matching competencies required for the specific duties of this position. This position has less of a reliance on interpersonal skills than many others found in the hospitality industry and as the findings reported. Okeiyi, Finley, and Postel (1994) focused on food and beverage management competencies. Their top 10 competencies included human relations, knowledge, and conceptual skills. For the entry-level manager, as in previous research efforts, human relations skills emerged as the most important. Okeiyi et al. concluded by stating, “Although this study has some limitations due to response rates and sample size, it is apparent that educators in conjunction with industry practitioners need to work together to design curricula…Hospitality educators and students must continue to keep abreast of industry expectations and incorporate
them into hospitality management curricula” (p. 40). In 1998, Emenheiser, Clay, and Palakurthi reduced 72 criteria to 12 success attributes and traits for restaurant managers. Also a believer in criterion-based education and testing, Emenheiser et al. stated “Hospitality curriculum planners can consider the traits of those most successful in the industry when educating current students and determining curriculum content” (p. 55). Using factor analysis, “the goal of the researchers was to reduce the numerous attributes and traits to a manageable number of components that can be used for further analysis” (p. 57). The result listed five components: management skills, organizational skills, marketing skills, communication skills, and psychomotor skills. Further, these were labeled as leadership, interpersonal, personality, and model attitude (p. 59).

Others have also found competencies to be important for the new hospitality manager. Knight and Salter (1985) honed in on communication skills specifically. Jonker and Jonker (1990) looked more at technical skills, computer skills, and a guest-orientation or guest-focus. Creativity was a key component analyzed by Hanson (1993). Without a doubt, human relations skills continue to be important among a vast variety of the research available (Ashley et al., 1995; Hsu, Gilmore, & Walsh, 1992; Tas, Labrecque, & Clayton, 1996).

Recently, Lin (2002) explored the relationship between hotel management courses and industry required competencies. A statistically significant regression demonstrated a link between the competencies of “communication skills” and “adaptation to environmental changes” with hospitality industry career success (p. 92). Ricci (2005) further refined the job competencies suggested by Tas (1988) using focus groups of experts in the lodging industry. A sample of lodging managers in the central FL area was queried to see if this group of individuals had higher expectations based upon job competencies for graduates of baccalaureate degrees specific to hospitality management compared to more general degree disciplines. Statistical significance was found in a vast majority of instances. It did appear that a majority of lodging managers expect institutions to be better preparing our future hospitality leaders through training and learning of specific job competencies.

The most recent movement (since the late 1990s) in terms of job competency research within hospitality concerns competency modeling. “A current hot topic in HRD [Human Resources Development] is competency modeling” (Mirabile, 1997, p. 73). Competency modeling was defined by Mirabile as “the output from analyses that differentiate high performers from average and lower performers” (p. 75). It was created using a variety of
techniques, models help recruiters and employers identify success factors. Such techniques include job-analysis interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, job descriptions, etc. (p. 75). Hospitality venues may identify such success factors after being rank ordered by various expert groups. The venue can then establish minimum levels of competency or proficiency for each factor as determined by the group effort, research literature, or input from educators within the hospitality field. Cautioning that competency models are only as strong as their ingredients, Mirabile states: “The most important point about competency models is that the formats be governed by the collective wisdom of the people that need to build them” (p. 76). Competency modeling is slowly emerging as an area of research within the hospitality management literature (Brownell & Chung, 2001; Lefever & Withiam, 1998; Lin, 2002). Lefever and Withiam emphasized that “curriculum review now involves regular contacts with industry representatives…As a result, we believe industry and academe are now tied more closely together than at any time in the 75 years that colleges have offered formal hospitality-management curricula” (pp. 70–71).

Over the past several decades, competencies deemed significant and useful in the identification of future hospitality industry leaders have been proposed, identified, evaluated, re-tested, and either refined or refuted by multiple hospitality industry researchers (Getty et al., 1991; Hsu et al., 1992; Jonker & Jonker, 1990; Lin, 2002; Okeiyi et al., 1994; Sapienza, 1978; Tas, 1983, 1999; Tas et al., 1996). Emerging from this iterative process are competencies related to knowledge, attitude, and ability of the future hospitality management leaders. These appear quite often as the key drivers or anchors for future success in the hospitality industry.

As a HR professional interested in creating better and stronger work environments of the future, specific job competencies determined relevant and important for hospitality careers must be identified and measured among our future workforce. Our professional assistance in the development and refinement of the various hospitality management curricula found in college-level programs will enhance the future success of the overall industry based upon employee performance. If we match correctly the first time around, our employees are likely to be more satisfied and content in their positions.

Summary and conclusion

From 1950 through the present, job competency use among HR professionals in recruiting, selecting, and interviewing
prospective hospitality industry employees has become prevalent in not only the academic literature, but also the hospitality professional’s repertoire as an effective and worthy tool for matching applicants with future potential career success. Lodging managers were recently found to expect more from college hospitality management programs than from non-hospitality 4-year degrees. In Ricci et al. (2004), it was stated that “practicing professionals currently expect more from college graduates who have studied hospitality” (p. 29). Human skills/interpersonal skills were found to be equally important whether students emerged from hospitality programs or non-hospitality programs continuing a decades-long trend within the research that interpersonal skills remain paramount for hospitality industry professional success among employers.

Ricci and Tesone (2007) found consistency between educators and industry practitioners when examining the competencies expected by hospitality managers with hospitality workers. The findings were combined to one large metropolitan statistical area (MSA); yet, the findings were consistent with the broad array of hospitality and business literature over multiple decades (Chung-Herrera, Enz, & Lankau, 2003; Katz, 1955; McClelland, 1994; Tas, 1983, 1988).

With the high expense of employee turnover in the hospitality industry (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000; Simons & Hinkin, 2001), job competency instruments may assist HR professionals in their ongoing pursuit of the “right” employees for the “right” positions. As suggested by Boles, Lawrence, and Johnson (1995), pre-employment application screening and matching of demographics and skills will help reduce employee turnover. In their lodging oriented study, Milman and Ricci (2004) also discussed many variations (of which job competency pre-employment screening could be utilized) of methods to enhance employee retention and reduce employee turnover.

The literature is replete with the discussion of job competency and competency-based education. The hospitality industry has only recently moved toward incorporating competency-based education and pre-employment measurement to improve organizational profitability, employee satisfaction, and to help reduce employee turnover. By matching the “right employees” to the “right jobs” initially, job competencies specific to the hospitality industry can be a key indicator of future success for such new employees in the field. The hospitality industry is wide and varies considerably between segments (i.e., event planning, airline, restaurant management). Nonetheless, it appears that interpersonal skills remain paramount across segments and across time. Job-specific knowledge/skills also appear important. As
HR leaders, we must tailor specific competencies to the nuances of the individualized segment within which we make our professional livelihood. The development of job competency identification instruments specific to our segment, will assist us in honing our perfection in the identification of such individuals possessing these competencies. Further, we shall work alongside those in academia designing curricula and course materials to help foster and communicate these important and necessary competencies to the future leaders.

The reader is encouraged to help develop instruments ideal for their respective hospitality segments. Only through expert panels, focus groups, and continual refinement will these instruments become ubiquitous among hospitality recruiters. We have only touched the surface of job competency research and instrument design in the hospitality industry. The reader is encouraged to peruse the literature specific to his or her discipline and to help identify specific job competencies relevant in today’s workplace. The hospitality industry continues to grow and change. Technology, economical, and societal influences are ever-present. With the changing times come changing expectations for our future leaders. Only through ongoing identification and refinement of job competencies can we continue to design instruments to identify the talent our industry needs to continue to flourish and grow.

References


