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The Impact Of Gender, Age and Education Related To Leadership Competencies Needed For Success As A Hotel General Manager

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ABSTRACT
This study explored the leadership competencies necessary for hotel general managers. Exploratory factor analysis extracted six leadership competency components. The findings showed that team building and ethics, leadership skills, and communication skills were the most important leadership competencies. In contrast, flexibility and strategic orientation were the least important leadership competencies for hotel general managers. There were significant differences between leadership competencies necessary for success versus hotel general managers’ age and education. On the other hand, no significant differences were found between leadership competencies needed and hotel general managers’ gender.

Key words: Gender, Age, Education, Leadership, Competencies, Hotel Manager

INTRODUCTION
Today, more than ever, hotel executives and managers are faced with significant challenges. Globalization, a free market system, a knowledge-based environment, labor challenges, and a growing concern for health and well-being are emerging as the drivers of change in the 21st century. With all these changes, the future requires different leadership skills for hotel managers which may not be contained in the conceptual toolbox of today’s hospitality manager and may not be taught in the hotel schools of the world. Hence, the ability to identify the skills and competencies required for tomorrow’s hospitality industry leaders is essential for companies that hope to remain competitive in the business (Chung-Herrera, Enz & Lankau, 2003). For example, Choice Hotels International assessed core competencies needed by its future leaders and created an integrated executive-training and development system. Likewise, Marriott International used leadership competencies to help senior managers in selecting, developing, and coaching future leaders (Enz & Siguaw, 2000).

Many studies have examined the competencies needed for the hotel industry from the perspective of entry level hotel managers (Hsu & Gregory, 1995), middle level managers (Siu, 1998), senior level mangers (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003), and club managers (Perdue, Woods & Ninemeier, 2001). Since the majority of the empirical research regarding leadership competencies for hotel management has been conducted at the entry or lower levels, and little at the general manager level. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to: (1) explore the leadership competencies necessary for success as a hotel general manager, and (2) determine the impact of general managers’ demographic characteristics on their perception of the leadership competencies necessary for success as a general manager. The outcome of this study could help hotel owners and executives to recruit prospective management employees who have the right mix of competencies to be future general managers or prepare lower level managers all ready in the organization for senior management positions.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Leadership Competency in Hotel Industry
The concept of competencies have been defined by various management experts, and one of the most

acceptable definitions is as follows: competencies is a combination of observable and applied knowledge,
skills, and behaviors that create competitive advantage for an organization. It focuses on how an employee creates value and what is actually accomplished (Nath & Raheja, 2001:26). Meanwhile, Crawford (2005) described competencies as characteristics of an individual that are related to criterion-referenced effective and/or excellent performance in a job or situation. Many hospitality organizations are increasingly viewing leadership development as a source of competitive advantage. Hsu and Gregory (1995) investigated and identified competencies needed for entry-level hotel managers from the industry professional’s view point and found that human relation skills such as communication and leadership skills should receive extra recognition in the future. Siu (1998) identified the managerial competencies essential for middle managers in the Hong Kong hotel industry. This study found that communication was perceived as the most important attribute, followed by concern for customers and leadership competency. Team building and team membership were also considered as quite important, whereas competencies pertaining to efficiency, personal drive and results orientation were considered as having lower importance than others.

Kay and Russette (2000) investigated the essential competencies – leadership, interpersonal, conceptual and creative, administrative, and technical - of executive levels (entry and middle management) in the hotel industry. The managers in different departments—food and beverage (F&B), front office, and sales—required some similar and some different leadership competencies for operating the department. Middle managers in F&B and front office focused on leadership competencies in terms of employee relations, crisis management, and team building, whereas the middle sales managers were not required to have these competencies but rather used relationships with the outsiders. Moreover, technical competencies were necessary for entry and middle front office managers. Interpersonal and administrative competencies were needed for entry and middle managers of these three departments. In contrast, only sales managers must have the conceptual-creative competency. The researchers showed that customer-centered leadership competencies were rated the highest by managers with advanced degrees. Managers who managed more than 100 employees emphasized more on customer relations than managers who managed fewer than 100 employees. On the other hand, managers who managed fewer than 100 employees rated working knowledge of product service higher than did those managers who managed more than 100 employees. Lastly, female managers rated role-modeling leadership, interpersonal skills, and conceptual-creative competencies higher than male managers. Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) presented a future based leadership-competency model for use in the hospitality industry. Competency in self management was the most important factor, followed by knowledge of strategic positioning, implementation skills, and critical thinking. The self-management factor consisted of four behavioral dimensions: ethics and integrity, time management, flexibility and adaptability, and self development. The behavior of acting ethically or with integrity was the most important among these dimensions. The ethics-integrity dimension contained six specific behavioral competencies, such as “treats people with respect,” “displays consistency between words and actions,” and “considers ethical implications prior to taking action.” Moreover, self-management skills encompassed actions related to the personal characteristics of the leader and how he or she handles himself or herself.

