Career Competencies And Career Success Of Thai Employees In Tourism And Hospitality Sector

Aurathai Lertwannawit, Ph.D., Rajabhat Suan Dusit University, Thailand
Sirivan Serirat, Rajabhat Suan Dusit University, Thailand
Siroj Pholpantin, Ph.D., Rajabhat Suan Dusit University, Thailand

ABSTRACT

This research assesses the relationship between career competencies and career success of Thai employees in the tourism and hospitality sector. The authors distinguished and operationalized four career competencies, i.e. computer and language skills, work spirits and ethics, team working and leadership, and tourism and hospitality knowledge and skills, and two career successes, i.e. objective and subjective career successes. A quantitative study was performed using 800 employees in four industries, i.e. restaurant, hotel, travel and tour operation, and airline business. Pearson correlation and regression analyses were used to analyze data. The results indicate that career competencies have moderately positive relation with career success. Furthermore, three career competencies, i.e. computer and language skills, team work and leadership, and tourism and hospitality knowledge and skills have effect on career success. The results are discussed with respect to facilitate organization's training programs, which enhance employees' career success.

Keywords: career competencies, career success, human capital, Tourism and hospitality sector

INTRODUCTION

$\mathcal{T}$he tourism and hospitality sector has been promoted as an emerging source of revenue for Thai economy after traditional sources of national competitive advantage, such as production capacities, low labor cost advantage for industrial products, have been lost to emerging countries such as China, India, and Vietnam. A report by the World Travel & Tourism Council (2009) indicated that the contribution of travel and tourism to gross domestic product is expected to rise from 14.7% in 2009 to 15.6% by 2019. In addition, Thailand's travel and tourism revenue rank in 24th in absolute size worldwide, 44th in relative contribution to national economies and 25th in 10-year growth.

The natural characteristics of tourism and hospitality services are intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability. The services are intangible because often customers do not know how good the services are until he/she receives them. They are inseparable because the production of the services cannot be separated from their consumption. Customers and service providers have to present at the time when the services are delivered. In addition, service quality and consistency are subject to great variability because they are delivered by people, and human behavior is difficult to control. Lastly, the services are perishable because they cannot be stored for future use. The inherent value vanishes when there is no existence of customer. "People" become the most important enterprise assets for the tourism and hospitality sector, and human capital represents the only sustainable source of competitive advantage. The companies need highly competent employees who have knowledge and skills to provide the best services to serve the unpredictable customers' requirements. Consequently, it is important to attract, retain, and use the talents of people to provide a competitive edge for the tourism and hospitality sector in Thailand.

Career competencies as part of human capital development can be developed through education and training. Additionally, career success is a leveraged outcome in retaining employees. It is then important to

companies to improve their understanding the effects of career competencies on the career success of employees' in tourism and hospitality sector in Thailand. This research addresses the research question: to what extents are career competencies related to the career success of Thai employees' in the tourism and hospitality sector.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Career Competencies

Competency refers to "an area of knowledge or skill that is critical for producing key outputs…internal capabilities that people bring to their jobs (or) capabilities which may be express in a broad, even infinite array of on-the-job behaviors"(McLagan & Suhadolink, 1989, p77). Hence, career competencies could be seen as a person's self-management of his or her working and learning experiences in order to achieve desired career progress. Career development is taken as active career-actualization, which we define as the realization of personal goals and values in one's career vis-à-vis the facilitation and constraining conditions of the work situation. Kuijpers & Scheercns (2006) distinguished between six career competencies: career-actualization-ability, the degree to which employees are capable of realizing personal goals and values in their working career; career reflection, reviewing one's own competencies with respect to one's career; motivation reflection, reviewing one's own desires and values with respect to one's career; work exploration, orientation toward matching one's own identity and competencies to the required values and competencies in a specific work situation; career control, career-related planning and influencing of learning and work processes; and networking, setting up contacts that are relevant for one's career. Defillippi & Arthur (1994) introduced broadly career competencies which are know-why, know-how, and know-whom competencies. Know-why competencies mainly focus on relationship between corporate cultures and personal identity. Know-how competencies reflect career relevant skills and job-related knowledge, and underlie how people contribute to a firm's repertoire of overall capabilities. Know-whom competencies reflect career relevant networks, and refer to how people contribute to inter-firm communication, sometime called networks, which are the source of new resource, reputation, and new learning.

