A model of hospitality leadership competency for frontline and director-level managers: Which competencies matter more?

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ABSTRACT

Competency models are useful tools for hospitality organizations and academic programs to identify skills and behaviors needed in the workforce. Using two studies, the present study provides an updated leadership competency model for frontline and director-level managers in the hospitality industry. In a pilot study, we updated the model of hospitality leadership competencies (in a list of 195 behaviors, grouped into 15 competencies comprising 44 skills) based on existing competency models and the opinions from 30 senior hospitality leaders. We further clustered these competencies into business leadership competencies, personal leadership competencies, and people leadership competencies. In the main study, we surveyed 98 director-level managers on the relative importance and competency priority for frontline and director-level managers. Rank-test results showed that while business leadership competencies were the top priority for director-level managers, people leadership competencies ranked first for frontline managers. This study yields both research, practical and educational implications.

1. Introduction

Competency models are useful tools for human resource managers and educators to identify and develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for future industry leaders (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Kay and Russette, 2000; Testa and Sipe, 2012; Sisson and Adams, 2013). Developing competence in employees is related to employees' professional confidence and job satisfaction (Ko, 2012) and business performance (Blayney, 2009). As such, increasing number of studies examined both generic leadership competencies (e.g., Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Testa and Sipe, 2012) and job-specific competencies (e.g., Ko, 2015; Koenigsfeld et al., 2012) for hospitality managers.

Despite these notable works, previous studies focused on developing competency models for a single (hierarchical) level of managers, without comparing the relative importance of frontline managers and director- level managers' competencies or prioritizing these competencies. The existing universalism approach implies that there is a single best set of equally important competencies for all managers (cf. Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Koenigsfeld et al., 2012), which limits the potential for practitioners to develop the *right set of people* with the *utmost important competencies* (Antonacopoulou and FitzGerald, 1996; Huselid and Becker, 2011; Lepak and Snell, 1999). To better utilize limited resources, hospitality organizations need to understand whose competencies are more important. They also need to know which

competencies have the highest priority with the assumption that priority of competencies may differ for frontline and director-level managers. Addressing these issues can also help hospitality educators to differentiate their undergraduate and master programs by aligning curricula with critical competencies for jobs- undergraduate programs prepare students to become successful frontline managers whereas master programs often focus on developing students to become successful director-level managers (Raybould and Wilkins, 2005). Thus, we aim to compare the relative importance of frontline and director-level managers' competencies, as well as investigate the priority of these competencies for frontline and director-level managers, respectively.

To address the issues raised above, it is essential to have an updated model of hospitality leadership competency. Recent development of competency models has focused on specific jobs, such as golf club managers, food and beverage researchers, and training managers (e.g., Bharwani and Jauhari, 2013; Ko, 2015; Koenigsfeld et al., 2012; Wong and Lee, 2017). While these job-specific models are useful for specific jobs, these cannot be easily applied to the general hospitality industry (Koenigsfeld et al., 2012; Zagar et al., 1983). Thus, their implication on hospitality education and training programs (e.g., university programs, management trainee programs, etc.) - which tends to train generalists (Cho et al., 2006; Tynjälä et al., 2006) - are limited. With the majority of generic hospitality competencies focused on competencies needed in the 2010 s (e.g., Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Testa and Sipe, 2012),

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there is not sufficient knowledge on generic hospitality leadership competencies in 2020s. Given the dynamic nature of hospitality industry and time-specific nature of competency models (Winterton and Winterton, 1999), it is time to update the generic hospitality competency model for hospitality leaders. This can enhance the hospitality industry's ability to recruit, select, train, and appraise future leaders (cf. Pavesic, 1993).

In sum, we used two studies to answer three questions: RQ1) What are the competencies needed for hospitality managers in the 2020s? RQ2) What is the relative importance of these competencies for frontline and director-level managers? and RQ3) Which competencies have the highest priority for frontline and director-level managers, respectively? In the pilot study, we answered RQ1 and developed an updated model of hospitality leadership competency. In the main study, we answered RQ2 and RQ3 and explored which frontline or director-level managers' competencies should hospitality organizations and educators invest in.

2. Literature review

2.1. Hospitality competency model

Hospitality researchers have been interested in the study of competency models because human resource managers use competency models as a basis for various talent acquisition processes (see Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Kerr and Jackofsky, 1989, for detailed discussions). Competency models are also useful for curriculum and class designs (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Sisson and Adams, 2013; Tesone and Ricci, 2005). Employing competent employees, in turn, can increase job satisfaction (Ko, 2012), improve guest service quality (Bharwani and Jauhari, 2013) and result in better financial performance (Blayney, 2009).

There are two major lines of competency research. First, job-specific models focus on developing specific competencies needed for jobs (Ko, 2015; Koenigsfeld et al., 2012; Wong and Lee, 2017). Examples of specific competencies include product knowledge and capacity for foodservice research and development employees (Ko, 2015), administrative and technical domains for private club managers (Koenigsfeld et al., 2012), and training and facilitation skills for training professionals (Wong and Lee, 2017). Despite the importance of job-specific competencies (Koenigsfeld et al., 2012), there are some "common core" generic competencies, such as business competencies (e.g., strategic management, innovation, and change), self-characteristics and interpersonal competencies (e.g., team player, people skills), and leadership competencies (e.g., coaching). Indeed, Sisson and Adams (2013) showed that generic competencies account for 86% of all competencies.

