

ABSTRACT

Exploring and Developing Students' Competencies in Asian Airline Business: A Case of Aviation Personnel Development Institute Students

Thitiporn Milindra Christensen (Thitiporn.chr@kbu.ac.th)

Nutchirathorn Inthorndharamana (Varapattra.nau@kbu.ac.th)

Kasem Bundit University, Thailand

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This research aimed to explore and develop the airline competencies of the students who are studying the Bachelor of Arts in Airline Business, Aviation Personnel Development Institute, Kasem Bundit University. The researcher used interview as a qualitative method to ask the airline human resource managers from the well-known airlines. Ten key informants in the study were from Thai Airways International Company, Bangkok Airways, Thai Air Asia, Singapore Airline, Japan Airline, EVA air, Korean Air, China Airline, Thai Smile Airways, Nok Air, Thai Lion Airs. Results of the study found that based on 3 components of competencies, the students lack the skills of English communication most. They need more communicative skill improvement, particularly speaking. In addition, the students need to study popular languages for Eastern Asian passengers such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean and aware of Eastern Asian cultures, such as seniority, national identities and some non-verbal communication. Some computer skills should be trained such as intermediate level of Microsoft Office, Excel. For the knowledge, the students need more knowledge of airline and aviation industry, such as organization knowledge, international knowledge related to aviation industry. However, the students have desired attributes for airline business, such as nice grooming, disciplines and favorite behavior. They were helpful and considerate different cultures. The development from the airline human resource managers from the interview were the students need to improve communicative English and computer skills. These skills should be learnt and practiced in the classroom with operation. In addition, to improve the students' competencies, the instructors should plan and invent clear functional analysis sheet for internship such as key roles and key functions for studying and internship since they were important for competency evaluation and development. The research merits were to increase job opportunities for the students and develop the curriculum to meet the demands of airlines.

Introduction

The ancient Greeks thought competency to be more than a skill. It was considered "a virtue; a general sense of excellence and goodness". (Infed, 2005) Over time this definition has been stripped of its moral, social and intellectual qualities and whittled down to a simpler definition of "having the ability to undertake specific tasks." (Infed, 2005) Terrence Hoffman (1999) believes that there is no clear agreement on the definition of competency. He proposes three main positions within the definition which include: observable performance, standard or quality of performance and the underlying qualities of the individual. Hoffman shares the opinion of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy in that he states that the meaning of competency will shift according to the context of its use and the requirements of the user. He further suggests that the word competence should be selected based on its suitability to the context's needs.

A competency is the capability to apply or use a set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully perform "critical work functions" or tasks in a defined work setting. Not to be confused with competence, a competency describes a behavior, but does not attempt to describe a level of performance. Competencies often serve

as the basis for skill standards that specify the level of knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in the workplace, as well as potential measurement criteria for assessing competency attainment. (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2015).

Background

Aviation Business is one of the popular curricula in bachelor degrees at the present due to an increase in demand of the aviation industry and tourism in Thailand. Aviation Personnel Development Institute (APDI), Kasem Bundit University, aims to produce qualified and competent personnel for careers in aviation industry, such as cabin crews, ground service agents and related careers in the aviation industry (www.apdi.kbu.ac.th, 2018). To succeed in aviation business and career, the students' needs to have some certain competency and combined with skills.

Competencies in aviation industry can be segmented into 3 parts as core competencies, managerial competency and functional competency. The main competencies include interpersonal skills, computer skills and problem-solving skills. The components competencies divided into knowledge such as organizational knowledge, aviation safety and security, customer service knowledge, language and cultures; skills such as using Amadeus

reservation system, applying excel, word & power point, speaking Chinese and Japanese Languages; attributes such

as service-minded, disciplines, personality and grooming, etc.

