

Key Psychosocial Competencies for Employability in the Hotel Industry: Insights from A Literature Review

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Abstract: *This paper aims to explore the key psychosocial competencies essential for enhancing employability for hotel management graduates. Through an extensive literature review, the competencies of communication, problem solving, interpersonal skills, managing emotions, critical thinking, and empathy are identified as crucial for success in the hotel industry. The article delves into the significance of these competencies in shaping the professional development and career prospects of hotel management graduates. Drawing upon insights from scholarly references, this comprehensive review sheds light on the importance of psychosocial competencies in preparing graduates for the dynamic and demanding landscape of hotel management. Strategies for developing psychosocial competencies are elaborated.*

Keywords: Employability, Psychosocial competencies, Hotel Industry

I. INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry is a dynamic and multifaceted sector that needs a singular blend of technical expertise and psychosocial competencies from its workforce. While traditional training often emphasizes the event of job-specific skills, the hallmark of outstanding hospitality professionals lies in their ability to navigate the intricate interpersonal landscape that's integral to the guest experience. Because the industry continues to evolve, employers within the hotel sector are increasingly recognizing the necessity to nurture a generation of employees equipped with a strong set of psychosocial skills, including effective communication, strong interpersonal abilities, problem-solving aptitude, critical thinking, empathy, and emotional management. This paper explores the key psychosocial competencies which play a crucial role in shaping the success and career trajectories of prospective hotel employees. The paper discusses practical strategies for developing these essential life skills within the context of hospitality education and training programs.

II. DEFINING EMPLOYABILITY

There are several definitions of employability since different researchers have addressed the subject from different perspectives. Here are a few viewpoints:

Fugate et al. (2004) define employability as "a form of work-specific active adaptation that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities." Being employable means taking advantage of employment opportunities and proactively adjusting to shifting work environments.

Employability is defined as "the ability to obtain and to keep employed, within or outside one's current organization, for one's present or new customers, and with regard to future prospects" Van der Heijden et al. (2009). This definition places equal emphasis on acquiring a job initially and being able to keep a job over time.

Greenhaus et al. (2009) state that career experiences contribute significantly to overall employability, which is also related to the progress and development of individuals in the professional field.

Di Fabio et al. (2015) refer to employability as an individual's "ability of being employed" to function at work and on the labour market.

An approach to employability that is competence-based and multidimensional is advocated by Römgens, Scoupe, and Beausaert (2019). They highlight the necessity for a cohesive overview of conceptual frameworks and terminology by

integrating ideas from studies on workplace learning and higher education. This viewpoint acknowledges that employability has multiple facets, such as professional competencies, flexibility, and the capacity to detect and seize career chances.

III. LINKAGES BETWEEN EMPLOYABILITY AND PSYCHOSOCIAL COMPETENCIES:

The CareerEdge model proposed by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), identifies five key elements of employability: career development learning, experience in work and life, degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills, generic skills, and emotional intelligence which includes the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate interpersonal relationships and adapt to changing work environments. The model suggests that the development of psychosocial competencies is essential for individuals to achieve success in their career and effectively navigate the dynamic job market.

The Graduateness Framework developed by Glover et al. (2002) highlights the importance of personal qualities, transferable skills, and subject specific skills in determining graduate employability. Psychosocial competencies, such as communication and problem solving are identified as key transferable skills within this framework.

The USEM Model developed by Yorke and Knight (2004) suggests that employability is influenced by a combination of understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs, and metacognition. The psychosocial competency of problem solving is closely tied to the efficacy beliefs and meta-cognition component of the model.