The second line of competency research focused on the development of generic competency models for hospitality leaders. Generic models put more emphases on business, self-interpersonal and leadership competencies and less emphasis on technical skills (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Kay and Russette, 2000). For example, Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) developed 8-factor models including strategic positioning, implementation, critical thinking, communication, self-management, interpersonal, leadership and industry knowledge. It is generally agreed that there are three-major generic competencies factors. These factors are empirically distinguishable (Mumford et al., 2007; Sisson and Adams, 2013). Testa and Sipe (2012) called these three leadership competencies factors as business-, self-, and people- savvy. Based on the Testa and Sipe's (2012) study, we proposed that generic hospitality leadership competencies can be clustered into 3 factors: 1) business leadership competencies - defined as competencies required for managing business functions; 2) personal leadership competencies − defined as self-focused competencies required for a personal growth and interpersonal needs; and 3) people leadership competencies - defined as other-focused competencies required for leading and developing subordinates.

While both job-specific and generic competency models advance our knowledge of hospitality leadership competencies, recent competency research focuses on sector-specific models which cannot be readily applicable to all hospitality managerial jobs. Moreover, existing generic models are dated with most of them focusing on competencies needed in the 2010s (e.g., Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Testa and Sipe, 2012). However, the hospitality industry is highly dynamic (Koenigsfeld et al., 2012). For example, there is an increasing emphasize of social media competencies (Leung et al., 2013; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014), cross-culture competencies (Pizam, 2014) and emotional intelligence (Bharwani and Jauhari, 2013). As such, competency models are time-specific (Winterton and Winterton, 1999). Thus, we adopt a future-focus approach, incorporate recent changes, and update the generic hospitality leadership competency model in the pilot study.

Research question: What are the leadership competencies needed for frontline and director-level hospitality managers in the 2020s?

2.2. Level of management

Another limitation in existing studies is that they did not differentiate the competencies needed for different levels of management. Organizations are designed with multiple hierarchical levels to coordinate functions as well as monitor and react to different aspects of organizational environments (Zaccaro and DeChurch, 2012). For example, in a hotel setting, while frontline managers are responsible for monitoring the interactions between frontline employees and guests, director-level managers have broader responsibilities such as monitoring the general external environment for trends that can have impacts on the whole business unit. Table 1 summarizes the difference between the two level of management. Given the differential nature of jobs and job-specific competency requirements, the degree of importance differ across levels (Mumford et al., 2007; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001).

Addressing DeChurch et al. (2010) call to understand director-level managers (i.e., middle management) - an under-studied hierarchical level (DeChurch et al., 2010; Zaccaro and DeChurch, 2012) - we contrasted the relative importance of frontline and director-level managers, as well as the differential priority of the two levels. Throughout this study, we defined frontline managers as managerial employees that have employees directly reporting to them and director-level managers as mid-level managers that oversee teams of managers.

Table 1
Differences between fronline and director-level managers.

	Frontline managers	Director-level managers
Definitions	Managerial employees that have employees directly reporting to them	Mid-level managers that oversee teams of managers
Examples	Restaurant managers, front-desk managers and club managers, and sales managers	General managers of a small hotel property, directors of food and beverage, director of hotel operations
Major responsibilities	Manage systems and to lead frontline employees, including assigning work tasks, scheduling, managing operation cost, monitoring work processes, train and develop, and to create accountability for performance	Monitor the external environment, planning and organizing multiple business units

2.3. Whose competencies are more important?

Both frontline and director-level managers need to monitor and react to both their internal and external environment. However, the latter has more complex interactions with the environment (Hooijberg et al., 1997; Jacobs and Jaques, 1987). Director-level managers are not only charged with tactical implementation of strategic initiatives, but also frontline manager execution (Floyd and Wooldridge, 2000). In contrast with frontline managers, whose duty is to implement director-level managers' decisions, director-level managers plan and oversee all business-related activities (Jacobs and Jaques, 1987; Mumford et al., 2007). This requires director-level managers to possess a much higher level of business leadership competencies (e.g., business acumen) to be successful at their job.

Although director-level managers are not in direct contact with frontline employees, previous research has consistently shown that their actions have trickle-down effects on frontline employees through the actions of frontline managers (e.g., Boshoff and Allen, 2000). For example, research showed that both frontline employees and frontline managers model director-level managers' ethical and unethical behaviors (Liu et al., 2012; Mayer et al., 2009). Hannah and Lester (2009) also showed that leaders increase the level of developmental readiness of individual followers. These studies highlight the importance of director-level managers' to be good role models. The trickle-down effect increases the competency requirement, making director-level managers' personal leadership competencies more important than that of front-line managers'.

Finally, both frontline managers and director-level managers are leaders i.e., they stand in a unique position which shape their followers' behaviors. Followers understand organizational policy and practices (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007), service culture (Boshoff and Allen, 2000) through their direct and distal leaders. Given that frontline managers are likely to imitate their director-level managers' leadership style (Hon and Lu, 2016; Ling et al., 2016), director-level managers' people leadership competencies have a more far-reaching effect than frontline managers' competency. This is especially true at the time of organizational change when director-level managers are in a pivotal position (Balogun, 2003).

Considering the impact that director-level managers have on business results and on the frontline managers they lead, we expect that director-level managers' competencies are relatively more important than that of frontline managers. Kaiser et al., (2011) suggested that director-level managers engage in more complex functional activities and need higher skills level. Indeed, Mumford et al. (2000) inferred that "more senior leadership positions apparently require higher levels of skills in general" (p. 109). Similarly, Mumford et al. (2007) found that job level in the organization is positively related to business, strategic, cognitive, and interpersonal competencies. In sum:

Hypothesis 1. Hospitality leadership competencies [a) business leadership competencies, b) personal leadership competencies, c) people leadership competencies)] are more important for director-level managers than for frontline managers

2.4. Priority of competencies for frontline and director-level managers

Researchers have called for attention to the potential conflicts in standardizing competency models to be used at levels of management (Conger and Ready, 2004). Some research showed that competencies are stratified by management level (Jacobs and McGee, 2001). Mumford et al. (2007) stated that "leadership skill categories will be differentially related to organization level" (p. 162). Kaiser et al. (2011) further argued that there is the difference between frontline and director-level managers' work nature, with director-level managers making decisions with the longer time frame and a higher level of complexity (see also Jacobs and Jaques, 1987). Despite the lack of

direct tests on differential importance, Kay and Russette (2000) developed the first hospitality leadership competency model that differentiate the need for frontline and director-level managers' competencies. Thus, frontline and director-level managers have different competencies priority.