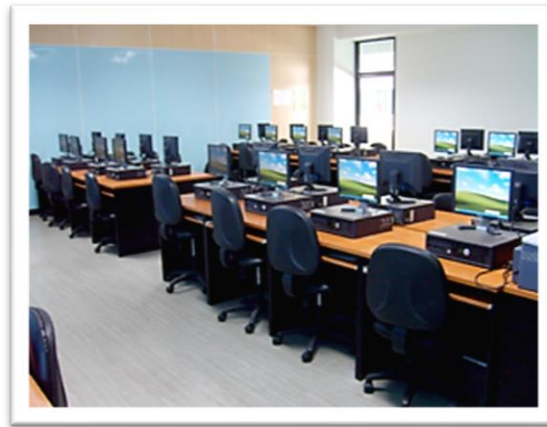


Fig. 1 : Competency Reservation Amadeus System ,Mockup at APDI, Kasem Bundit University

Source: <http://apdi.kbu.ac.th>,



Fig. 2: Competency In-Flight Service Mockup at APDI, Kasem Bundit University

Source: <http://apdi.kbu.ac.th>

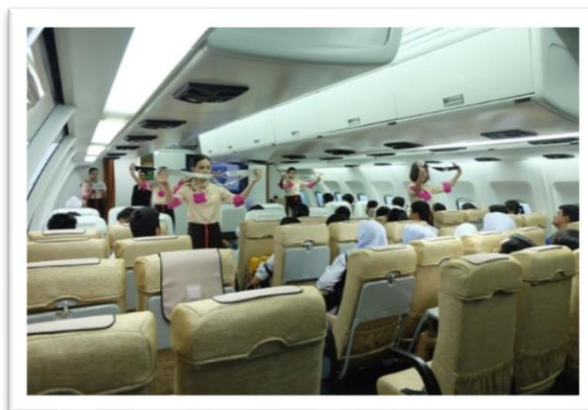


Fig. 3: Competency In-Flight Service Mockup at APDI, Kasem Bundit University

Source: <http://apdi.kbu.ac.th>



Fig. 4: Competency Ground Service Mockup at APDI, Kasem Bundit University

Source: <http://apdi.kbu.ac.th>,



Fig.5 : Competency English Knowledge TOEFL iBT KBU Testing center (EST) and KBU Prometric Testing Center. Source : <https://kbuprometric.business.site>



Fig. 6: Personality Training by The Expert at APDI, Kasem Bundit University
Source: <http://apdi.kbu.ac.th/activities.html>, Retrieved on December, 22, 2018



Fig 7 : Instructor provided lecture in Airline English subject.
Source: <http://apdi.kbu.ac.th>, Retrieved on December, 22, 2018

Research Objectives

1. To explore the airline competencies of APDI students
2. To develop the airline competencies of APDI students

Significance of the Study

The research contributed the information of developing APDI students' competencies for airline. The instructors can use the result to develop the curriculum to meet the labor demand.

Scopes of the Study

Time: The researcher interviewed with 10 airline human resource managers during December, 2018.

Place: Survarmbhumi Airport where include offices of the low cost and premium airlines.

Concept and Related Literatures

Competencies: Competency is the combination of measurable and observable abilities, skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that contribute to improved employee performance and result in organizational accomplishment. It's important to described the

components of competencies. Competency shows skills and knowledge that someone is able to do in a variety of situations. Therefore, to have certain competency guarantee the standards for the level of knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in the job (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2015). Competencies consists of core competencies—the competency which is important for every organization employee, managerial competency—the competency which is necessary for every organization middle level managers and functional competency—the competency which is needed in the job function for operational level officers. However, the competency-based selection aims to measure and evaluate 3 components of competencies as knowledge, skills and attributes or characteristics (Fig. 8). Competency model pyramid explains the components of competency and its development such as personal characteristics, aptitudes, skills, knowledge, and behavior. The strong and endured competency needed to be developed from personal characteristics, aptitudes, skills, knowledge and behavior from both formal and informal learning. However, the personal characteristics are the beginning of competencies (Fig.9).

