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Competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica: The Implications of soft skills

Sharmon Hinds-Smith

COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS OF MANAGERS IN HOTELS IN JAMAICA:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOFT SKILLS

by

Sharmon Hinds-Smith

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Thesis Committee Members:

Dr. Thomas Maier

Dr. James Jacobs

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: hospitality industry, hotel, competencies, soft skills, management, and Jamaica.

Jamaica, being considerably dependent on tourism and its subsequent hotel industry, has consistently recruited technically competent managers. A manager in a hotel in Jamaica must meet certain requirements in terms of academic and technical competencies which include bodies of knowledge such as accounting, finance, marketing and operations (hard skills). Since globally, managers with competencies in both the hard and soft areas have had more of a competitive edge regarding the hotel business at large, it is clear that the "softer" skills are seen as significant in terms of competency and vital to a manager's performance within the hotel. This study seeks to investigate and examine the relevance of soft skills within competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica.

It is important that institutions responsible for the educating, training and development of Jamaica's hotel managers incorporate soft skills training into their curricula. This research will provide valuable information to Jamaica's educational institutions responsible for training future hospitality industry leaders.

The population in this study was the Jamaican hospitality/hotel industry. A random sample of a hundred hotel departmental managers and assistant managers taken from small, medium and large properties were selected. Since the size of the property does not indicate managerial qualification requirements, there was no need to select specific sized properties from which to gather the information.

The findings of the study revealed that soft skills are considered significantly more important than hard skills for managing hotel departments. It is therefore urgent that hospitality

educational institutions aim to meet the needs of the industry in their demand for soft skills training.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Jamaica's hospitality and tourism industry is one of the key economic sectors in terms of earnings and income gained from foreign exchange and employment (HEART). Dominated by the US market which accounts for sixty percent (60%) of arrivals to the island, Jamaica also hosts visitors from Canada, Europe, Japan and Latin America. (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002)

Since 1981, the external demands for Jamaica's tourism grew rapidly, surpassing bauxite as a foreign exchange earner. In 1987 the island exceeded its one million mark in visitor arrivals for the first time. The island has continued to receive over a million visitors annually with the exception of the year 2001. The industry is comprised of several sub-sectors; accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment, shopping and transportation. (Jayawardena, 2004)

The accommodation sub-sector

The accommodation sub-sector dominates the Jamaican hospitality and tourism industry and accounts for over 60% of total revenues and almost 50% of employment. This sector surpasses other tourism counterparts such as food and beverage, entertainment, transportation and shopping. (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002).

Jamaica has the third largest stock of rooms in the Caribbean, with in excess of 26,000 rooms, and a projected additional 5,000 rooms by 2010. This accommodation is concentrated on the north and north-west coasts of the island in Ocho Rios, Montego Bay and Negril. In the year 2004 these three primary resort areas accounted for eighty four percent (84%) of the room stock, with seventy percent (65%) in hotels. Non-hotel accommodation such as guest houses, villas and

apartments accounted for the remaining thirty percent (30%). (Jamaica Tourist Board, 2007)

Background to the problem

Jamaica, heavily dependent on tourism and the subsequent hotel industry, has consistently increased its demand for technically competent managers. According to the Jamaica Gleaner and over a twelve year span (1996-2008), recruiters of hotel managers place very specific advertisements listing the various attributes and qualifications desired from an applicant for the position of hotel manager (Jamaica Gleaner, 2008). One common trend seen among all the advertisements is that prospective hotel managers must have achieved at least a diploma from a recognized university or a first degree. Another commonality is years of experience at a managerial level ranging from five to ten years.

Advertisements recruiting hotel managers in the late 90's state that prospects were to have "strong analytic and strategic management skills". During the early 2000's recruiters want applicants to posses "excellent leadership skills". From the mid 2000's to present day, recruitment efforts demand that hotel managers own "good oral and written communication skills." Another posted requirement is for prospects to be able to "interact with industry players at all levels." (Jamaica Gleaner, 2008)

On a global level, managers with competencies in both the hard and soft areas have aided in the creation of a more competitive edge regarding the hotel business at large. It is therefore important that institutions responsible for the educating, training and development of Jamaica's hotel managers to be proactive in seeking ways to make soft skills "teachable". Littlejohn and Watson (2004) stated that soft skills such as IT, communication, team work, problem solving and motivation should be provided as a priority. The result would be hotel managers with the ability to successfully compete in meeting the dynamic demands of the tourism and hospitality market.

Statement of the problem

A manager in a hotel in Jamaica must meet certain requirements in terms of academic and technical competencies which include bodies of knowledge such as accounting, finance, marketing and operations (hard skills).However it is not clear whether the "softer" skills are seen as significant in terms of competency and if so which of them are considered vital to a manager's performance within the hotel.

Purpose of Study

The study seeks to investigate and examine the relevance of soft skills within competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica.

Significance of the Study

This research will provide valuable information to Jamaica's educational institutions responsible for training future hospitality industry leaders since according to Ladkin, (1993) education and training play an integral role in the growth and sustainability of the hospitality industry. In studies carried out by Okeiyi, Finley and Postel, 1999; Enz, 2001; and Christou, 2002, it is agreed that soft skills competencies should be investigated in the formulation of hospitality management programs. To meet the ongoing demands of the industry, institutions need to integrate into their programs, studies that facilitate the development of managerial competence not only in the hard skills areas, but the soft skills as well. (Chung-Herrera, Enz and Lankau, 2003) As a result, the gap between the needs of the industry and what educational institutions provide may be decreased when both parties become better aligned in terms of competence requirements.

Research Questions

1) Which competencies, hard or soft, are perceived as more important for managers in Jamaica's hotels?

2) How significant is the need for competence in soft skills for managers in hotels?

Limitations of the study

The limitations of this research are as follows:

1. The industry population surveyed represents only the hotel departmental managers and not hotel general managers.

2. Members of hotel line staff were not included in the survey for this study.

Definition of terms

With regards to the competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica certain terms were used frequently. In order to clarify their purpose for this study, they are defined as follows:

Competent – having the necessary skill and knowledge to do something

successfully

Hard skills – skills of a technical or cognitive nature such as accounting, computer

literacy, planning and development.

Soft skills – skills of social nature such as communication, creative thinking,

interaction

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

This chapter provides a review of literature regarding the research on competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica in relation to "soft" skills. The first section provides several discussions on varying definitions and meanings of competence and subsequently competency in terms of skills and performance. The second section deals specifically with competency as it relates to the hospitality industry by definition, as well as it look s at how "soft" skills are perceived by the industry. The final section deals with the role of academic education and training in the development of competencies applicable to the hospitality industry.

Competency defined

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 (1998) 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.

Competency, in this context, the hospitality industry, is best defined by the original Greek meaning attached to the word. Competency in hospitality has taken on a myriad of qualities that are closely linked to the intrinsic senses of what is, as stated by Brezinka, (1988) excellent and good. Research conducted by Pate, Martin and Robertson (2003) displays the view that there are two approaches to discussing competency; including the rationalist approach and the subjectivist or constructivist approach. The rationalist divides competency into worker-oriented and task-oriented approaches. Worker-oriented refers to motives, traits and social skills while task-oriented refers to the behavior of individuals in the organization.