Director-level managers impact business results by making strategic decisions, which in turn, impact the unit's policy, practices, and goals that affect all frontline employees' behaviors (Kaiser and Craig, 2011; Kaiser et al., 2011). Due to the impact of the decisions as well as the level of complexity of the external environment (Hooijberg et al., 1997; Jacobs and Jaques, 1987; Mumford et al., 2007), director-level managers must have a high level of competence to make conceptual and business decisions. Conversely, frontline managers face a relatively simple environment. Their key responsibility is to communicate the decisions made by higher-level managers to frontline employees (Lam et al., 2010). As the scope of their decision making is limited and is more automatic (rather than reflective) in nature (e.g., Huy, 2001; Mintzberg, 1980), their business leadership competencies have relatively low priority. In their seminal works, Guglielmino and Carroll (1979) and Katz (1955)[1] showed that conceptual skills are essential for director-level managers. Thus:

Hypothesis 2. The priority of business leadership competencies is higher for director-level managers than for frontline managers.

Both frontline and director-level managers need to be good role models with reasonable communication skills to communicate their ideas to their direct and indirect subordinates. The fact that frontline managers have a larger span of direct control, counterbalances the fact that director-level managers have more (direct and indirect) followers. As a result, the priority of personal leadership competence is similar for both frontline and director-level managers. Supporting our arguments that frontline and director-level managers have differential competencies priorities, Mumford et al. (2007) found that the positive relationship between management level and competency requirements are stronger for business competencies than for interpersonal competencies. Kraig and Craig (2011) showed that learning agility is important for both frontline and director-level managers. In sum:

Hypothesis 3. There is no significant difference in priority of personal leadership competencies for frontline and director-level managers.

Notably, it is frontline managers manage frontline employees on a day-to-day basis (Kaiser and Craig, 2011). Frontline employees directly receive signals and information from their frontline managers (Alexandrov et al., 2007). They embody the organization values and goals (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). Frontline managers' leadership style also mediates the relationship between director-level managers' leadership style and frontline employees' behaviors (e.g., Liu et al., 2012). Given the importance of having high quality relationships with frontline employees (Gerstner and Day, 1997; Judge et al., 2004), frontline managers must be capable of leading frontline employees, making their people leadership competencies as the highest priority. On the contrary, with a smaller span of (direct) control and more experienced subordinates (i.e. frontline managers), director-level managers' people leadership competencies have relatively low priority. Guglielmino and Carroll (1979) and Katz (1955)[2] showed that human skills are most important for frontline managers. Thus:

Hypothesis 4. The priority of people leadership competencies is higher

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[1] These authors conceptualized entry-level managers as supervisors, who handle day-to-day operation. Their mid-level managers correspond to frontline managers in this study, whose major responsibility is to manage frontline employees. Our discussion of director-level managers corresponds to their discussion of top-level managers.

[2] These authors conceptualized entry-level managers as supervisors, who handle day-to-day operation. Their mid-level managers correspond to frontline managers in this study, where their major responsibility is to manage frontline employees. Our discussion of director-level managers correspond to their discussion of top-level managers.

for frontline managers and director-level managers.

3. Pilot study

3.1. Initial model development

The goal of the pilot study was to develop an updated competency model. We developed our initial competency model based on existing research (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Testa and Sipe, 2012) and discussion from a one-day workshop with senior hospitality leaders on hospitality competencies. Next, we fine-tuned the wordings and defined each competency based on the Harvard University Competencies Dictionary (2014). It resulted in a competency model with three levels: 1) competency is at the broadest level, which is a cluster of related skills and behaviors that enable a person to be successful in a managerial position; 2) skill reflects a manager's ability to exhibit behaviors; 3) behavior is at the lowest level, which are observable and measurable actions that managers need to exhibit in their jobs. Based on the work of Testa and Sipe (2012), we further classified the competencies into 3 factors, namely a) business leadership competencies, b) personal leadership competencies, and c) people leadership competencies.

3.2. Pilot study sample and procedures

We invited 76 senior-level managers' (i.e., vice-presidents or above) to provide feedback on the initial competency model. Completed responses were collected from 30 respondents. Table 2 illustrates the sample characteristics. Respondents were given the definitions and the list of skills. Next, they were asked to rate the extent to which the competency's definition is clear, easy to understand, and capture the meaning of that competencies on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree… 7 = Strongly agree). Respondents were asked whether the proposed skills are appropriate for the competency using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Very inappropriate… 7 = Very appropriate). We averaged the skill appropriateness to the competency level. Third, respondents were also asked to list additional competencies and skills that they believed is important to the competency model for hospitality leaders and managers. They were also asked to provide suggestions on the competence definitions, dimensions, and classification.

3.3. Pilot results and final competency model

As illustrated in Table 3, respondents suggested that the competency's definitions are clear ($M = 6.33$, $SD = 0.20$), easy to understand ($M = 6.28$, $SD = 0.23$), capture the meaning of the competency ($M = 6.26$, $SD = 0.18$), and proposed skills are appropriate for the competencies ($M = 6.39$, $SD = 0.46$). Based on the pilot result and

written suggestions, primary researchers modified the competency model. After the modification, the primary researchers, along with 3 administrators (i.e., Dean and department heads) from a hospitality program, and 2 industry partners, discussed the modified competency list for additional competencies, wordings, and classification of skills and behaviors into competence dimensions. No changes were made at this point. The final competency model has 15 competencies, which consist of 195 behaviors (in 44 skills). Table 4 lists the competencies, their definitions, a list of skills, and sample behaviors.