Career Success

"Career success" can be viewed as a means to fulfill a person's needs and desires through achievements, accomplishment and power acquisition (Lau & Shaffer, 1999; Nabi, 1999). Career success refers to objective and subjective elements of achievement and progress of an individual through the vocational lifespan (Judge *et al.*, 1995; Nabi, 1999; Ng *et al.*, 2005). Objective career success has been measured in terms of extrinsic measures, such as salary and occupational status (Kuijpers *et al.*, 2006). Subjective career success has been measured in terms of an individual's perception of career actualization success (Aryee *et al.*, 1994; Kuijpers et al., 2006). More specifically, subjective career success has been defined as a conceptually distinct construct referring to an individual's judgment of their own success evaluated against personal standards, age, aspirations and views of significant others (Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987; Gattiker and Larwood, 1986). Thus, individuals with high subjective career success feel happier and more successful about their careers relative to their own internal standards.

Ng et al., (2005) has identified three approaches to explain career success predictors. The three well-known approaches are the individual, the structural, and the behavioral perspectives (Aryee et al., 1994; Rosenbaum, 1989). The first approach draws heavily on individual variables found in the popular literature of human capital and motivational theories. This approach focuses on the individual as the one who develops his/her own human capital and therefore maximizes his/her education and skill investments for achieving success in careers. The second approach relies on the management theory of the firm and vacancy models and postulates that organizational factors such as organizational size and internal promotional practices are prerequisites for successful individual careers in organizations. The third approach assumes that career achievement is a function of certain career strategies including politically influenced behavior.

Tourism and Hospitality Sector in Thailand

The real GDP growth rate for Thailand's travel & tourism economy is expected to be -3.3% in 2009 and to average 6.1% per annum over the coming 10 years (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2009). However, tourism and

hospitality has provided many job opportunities and has become one of the main ways to resolve the problems of employment in Thailand. In 2009, the tourism and hospitality sector is forecasted to support more than 4.04 million jobs (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2009). The strength of tourism and hospitality human resources in Thailand continues to develop and the number of employees continues to increase. The good indicator is the number of institutes in providing tourism and hospitality programs in Thailand, which is about 88 institutes in 2003. Tourism and hospitality education in Thailand offers both Thai and International tourism and hospitality courses ranging from diploma to doctorate. Although the number of institutions and programs as well as student inputs and outputs has increased, Chaisawat (2000) found that the quality of tourism graduates and curricula remain difficult to be measured and standardized. In response to these issues, future labor demand in the industry, particularly at management level, is likely to be a shortfall in the supply of "highly-qualified" candidates, despite recent increases in numbers of students studying tourism and hospitality management and related subjects at degree and diploma levels. This is a challenging issue for the industry, which rightly proclaims itself as a "people industry". Thailand is still faced with the problem of a shortage of qualified personnel. Service quality, management skills and quality of staff cannot meet the needs of rapid tourism and hospitality development. At the same time, the hospitality industry is also confronted by a series of problems that need to be resolved fast, such as low quality and skills of employees, imbalanced allocation of human resources as well as low level of training. A key to resolve these problems is to survey the specific situation of employees and to find out what skills will be required in the future so as to take advantage of new opportunities and to enhance the development of the Thai tourism and hospitality sector.
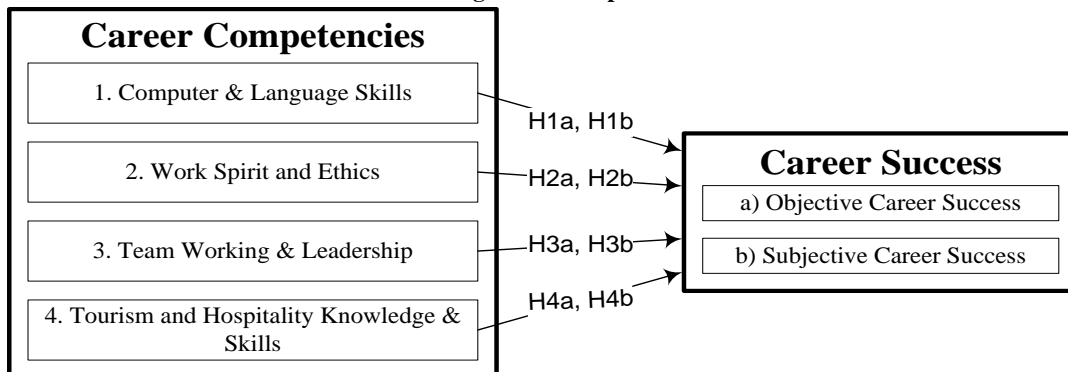
CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES RELATIONSHIP