The subjectivist approach looks at the worker and the work as one entity. This means it takes into consideration the interaction between the individual and the job in terms of what the individual has brought to the job and the characteristics of the job itself. Pate, Martin and Robertson (2003) recognize, like the ancient Greeks, that competency is a condition which arises from predefined organizational culture, ethos, values and expectations. However, they also suggest that industry standards also act as benchmarks and may dictate the meaning of competency. In similarity, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, states that competency is "a dynamic and continuous process" which should incorporate the values of both the person and the profession and consider knowledge, specific skills and abilities. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy claims that competency has the ability to change and is dependent upon the individual's role and the context in which the individual works. (Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, 2000)

Hoffmann (1999) posits that the underlying attributes of individuals may aid in defining the term competence. Underlying attributes could include personality, motivation and

intelligence among other psychological measures. "Training and education may not be sufficient in terms of learning inputs to create a competent performer. Selection of those with potential or appropriate personality may be needed as well." (Hoffmann, 1999)

"The language of competence is often misunderstood." (Hyland, 2004) It is a permanent quality of personality which is valued by the community to which we belong." (Brezinka, 1988)
Hospitality management competencies

According to Jauhari (2006) global tourism is estimated at about 700 million travelers accounting for 8% of world exports and 30% of international trade in services. As a result, for this industry, competency ought to be more than a skill. The competencies for hospitality management fall within two considerably large domains. These consist of "hard" and "soft" skills domains. (Rausch, 2004) The "hard" or technical skills domain involves bodies of knowledge such as accounting, finance, marketing and operations. The "soft" domain includes the behavioral aspects of management, motivation and leadership. Robotham and Jubb (1996) make similar observations stating that it was possible to distinguish between hard and soft competencies. "Soft competencies referred to creativity and sensitivity and comprised more of the personal qualities that lie behind behavior." Studies conducted by Tas et al (1996), group managerial competencies into five areas; cognitive, leadership, interpersonal, administrative and technical skills.

In a study to determine which competencies were specific to the management of hospitality departments Kay and Russette (2000) came up with four domains; leadership, interpersonal, technical and creative.

Johns and Teare (1995) propose that structural change within the hospitality industry has

brought about a need for new managerial skills. A study conducted by Gamble et al (1994) on hospitality managers in six countries indicate the need for more business managers who can utilize financial skills as well as strategic thinking skills regarding customers' needs.

Because people and their needs are what the hospitality industry is built upon, it stands that the consistently dynamic needs of this market must be met in order to achieve success. Research conducted by Connolly and McGing (2006) finds that "soft" skills such as people management, team-working and communication skills are considered to be more important when compared to "harder" skills such as analytical skills. The data from their study indicates that the industry has a preference to employ persons with "soft" people management skills. Burns (1997) also argues that "soft" skills are much more important than "hard" skills in providing hospitality. "Emotional demands are made of employees to constantly be in a positive, joyful and even playful mood".

Soft skills for the hospitality industry

According to Gibbons-Wood and Lange (2000) the term "soft" skills are synonymous with core skills, key competencies and personal skills. Lorenz (2006) refers to soft skills as "a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that make someone a good employee and a compatible coworker".

Studies carried out by Tas (1998) show that essential competencies for management in the hotel industry include understanding guest problems, being sensitive to guest issues, maintaining professional and ethical standards and effective written and oral communication among others. Tourism and hospitality industries are regarded as people industries where effective and efficient management of human resources is demanded. Many researchers within the realms of tourism and hospitality, including Kay and Russette, (2000) and Chung-Herrera et

al, (2003) hold the position that soft/human relations skills which include oral, written and interpersonal communication are essential.

Early research conducted by Katz in the 1970's address the fact that technical, human and conceptual skills were required by all managers, depending on the level of responsibility related to the job. Similarly, Gundrum (1978) states that providing quality service and demonstrating professional behavior are significant to the competencies required for entry-level foodservice managers. Buergermeister (1983) alludes to those competencies essential to the success of an entry level manager including effectual supervising, and also being a good communicator between both internal and external employees of the organization. Knight and Salter (1985) conducted studies among hospitality interests about the essential traits that managers need to acquire. The results of these studies further support the point that communication is paramount to the fundamental skills managers need to acquire within the hospitality industry.

Kay and Russette (2000) found that leadership and interpersonal skills are competencies essential to more than one operational area and level of management. The studies of Connoly and McGing (2006) led them to find that "soft" management and human resource skills are highly valued and necessary for the industry.

In 1990 Baum asked one hundred and eighteen hotel managers to rank thirty six competencies in terms of their importance. The rank order consisted of how guest problems were managed with understanding and sensitivity as number one; communicates effectively orally and in writing as number two; strives to achieve positive working relationships with employees as number three and shows professionalism in appearance and demeanor as number four. In following studies conducted in 2000, Baum identifies that the essential skill was human relations

as the hospitality industry is primarily service related. This can be closely linked to Haywood's (2000) claims that critical thinking skills as essential for managers since they are required to solve a wide range of problems they encounter in the workplace.

Jauhari (2006) posits that the critical success factors which contribute to the growth of the hospitality industry include customer orientation, outstanding service, flawless operations management as well as cost management and marketing strategy. As a result the researcher recommends that for the success factors to be attained there should be investment in people's knowledge and skills as well as molding people's attitudes. Competencies recommended for managers by industry experts are related to the special functions and areas within the hospitality industry. These include "managing guest problems, professional and ethical standards, professional appearance and poise, effective oral and written communication, positive customer relations and positive working relationships" (Tas, 1998).

Measuring soft skills

The importance of soft skills has been acknowledged in the managerial occupation by Boyatzis, (1982) and across cultures by Nonaka and Johannson, (1985). Soft skills such as dealing with conflict and gathering and sharing information are highly sought after by organizations according to Zedeck and Goldstein, (2000). Leigh, Lee and Lundquist, 1999, express that workplace competencies include problem solving, communication skills, personal qualities and work ethics. "Soft skills are complimentary to other constructs in the performance domain, such as task or contextual skills." (Kantrowitz, 2006) In 1982 Boyatzis was among the first to study and describe managerial competencies. The objective of his study was to create a listing of all competencies shown to relate to the effectiveness of a manager. Studies conducted by Campbell (1990) proposed eight dimensions of job performance taxonomy. Through sorting of critical incidents, Borman and Brush (1993) agreed upon categories of management

performance. Stevens and Campion (1999) developed a taxonomy which describes five dimensions of soft skills inclusive of communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, goal setting and planning and task coordination.

This current study draws on taxonomies developed by Kantrowitz (2005) in terms of developing taxonomies of soft skills performance appropriate for the Jamaican environment. Role of education and training

Ladkin (1993) and Riegel (1993) define hospitality as a "field of multidisciplinary study which brings the perspectives of many disciplines, especially those found in the social sciences, to bear on particular areas of application and practice in the hospitality and tourism industry". This has led to an ongoing debate between employers and educators, where the major concerns are whether the education received by graduates was sufficient to meet the requirements of skills and competencies needed within the industry. There is indeed a question of which skills and competencies are considered paramount for the industry.

Studies by Harper et al (2000) demonstrate that the role of today's hotel general manager encourages a greater business than operational perspective and consequently demands a higher level of technical and business skills. However, there is a persistent level of dissatisfaction expressed by professionals and graduates who interface with the industry which has led hospitality educators to question whether hotel management programs adequately prepare students for the hotel industry (Kay and Russette 2000).

Brotherton et al, (1993) and Goodman et al, (1991) agree that educators who emphasize operational competence are accused of producing poorly prepared graduates and hospitality institutions curricula aimed at increasing business skills through business subjects has impacted

on the relatively poor retention rates of graduates in the hospitality industry (Cotton 1991; Leslie 1991).

Reflected changes in the sector would transform the manager into becoming not only experienced but also a highly skilled professional who is trained in the operational elements of the industry as well as the overall management of hotels. Hospitality educators, as a result, have to adapt to the dynamics of the hospitality market. The resulting changes in courses curricula aim at improving the managerial skills that are required for successful managers. Gamble et al (2000) state that changes in the hospitality manager's competencies includes a shift from craft skills to functional managerial skills.