4. Main study method

4.1. Sample and procedures

The goal of the main study was to test the difference in importance and priority of competency for frontline and director-level managers (Hypothesis 1–4). We invited hospitality directors to rate the importance of competency using snowball method. We emailed 19 senior managers from various hospitality sectors and asked them to forward the survey to their director-level subordinates. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and were informed about the potential implication of this study on curriculum development. 174 surveys were returned and there are 98 fully-completed surveys. Table 5 lists the sample characteristics.

The survey includes 3 major section - 1) introduction and demographics, 2) importance of behaviors, and 3) competencies priority. First, at the introduction and demographics section, we explained the purposes of the survey and provided the definitions of key terms (e.g., competency, skills, behaviors, frontline managers, director-level managers). Respondents also reported their demographic information. Second, at the importance of behaviors section, respondents were asked to rate the importance of behaviors for a) front-level and b) director-level managers in a scale of 1 (not important) to 7 (very important). Considering the length of the competency model, we asked participants rated 5 out of 15 competencies in random order with an average of 65 behavioral items. This helped to reduce respondent fatigue and improved both participation rate and response quality. Third, at the competencies priority section, all respondents were asked to rank the priorities of 15 competencies on from 1 (most important) to 15 (least important) for frontline managers and director-level managers, respectively.

4.2. Data analysis

We calculated the importance of competencies by first averaging the importance of behaviors (from survey Section 2) to the skills level and then averaging the importance of skills to the competency level. It resulted in a continuous (interval/ratio) variable. We used pair-sample *t*-tests to evaluate the difference in importance of competencies for frontline and director-level managers (Hypothesis 1). We used Cohen's D to interpret the effect size in Hypothesis 1. We calculated the average competencies factor priority by averaging the priority of competencies (from survey Section 3) in that factor. Given the rank nature of priority rankings, we used Wilcoxon signed-priority test to test the difference of priority of competencies for frontline and director-level managers (Hypothesis 2–4). We used Mann-Whitney *U* test to interpret the effect size in Hypothesis 1–4. Compared to the simple *t*-test, Wilcoxon test does not rely on the assumption of normally distributed outcomes and is considered as more appropriate for rank variables (Wilcoxon, 1945). To avoid multiple comparison problem, we interpreted the results at the competency factor level while presented the results at the competency level in the tables for reference.

Table 2
Pilot Study Sample Characteristics.

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Industry segments		
Gaming/Casino	13	43%
Hotel/Lodging/Resort	8	27%
Restaurant/Food and beverage	4	13%
Meeting and event management	2	7%
Clubs	1	3%
Others	2	7%
Title		
Senior/Executive Director	6	20%
Chief Administration/Operating Officer	3	10%
Senior/Executive Vice President	4	13%
Vice President	13	43%
Regional President	1	3%
President/Business Partner	3	10%
Total	30	

Table 3
Pilot Study Result on Initial Competency model.

Competencies[*]	Clarity	Easy to understand	capture meaning	[*]Proposed number of skills	Average skills appropriate
Business leadership competencies					
Plans and Organizes Effectively	6.28	6.28	6.17	4	6.43
Analyzes and Solves Business Problems	5.94	5.83	6.17	4	6.61
Demonstrates Business Intelligence	6.44	6.44	6.33	4	6.39
Delegates Effectively	6.44	6.17	6.17	2	6.68
Defines and Achieves Excellence	5.78	5.83	5.61	2	5.91
Personal leadership competencies					
Acts in an Ethical Manner	6.56	6.61	6.5	3	6.41
Values and Promotes Diversity	6.33	6.33	6.5	3	4.83
Maintains a Proactive Learning Orientation	6.22	6.18	6.25	3	6.37
Communicates Effectively	6.61	6.61	6.33	3	6.61
People leadership competencies					
Manages Conflict	6.33	6.22	6.28	4	6.44
Leads Effective Teams	6.06	5.94	5.82	3	6.44
Coaches and Develops Others	6.67	6.61	6.56	3	6.7
Leads Change and Supports Innovation	6.22	6.28	6.24	2	6.53
Models Hospitality and Service Excellence	6.22	6.17	6.11	2	6.65
Mean	6.29	6.25	6.22		6.39
SD	0.25	0.26	0.25		0.46

N = 30.

 * The competency dimensions and proposed number of skills is different from the final competency model because we revised the initial competency model based on the pilot result.

5. Main study results

5.1. Importance of competencies

Tables 6a and 6b shows the difference between the competency importance for frontline and director-level managers. Supporting Hypothesis 1, competencies were more important for director-level managers than for frontline managers for all three competencies factors. First, business leadership competencies – including "plans and organizes effectively", "analyzes and solves Business Problems", "demonstrates Business Acumen", "Leads Change and Supports Innovation" – were more important for director-level managers than for frontline managers (mean difference = 0.62, $t = 6.18$, $p < .01$). Second, the importance of personal leadership competencies – including "acts in an ethical manner", "displays emotional intelligence", "values and promotes diversity", "maintains a proactive learning orientation", "communicates effectively" – is also higher for director-level managers than for frontline managers (mean difference = 0.47, $t = -9.35$, $p < .01$). Third, director-level managers' people leadership competencies – including "delegates effectively", "leads effective teams", "coaches and develops others", "defines and achieves high performance" – is significantly more important than those of frontline managers (mean difference = 0.50, $t = -8.37$, $p < .01$). Moreover, all three competency factors yield large effects ($D_{business leadership competencies} = -0.87$; $D_{personal leadership competencies} = -0.93$; $D_{people leadership competencies} = -0.88$) suggesting that the means of director-level and frontline managers differ by 0.87–0.93 SD.