Conceptual Model

Human Capital theory refers to individual knowledge and abilities that allow for changes in action and economic growth. Human capital may be developed through formal training and education aimed at updating and renewing an individual's capabilities in order to do well in society (Becker, 1964, 1993). For this research, career competencies defined as know-how competencies (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Kuijpers & Scheercns, 2006; Kuijpers et al., 2006), which directly affect individual employee perception of themselves in possessing knowledge, skills and abilities. The capability of individual employees' collective learning will contribute to idiosyncratic component of the organization, and to career successes including both objective and subject career successes (Kuijpers & Scheercns, 2006; Kuijpers et al., 2006).

As this research aims to investigate the relationship between career competencies and career success of Thai employees' in thetourism and hospitality sector, the conceptual model for this research consists of one main independent variable, i.e. career competencies (computer & language skills, work spirit and ethics, team work & leadership, and tourism and hospitality knowledge and skills), and one main dependent variable, i.e. career successes (objective and subjective career successes), as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual Model

Hypotheses Relationship

According to the conceptual model in Figure 1, the alternative hypotheses are as follows:

H1:   There is positive relationship between computer and language skills and a) objective career success; b) subjective career success.

H2:   There is positive relationship between work spirit and ethics and a) objective career success; b) subjective career success.

H3:   There is positive relationship between team working and leadership and a) objective career success; b) subjective career success.

H4:   There is positive relationship between tourism and hospitality knowledge and skills and a) objective career success; b) subjective career success.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used quantitative methodology. Survey is conducted to collect data. The following explains the research design used for data collection and hypotheses testing stated previously.

Population

In this research, the population is employees in the Thai tourism and hospitality sector. Instead of canvassing all, the research focuses on four major sub-sectors that are restaurant, hotel, travel and tour operation, and airline business. The target population includes professional employees, whose services directly reflect on customers' service experience. Quota sampling is used in collecting data. The total sample size is 800 sets – 200 sets per industry.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Career Competencies