Ladkn and Juwaheer (2000) cite studies that have been done by hospitality researchers on the skills required for the hospitality industry. There are some who believe that there is a shift from traditional technical skills to more managerial ones. This results in an increased variety of training methods being employed within the industry to meet the needs resulting from globalization.

Theory provides a sound foundation of the knowledge and concepts needed for the industry but adequate practical experiences that is gained, aids in the development of the competency in performing technical tasks within the hotel. Demonstrations, explanations, practical experience in training kitchens and training restaurants expose students to the realistic situations that they need to be competent and confident within. There is no substitute for the real life situation (for example working in a kitchen) .The practical experience of trainees plays a vital role in them gaining competency in the relevant skills. The training that takes place facilitates students with fundamental tasks that are to be learnt.

Dowling et al (1999) believes that organizations should couple technical skills training with soft skills or customer service training to ensure that all workers appreciate their roles whether large or small. Sensitivity training, cultural awareness and structured relational skills orientation programs topped the items in their training content menu. Critical parts to be studied include requirements cited for general managers in the USA which include personnel management and accounting and finance as the most important areas of study (Mu Kim, 1994).

Hotel managers require good general management ability, good knowledge of key technical areas, management and marketing, (Jaywardena, 2000). These are critical areas, which need to be implemented into hospitality management degree (Bachelors and Masters) programs. Additional support from Airey and Tribe (2000) proffer views that traditional hospitality management higher education trains students to perform beyond the existing practices that are used within the industry, with the provision of personal and professional development which promotes the creative ability of ones self.

In future education for hospitality managers, it is especially important that sufficient operational skills and trainer skills are developed. These skills will be very useful especially during the early years of management careers when on- the- job and off –the- job training of junior employees becomes a fairly common duty. In the International Hotel School in Sri Lanka it was found that during the course designed to train supervisory and middle management personnel, greater emphasis was placed on technical areas such as food production, food and beverage service among others. Supervisory techniques were also found in subjects, which relate to communication, which are very useful in helping trainees to fit into supervisory jobs with confidence provided the right level of competence in the relevant skills achieved.

According to Ladkin and Riley (1996) the nature of the hospitality industry challenges the bureaucratic model of career development and the concept of long term careers. A study conducted by Ruddy (1989) shows that managers rated qualities related to behavior and personal characteristics such as leadership and motivation higher than education on the list of key influences to being successful. Littlejohn and Watson (2004) agree that soft skills such as communication, team working, problem solving and motivational skills should be provided as a priority at the Higher Education levels.

Since the nineties there has been a great demand for highly skilled graduates who can adjust and perform and manage themselves in highly technical areas within the hospitality industry. This became evident with the emergence of the hospitality and Resort management specialization at the University of Technology first at the diploma level then at the degree level. The follow up of that program is the joint degree between the University of West Indies and the University of Technology, (Davis and Sewell 2002)

Swanljung (1981) anticipates that increased competition for management positions within the hospitality industry would result in an "MBA" becoming the key to success for future graduates. Goodman and Spragues (1991) is adamant that in the present hospitality industry managers are expected to understand spreadsheets, psychographics and strategic planning. Ladkin (1993) firmly believes that hospitality education's purpose is to adequately prepare students for managerial or management positions within the industry. Studies conducted by Pavesic (1991) assert that students who major in hospitality have greater longevity within the industry than non-hospitality majors because those who major have the basic skills and knowledge which require them to perform. Research from Dickinson, 2000; Fallows and Stevens, 2000; Morgan and Turner, 2000 suggests that academic competence alone is

insufficient and that pools of knowledge acquired in an academic setting should be matched with appropriate communicative, administrative and interpersonal skills.(Thomas and Grimes 2003)

In an attempt to provide a form of standardization for dealing with quality issues in tourism education and training The World Tourism Organization (WTO) developed a programme called TEDQUAL methodology. TEDQUAL investigates the creation of programmes made to fill existing gaps in regard to human capital needs; quality of staff and quantity of staff. Quality gaps are matched with specific training areas. This training is used to develop those abilities of existing candidates. These training methods entail specialized training for future professionals with the basic capacities and relevant competencies to make them employable. (UNWTO, 1997)

"Management education has the responsibility to provide industry with graduates equipped with relevant management competencies." (Christou, 2002) Tourism and hospitality employers anticipate that graduates possess transferable generic skills in areas of leadership, communication, strategic thinking and decision making. (Williams and DeMicco, 1998)

In the past, management studies emphasized hospitality –specific technical skills. It has been ascertained that a more analytical approach to management regarding the "soft" functions of management; such as dealing with people, be taken into account. (Gilbert and Guerrier, 1997)

Dimmock, Breen and Walo (2003) affirm the importance of hospitality and tourism educators incorporating a wide range of learning experiences that can contribute to the development of the essential competencies. A CNAA review of hospitality courses proposes that more emphasis be placed on the development of communication and interpersonal skills.

Hospitality education plays a major role in the recruitment of employees for the industry. With both competent academic and soft skills required, recruiters seek to obtain individuals who

possess the necessary competencies which are related to the job requirements. Macadam (1991) infers that management and recruiters must define the specific skills and personal attributes that an individual needs to attain in order to perform competently in an organization. Education provides the knowledge that graduates would need to be competent in the managerial positions. Varner (1978) believes that all those involved in hospitality education have a pivotal role in preparing students for demanding managerial roles within the industry.

Summary

The success of the hospitality and tourism industry is based upon exceptional service delivery. As a result the elements which comprise this desired service delivery must be examined to determine their significance. It is realized that "soft" skills and other competencies fall within the framework which contributes to exceptional service delivery. Management theorists have recommended that investments be made in people's knowledge and skills as well as in molding their attitudes. (Jauhari, 2006) To this end, teaching and learning institutions responsible for providing competent managers need to increase their efforts to find solutions which will enhance their relevance as they respond to the "soft" skills challenges of the hospitality industry.

What is significant about "soft" skills is that education does not concentrate on developing these skills. "If the educational and management development establishments are to be effective in developing professionals who are competent leaders and managers, then it would be useful if there were greater focus and emphasis on foundations for sound decisions. That requires exposing learners to practical guidelines and criteria for the "soft" domain issues." (Rausch, 2004)

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This chapter intends to discuss the methodology of this study. The design and procedures used in this particular research will include a questionnaire to be developed geared towards the collection of data regarding the objectives of this study. A more detailed explanation of the methodology will be evident in the accompanying sections: research design, research instrument, population and sample, data collection and data analysis.

The purpose of the study is to investigate and examine the relevance of soft skills within competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica by way of two research questions; which competencies, hard or soft, are perceived as more important for hotel managers and how significant is the need for competence in soft skills for hotel managers?

Population and sample

The population in this study was the Jamaican hospitality/hotel industry. A random sample of a hundred hotel departmental managers and assistant managers taken from small, medium and large properties were selected. Since the size of the property does not indicate managerial qualification requirements, there was no need to select specific sized properties from which to gather the information.

Research design

The purpose of this study was to investigate and examine soft skills' relevance to competency requirements for hotel managers. As a result a two-fold approach was used in order to obtain best results. In face to face interview sessions, participants were required to create an order of importance list, of no more than five skills they consider necessary to the performance

of their jobs as hotel managers. This activity was then followed by a request that the participants place in rank order, a list of twenty-five job performance skills items. Interview appointments were requested via email followed by telephone contact within two days of initial request for confirmation of dates and times.