Competency in strategic positioning was considered to be second most important for future leaders. This factor comprised the following four dimensions: awareness of customer needs, commitment to equality, managing stakeholders, and concern for community. The examples of behaviors that fall in this factor were “influences owners’ and stakeholders’ decision,” “promotes quality initiatives,” and “considers customer needs when making decisions.” Additionally, implementation, critical thinking, and communication skills were also considered as important for the leaders who wanted to reach higher leadership positions. These competencies allowed managers for possess strategic orientation and approach decision making with a long range perspective. Surprisingly, the interpersonal, leadership skills, and industry knowledge were still considered as important, but were ranked lower than other factors.

Demographic Characteristics and Leadership Competencies

The effectiveness of the leaders more or less dictated the fate of the hotels (Li, Tse, & Xie, 2007). The hotel managers’ demographic characteristics influenced the business success. Li et al., (2007) investigated hotel general managers’ characteristics and career paths (managerial experience within and outside hotel business) in China’s hotels. Through investigation of 2-3 star hotels, the results showed that most of the hotel general managers in Guangdong, China were between ages of 31-51 years old. Moreover, older general managers had more experience and stayed longer in the current positions. Most of the male general managers had at least three-years of vocational college educations. The study by Yu and Huimin (2005) showed that the demand for executive education was increasing in China. Many higher education institutions such as Hong Kong Polytechnic University in China and Cornell-Nanyang Institute of Hospitality Management in Nanyang Technological University in Singapore...
incorporated the graduate programs and training programs for both academic purposes and for managers in the hospitality industry.

Mirini, Narjo, and Kumbhar (2003) explored the needed leadership competencies. This study divided perceptions of leadership competencies into six categories: developing good habits, leading individuals and groups, participating in committees and groups, participating in professional and business official organizations, developing communication skills, and developing personal skills. The results showed that there were highly significant differences between the age groups, educational qualifications, and work experience and leadership competencies. The leaders who were 30 or fewer years of age perceived the competencies of developing good work habits, participation in committee and groups and participation in professional and business official organization higher than other age groups (31-40 years and over 41 years old). Their study suggested continuing educational programs and training for leaders so that they can become up-to-date and skilled in their professions.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Design

Thailand has one of the largest growth markets and the fastest-growing economy based on tourism in Asia (Thailand Board of Investment, 2006). In 2007 the tourism industry generated 537.3 billion baht ($15.8 billion) (Bank of Thailand, 2008). Based on the strength of the Thai hotel industry; the target population for this study was hotel general managers in Thailand. A comprehensive list of all hotels in Thailand as identified by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT, 2006) was used to develop contact information for general managers. A census survey was utilized and the questionnaire was distributed to all 2,230 General Managers of all hotels from the Tourism Authority of Thailand name list. The survey was conducted during May 2006. The questionnaire package included a souvenir (a glass mat or coaster), a postage-paid return envelope, and a cover letter that described the purpose of the study. After two weeks, a followed-up mail questionnaire was sent to the non-respondents. Enough questionnaires were returned to meet the minimum sample size requirement of 305 for a 95% confidence standard (Burns & Bush, 1995). From 530 completed questionnaires, the usable sample size was 503, indicating a 22.6% response rate.