5.2. Priority of competencies

Table 7 shows the difference between the competency priorities for frontline and director-level managers. Supporting Hypothesis 2, business leadership competencies – including "analyzes and solves business problems", "demonstrates business acumen", "leads change and supports innovation", and "models hospitality and service excellence"– had a higher priority for director-level than for frontline managers ($M_{frontline managers} = 8.60$, $M_{director-level managers} = 7.08$, $Z = -5.46$, $p < .01$) with a large effect size ($r = -0.55$). There was no significant difference in priority of personal leadership competencies – including "acts in an ethical manner", "displays emotional intelligence", "values and promotes diversity", "maintains a proactive learning orientation", and "communicates effectively" – for frontline and director-level managers

($M_{frontline managers} = 7.93$, $M_{director-level managers} = 8.09$, ns). The effect size is small ($r = -0.10$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported. Hypothesis 4 states that people leadership competencies has a higher priority for frontline than for director-level managers. Supporting this hypothesis, the priority of people leadership competencies – including "manages conflict", "leads effective teams", "coaches and develops others", "defines and achieves high performance" –were higher for frontline managers than for director-level managers with large effect sizes ($M_{frontline managers} = 7.47$, $M_{director-level managers} = 8.83$, $Z = -5.55$, $p < .01$, $r = -0.56$).

6. Discussion and recommendations

6.1. Theoretical implication

Using an updated generic competency model for hospitality leaders and managers developed in our pilot study, we contrasted the competencies required for frontline and director-level managers in the main study. We extended previous competency studies in three major ways. First, while the basic structure of competency model remains unchanged, we showed that competency model is time-sensitive. Similar to earlier hospitality leadership competency models (e.g., Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Testa and Sipe, 2012; Kay and Russette, 2000), we identified three broad competency-factors, namely business leadership competencies, personal leadership competencies, and people leadership competencies. However, our pilot respondents identified updates related to personal leadership competencies. These changes are in line with what hospitality industry leaders are increasingly focusing on and are not surprising given the changing nature of today's workforce (Richardson and Thomas, 2012). Our study not only provides an up-to-date competency model for researchers and practitioners to understand hospitality leadership competency, but also highlights the importance of periodically updating the competency model.

While it is not our intent to suggest that frontline managers' competencies as not important, this study shows that director-level managers' competencies are relatively more important than that frontline managers' competencies. Despite efforts showing how competency requirements differ across industries (e.g., Ko, 2015; Koenigsfeld et al., 2012; Wong and Lee, 2017), much less attention has been paid on the difference across levels of management. Our study echoes the human resource architecture literature (Huselid and Becker, 2011; Lepak and Snell, 1999) and shows that frontline and director-level managers'

Table 4
Model of Hospitality Competencies.

Competencies	Definitions	Skill	Sample behaviors[*]
Competency factor: Business leadership competencies			
Plans and Organizes Effectively	Proactively plans and structures work efficiently; identifies critical task and activities; manages resources, including people, to ensure that key objectives are achieved on time and within budget.	• Prioritizes work • Manages projects • Schedules tasks and people	• Identifies the sequence of tasks and the resources needed to achieve a goal • Stays within budget
Analyzes and Solves Business Problems	Seeks to objectively identify and comprehend the nature of problems and opportunities; compares and considers both qualitative and quantitative data from different sources before drawing conclusions; uses an effective method when selecting a course of action; takes specific action that is consistent with accessible facts and possible consequences; follows up to ensure action taken is successful	• Identifies problems • Collects and uses information • Generates alternatives • Chooses appropriate action	• Critically analyzes all facets of problems, including hidden or complex aspects • Integrates information from a variety of sources
Demonstrates Business Acumen	Demonstrates the ability to think strategically; analyzes business data to find patterns and themes related to success and performance problems; leverages business investments and keeps promises to consumers; stays current on industry trends.	• Think strategically • Leverages financial data • Delivers on business goals • Stays current on industry knowledge	• Thinks forward and selects tactics most likely to succeed • Identifies cause and effects related to financial analysis
Leads Change and Supports Innovation	Leads change and deals effectively with those who resist change; stays open-minded to new ideas; learns from change; communicates enthusiasm for new initiatives, systems, or processes; understands resistance to change and motivates others to embrace innovation.	• Leads change • Supports innovation	• Articulates the need for change with clarity • Encourages and recognizes others who voice constructive ideas
Models Hospitality and Service Excellence	Displays passion for being of service; creates an environment where the needs of guests and team members fulfilled; expresses passion and commitment to increasing guest satisfaction and loyalty; models and consistently expects service excellence.	• Displays hospitality • Guest focused service	• Promotes a passion for being of service to others • Ensures that all team members create meaningful interactions with guests and work to build relationships
Competency factor: Personal leadership competencies			
Acts in an Ethical Manner	Is honest and displays integrity with self and others; does not cross ethical boundaries; earns others' trust and respect through consistent honest and values-based interactions; builds and maintains credibility for self and the organization.	• Demonstrates organizational values • Maintains credibility and trustworthiness • Acts with integrity	• Communicates honestly and timely with others • Displays transparency when mistakes are made and encourages others to do the same
Displays Emotional Intelligence	Has the capacity to recognize the moods, needs, and emotions of self and others; works to build and maintain a positive work environment; effectively manages relationships.	• Knows self and others • Manages disruptive emotions and impulses • Understands social dynamics • Manages relationships	• Has in-depth knowledge of the emotional capacity of self and others • Understands the emotional needs of others
Values and Promotes Diversity	Appreciates and leverages the capabilities, insights, and ideas of all individuals; working effectively with individuals of diverse style, ability, and thought; ensures that the workplace is free from discriminatory behavior and practices; embraces the inclusion of all people.	• Values diversity • Respects differences • Ensures inclusions	• Takes actions to increase diversity in the workplace • Works effectively with individuals of diverse style, ability, and motivation
Maintains a Proactive Learning Orientation	Proactively seeks new learning opportunities; applies newly gained knowledge and skill on the job; takes risks to advance learning.	• Seeks learning opportunities • Takes risks in learning • Applies learning on the job	• Seeks and acquires new competencies, work methods, ideas, and information that will improve own efficiency and effectiveness on the job • Takes on challenging or unfamiliar assignments
Communicates Effectively	Shares information with clarity, candor, and purpose; speaks and writes in a coherent and effective manner; clearly articulates a point of view; listens carefully to ensure accuracy of understanding when communicating with others; actively engages in debating ideas and the right course of action.	• Communicates effectively • Listens empathically • Engages in respectful debate	• Uses syntax, pace, volume, diction, and mechanics appropriately when speaking • Reads body language of others
Competency factor: People leadership competencies			
Manages Conflict	Approaches conflict with intent to resolve, manage, and/or minimize non-productive escalation; uses an appropriate interpersonal style and method to reduce tension; summarizes and follows up on agreements and required actions.	• Deals with conflict directly • Gathers and interprets information • Initiates action • Concludes and follows up on conflict	• Intervenes quickly when conflict arises • Shows respect for the needs and perspectives of all sides in a dispute
Delegates Effectively	Allocates decision-making authority and/or task responsibility to others to maximize organizational and individual effectiveness; provides support and encouragement; follows up on delegated tasks to ensure that desired outcomes are achieved	• Delegates tasks • Follow-up on delegation	• Clearly defines expected outcomes • Communicates belief that others will deliver intended results
Leads Effective Teams	Builds effective teams by focusing on selection and on balancing the skill of team members; provides role clarity for team members; communicates contribution expectations for individual team members and the overall team.	• Builds teams • Provides direction to the team • Develops others	• Proactively plans for succession to ensure the balance in teams • Encourages team members to look beyond the boundaries of their own job requirements