Research instrument

Surveys can be unstructured, semi structured or fully structured. Angold and Fisher, (1999) indicate that using an unstructured survey often leads to failure to capture key aspects of the intended research. According to Zimmerman, (2003) a structured survey may formulate greater diagnoses within the research, however the researcher is limited to asking the question as written and recording the responses given. In semi-structured surveys the researcher is largely responsible for rating the criteria as accurately as possible. The researcher employing this approach also has the opportunity to improvise any additional questions or confront any inconsistencies where necessary. A semi-structured survey will yield higher quality data than the fully structured approach due to the fact that the researcher has a better understanding of the constructs being assessed than the respondents. (Hunsley and Marsh, 2007).

The main research instrument that was used in this study was a semi-structured survey based mainly on the research questions and literature review. The purpose of conducting a semi-structured survey allowed the researcher to probe into how the participants perceive a particular subject area while gathering data through standard questions. The survey instrument contained three (3) main sections; skills criteria and demographics for selection. An additional section asking that the participant state the reason for selecting their number one ranked option was also included.

The first section provided participants with the opportunity to create, without prompting, a list of their top five job performance skills in order of importance. Section two provided participants with twenty five soft skills items, grouped into separate five item blocks inclusive of communication, persuasion, technical, interpersonal and leadership skills. Each item in the block was to be placed in rank order, 1 to 5, where 1 was the most important and 5 the least important, by each participant. In the final section of the survey instrument, demographic information was obtained; using multiple choice questions. The main purpose of this section was to collect some basic information from the respondents such as their gender, age group and length of time in their present position.

Pilot test

A pilot test was administered in order to evaluate the instrument for reliability, validity as well as timing. The questionnaire was administered to 15 lecturers in the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management at the University of Technology, Jamaica. These lecturers volunteered to take part in the assessment of the survey instrument. The lecturers were individually interviewed in order to acquire their responses, along with their comments, by the researcher. Due to almost 100% positive feedback in terms of the structure and contents of the survey, there were no adjustments made to the survey instrument.

Data collection

Cover letters requesting face to face interviews with the potential respondents, via email or fax were sent out to a random selection of potential respondents. The required information regarding email addresses and fax number for these potential respondents was collected from the local telephone directory. Within two days of the preliminary requests, telephone contact was

made to confirm interview dates and times. However interview dates and times were not finally confirmed for almost 30% of potential participants. These potential participants stated a preference for sending their responses via email. However, those responses were never received. Several attempts were made in following up the required participation via both telephone contact and email, but none were successful.

Confirmed interview dates and times were strategically organized by geographic area so as to reduce travelling and accommodation expenses. Those participants contacted in the main hotel areas of Jamaica; Kingston, Ocho Rios, Montego Bay and Negril were interviewed over four weekends with each interview slated to last a total of fifteen minutes. In this way the researcher could have accommodated up to five interviews per hotel without infringing too much on business time.

Of the thirty hotels visited only five met this planned schedule. Although interview dates and times had been confirmed, difficulties were experienced in securing a fifteen minute stint during which to conduct the interview. In one instance when the researcher arrived to the property for the confirmed interview time, three managers had been called into an emergency meeting and as a result could not be interviewed then. They were contacted after with the offer of completing the survey via email, but they have yet to respond. Another property which had also confirmed five managers for interviews cancelled at the appointed hour when the researcher had already arrived to the property to conduct those scheduled interviews. Three other properties took the surveys from the researcher at their individual gates with the claim that they would complete them and have them returned to the researcher, but they have not yet been received. Several attempts had been made to retrieve the surveys but none resulted in success.

As a result, of the confirmed intended one hundred potential participants, the researcher conducted face to face interviews with forty-seven participants while nine completed their surveys via email. The completed questionnaires were collected from the participants at the end of each face to face interview session. Questionnaires were perused to ensure that all required responses were provided by the participants. Any inconsistencies observed were queried at that time. During the perusal of the questionnaires it was found that two of the emailed responses were incompletely filled out making them invalid.

Method of analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected. An analysis of the results of the surveys provided the researcher with the ability to draw certain conclusions about the findings of the study. The conclusions are related to the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate and examine the relevance of soft skills within competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica. This chapter will present the results and findings of the study regarding the relevance of soft skills and how they are perceived by managers in hotels in Jamaica. Data and information found in the study were analyzed in accordance with the research questions which guided this study:

1. Which competencies, hard or soft, are perceived as more important for managers in Jamaica's hotels?

2. How significant is the need for competence in soft skills for managers in hotels?

Response rate

In this study, 30 hotels in Jamaica were used to represent the hospitality industry population. The overall rate of response was 56%. Of the 100 participants contacted for face to face interview, 56 were successfully interviewed. Of the 56 interviews, 2 were inadequately completed. As a result 54 out of 100 managers participated in this study. The results were statistically analyzed. The cross tabulation was utilized to describe the demographics of the participants. Questions relating to demography were listed in section three of the questionnaire. Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation were used to examine both objectives of the study. Objective one was to examine which competencies, hard or soft, are perceived as more important for managers in Jamaica's hotels. Objective two was to investigate how significant is the need for competence for soft skills for managers in hotels.

Respondents' profiles

All respondents completed the demographic questions. The results showed that 51% of participants were male and 49% were female. 43% of the participants indicated that they were in the category of 30- 40 years of age. Almost 32% were in the category of 40-50 years old. 17% were between 20 -30 years old; only 3 participants (5%) were 50 years old or older.

The question which asked participants about how long they worked in the hotel industry showed 26% of respondents having worked in the industry for between 10 and 15 years. Another 22% worked for 5-10 years in the hotel industry. Approximately 17% worked in the industry for 15 -20 years. Another 17% of respondents also worked in the industry for between 1-5 years.

Regarding the question about how long participants had worked as managers in the hotels the results showed that nearly half of the respondents (48%) had been a manager for 1-5 years. 35% of respondents had held a managerial position for 5-10 years. 7% of the respondents had been managers for 10-15 years and a mere 6% had been managers for 15-20 years.

Table 1. Gender

Pie Chart Showing Gender of Inteviewee

51%   49%   Male   Female

Table 2. Age Range

Line Graph Showing Age Range of Interviewee

Number of Interviewee (y-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25)

Age Range (x-axis: 20 - 30, 30 - 40, 40 - 50, 50 - 60, Over 60)