Career Competencies Scale Items	Mean	S.D.	Factor Loading	Reliability
Computer & Language skills				.9035
1. English conversation over media	3.33	.960	.888	
2. Computer usage skill	3.32	.956	.891	
3. English communication skill	3.31	.923	.881	
4. Apply Computer to solve problem	3.19	1.019	.866	
Work Spirits and Ethics				.8952
5. Willingness to provide service	4.13	.792	.847	
6. Honesty to customers	4.12	.777	.831	
7. Discipline in providing service to customers	4.08	.757	.840	
8. Make the customer satisfy in service	4.04	.774	.847	
9. Mentally stable and patient in providing service	3.84	.817	.776	
10. Provide quick and correct service to customers	3.81	.786	.721	
Team Working and Leaderships				.8452
11. Ability to work in team environment	3.83	.788	.816	
12. Inspiration and enthusiasm in working in team	3.78	.835	.811	
13. Ability to solving team conflict	3.66	.842	.829	
14. Vision and creativity in working	3.63	.851	.849	
Tourism and Hospitality Knowledge & Skills				.9410
15. Create different tourism and hospitality service from competitors	3.61	.888	.796	
16. Develop long-term relationship with customer	3.60	.928	.834	
17. Do proactive work	3.56	.870	.794	
18. Adapt tourism and hospitality service to serve customer in different situation	3.48	.949	.860	
19. Knowledge about principle of tourism and hospitality	3.45	.935	.848	
20. Provide tourism and hospitality service	3.44	.966	.872	
21. Create organization tourism and hospitality activities	3.38	.983	.867	
22. Develop marketing plan for tourism and hospitality marketing	3.25	1.040	.859	

Questionnaire Development

Career competencies are defined as those activities and skills judged essential to perform the duties of a specific position (Tas, 1988). Employees were asked to state the extent of individual perception of each competency. Items were measured on a five-point likert scale (1 to 5) in which the respondent indicated "the degree to which each of the statements described him or her – "strongly disagree (1)", "disagree (2)", neither agree nor disagree (3)", "agree (4)", and "strongly agree (5)". The career competencies for the tourism and hospitality sector include four competencies i.e. computer & language skills (4 items, α = .9035), work spirits and ethics (6 items, α = .8952), team working & leadership (4 items, α = .8452) and tourism and hospitality knowledge & skills (8 items, α = .9410). The completed scale items listed in Table 1.

Career success defines as self assessment of individual employee's success including both objective and subjective. The 5-point semantic differential scale is used for this section. Objective career success was assessed based on extrinsic career success using four-item scale for salary and occupational status (4 items, α = .7652). Subjective career success was assessed based on intrinsic career success using four-item scale for career actualization success (4 items, α = .8608). The completed scale items listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Career Success

Career Success Scale Items	Mean	S.D.	Factor Loading	Reliability
Objective Career Success				.7652
1. Job responsibility (not challenge….challenge)	3.61	.926	.804	
2. Current position (do not meet requirement…meet requirement)	3.53	.877	.822	
3. Compensation comparing with expense (not enough….enough)	3.15	1.038	.819	
4. Salary and compensation comparing with other in the same career (less….more)	3.04	.956	.617	
Subjective Career Success				.8608
5. Happiness (no happiness….high happiness)	3.69	.835	.806	
6. Satisfaction in working life (dissatisfy….satisfy)	3.51	.909	.862	
7. Social acceptance (not acceptable…acceptable)	3.48	.924	.856	
8. Career actualization (no career actualization…high career actualization)	3.35	.950	.836	

RESULTS

Respondents Profile

Respondents are female (56.3%) and male (43.8%). Age ranges are less than 25 years (52.7%), 26-35 years (36%), and more than 35 years (11.4%). Marital status is mostly single (73.5%). Education is bachelor degree or higher (67.9%). The position level is operational level (81%).

The descriptive statistics for career competencies and career success as composite summated mean scores are reported as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Career Competencies and Career Success

Variables Name	Mean	S.D.
Computer & Language Skills	3.288	0.850
Work spirits and Ethics	4.003	0.635
Team Working and Leadership	3.724	0.685
Tourism and Hospitality Knowledge & Skills	3.471	0.796
Objective Career Success	3.331	0.729
Subject Career Success	3.508	0.760

Hypotheses Testing

Pearson correlations were used to assess the simple relationships between career competencies and career success. All were analyzed as composite summated mean scores in this analysis. All hypotheses are supported at statistical significance at level 0.01, and the results are as shown in Table 4. In conclusion, career competencies have moderately positive relationship with both objective career success and subjective career success.