Table 4 (*continued*)

Competencies	Definitions	Skill	Sample behaviors[*]
Coaches and Develops Others	Demonstrates a commitment to the development of others; provides timely communication of expectations and performance; looks for opportunities to reinforce, recognize, and reward behaviors and outcomes.	• Coaches for performance • Provides feedback	• Takes time to observe behaviors that contribute to or detract from others' success • Ensures that processes fairly evaluate the capabilities and performance of others
Defines and Achieves High Performance	Models and maintains high standards of excellence in performance; ensures all systems, processes and procedures are followed without exception; continuously looks for ways to improve performance; provides feedback and recognition for good work and applies appropriate negative consequences for non-performance.	• Maintains high standards of excellence • Defines and creates accountability	• Ensure standard operating procedures remain applicable in dynamic business environment • Holds self and others accountable for achieving performance goals

[*] Each skill is measured by 2–9 behaviors. The completed list of behaviors is available upon request.

Table 5
Main Study Sample Characteristics.

Industry segments	Number of respondents	Percentage
Age		
< 30	4	4%
30–35	13	13%
35–40	24	24%
41–45	19	19%
46–50	12	12%
51–55	12	12%
56–65	11	11%
> 65	3	3%
Gender		
Male	52	53%
Female	46	47%
Race		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	5%
Hispanic	8	8%
Black	8	8%
White	72	73%
Non-disclosed	3	3%
Education		
High school/GED	12	12%
Undergraduate	46	47%
Graduate	40	41%
Industry segments		
Gaming/Casino	45	46%
Hotel/Lodging/Resort	46	47%
Restaurant/Food and beverage	4	4%
Meeting and event management	2	2%
Others	1	1%
Highest position held		
Partner	1	1%
Vice president	20	20%
Region Manager	1	1%
General manager	1	1%
Director	48	49%
Manager	12	12%
Specialist	2	2%
Total	98	

leadership competency is not equally important. Our study emphasizes the importance to study director-level managers' competencies.

Third, our findings show differential priorities for frontline and director-level managers. Unlike previous hospitality competency studies which implies that all competencies are equally important (e.g., Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Testa and Sipe, 2012), we are in line with recent management competency studies which shows that some competencies have higher priority than the others (Mumford et al., 2007; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2002). Further extending these management studies, we argue against a universalism approach and suggest that the competency priority for director-level managers is different from that for frontline managers. Our results support our arguments: Business leadership competencies are most pressing for director-level managers, followed by personal and people leadership competencies. However, the priority

of frontline managers' competencies is in the order of people, personal, and business leadership competencies. These findings also yield three distinctive practical implications on training and development, as well as university curriculum development.

6.2. Practical implication 1: the rise of personal leadership competencies in the 2020s

Our study identifies some changes in personal leadership competencies. Our model includes a new competency on emotional intelligence. Recent research on emotional intelligence suggests that emotionally intelligent leaders can control their negative reactions while simultaneously transmitting enthusiasm and positive energy when communicating with followers (Ashkanasy, 2003). This has important hierarchical implications in the hospitality context because of the high number of emotional exchanges that occur among managers, employees, and customers. Considering its importance to the frontline and director-level managers, we recommend hospitality educators and industry trainers include emotional intelligence training with a focus on social skills and self-management.

Another personal leadership competency that received much attention is managers' ability to act in an ethical manner. While earlier models include similar competencies (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Kay and Russette, 2000; Ko, 2015; Testa and Sipe, 2012), our pilot respondents suggested that being ethical includes the ability to demonstrate organizational values, to maintain credibility and trustworthiness, to act with integrity, and to know self and others. These broader definitions of ethics are in line with a recent 10-year longitudinal study conducted by Min et al., (2016), who found ethical competencies to be consistently ranked in the five most important course subjects by industry professionals. This supports the need for curriculums that emphasizes moral development at the undergraduate level and the development of ethical reasoning skills at the graduate level.

Values and promotes diversity emerged as a topic of interests for our pilot respondents. Respondents noted the importance to go beyond surface-level diversity (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) and to promote the diversity and inclusion of deep-level diversity (e.g., attitudes, personality, thoughts). These discussions are in line with Pizam's (2014) call to understand cultural competency. We encourage hospitality educators to emphasize the importance of diversity and workplace inclusion in class and training. This can be achieved by lectures, discussion, mindfulness training, and team building activities (cf. Earley and Peterson, 2004).