Series1
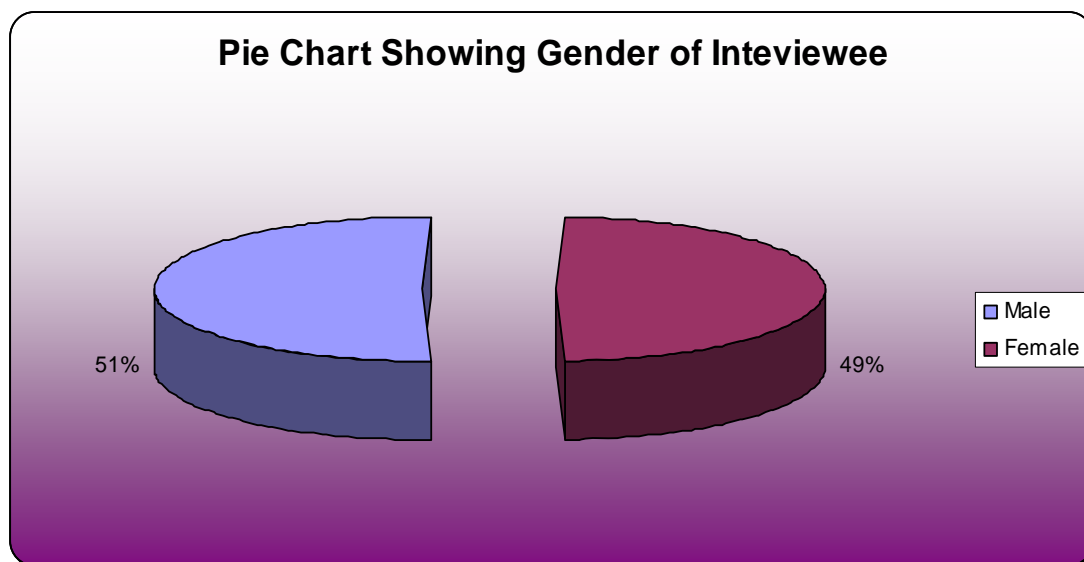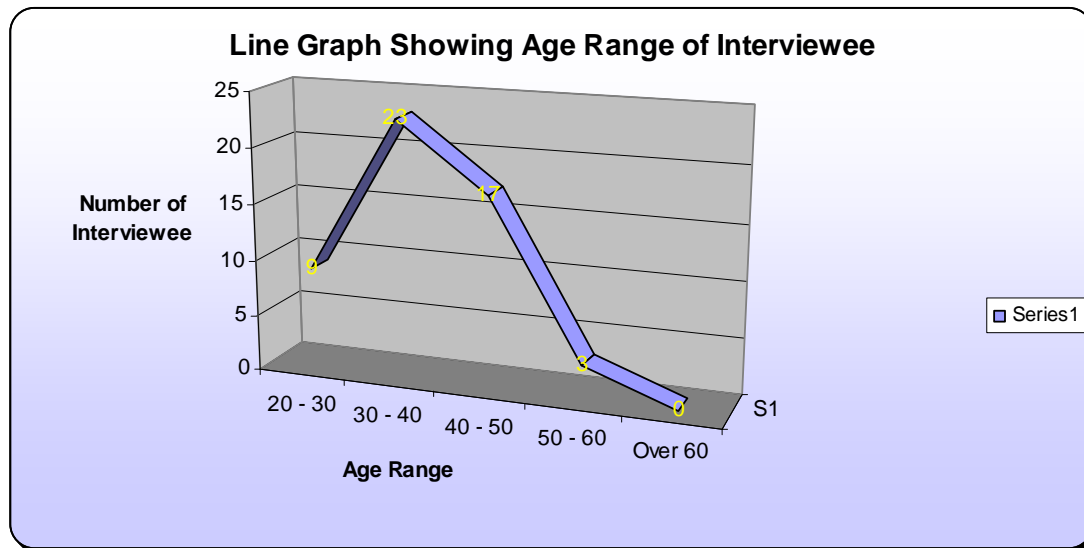
Table 3. Industry Experience

Bar Graph Showing Years of Experience in the Hotel Industry

(y-axis: 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14)

Values: 1-5yrs = 9, 5-10yrs = 12, 10-15yrs = 14, 15-20yrs = 9, 20-25yrs = 2, 25-30yrs = 6, Over 30yrs = 0

Number of Years

Table 4. Management Experience

Line Graph Showing Interveiwee Years of Experience as Hotel Manager

1-5yrs	26
5-10yrs	19
10-15yrs	4
15-20yrs	3
20-25yrs	0
25-30yrs	0
over 30yrs	0

Years of Experience
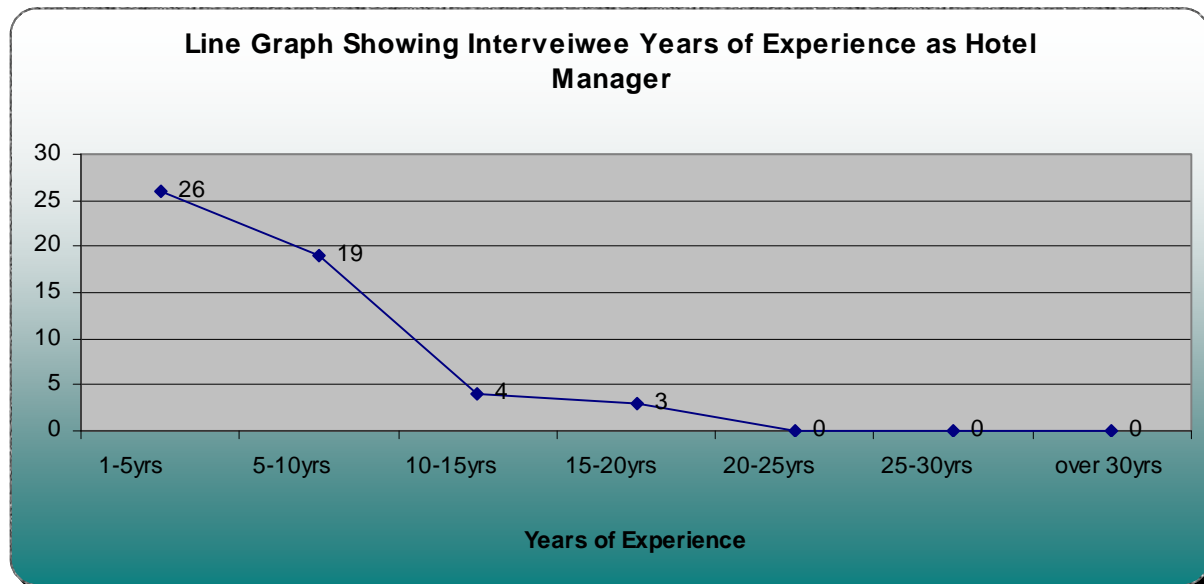
Data analysis

This section will relate to research question 1 (which competencies, hard or soft, are perceived as more important for managers) and research question 2 (how significant is the need for competence in soft skills for managers in hotels).

Respondents were asked to list in order of importance five skills they thought necessary for the performance of their jobs as managers in the hotels. The top five skills were lis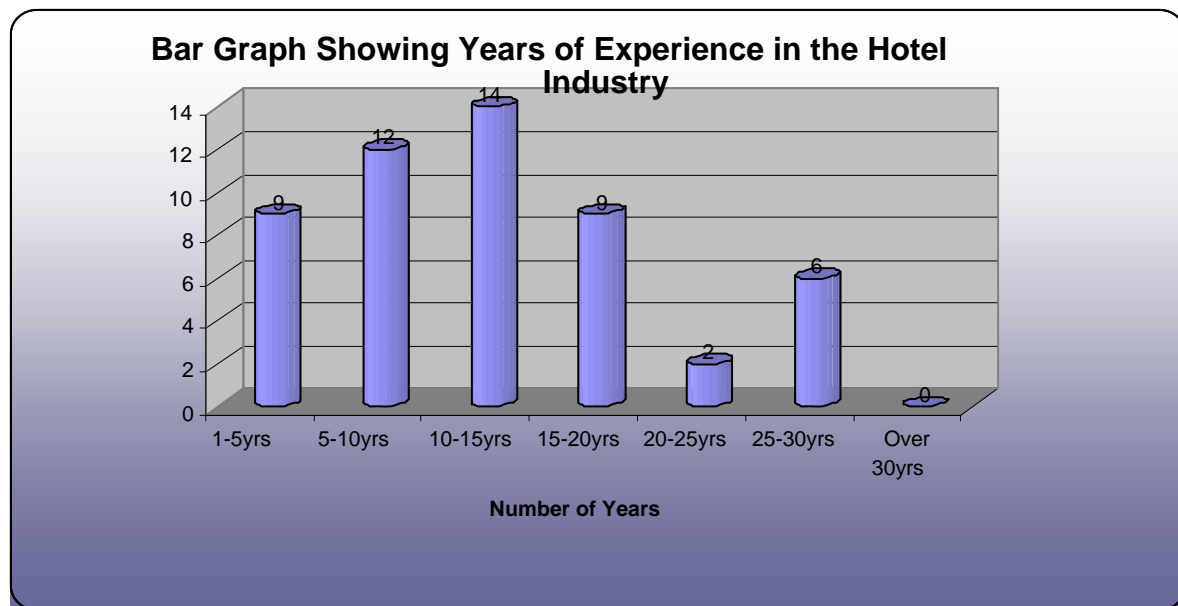ted as the following: communicating, interpersonal, leadership, organizing/time management skills and motivating employees.