Research Design and Instrument

This research involved a cross-sectional design to collect data because it provided a snapshot of the variables of interest at a single point in time. Moreover, the sample elements of the cross-sectional design was typically selected to be representative of some known population (Churchill & Brown, 2004). The questionnaire was adapted from previous literature regarding the leadership competencies necessary for success as a hotel general manager on a global basis (Gupta et al., 2002; Tracey & Hinkin, 1996; and Hsu & Gregory, 1995). The survey instrument consisted of two sections. Section I was comprised of six questions which asked the respondents’ demographic characteristics (age, gender, and education level) and hotel property characteristics (hotel size, star rating, and location). This section used closed-ended questions. Section II included 98 specific behavioral leadership competencies, which were adapted from Chung-Herrera et al., (2003). The English language version of the instrument was translated into the Thai language and then translated back into English to ensure meanings remained the same in both languages. Both the English and the Thai language versions of the instrument were used to ensure that both Thai and non-Thai respondents understood each question accurately.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze the characteristics of the respondents and hotels. Exploratory Factor Analysis was used as the statistical approach to discover interrelations among a large number of variables and explain these variables in terms of their common underlying dimensions (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 2006). Lastly, an independent-sample t-test and the analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to investigate mean score differences of leadership competency dimensions and respondents’ demographic characteristics (gender, age, and education).

RESULTS

Hotel General Managers’ and Properties’ Characteristics

There are 277 (55.1%) male and 226 (44.9%) female respondents. 30.0% from the age group are 35-44 years old and 31.4% are from the 45-54 age group. Only 20.5% of respondents are under 35 years of age, while 18.1% of the respondents are above 55 years of age. 289 (57.5%) respondents hold an undergraduate degree, 113 (22.5%) respondents hold a certificate or diploma, and 101 (20%) respondents hold a graduate degree. In terms of
hotel size, 32.2% of hotels have less than 50 rooms, 52.1% had 51-199 rooms, and 15.7% had 200 rooms or more, respectively. Two hundred twenty two (44.1%) of the hotel properties have no rating in the star system, 169 (33.6%) indicates the hotel properties as 2-3 star hotels, and 112 (22.3%) is the 4-5-star hotels. Finally, 50.1% (252) of properties are located in the city areas whereas 49.9% (251) are located in the resort area.

**Dimensions of Leadership Competencies**

There are 98 leadership competency items used in this study. Principal component analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation is employed in the exploratory factor analysis to extract a set of simplified composite factors from the 98 competencies that could be used to describe the original construct to analyze the leadership competencies necessary for success as a general manager. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is used to quantify the degree of intercorrelations among the variables and the appropriateness of factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic is 0.97, indicating the interrelated and shared common underlying dimensions of constructs. Second, the Bartlett test of Sphericity is conducted in order to test the significance of the correlation matrix ($\chi^2=35175.55$, df=4753, $p \leq 0.000$). Both tests indicate that the factor analysis is appropriate for classifying the factors (Hair et al., 2006).

Competencies with a factor loading of 0.5 or higher and an eigenvalue greater than 1 are clustered together. Forty-five out of ninety-eight competencies are excluded from this process. Table 1 shows the results of the factor analysis. From the Oblimin rotated factor matrix, eight factors are extracted that explain 55.8% of the overall variance. These eight factors are named based on the common characteristics of the items in each factor as 'leadership,' ‘motivation/interpersonal skill,’ ‘strategic orientation,’ ‘planning and implementation,’ ‘team building and ethics,’ ‘communication skill,’ ‘flexibility,’ and ‘concern for community.’ The Cronbach’s alpha for all eight factors range from .72 to .93, which indicates acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2006; Stevens, 2002). ‘Team building and ethics,’ ‘leadership,’ and ‘communication skill’ are rated as the high necessary factors (mean=4.07, 3.97, and 3.89, respectively). In contrast, ‘flexibility’ (mean=3.29) and ‘strategic orientation’ (mean=3.68) are perceived as the least necessary factors by the respondents.

**Table 1: Leadership Competency Factors for Hotel General Managers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>Eigenvalue (% of Variance)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1: Leadership ($\alpha = .87$)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.81 (41.52)</td>
<td>3.97 (.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selects leadership style most appropriate for the situation</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduces redundancies in processes and procedures</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Protects confidential information</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spends time on the most important issues, not just the most urgent</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deals constructively with own failures and mistakes</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands complex concepts and relationships</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confronts problems early before they become unmanageable</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2: Motivation/Interpersonal Skill ($\alpha = .93$)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.52 (3.12)</td>
<td>3.76 (.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides challenging assignments to facilitate development</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages employees to use their initiative to remedy problems when they first occur</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Allows others to lead under the appropriate circumstances</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberately allows direct reports to use their own methods for completing tasks</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspires and motivates others</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepares people to understand changes</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defines and sets up quality standards for employees</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives others the authority necessary to accomplish their objective</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves others in creative decisions that affect them</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegates enough of own works to others</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeps others updated with information</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets others interested and involved in the change process</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
F3: Strategic Orientation ($\alpha = .88$)
- Knows the strengths and weaknesses of competitors: 0.59
- Identifies and defines problems: 0.59
- Determines which of many problems may become crises: 0.55
- Creates needed systems and procedures to support changes: 0.59
- Understands owners’ and stakeholders’ values: 0.54
- Recognizes and seizes strategic opportunities in the environment: 0.55
- Sees how things fit in the big picture: 0.51