Table 4 Correlations between Career Competencies and Career Success

	Objective Career Success	**Subjective Career Success**
Computer & Language Skills	.414** (H1a)	.447**(H1b)
Work spirits and Ethics	.222**(H2a)	.338**(H2b)
Team Working and Leadership	.357**(H3a)	.436**(H3b)
Tourism and Hospitality Knowledge & Skills	.402**(H4a)	.451**(H4b)

** $p < 0.01$

Multiple regression analyses were used to assess the contribution of the career competencies on career success. The predictor variables were simultaneously entered in the regression model by using stepwise regression. Table 5 displays which variables contributed significantly to the explained variance in objective career success and subjective career success. Together computer & language skills, team working and leadership, and tourism and hospitality knowledge & skills explained 19.8% of the variance in objective career success and 25.2% of the variance in subjective career success (see R^2 in Table 5). For objective career success, the computer & language skills ($\beta = .237$) has the highest effect followed by team work and leadership ($\beta = .152$) and tourism and hospitality knowledge & skills ($\beta = .108$) . For subjective career success, team work and leadership ($\beta = .154$) has the highest effect followed by tourism and hospitality knowledge & skills ($\beta = .201$) and computer & language skills ($\beta = .154$). However, work spirits and ethics have no effect on both objective and subject career success.

Table 5 Multiple Regression Analysis with Career Success as Dependent Variables

Variables	Objective Career Success as Dependent Variable				Subjective Career Success as Dependent Variable			
	B	**β**	**VIF**	**R^2**	**B**	**β**	**VIF**	**R^2**
Constant	1.751			.198**	1.540			.252**
Computer & Language Skills	.203	.237**	2.261		.147	.154**	2.814	
Team Working and Leadership	.140	.152**	2.814		.223	.201**	2.008	
Tourism and Hospitality Knowledge & Skills	.115	.108*	2.008		.190	.213**	2.261	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research contribute to the contextual understanding of Thai employees in the tourism and hospitality sector particularly in terms of career competencies and career success as well as to the theoretical explanation of the effects of career competencies on career success through the human capital theoretical model. The results from the hypothesis testing support human capital and motivational theories, which focus on the individual as the one who develops his/her own human capital and therefore maximizes his/her education and skill investments for achieving success in careers. As all of the employees have positive relationship with both objective and subjective career successes, this study provides both theoretical and empirical evidence for the crucial role of these factors in determining the career success of Thai employees and corresponds to earlier research efforts to re-emphasize the individual perspective in individual competencies and career success. This ultimately contributes to the organization's success as has been stated by Darling (1999, p. 317), "the biggest, most valuable asset any company has is its people, because all management plans for success enhancement are carried out, or fail to be carried out, by people".

Our results also suggest ways in which organizations in Thai tourism and hospitality sector can support their employees in their efforts to achieve career success. To enhance objective career success, the employees should develop computer & language skills, team work and leadership and tourism and hospitality knowledge and skill in order. And to enhance subjective career success, the employees should develop tourism and hospitality knowledge & skills, team work and leadership, and computer & language skills in order. Human policies, programs and activities have to be developed in corresponding to these results to enable firms to compete and companies have to develop through their employees. This is coherent with the Human capital theory (Becker, 1975), which suggests that individuals who invest the most in human capital attributes, such as education, training, and experience, are expected to show higher level of work performance and subsequently obtain higher organizational rewards. According to this theory, an individual's career progress and success is contingent upon the quantity and quality of human assets one brings to the labor market (Becker, 1964) and the skills and experiences that individuals bring to their work are related to their compensation.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Although our sample was relatively large, making the results less prone to generalization problems, this research has some limitations. All data were collected from the selected industries and were collected at one point in time. The latter means that we cannot unequivocally determine the direction of relationships we found, although based on prior research and theory, the direction from competencies to career success seems more logical.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Aurathai Lertwannawit, full-time lecturer, Graduate School, Suan Dusit Rajabhat University. She earned her bachelor's degree in Business Administation major in Marketing and her master's degree in Information technology from Assumption University and doctoral degrees in marketing from Thammasat University. Her research interests include consumer behavior, tourism marketing and management, and relational marketing in business market.