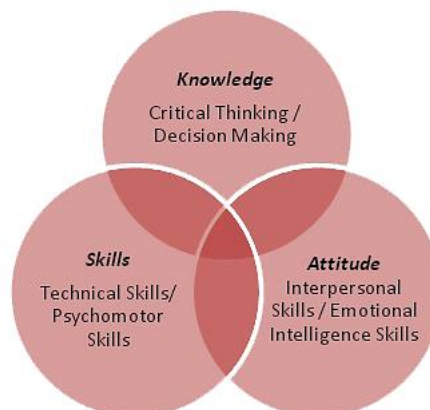


Fig.8 Competency Based Selection
Source: <http://www.orgwide.com>

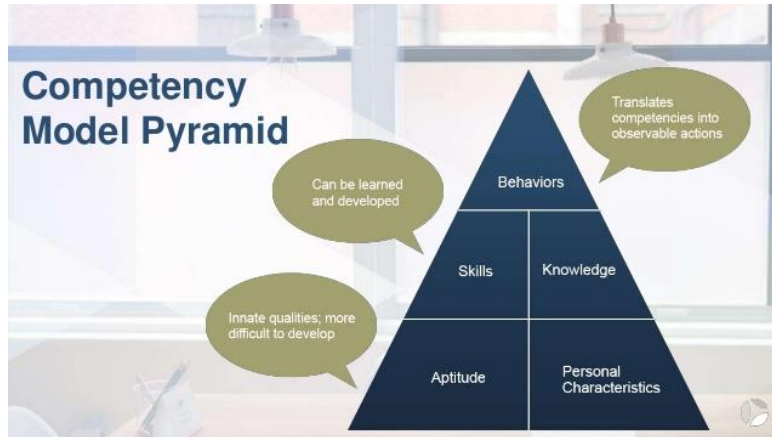


Fig. 9 competency model pyramid

Source: <https://www.onpointconsultingllc.com/competency-modeling-leadership-development>

Competencies in Airlines and Development

Core competency of an airline is largely dependent upon its industrial, social and cultural background. Nunes & Breen (2011). Nichanong & Kankaew (2013) proposed that well-trained, experienced teacher was better transfer knowledge and skills to student.

To be successful in the aviation industry, the students require to possess the following core competencies in aviation industry as:

- Customer Service Orientation is an ability to provide caring and outstanding customer service. GSA (Ground Service Agent)
- Flexibility and Adaptability are abilities to work in many different environments, locations, schedules, with different people.
- Interpersonal Skills are abilities to work with and get on with other people, manage time and keep temper. They include teamwork skills.
- Communication Skills are abilities to communicate with the others. There are 3 main types of communication
 - Verbal Communication is the most interactions.
 - Non-Verbal Communication is communicated through facial expressions, hand gestures, appearance and posture.
 - Visual Communication includes sign, maps, drawing or graphic design
- Cultural Sensitivity is an ability to interact with others from different cultures by following the norms of that culture.
- Integrity and Ethical are abilities to show honesty and ethically at work.



Fig.6 Competency for Aviation Personnels

Related Literatures

Kim and Park (2013) studied the research titled “An Investigation of the Competencies Required of Airline Cabin Crew Members: The Case of a Korean Airline” The research aimed to identify ways to develop training program for airline cabin crews which focused on competencies. The significance of the study was to increase job skills and knowledge and develop the cabin crew competency which resulted in company productivity. The researcher used 446 questionnaires surveyed consisted demographic profiles and work-related characteristics. The Likert’s Scale ranging from 1-7 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The result of the study showed that there was a relationship between the most important required competencies and the socio-demographic or work-related characteristics of cabin crews for an international airline. The 4 important competency scores were appearance and attitude (mean = 5.54), interpersonal skills (mean = 5.49), emotional intelligence (mean = 5.37), and knowledge of foreign culture and language (mean = 5.01). From this study, the past experience was lowest at the moderate level (mean = 3.60).

Hinds-Smith (2009) did the thesis titled “Competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica: The implications of soft skills.” The objectives were to investigate and examine the relevance of soft skills within competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica. The significance of the study were to improve competencies of hotel managers in Jamaica and developed effective programs for the hotel managers. The research instrument was the semi-structured questionnaire consisted of 3 parts as 1) demographic profiles 2) important skills for jobs as hotel managers 3) hotel manager skills’ ranking including communicating skills, persuasion skills, technical skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills. The infinite population was Jamaican hotel managers from small, medium and large sizes. The results of the study showed that soft skills such as communication, persuasion and leadership are perceived as more important than hard or technical skills such as accounting, marketing and decision making.

Research Method

The research aims to explore and develop the airline competencies of the students who are studying the Bachelor of Arts in Airline Business, Aviation Personnel Development Institute, Kasem Bundit University. To do so, the researcher created 4 interview questions to 10 key informants who are the 10 airline human resource managers with more than 5 year experience in the currently working airlines and they accepted the APDI students in their airline internship. The 10 key informants are from premium and low-cost airlines as: Thai Airways International Company, Thai Air Asia, Singapore Airline, Japan Airline, EVA air, Korean Air, China Airline, Thai Smile Airways, Nok Air, Thai Lion Airs

The interview included 4 questions about competency in aviation industry, focusing on the airlines, the competencies needed by the APDI students, how to develop competencies and improving competency by APDI.