F4: Planning and Implementation ($\alpha = .86$)
- Anticipates obstacles and develop plans: 0.51
- Manages time to ensure productivity: 0.62
- Integrates planning efforts across work groups or functional units: 0.59
- Identifies measurable action steps that support strategy and mission: 0.64
- Considers a broad range of factors when resolving problems: 0.61
- Translates business strategies into clear objective and tactics: 0.59
- Brings together different perspectives: 0.55
- Examines and monitors trends in the hotel business: 0.55

F5: Team Building and Ethics ($\alpha = .90$)
- Champions new ideas and initiatives: 0.50
- Employs a team approach to solve problems when appropriate: 0.53
- Promotes respect and appreciation for diversity: 0.56
- Treats people fairly: 0.66
- Promotes teamwork among groups: 0.67
- Acts in an ethical manner: 0.51

F6: Communication Skill ($\alpha = .88$)
- Interacts with people in a direct and open manner: 0.60
- Listens to people without interrupting: 0.61
- Listens carefully to input and concerns expressed by others: 0.52
- Writes in an effective manner: 0.54
- Actively and frequently listens directly to customers: 0.51
- Speaks clearly and articulately in a variety of situations: 0.56
- Presents ideas in a convincing manner: 0.52

F7: Flexibility ($\alpha = .72$)
- Models the changes expected of others: 0.65
- Adjusts leadership approach to fit other individuals: 0.56

F8: Concern for Community ($\alpha = .88$)
- Commits organizational resources for community events: 0.67
- Considers ethical implication prior to taking action: 0.56
- Considers the effect of decision on community well-being: 0.69
- Builds partnerships and alliances with community organizations: 0.61

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)=.97, Bartlett test of Sphericity ($\chi^2=35175.55, df=4753, p \leq 0.000$)

Leadership Competencies and Hotel General Manager Characteristics
The three demographic characteristics – gender, age, and education– are compared to the leadership competency factors see if significant differences existed. There is no significant difference between leadership competency factors and respondent gender at $p \leq .05$ level. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to test for differences among groups of age and leadership competencies, see Table 2. Leadership competency factors in terms of leadership ($F$-value=2.71, $p \leq .05$), motivation/interpersonal skill ($F$-value=3.27, $p \leq .05$), team building and ethics ($F$-value=3.29, $p \leq .05$), communication skill ($F$-value=4.23, $p \leq .01$), and concern for community ($F$-value=4.55, $p \leq .01$) have a significant difference on general managers’ age. The Post Hoc test finds that the general managers who are age 25-34 years old perceive as more important the factors of leadership, motivation/interpersonal skill, teambuilding and ethics, and concern for community as more important than general managers who are 45-54 years old. In contrast, strategic orientation, planning and implementation, and flexibility factors are not significantly different for general managers’ age ($p >.05$ level).

Table 2 ANOVA Comparison of Leadership Competencies and Age
Table 3 indicates a significant difference between leadership competency factors and education. Motivation/ interpersonal skill (F-value=4.01, p≤.05), strategic orientation (F-value=9.89, p≤.01), planning and implementation (F-value=7.35, p≤.01), team building and ethics (F-value=4.67, p≤.05), communication skill (F-value=4.08, p≤.05), and concern for community (F-value=4.09, p≤.05) are significantly different with general managers’ education. The Post Hoc test found that general managers who have a graduate degree and above perceived the factors of motivation/ interpersonal skill, strategic orientation, planning and implementation, team building and ethics, communication skill, and concern for community as more important than the general managers who have the undergraduate and certificate/ diploma degree. General managers who have a graduate degree and above perceived the factors motivation/ interpersonal skill, strategic orientation, planning and implementation, and concern for community as more necessary than the general managers who hold a certificate or diploma degree. On the other hand, there are no significant differences on the competencies of leadership and flexibility factors and education. (p>.05).

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Eight leadership competency factors are found and described as leadership, motivation/ interpersonal skill, strategic orientation, planning and implementation, team building and ethics, communication skill, flexibility, and concern for community. These leadership competency factors are used to assess whether significant differences existed on several of the general managers’ demographic characteristics.