The skill of communication was ranked as the number one important skill; almost 25% of respondents rated communication as the number one skill in the order of importance list of skills necessary to do their jobs as managers in hotels. Almost 84% of respondents listed communication among their top five important skills necessary.

The second most important job skill was leadership, which had a 60% overall response rate. Nearly 19% of respondents selected leadership as their number two important skill. It must be noted that 19% of respondents also stated communication as the second most important skill necessary for their jobs as managers in hotels.

Nearly 50% of respondents chose interpersonal skills as necessary to their job functions. Almost 16% of respondents rated interpersonal skills as the third most important of the five important skills. Significantly, an equal 16% of respondents viewed communication as third in the list of important skills.

The fourth most important job skill necessary for the managers in hotels was the skill of organizing/time management which had an almost 12% rating and an overall response rate of 36%. However, the skill of communication received just over 13% rating as fourth most important skill.

Motivating employees was seen as the fifth most important skill in the list of top five important skills necessary to manage in a hotel; 28% of respondents selected motivation as an overall important skill. Motivating employees received an 8% rating which placed it in fifth position.

Besides the top five skills mentioned there were other noted skills with significant ratings, such as; efficiency/competency at 48% overall response rate, coaching at 14% overall response rate, compassion with 14% overall response rate, creativity at 20% overall response rate, ability to delegate at 16% overall response rate and persuasion skills at an overall response rate of 8%.

In the skills blocks where respondents were required to rank the given skills items 1 to 5 where 1 identified the most important skill and 5 identified the least important skill, the first

block, communication skills, was divided into 5 specific identifiable communication skills items. These included the following: asks questions, shows enthusiasm, voices opinions, uses humor to make a point and delivers presentations. Of the 5 communication skills 79% of respondents consider asking questions to be important. 17% of responses rated asking questions as neither important nor unimportant. A total of 6% of respondents ranked this specific skill as unimportant. 56% of respondents ranked showing enthusiasm as an important communication skill. 21% considered this skill as unimportant although none considered it to be very unimportant. 23% remained neutral as to whether showing enthusiasm or not was an important or an unimportant communication skill.

As a communication skill respondents ranked voicing opinions as fairly important totaling 40%. 26% viewed voicing opinions as unimportant while 17% saw it as very unimportant. A further 17% were neither for nor against voicing opinions as an important or unimportant communication skill.

The skill of delivering presentations was ranked by 32% of respondents as an important communication skill. Significantly more respondents however, viewed delivering presentations as unimportant with a combined ranking response of 44%. 25% remained neutral as to the importance or lack thereof of delivering presentations as a communication skill.

Using humor to make a point was not considered important for 76% of respondents. Only 11% total of respondents thought this communication skill was important at all. 13% did not think of using humor to make a point as either important or unimportant.

Table 5. Communication Skills
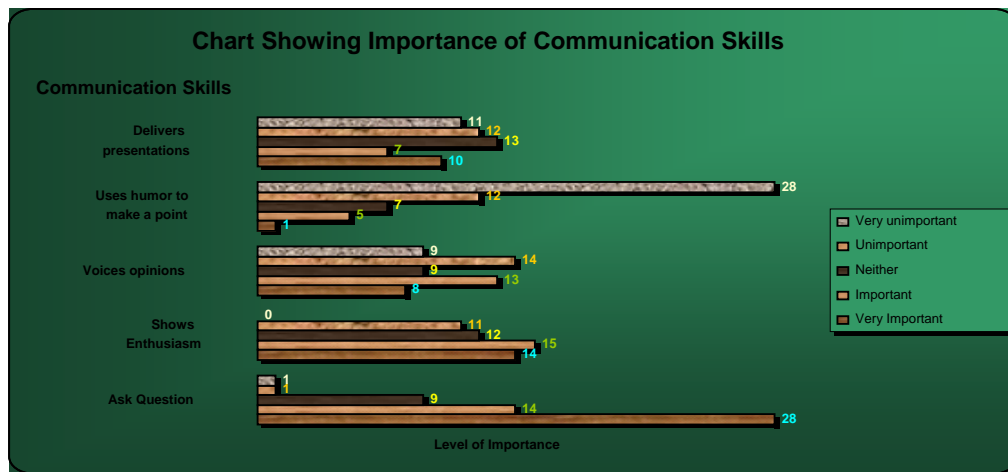
In the second skills block persuasion skills were presented inclusive of the following identifiable skills: influences others, negotiates, seeks information, gets buy in and tries new ideas. Influences others was ranked as important by a total 66% of respondents. 21% of respondents considered influencing others as unimportant. A further 11% remained neutral as to the importance or unimportance of influencing others as a persuasion skill.

Negotiating as a persuasion skill was seen by 48% of respondents as important. 23% saw it as neither important nor unimportant. Just a few percent more (29%) than those who remained neutral considered negotiating as unimportant.

The skill of seeking information as a persuasion skill received a consensus of important by 58% of respondents. 25% of respondents do not consider seeking information to be important. The respondents who had no thought as to the importance or unimportance of seeking information as a persuasion skill held at 17%.

As a skill of persuasion getting buy-in was not seen as important by 69% of respondents. A mere 4% though that getting buy-in was very important as a persuasion skill and 10% saw it as important. 26% of respondents remained neutral on the importance or lack there of getting buy-in as a skill of persuasion.

Trying new ideas as a skill of persuasion was met with a close three way split in terms of ranking by respondents. 35% of them thought it was fairly important, 26% were neither for nor against and 38% thought ii was fairly unimportant.

Table 6. Persuasion
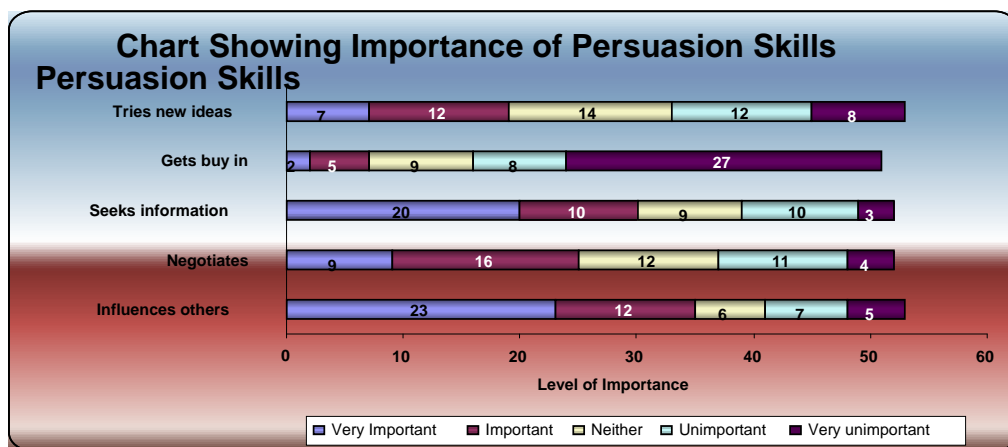
Block 3 presented technical skills inclusive of; develops strategies, spends money wisely, multitasks, delegates responsibility and organizes work. As a technical skill developing strategies was ranked as significantly important by 58% of respondents. Only 6% of respondents ranked this skill as very unimportant while 26% saw it as unimportant. Just 9% of respondents did not rate this skill as either important or unimportant.