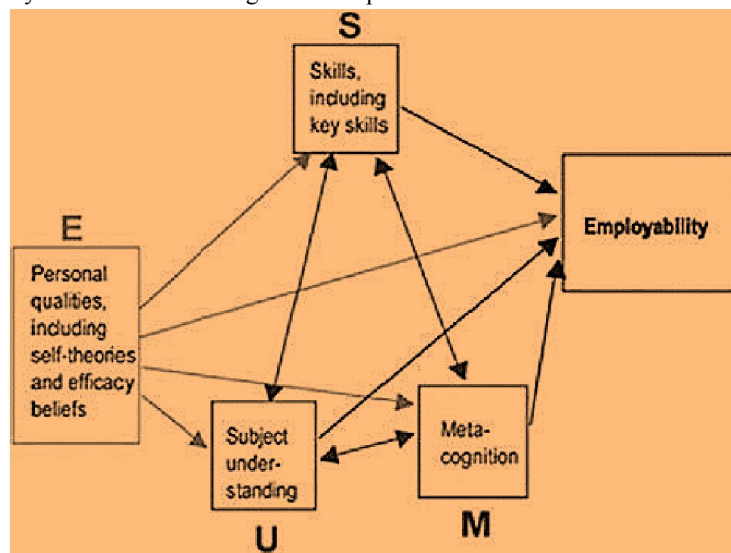


Figure 1. SCANS (Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) Framework

Source: Adapted from Knight & Yorke (2004)

The SCANS (Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) Framework, developed by the US Department of Labour in 1990s, identified competencies and foundation skills necessary for workplace success which are closely linked to psychosocial competencies. These frameworks and models signify the importance of psychosocial competencies by which students can better navigate the transition from graduation to the workforce and succeed in their careers.

IV. THE KEY PSYCHOSOCIAL COMPETENCIES:

4.1 COMMUNICATION: THE INSPIRATION OF HOSPITALITY EXCELLENCE:

Effective communication is widely recognised as an important psychosocial competency for career success in the hotel industry (Christou, 2002; Kandampully et al., 2014). From the initial greeting at the front desk to the seamless resolution of guest inquiries, the power to speak clearly, concisely, and empathetically may be a cornerstone of outstanding hospitality service. For prospective hotel employees, honing communication skills should be a primary

focus of their professional development. This involves mastering the art of active listening, which enables them to completely comprehend the requirements and concerns of guests and respond accordingly. According to Adler and Elmhorst (2019), communication skills encompass the ability to express oneself clearly, listen effectively, and adapt one's message to the audience. In the hotel context, these skills are essential for activities such as greeting guests, handling inquiries, providing recommendations, and resolving conflicts. Listening also encompasses the power to adapt one's communication style to the preferences and cultural backgrounds of diverse clientele, fostering a way of comfort and trust. In addition to verbal communication, proficiency in written language is equally important, as hotel staff are often required to document guest interactions, draft correspondence, and communicate with various stakeholders, both internally and externally. According to Smith et al. (2018), communication competence is a fundamental skill that influences the overall performance and success of hotel professionals. The power to craft clear, concise, and professional written messages is important for maintaining seamless operations and fostering positive relationships. According to a study by Albert (2018) communication skills are significant in resolving conflicts and handling different situations. In the hospitality industry, problems and misunderstandings may arise between staff members or customers, and effective communication helps to address such issues promptly and efficiently. According to a study by Lee et al. (2019) good communication skills allow hospitality professionals to understand guests' needs and expectations accurately. They enable employees to actively listen, ask relevant questions and provide appropriate responses resulting in improved guest experiences and increased customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Kotsiou et al. (2019) highlight the link between communication skills and teamwork in the hospitality industry. Effective communication allows employees to coordinate their efforts, share information, and work collaboratively towards common goals. Research by Pentescu and Dumitrescu (2020) emphasizes the importance in delivering quality customer service. Effective communication enables hospitality professionals to deliver accurate and relevant information, provide personalized recommendations, and promptly address any concerns or requests. Overall, communication skills are a vital psychosocial competency in the hospitality industry as they directly impact customer satisfaction which ultimately contributes to repeat business and creates memorable experiences.



Figure 2. Skills Required for Communicative Competence
(Source: Northwest Augmentative Communication Society)

The capacity to handle the pressures and difficulties of daily living, preserve mental health, and behave positively and adaptably in social situations is known as psychosocial competence. According to this model, a person's capacity for communication is shaped by both psychosocial and environmental elements. Psychosocial elements are internal to the individual. The environment is external to the individual.