The hotel general managers who response in this study demonstrate the same competencies considered to be important for effective leadership in previous studies such as Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Gupta et al. (2002), Hsu & Gregory (1995), and Tracey & Hinkin (1996). From this study, team building and ethics, leadership, and communication skills are rated as the most important competencies necessary for future hotel general managers. These findings support some previous studies of Estep (2005) and Henderson (2004). Estep (2005) stated that building leadership competencies is a career-long activity—whether the managers want to maintain a competitive edge in the current position, or they want to move to a higher position. Henderson (2004) also remarks that...
communication is the primary task of any executive, and communication with employees regarding their concerns, problems, ideas, and suggestions about the organization is a critical skill of managing. The outcome of this study is the same as the study by Lin (2002) that competency relating to communication skill is the most influential for the career success of the industry professionals. Likewise, Estep (2005) suggests that knowing how communication takes place is critical for success in any type of environment.

Planning and implementation, motivation/interpersonal skill, concern for community, strategic orientation, and flexibility were deemed necessary by general managers. This supports the argument from Reicher et al. (2005) that understanding and monitoring social dynamics within the problem domain represents a key leadership skill. Objectivity would seem to be necessary wherever one is dealing with a complex system. Additionally, House (1995, 1996) also states that skills such as identification of restrictions, analysis of downstream consequences, coordination of multiple activities, and sensitivity to relevant goals might play a major role in leader performance. A concern for community is considered as a leadership competency necessary for future success. The hotel market, especially the global hotel chains, such as Marriott International, are very active in protecting the environment, using internal measurement management systems for energy consumption, water, and disposal (Marriott International, 2008). Zaccaro et al. (1991) reveals that one important requirement during the social implementation phase is knowledge of subordinates, peers, and superiors, people with whom the leader is interacting during solution implementation.

The demographic characteristics age and education are tested to investigate the significant differences existed among the leadership competency factors. In terms of age, there is a significant difference between leadership competencies and general managers’ age groups, which mirrors the results found by Mirani et al. (2003). General Managers who are 25-34 years of age perceived leadership competency factors of leadership, motivation/interpersonal skill, team building and ethics, communication skill, and flexibility more crucial than the general managers who are in the 45-54 year old age group. The younger general managers notice the importance of leadership competencies; however, they do not have much experience in the hotel industry. These general managers require improvement in these capabilities to be competitive in their position. At the same time, the general managers in the 45-54 years old age group may have sufficient competencies for managing hotels; hence, they see these competencies less important than other general managers.

Education level plays a major role on required leadership competency factors. The general managers who hold graduate degrees perceived competency in motivation/interpersonal skill, strategic orientation, planning and implementation, team building and ethics, communication skill, and concern for community more necessary than the general managers who hold a certificate/diploma and undergraduate degree. General managers perceive and adapt these competency factors for business success differently based on their educational level. General managers who hold graduate degrees perceived team building, ethics and communication more necessary than general managers who hold only an undergraduate degree. Most undergraduate courses emphasize practical and basic knowledge. At the graduate level, general managers are more able to develop these advanced competencies such as team building, ethics and communication skills, which would not be found at the undergraduate level. The education level of the general manager will likely be a key component of perceiving leadership competency factors. The higher the education that the general managers held, the more necessary they feel that these competencies are important. It is interesting to note that since only 20% of the respondents held a graduate degree the majority of the hotel general managers who respond to this survey may have focused more on general operations that planning and team building and other leadership competencies.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH
The general managers who participated in this study might rate the necessary level of those 98 leadership competencies based on his/her experience. Second, the results of this study are only a reflection of those respondents who participated in this survey, a 22.6% response rate. The respondents who did not participate in the survey may have different perspectives regarding leadership competencies. A longitudinal study may corroborate the actual behaviors of general managers regarding these leadership competencies and increasing response rate. In addition, research that focuses on cross cultural comparisons might prove beneficial. In this research study hotel general managers in Thailand are considered to be one group with no distinction made for their country of birth (local or expatriate). Additional research may help to discover whether leadership competencies vary based on expatriate status or not. Lastly, this study investigated only the hotel general managers’ perception of leadership competencies.
Future research can explore the leadership competencies from the subordinates’ viewpoints. The comparison of leadership competencies between subordinates and managers might provide another insightful phenomenon.

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