Sirivan Serirat, Associate Professor, full-time lecturer, Graduate School, Suan Dusit Rajabhat University. She is Associate Professor in Business Adminstration Area. She received her Master Degree in Development Economic from National Institute of Development Administration, and Bachelor of Commerce from Chulalongkorn University. She was a director of MBA program at Srinakharinwirot University until 2006. She has lectured and published widely and is the author of well-known used undergraduate and graduate textbooks. Her special area is on marketing, international business, Hospitality and tourism. She is published about 20 papers in several areas such as mangement, marketing, international business and hospitaltity and tourism.

Dr. Sirote Pholpuntin, Associate Professor, is the 11th President of Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, one of the most respected universities in hospitality and education in Thailand. He is an Associate Professor in the field of education. Under his administration, many initiatives have been achieved; among them are the development of a renewed vision and mission in education management, and new academic plan for hospitality industry in Thailand. He earned his bachelor's degree in Social Science from Srinakharinwirot University, a master's degree in Social Science from Emporia Kansas State University, U.S.A. and a doctoral degree in Geography-Administrative Leadership from North Texas State University, U.S.A. His special areas are on Education, Hospitality and Tourism, and Culinary Arts. He published about 20 papers in several areas such as management, education and hospitality and tourism.

REFERENCES

1. Aryee, S., Chay, Y. W., & Tom, H. H. (1994). An examination of the antecedents of subjective career success among a managerial sample in Singapore. *Human Relations, 47*(5), 487-509.
2. Becker, G. S. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

3. Becker, G. S. (1975). *Human capital*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
4. Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analys*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
5. Chaisawat, M. (2000). *Baccalaureate and graduate degrees in tourism and hospitality studies in Thailand: The comparative studies between 1996 and 1999.* Paper presented at the Proceedings of the Sixth Asia Pacific Tourism Association Annual Conference, Phuket, Thailand.
6. Darling, J. R. (1999). Organizational excellence and leadership strategies: Principles followed by top multinational executives. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 20*(6), 309-321.
7. Defillippi, R. J., & Arthur, M. B. (1994). The boundaryless career: A competency based perspective. *Journal of rganizational Behavior, 15*(4), 307-324.
8. Judge, T. A., Cable, D. M., Bourdreau, J. W., & Bretz, R. D. (1995). An empirical investigation of the predictors of the executive career success. *Personnel Psychology, 48*(3), 485-519.
9. Kuijpers, M. A. C. T., & Scheercns, J. (2006). Career competencies for the modern career. *Journal of Career Development, 32*, 303-319.
10. Kuijpers, M. A. C. T., Schyns, B., & Scheerens, J. (2006). Career competencies for career success. *The Career Development Quarterly, 55*(2), 168-178.
11. Lau, V., & Shaffer, M. (1999). Career success and the effects of personality. *Career Development International, 4*(4), 225-231.
12. McLagan, P., & Suhadolink, D. (1989). *The models for hrd practice: The research report*. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development.
13. Nabi, G. R. (1999). An investigation into the differential profile of predictors of objective and subjective career success. *Career Development International, 4*(4), 212.
14. Ng, T. W. H., Eby, L. T., Sorensen, K. L., & Feldman, D. C. (2005). Predictors of objective and subjective career success: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology, 58*(2), 367-408.
15. Rosenbaum, J. E. (Ed.). (1989). *Organizational career systems and employee misperception*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
16. Tas, R. F. (1988). Teaching future managers. *The Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly, 29*(2), 41-43.
17. World Travel & Tourism Council. (2009). *Travel & tourism economic impact*: World Travel & Tourism Council.