4.2 INTERPERSONAL SKILLS: THE BEDROCK OF GUEST SATISFACTION:

The hotel industry is fundamentally a people-centric business, where the standard of interpersonal interactions can make or break the guest's experience. Prospective hotel employees must possess a keen sense of social awareness, the

power to read and answer nonverbal cues, and a real interest within the needs and preferences of others. Goleman (2006) emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence, which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These attributes enable hotel employees to interact effectively with guests, colleagues, and superiors, contributing to a positive work environment and enhanced customer satisfaction. Developing strong interpersonal skills involves cultivating a customer-centric mindset, where the main target is on anticipating and exceeding guest expectations. This needs the power to empathize with the perspectives and emotions of guests, and to tailor one's approach accordingly. Studies by Brown and Jones (2017) emphasize the significance of interpersonal competencies in creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere within hospitality organizations. For instance, a guest who is frustrated by a delayed check-in may respond better to a relaxed, reassuring demeanor, and a real apology, instead of a defensive or indifferent attitude. In addition to interpersonal skills, prospective hotel employees must also demonstrate a high degree of emotional intelligence, which enables them to navigate the complex social dynamics inherent to the hospitality industry. Research by Lee and Smith (2016) underscores the importance of emotional intelligence in enhancing job performance and job satisfaction among hotel professionals. This includes the power to stay calm, to defuse tense situations, and to manage one's own emotions in a professional manner.

4.3 PROBLEM-SOLVING: CORNERSTONES OF OUTSTANDING HOSPITALITY:

The hotel industry is inherently dynamic and unpredictable, with a continuing flow of latest challenges and unexpected situations. Prospective hotel employees must be equipped with strong problem-solving and important thinking skills to navigate these complexities and supply exceptional service to guests. Creative problem solving, which involves thinking outside the box and generating innovative solutions, is particularly valuable in the hotel industry (Pizam, 2010). As Sternberg (2014) suggests, problem solving involves the ability to identify issues, gather relevant information, generate and evaluate alternative solutions, and implement effective strategies. In the hotel setting, this competency is vital for addressing guest concerns, resolving operational challenges, and adapting to changing circumstances. Problem-solving within the hotel context involves the power to quickly identify the basis explanation for a problem, evaluate workable solutions, and implement the foremost effective course of action. This needs a methodical, analytical approach, also because the ability to think creatively and out of the box. Research by Johnson (2019) highlights the importance of problem-solving abilities in ensuring the smooth functioning of hotel operations and maintaining guest satisfaction. Prospective hotel employees must be ready to draw upon their technical knowledge, their understanding of guest needs, and their problem-solving aptitude to plan innovative solutions that address the unique circumstances at hand.

4.4 CRITICAL THINKING: NAVIGATES COMPLEXITIES TO DELIVER EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Critical thinking, is the ability to research information, evaluate assumptions, and make informed decisions. According to Patel and Williams (2018), critical thinking is a key competency that empowers hotel professionals to make sound judgments and contribute effectively to organizational success. Facione (2020) emphasizes the importance of critical thinking in terms of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. These skills empower hotel staff to think creatively, anticipate potential issues, and develop innovative solutions to enhance the guest experience. Within the hotel industry, this skill set is important for anticipating potential challenges, recognizing patterns and trends, and proactively developing strategies to mitigate risks and enhance the guest experience.

4.5 EMPATHY: THE METTLE OF OUTSTANDING HOSPITALITY

At the core of the hotel industry is that the fundamental desire to make a memorable, personalized experience for every guest. This will only be achieved through the cultivation of empathy – the power to know and share the emotions of others. According to Goleman (2006), empathy involves recognizing and responding to the emotional states of others, which enables hotel employees to provide tailored support, address guest concerns, and foster a sense of connection and understanding. Empathy may be a crucial psychosocial competency for prospective hotel employees, because it enables them to attach with guests on a deeper level, anticipate their needs, and respond with genuine care and compassion. An empathetic hotel employee can put themselves within the guest's shoes, to know their perspective, and to tailor their approach accordingly. Research by Garcia et al. (2020) highlights the role of empathy in creating memorable guest interactions and fostering loyalty towards hospitality brands. This empathetic mindset manifests during a sort of ways,

from the genuine greeting at check-in, to the thoughtful recognition of a guest's preferred amenities, to the sensitivity shown in addressing a complaint or concern. By cultivating empathy, prospective hotel employees can transform a routine hotel stay into an exceptional, emotionally resonant experience that leaves an impact on the guest. Developing empathy allows hotel staff to anticipate guests' need, offer personalized recommendations, and create memorable experiences (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Greiner, 2018).