The present study suggests that a proactive learning orientation can be a priority for hospitality leader development because it can expand both individual and organizational capabilities and have a direct impact on business outcomes (Kaya and Patton, 2011). Defined as a commitment to learning, shared vision, open-mindedness and knowledge-sharing (Calantone et al., 2002), a proactive learning orientation is increasingly important due to the changing nature of business, technological advancement and social media usage (e.g., Leung et al., 2013;

Table 6a
Comparison of mean difference in competency importance for frontline and director-level managers.

Competency/Results	Frontline managers		Director-level managers		Director-level managers - Frontline managers				Effect sizes: Cohen's D
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean difference	t	df		
Business leadership competencies	**5.95**	**0.89**	**6.56**	**0.46**	**0.62**	−6.18	57.00	**	−0.87
Plans and Organizes Effectively	5.66	1.04	6.37	0.59	0.70	−4.20	24.00	**	−0.83
Analyzes and Solves Business Problems	5.38	1.06	6.50	0.44	1.12	−5.59	24.00	**	−1.38
Demonstrates Business Acumen	4.99	0.98	6.47	0.55	1.48	−8.36	24.00	**	−1.88
Leads Change and Supports Innovation	6.22	0.65	6.86	0.22	0.64	−6.60	32.00	**	−1.31
Models Hospitality and Service Excellence	6.58	0.65	6.45	0.82	−0.13	1.02	32.00		0.18
Personal leadership competencies	**6.21**	**0.60**	**6.68**	**0.38**	**0.47**	−9.35	73.00	**	−0.93
Acts in an Ethical Manner	6.55	0.55	6.87	0.29	0.32	−5.31	40.00	**	−0.74
Displays Emotional Intelligence	6.14	0.69	6.60	0.52	0.46	−5.83	40.00	**	−0.76
Values and Promotes Diversity	6.13	0.77	6.70	0.44	0.57	−6.58	40.00	**	−0.91
Maintains a Proactive Learning Orientation	6.18	0.59	6.56	0.50	0.38	−5.01	40.00	**	−0.69
Communicates Effectively	6.16	0.66	6.67	0.39	0.51	−5.92	32.00	**	−0.94
People leadership competencies	**6.14**	**0.67**	**6.64**	**0.44**	**0.50**	−8.37	98.00	**	−0.88
Manages Conflict	5.99	0.88	6.35	0.54	0.36	−2.05	24.00	†	−0.49
Delegates Effectively	5.88	0.88	6.51	0.57	0.63	−5.25	24.00	**	−0.86
Leads Effective Teams	6.02	0.61	6.69	0.47	0.66	−6.95	40.00	**	−1.21
Coaches and Develops Others	6.44	0.50	6.66	0.41	0.22	−2.58	32.00	*	−0.49
Defines and Achieves High Performance	6.43	0.67	6.80	0.31	0.37	−3.80	32.00	**	−0.71

N = 98 (participants rate 5 out of 15 competencies, with effective N range from 25 to 99).

† p ≤ .1.

* p ≤ .05.

Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). Director-level managers can use learning opportunities intentionally to encourage creativity, improve competence, and to move frontline managers toward proficiency and mastery. Career trajectory can be greatly enhanced if frontline managers are taught how to engage in self-directed learning (Boyatzis, 2004).

Last but not least, similar to all of the earlier competency models, our respondents noted the importance of communicating effectively (see Testa and Sipe, 2012, for relevant discussion). Addressing the changing nature of communication (e.g., Leung et al., 2013), we note that competent leaders need to communicate well in various forms of communication channels, as well as to understands both verbal (i.e.,

what's being said) and underlying emotional meanings.

6.3. Practical implication 2: importance of director-level managers' competencies

Our findings show that it is more important for director-level managers to have a higher level of competence. Director-level managers are the synapses between the senior-level that are focused on vision and strategy and frontline-level that are charged with their execution. When there is a lack of clarity about the importance of leadership competencies at the director level, both competitive advantage and organizational performance can be in jeopardy (King et al., 2001).

Table 6b
Comparison of difference of competency priorities for frontline and director-level managers.

Competency/Results	Mean priority		Positive ranks		Negative ranks		Ties ranks	Z		rᵃ
	Front-line	Director-level	Positive ranks	Sum of rank	Negative ranks	Sum of ranks				
Business leadership competencies	**8.60**	**7.08**	**65**	**3337.0**	**24**	**668.0**	**8**	−5.46	**	−0.55
Plans and Organizes Effectively	5.31	6.34	35	1280.5	46	2040.5	16	−1.80	†	−0.18
Analyzes and Solves Business Problems	8.38	6.46	56	2693.5	30	1047.5	11	−3.55	**	−0.36
Demonstrates Business Acumen	8.92	7.35	51	2477.5	33	1092.5	13	−3.10	**	−0.31
Leads Change and Supports Innovation	11.59	8.20	67	3203.0	19	538.0	11	−5.75	**	−0.58
Models Hospitality and Service Excellence	8.82	7.04	51	2154.5	25	771.5	21	−3.59	**	−0.36
Personal leadership competencies	**7.93**	**8.09**	**39**	**1730.5**	**49**	**2185.5**	**9**	−0.95		−0.10
Acts in an Ethical Manner	4.41	4.82	27	722.0	32	1048.0	38	−1.24		−0.13
Displays Emotional Intelligence	8.30	8.40	39	1317.5	35	1457.5	23	−0.38		−0.04
Values and Promotes Diversity	10.33	10.28	35	1417.5	41	1508.5	21	−0.24		−0.02
Maintains a Proactive Learning Orientation	11.77	11.84	32	1359.0	45	1644.0	20	−0.73		−0.07
Communicates Effectively	4.87	5.13	33	1084.5	37	1400.5	27	−0.93		−0.09
People leadership competencies	**7.47**	**8.83**	**24**	**624.0**	**64**	**3292.0**	**9**	−5.55	**	−0.56
Manages Conflict	8.08	9.89	24	690.0	56	2550.0	17	−4.47	**	−0.45
Delegates Effectively	9.54	8.94	49	1900.5	31	1339.5	17	−1.35		−0.14
Leads Effective Teams	5.84	6.79	30	1035.5	45	1814.5	22	−2.06	*	−0.21
Coaches and Develops Others	7.24	8.37	35	1277.5	49	2292.5	13	−2.27	*	−0.23
Defines and Achieves High Performance	6.62	10.17	15	414.5	62	2588.5	20	−5.53	**	−0.56

N = 98.