Spending money wisely as a technical skill was not considered to be of significant importance by 57% of respondents. 22% viewed spending money wisely as important to an extent but an almost equal percentage of respondents at 21% remained neutral on the matter.

The skill of multitasking had 42% of respondents ranking it as an important technical skill. A very close 36% of respondents felt the opposite, and 23% of the respondents were unsure of the importance or unimportance of multitasking as a technical skill.

A mere 4% difference in respondents separated the importance from the unimportance of delegating responsibility. 36% of respondents believe that delegating is important while 32% believe it is unimportant. An equal number of respondents viewed delegating responsibility as neither important nor unimportant.

Just 8% of respondents could not decide on the importance or unimportance of organizing work as a technical skill. An impressive 66% of respondents agree that it is important with 36% ranking it as very important. 26% of respondents believe organizing work as a technical skill is unimportant.

Table 7. Technical Skills
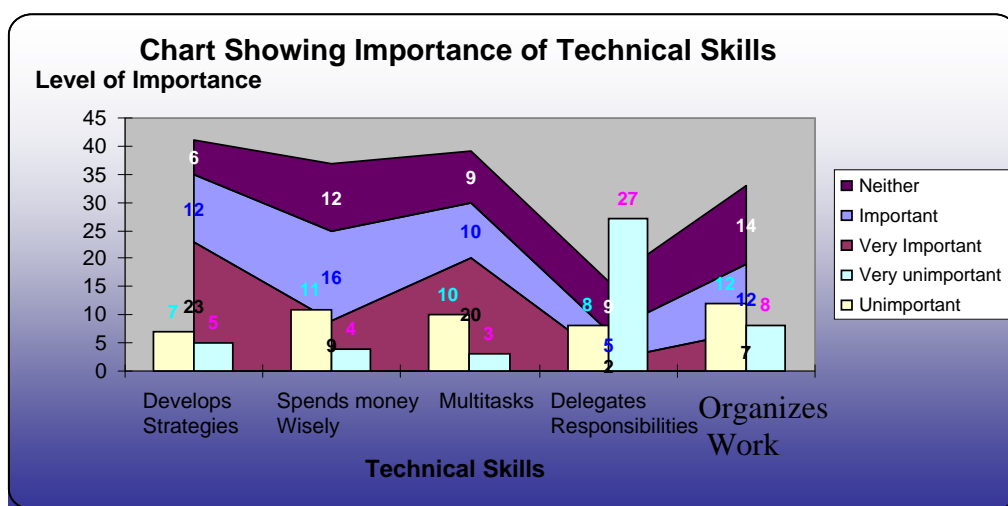
Block 4 which represented interpersonal skills identified the following skills: promotes a team environment, admits mistakes, develops rapport, listens to concerns and resolves conflict. Where promoting a team environment was concerned only 9% of respondents considered it to be very unimportant out of the 18% that thought it was unimportant. Just 4% remained undecided regarding importance or unimportance. 77% of respondents viewed promoting a team environment as definitely important.

Admitting to mistakes as an interpersonal skill was not seen as significantly important by 60% of respondents. 11% did not consider this skill either way. Only 9% saw it as very important while 19% viewed it as important.

As an interpersonal skill, developing rapport was ranked as mostly unimportant; 19% unimportant and 23% very unimportant. The respondents that remained neutral on this skill numbered 25%. Only 6% considered developing rapport to be very important out of the 34% of respondents that ranked this skill as important.

55% of respondents felt that listening to concerns was a strong interpersonal skill. Just 2% thought that this interpersonal skill was very unimportant out of the 17% of respondents that believed that listening to concerns was unimportant overall. The neutral respondents numbered a significant 28%.

Resolving conflict as an interpersonal skill was not seen as particularly important by 47% of respondents. In fact, 28% thought it was very unimportant. Only 6% felt this skill was very important out of the 29% that ranked it as important overall. 28% responded neutrally to this skill item.

Table 8. Interpersonal Skills

Chart Showing Importance of Interpersonal Skills

Level of Importance

Legend:
- Very Important
- Important
- Neither
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

Y-axis values: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35

Data labels visible: 32, 9, 5, 2, 10, 5, 15, 13, 12, 10, 3, 17, 15, 12, 8, 15, 13, 12, 10, 3, 1

X-axis (Interpersonal Skills): Promotes a team environment, Admits mistakes, Develops rapport, Listens to concerns, Resolves conflict

Interpersonal Skills

In the final block, leadership skills are represented by defines objectives, attends to details, acts decisively, models behavior he/she would like to see in others and commands the respect of others. As a leadership skill defining objectives is particularly important; 47% ranking very important and 19% ranking important. Just 6% felt that this skill was very unimportant and 9% felt it was unimportant. However, 19% remained neutral as to whether defining objectives was important or not.

Attending to details was not considered to be too important to 44% of respondents. In fact, 25% saw it as very unimportant. 33% felt it was important. A total of 19% of respondents were neither for nor against the state of importance.

The leadership skill of acting decisively was considered to be important by 34% of respondents. However, 42% of respondents felt that this skill was not particularly important. A quarter of the respondents did not rank this skill either way.

With the skill of modeling behavior over half the respondents (54%) thought it was significantly important. Only 9% remained neutral while 38% felt it was unimportant.

Commanding the respect of others as a leadership skill was almost equally ranked in terms of importance of lack thereof. 43% of respondents believed that this skill was important. Almost equally split, 42% of respondents felt that commanding the respect of others was not important. 15% of respondents were unsure of the importance or unimportance of such a skill.

Table 9. Leadership Skills

In analyzing the data regarding participants' selection of their number one skill across the blocks, it was observed that the skill of seeking information from block 2, the persuasive skills block was the number one managerial skill for 29 of the 54 participants or 54%. The respondents also perceive promoting a team environment from block 4, the interpersonal skills block, as a considerably significant skill for managers in hotels to possess since 17 of the 54 respondents, or

31% selected this skill as the number one choice across the blocks. 15% or 8 of the 54

respondents selected listens to concerns as the number one skill that a manager in a hotel should

have.

Table 10. Number One Skill
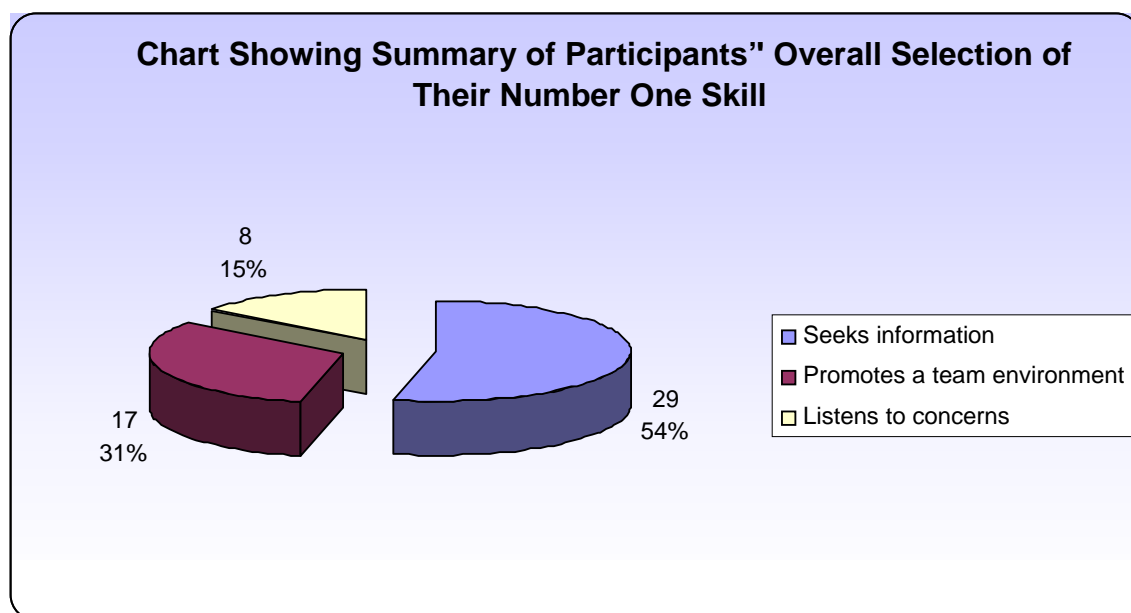
Seeks information	29
Promotes a team environment	17
Listens to concerns	8

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary

This chapter provides a summary of the major research findings and discussions, conclusions. It also looks at some recommendations for Jamaica's educational institutions responsible for training future hospitality industry leaders, and some final recommendations for further research.