1. What are the competencies demanded by the airlines?
2. What are the competencies which the APDI students need to add more or lack of?
3. How can the APDI students develop their competencies in order to work in the airline?
4. What should the institute (APDI) develop the students for airline competencies?

Results of the study

Based on the interview questions, the 10 key informants from the airline business informed:

1. What are the competencies demanded by the airlines?

There are core competencies demanded by both premium and low-cost airlines as organizational knowledge and East Asian cultures, such as Chinese, Japanese language and computer skills, such as intermediate Microsoft Office. The airlines also commanded the interpersonal skills such as human skills, communication skills and problem-solving skills. Some attributes to be added on for the students are punctuality, disciplines, service minded and personality. Both premium and low-cost airlines recommended that the students should be able to adapt themselves with the passengers from different culture.

2. What are the competencies which the APDI students need to add more or lack of?
The airlines recommended that the students should increase their English proficiency, particularly speaking and listening. The students should be able to solve the problem when they are in unfamiliar situation. In addition, the students should learn and adapt to organizational culture. The students need to study IT and some software by themselves.
3. How can the APDI students develop their competencies in order to work in the airline?
There are formal and informal competencies developed, such as coaching, self-study and formal learning such as training, workshop, etc. The airlines recommended the institute to implement the courses for the students in preparing themselves before entering to the airline organizations. However, each airline provided the different results based on their marketing and selling points, such as some airlines focused on the personal services.
4. What should the institute (APDI) develop the students for airline competencies?

There are 3 points which airlines recommended the institute to do:

1. Cultivating the service culture to the students. The students should learn how to provide excellent service based on customer needs. In addition, the students should have some service personnel characteristics demanded by airlines such as tolerance,

accepting diversities and disciplines in the airlines. Some East Asian culture should be taught to the students who aim to work in East Asian airlines, i.e. Chinese, Japanese.

2. Restructuring and developing the curriculum to meet the demand of airline business.
The institute should restructure and develop the curriculum based on demand on airline by asking participants from the airlines. Some internship and cooperative, which are experience-based study should be implemented. Rather than informal subjects, the institute should put more short course for the students., such as creativity development course, IT for airlines in particular purposes. The institute should invite the personnel from the well-known airlines to provide the lecture for internship.
3. Language, both English and third language should be emphasized on using rather than lecture. The airline recommended that the students should have more time to practice speaking and listening, rather than only passing exam. In addition, to study best, the language courses should be together with the culture and activities. Therefore, this will encourage students to learn. To provide some third language courses, East Asian culture such as Chinese and Japanese can also add some values and cultural knowledges for the students in order that the students can understand the passengers and the airline personnel who work with them such as seniority, harmony, adaptability.

Conclusion

Students should develop English specially speaking skills because in complicated situations, students cannot communicate in English. In addition, students should also develop the necessary computer skills for example advance level Microsoft Office. Aviation Technology and innovation change constantly so students should study and updated information, knowledge and news about aviation. Moreover, students should also study information about the organization and the competencies that the airlines needed.

Discussions

This research found that both Premium and Low-cost airlines agreed that English for communication and Information Technology are the most important competencies for students. Japanese and Chinese languages are significant too. For an attribute, Asian Airlines expect discipline, on-time performance and respectful from student's trainee. All human resource managers proposed that Airline and APDI should collaborate to develop student's competency by using coaching and simulation method rather than learning in class. They are not creating motivation and competency in the work place.

Suggestions

1. Good development performance requires both side students and airlines. All parties present ideas for the development of students' competencies, such as organizing meetings in sub-departments, exchanging knowledge between organizations. Create activities and design courses together to find the succeed and meet the airline requirements.
2. Competency motivation is important for students. Instead of setting the goal to get a job in the internship, the university should constantly encourage their student's competencies such as activities between university and airline in community service. Generate consistent behavior to develop students' abilities. It's a way to create a relationship between student and airline and moreover to form the inspiration for developing student competency in the airline business.

Suggestions for further research

1. In this research, interviews were conducted from 10 airlines human resource managers. For future research, the researchers suggest making inquiries and interviews with 4th year students who needs to develop competency.
2. There should be a comparative study with competing educational institutions such as CATC (CIVIL AVIATION TRAINING CENTER) by using Benchmarking to find development methods.

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