

# COMPETENCES THAT SHAPE SERVICE QUALITY AT HOSPITALITY ENTERPRISES

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**Abstract.** The paper discusses professional key competencies in catering and accommodation, where the level of service depends on the professionalism of personnel. One of the main assessment criteria of professionalism in the hospitality area is a communicative competence.

**Keywords:** competence, integrated professional competences, hospitality, personality development, acquisition of knowledge.

## Introduction

The modern concepts of the service offered by specialists have moved far from the concepts of the service, prevailing in the mind of an average man. (Hudakova L.V.) Today's requirements for service levels are inextricably linked with psychological and philosophical aspects of the activity.

Service is the interaction, which involves a specialist (the staff) and a customer-consumer of the service. That is, we are talking about the relationship between people. (Veledinsky V.G., 2010)

Service rendering has quite a long history, commensurate with the history of mankind in general. Though, if earlier the service system was based on social inequality, defining the rights and obligations of the participants of this relationship, then nowadays, the society, proclaiming the equality of people *de iure*, at the same time has done much in the field of equality *de facto* (Hudakova L.V.).

However, along with this process, the need for services has not diminished. And today, a great variety of customer service companies are not at risk of losing their jobs. In particular, when it comes to the professional activity at the hospitality industry, the current level of requirements for professionalism, leave no doubt of the necessity of *integrative professional competence* (Hudakova L.V.).

The aim of the article is to analyse and evaluate theoretical aspects of the competences forming quality of the hospitality service in order to improve competitiveness of the companies.

## Studies on the concept of competence and its role in the hospitality industry

If the quality of services offered by well trained employees satisfies customers, most likely, that will increase a number of customers' repeat visits to purchase products or services. Ultimately, it can increase profits of organisations and companies (Gupta et al, 2007; Sulek et al, 2004; Cheng, 2005).

The most essential competencies of employees according to the employers are motivation to work, ability to communicate and professionalism (Balode, 2010).

The interpretation of the competence concept has drawn the attention of many scholars. One of the most significant researchers in the area, German philosopher J.Habermas describes competence as each person's ability to apply in action and to improve creatively what they have acquired (Habermas, 1981).

The concept of competence has been broadly viewed in two different ways: one is the strategic perspective at the organisational level and the other is central to the domains of human resources at the individual level (Chen et al., 2008; Hoffman, 1999; McLegan, 1997). From a strategic point of view, competencies can be regarded as a company's competitive advantage that competitors can never copy, including functions, processes and routines (Cardy, 2006; Kochanski, 1997). For example, customers' knowledge of products or services in current market places can be incorporated into creating new products or services by establishing the knowledge system (Canziani, 1996). It must not only be exclusive, but also difficult to duplicate by other competitors.

The overarching perspective of the competency at an individual level has been defined as the underlying work-related characteristics such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, motives, and traits. Previous studies have pointed out that these characteristics play a pivotal role in fostering managerial abilities including problem solving, analytical thinking, and leadership (Boyatzis, 1982; Chen et al, 2008; McClenland, 1973; Mirabille, 1997; Spencer et al, 1993).

External circumstances play a significant role in the manifestation of the competence; therefore, it cannot be defined by summing mechanically knowledge and skills.

"At the same time, the competence closely links the mobilisation of knowledge, skills and behavioural relationships that are configured in relation with conditions of a specific activity" (Markova, 2013).

Competency has an important role as a driving factor to achieve work values (intrinsic work values and extrinsic work values) (Ros et al, 1999) and it includes a variety of personal traits such as knowledge, skills, values, motives and enthusiasm. To maximize these work values, employees should extend their own competencies in performing tasks. If some essential competencies or qualifications are

missing, employees should have chances to learn skills or knowledge from participation in workshops, seminars and training courses. Presently, the concept of competency is being actively employed by many of the service organisations or companies to improve the function of human resources. The key points of competence management involve firstly, bringing enhanced productivity to the company as it can choose the right person in the right place on the basis of competencies and qualifications identified and secondly, employees are also able to recognise missing skills or knowledge for the tasks and learn about them, ultimately resulting in individual development (*Youngmi et al, 2011*).

As the hotel industry is labour focused and people-oriented, the concept of competency management should be applied to the hotel industry. If employees are fully competent to perform tasks, their job satisfaction will increase. Then, this will result in positive outcomes for the hotel (*Lee et al, 2008*).

The specificity of the professional activity at the hospitality industry involves not just the execution of customer orders, *but also a high level of integration* both with the physiological aspects of clients, in regard with their age, gender, religious and national characteristics of these clients.