4.6 MANAGING FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS: KEEPING COMPOSURE TO FACE CHALLENGES

The hotel industry is inherently fast-paced and high-stress, with employees often facing competing demands and challenging situations daily. As Hochschild (2012) suggests, the ability to manage one's own feelings and emotions, as well as those of others, is essential for maintaining composure when providing exceptional service and fostering a positive work environment. During this dynamic environment, the power to manage one's own emotions and feelings may be a critical psychosocial competency for prospective hotel employees. Emotional management involves the capacity to acknowledge and regulate one's emotional responses, even within the face of adversity or intense guest interactions. This skill set enables hotel employees to take care of a relaxed, professional demeanor, to de-escalate tense situations, and to supply a uniform, positive experience for guests. Effective management of feelings and emotions is crucial for hotel employees due to the demanding and often stressful nature of their job (Nahm & Lee, 2020). Prospective hotel employees must learn to spot and address their own emotional triggers, to develop coping strategies for stress and frustration, and to foster a way of emotional resilience. This not only benefits the employee's well-being, but it also contributes to the general positive work culture and guest satisfaction within the hotel. By cultivating emotional management skills, prospective hotel employees can become true ambassadors of the hospitality industry, embodying the values of grace, empathy, and unwavering commitment to guest satisfaction. Managing emotions contributes to employee well-being and job satisfaction (Wallen Warner & Bratko, 2020).

V. STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING PSYCHOSOCIAL COMPETENCIES IN HOSPITALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Given the importance of these psychosocial competencies within the hotel industry, it's essential that hospitality education and training programs prioritize their development alongside technical skill acquisition. Here are some strategies which can be considered jointly:

5.1 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Incorporate role-playing exercises and simulations that allow students to practice communication, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, and emotional management in realistic scenarios. Facilitate group projects and team-based activities that foster collaboration, conflict resolution, and leadership development. Provide opportunities for students to interact in community service or volunteer work, which may cultivate empathy, emotional intelligence, and a customer-centric mindset.

5.2 MENTORSHIP AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Establish mentorship programs that pair students with experienced hospitality professionals, enabling them to find out from real-world examples and receive personalized guidance. Implement coaching sessions that specialize in the event of specific psychosocial competencies, like speechmaking, active listening, and emotional resilience. Encourage peer-to-peer mentoring, where students can share their experiences, provide feedback, and support one another's professional growth.

5.3 INTEGRATED CURRICULUM DESIGN

Embed psychosocial competency development throughout the curriculum, instead of treating it as a standalone module. Integrate case studies, problem-based learning, and reflective exercises into technical courses to strengthen the application of psychosocial skills in real-world hospitality contexts. Collaborate with industry partners to style curriculum that aligns with the evolving needs and priorities of the hotel sector.

5.4 EMPHASIS ON LIFE SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Develop comprehensive assessment frameworks that evaluate not only technical proficiency but also the demonstration of psychosocial competencies. Incorporate peer and self-assessment tools that encourage students to reflect on their own growth and development in these areas. Provide detailed feedback and training to students, highlighting their strengths and areas for improvement in terms of psychosocial skills.

5.5 FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Create a culture of open communication, trust, and psychological safety within the training environment. Encourage students to experiment and learn from their mistakes without worrying of judgment or negative consequences. Offer resources and support services, like counselling and wellness programs, to assist students manage stress and develop emotional intelligence. By implementing these strategies, hospitality education and training programs can cultivate a generation of hotel employees who aren't only technically proficient but also equipped with the psychosocial competencies necessary to thrive within the dynamic and people-centric hotel industry.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the ever-evolving landscape of the hotel sector, the importance of psychosocial competencies can't be overstated. Effective communication, strong interpersonal skills, problem-solving aptitude, critical thinking, empathy, and emotional management are the hallmarks of outstanding hospitality professionals – the individuals who can truly transform the guest experience and contribute to the general success and competitiveness of the hotel industry. By prioritizing the event of those essential life skills within hospitality education and training programs, educators and industry leaders can empower subsequent generation of hotel employees to excel, not only in their technical duties but also in their ability to navigate the complex social and emotional dynamics that are integral to the hospitality experience. As the hotel industry continues to evolve, the necessity for a holistic, competency-based approach to talent development will only become more critical. By embracing the cultivation of psychosocial competencies, the hotel sector can make sure that it remains at the forefront of guest satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational success.

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