Positive priority (priority for director-level < priority for frontline level) Negative priority (priority for director level > priority for frontline level); Ties (priority for director level = priority for frontline level).

† p ≤ .1.

* p ≤ .05.

** p ≤ .01 (two-tailed).

ᵃ Effect size, r is calculated based on Mann-Whitney U Test.

Unfortunately, organizations frequently downsize its director-level managers in the time of organizational restructuring (Balogun, 2003). Given that it takes a long time to develop competent directors, our results showed that laying-off director-level managers can be unwise and should be avoided (cf. Cascio and Wynn, 2004).

6.4. Practical implication 3: differential competency priorities

We found a differential priority for frontline and director-level managers. Assuming organizations have limited resources and cannot develop all competencies, we recommend hospitality organizations to invest in director-level managers' business leadership competencies and frontline managers' people leadership competencies, followed by developing personal leadership competencies for both groups. Considering divergent placement goals (with universities target to place their undergraduates as frontline managers and master graduates as director-level managers), we recommend hospitality educators differentiate competencies taught in their undergraduate and master programs. Since students only have a limited amount of cognitive resources and time to master leadership competencies, graduate programs should put more emphasis on business leadership competencies while undergraduate programs put more focus on training undergraduate students' people leadership competencies. Next, they can develop personal leadership competencies, which has the second highest priority.

We recommend hospitality trainers and educators to use case studies, simulations, and problem-based learning to train director-level managers' business leadership competencies because there is evidence showing these problem-based trainings can enhance management education (Dolmans et al., 2001; Lean et al., 2006; Salas et al., 2009). Moreover, training and development of director-level managers, such as university master programs, should also focus on "leads change and supports innovation" because the ability to be agile and to adapt quickly to ever-changing needs of employees and customers can be a strategic advantage (Ireland and Webb, 2007).

In the present study, there was a high level of agreement on the importance of director-level managers to "model hospitality and service excellence". Both hospitality organizations and hospitality educators should take notice as this finding as it may imply a need for more focus on innate qualities in recruitment and training and development, as well as in curriculum development. In addition to trait-based assessments, more emphasis may need to be placed on director-level leaders and hospitality educators to role models the behaviors of excellence in hospitality (cf. Boshoff and Allen, 2000). Besides, teaching behavioral techniques that exemplify service excellence and employing assessments that validate skills, in kindness, friendliness, and empathy, could be useful in the success of director-level managers, and hospitality organizations.

Regarding frontline managers, developmental efforts should revolve around people leadership competencies. Given leadership is a combination of both traits and behaviors (DeRue et al., 2011), recruiters should focus on selecting frontline managers with a focus on people leadership competencies. In terms of selection, recruiters should focus on task competence (e.g., intelligence, conscientiousness) and interpersonal attributes (e.g., extraversion, agreeableness). Educators should include team-based experience (e.g., team building exercises, leadership challenges) in their class so that students can practice their leadership. Extra-curriculum developmental opportunities should also be provided to undergraduate students with the goal of developing their leadership skills.

6.5. Limitations

Our results should be viewed together with its limitations. First, given the time constraints of director-level managers who completed the survey on a voluntary basis, we ask participants to rate the 5 out of 15 competencies in the section on competency importance. This ensures

high-quality responses with a reasonable attrition rate. However, this design decreases sample size, which lowers our power to detect significant results in Hypothesis 1. Fortunately, the sample size was not an issue due to the strong effect sizes. The fact that Hypothesis 1 is tested using a within-subject design avoids the between-subject difference. The use of the full sample in the test of Hypothesis 2–4 (i.e., competency priority) ensured avoidance of this sample size problem. Yet, this design also stops us from conducting factor analyses of the whole hospitality leadership competency model (cf. Testa and Sipe, 2012). We encourage future research to address these questions by having respondents to complete the whole competencies survey.

Second, while we suspect that top-level hospitality managers have different competency needs from the frontline and director-level managers, we did not investigate this possibility. This is because it would be very difficult for us to gather a sufficient sample of top-level managers to understand their competency. Additionally, our study asked director-level managers to subjectively rate the importance and priority competency. While it allows us to capture what our respondents considered as important competency in the future, we could not measure its actual effectiveness in term of financial and employee outcomes (e.g., Blayney, 2009; Ko, 2012). We called for future research to understand the potential moderating roles of the level of management on the relationship between competent and employee and financial outcomes.

Finally, although we sampled both pilot and main study respondents from diverse hospitality segments and multiple managerial titles, our respondents are geographically homogeneous (i.e., located on the west coast of United States). More than 40% of our sample came from gaming and casinos industry, which affected the generalizability of our results. Additionally, we had a low responses rate from the food and beverage industry, which is a key segments of hospitality industry. We encourage future research to use alternative sampling methods to test whether our results can be generalizable to the food and beverage industry. Our model may not be generalizable to other countries and context due to differential culture and socioeconomic factors. Future research should consider conducting a cross-cultural comparison study on hospitality leadership competencies, which can be useful to identify training needs for expatriates.

Acknowledgement

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