The necessity for such integration becomes apparent if you try to reveal the concept "level of service". The necessity for a high level of service is dictated, in the first place, by the market situation in the modern world: a large number of enterprises in catering industry (restaurants, cafes, etc.) in a natural way compete among themselves. (*Hudakova*)

Thus, the selection of a potential customer is most often based not only on the food he/she wants to consume, but also on the whole atmosphere of the place: cosiness, decoration, music and, of course, proper service carried out by specialists of catering industry.

The level of service is a bit more complex concept than what is understood by this term outside the professional environment. High level of service - it is not just the friendliness of the staff or expressions, which are mandatory for use in a conversation with a client.

High level of service means a high level of professionalism of the staff, based on the *integration of vocational and general competencies*. (*Hudakova*)

Self-actualisation of the specialist of catering industry is the first step towards integration.

Since the professionals of the hospitality industry have to deal with people, the problems and need to solve them in daily work occur regularly. A certain degree of a non-standard approach is required to work with each individual or a group of persons. Therefore, a flexibility and novelty of thinking, constant external benevolence of the specialist at the service sector are the professional qualities comprising his/her professional competence (*Kouwenhoven*).

As for the ethical processes, they are often closely linked to the features such as national, age or

gender characteristics. The service staff who has a really high level of professionalism takes into account these attributes of customers almost automatically. For instance, the waiter should know that Muslims should not be offered pork dishes, and guests from India, on the other hand, beef dishes, etc.

Specificity of individual's work in hospitality industry is related to the fact that the professional qualities are inseparable from the human ones.

"To effectively carry out their professional duties, the catering industry specialist must have the following significant professional qualities: on a psychophysiological level - emotional stability, self-control, calmness, the ability to assess the situation, resistance to stress, strong type of nervous system; on an intellectual level - logical thinking, creativity, insight, knowledge of personality psychology and consumer psychology; on a personal level - sociability, focus on the other, professional motivation, activity, sociability, tact and diplomacy in communication, empathy, personal responsibility, morality, and others" (*Skobkin, 2012*).

The fact of complexity itself, in which the consumers of restaurant services assess the service quality, determines the need for *integration of vocational and general competences of waiter*.

Various kind of factors, that are related with particular enterprise - organisational level of production and management, technologies applied, state of discipline, organisation and working conditions, regulations governing the internal labour schedule, system of remuneration, corporate culture and relationships, motivation of staff, etc. have on the integration, organisational culture, motivation of employees - have some influence, more often - indirect influence, to the integration of professional and general competences.

However, all that is related with the individual psychology, because any human activity cannot be carried out without relation to the psychological attitudes of the individual performing this activity; that is to say, the psychological qualities of the catering and hospitality industry specialist working directly with consumers of restaurant services (*Skobkin, 2012*).

There are great opportunities both for success and for failure in this area of activity. Today's clients expect the hospitality industry will provide the highest standards of service. Hence, educational institutions, managers of the companies and personnel managers face new challenges, and development of new approaches to integrative and service competences of the staff is the way to respond to these challenges.

## Conclusions

Priority tasks of the hospitality industry are comprehensive development of personality, acquisition of knowledge, socialisation having a

decisive role in the development of communication competence, exchange of views and positions on recognising and accepting the differences, adoption of the dialogue principle in society. Personal culture and competence should be considered as culture of the society consisting of values, knowledge, skills, and attitudes, expressed in a form of a dialogue and creative activities, and acquired by a person individually. Culture of personality is a prerequisite and a result of education; for the hospitality industry specialist it is foundation for developing other competences.

### Summary

The aim of the paper is to analyse and evaluate theoretical aspects of the competences that shape the quality of the hospitality service in order to foster the competitiveness of the hospitality enterprises. The views of various authors on the concept of the competence are reviewed in the paper. Competency has an important role as a driving factor to achieve work values – intrinsic and extrinsic, and it includes a variety of personal traits such as knowledge, skills,

values, motives and enthusiasm. To maximise these work values, employees should extend their own competencies in performing tasks. If some essential competencies or qualifications are missing, employees should have chances to learn skills or knowledge from participation in workshops, seminars and training courses.

The specificity of the professional activity of the hospitality industry is that the specialist not just executes customers' orders, but also demonstrates high level of integration of both clients' physiological aspects, as well as their age, gender, religious and national characteristics.

Various factors, related with a particular enterprise – organisational level of production and management, technologies applied, level of discipline, organisation and working conditions, regulations governing the internal work schedule, system of remuneration, corporate culture and relationships, staff motivation, etc. have effect on integration, organisational culture, and motivation of its employees; at the same time these factors influence, more often – indirectly integration of professional and general competences.

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