With an ever increasing number of hospitality management graduates in Jamaica, the key competencies required in performing their duties as managers has gained significant attention. As a result the purpose of the study was to investigate and examine the relevance of soft skills such as communication, persuasion and leadership, within the competency requirements of managers in hotels in Jamaica.

Findings and discussions

The first objective was to determine which competencies, hard or soft, are perceived as more important for managers in Jamaica's hotels. Not surprisingly, the majority of managers in hotels considered soft skills such as communication, interpersonal, persuasion and leadership to be significantly more important than hard or technical skills, with the skill of communication leading the top five selected skills. From the first part of the questionnaire, which required participants to furnish their own responses to the question (without prompting), it could be gleaned that the skill of communication was the number one preferred skill for managers to possess. This supports research carried out by Kay and Russette, (2000) and Chung-Herrera et al, (2003) which concluded that skills which include oral, written and interpersonal communication are essential for the hospitality and tourism industry.

The second top soft skill for managers in hotels in Jamaica, as selected by the managers themselves, was the skill of leadership. This point was consistent with studies conducted by Kay and Russette (2000) which found that leadership and interpersonal skills are competencies essential to more than one operational area and level of management.

The category of interpersonal skills was selected within the top five skills identified in the study by the managers surveyed. Baum (2000) identified human relations/interpersonal skills as necessary for hospitality managers and supervisors and evidently the managers that participated in this study agree. Even though recruitment of managers for hotel departments highly emphasizes technical skills, the participating managers selected those skills more closely aligned with soft skills such as organizing and time management. These skills were also ranked in the top five skills from surveyed manager responses.

Objective two in this study was to examine how significant the need for competence in soft skills for managers within the hotels studied. From the responses given, it was obvious that there was a need for competence in soft skills as a manager in a hotel. Regardless of the department manager or supervisor, all participants rated the softer skills higher than they did the hard or technical skills. This is supported by research conducted by Connolly and McGing (2006) which found that "soft" skills such as people management, team-working and communication skills are considered to be more important when compared to "harder" skills such as analytical skills.

Respondents expressed additional views in the comments section of the survey, reasons as to their selection of the top skill required. Surprisingly, seeking information was declared the number one skill within the listed skills by 54% of participants. The participants supplied reasons

inclusive of; "the more informed a manager is, the more persuasive he/she can be". Promoting a team environment, as a top skill within the blocks, was supported by statements of; "sets foundation for good working relations"; "fosters positive relations in al areas"; "essential to a perfect work environment".

Conclusion

The results in the study indicated 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. Management participants confirmed that the soft skills of communication, persuasion and leadership were significantly necessary to their performance as hotel department managers or supervisors. However, recruitment efforts for managers in hotels do not indicate that competence in soft skills is a necessity. As a result there needs to be continued dialogue between the hospitality industry and hospitality management educators.

Recommendations for hospitality educational institutions

Based on the results of the study and the reviewed literature, soft skills, namely persuasion, communication, leadership and interpersonal skills, implicate hospitality education and the industry at large. Since managers in hotels in Jamaica have confirmed the significance of soft skills to their job performance it is essential that hospitality educational institutions design adequate curricula to involve and emphasize soft skills training and development.

Recommendations for further research

This study was based on the estimation of preferred competencies in hotel mangers from Jamaica. These competencies were analyzed from the context of soft and hard skills. The analysis of data and the literature reviewed form the grounds for the following recommendations:

1. The study was conducted solely on the perspective of managerial staff. As a result further studies could be conducted to evaluate the perspectives of line staff.

2. It may be useful to investigate the perceptions of hotel management students regarding training in soft skills versus hard skills.

3. The researcher recommended that educational institutions include soft skills training and development into the curricula. There may be scope for further research into whether or not soft skills can actually be taught as subject material.

Summary

This study set out to investigate the implications of soft skills regarding competency requirements of managers in Jamaica's hotels. Jamaica's hotel management staff recruitment efforts have consistently demonstrated a demand for competence in technical skills such as budgeting, planning and development and marketing. The researcher has found that even though the softer skills like persuasion, communication and motivation are not necessarily listed as required competencies for management staff, they are implied. However, the researcher is certain that this implied competence requirement needs to be removed from that precise state and made to be a solid requirement of a manager. Managers in hotels need to be as sophisticated and savvy as not just their members of staff but also their guests. Soft skills stem from emotional intelligence, which ought to become a learned subject at the managerial level and not an assumption of those imparting knowledge. The number one skill across the blocks of skills was "seeks information". In the researcher's opinion it is all well and good to have information but if it cannot be communicated effectively, used to persuade others, help to motivate workers or give proper direction, it is useless.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Cover Letter

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am requesting your cooperation in carrying out a research study on "Competency Requirements of Managers in Hotels in Jamaica" for a Masters degree in Service Management from the Rochester Institute of Technology. The new buzz phrase in the hotel industry is "soft" skills which is gaining great attention as well as momentum. Globally, managers are being selected based not just on their technical abilities but to a great extent, their ability to relate to personnel. Industry practitioners and educators alike need to understand the implications of these "soft" skills in preparing future hotel managers for the industry. Information from this research could help to provide a basis for modifying management training and education practices.

Your participation is voluntary. You will not be identified in any way and your responses will be kept confidential. A follow up phone call will be made to you two days from your receipt of this email for confirmation of your participation.

Thank you for your time and cooperation in assisting me with this study. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 893-6308 or 512-2432 or email ssmith@utech.edu.jm .

Sincerely,

Sharmon Hinds-Smith
Masters Degree Candidate

Appendix B: Survey

The purpose of this study is to examine what competencies are required of managers in hotels in Jamaica.

Please list in order of importance five skills necessary for the performance of your job as a manager in the hotel.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

The following is a list of twenty five skills items, divided into blocks. Please rank the listed items, 1 to 5, where 1 is the most important and 5 the least important.

Block 1

COMMUNICATION SKILLS	RANKING
Asks questions	
Shows enthusiasm	
Voices opinions	
Uses humor to make a point	
Delivers presentations	

Block 2

PERSUASION SKILLS	RANKING
Influences others	
Negotiates	
Seeks information	
Gets buy in	
Tries new ideas	

Block 3

TECHNICAL SKILLS	RANKING
Develops strategies	
Spends money wisely	
Multitasks	
Delegates responsibility	
Organizes work	

Block 4

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	RANKING
Promotes a team environment	
Admits mistakes	
Develops rapport	
Listens to concerns	
Resolves conflict	

Block 5

LEADERSHIP SKILLS	RANKING
Defines objectives	
Attends to details	
Acts decisively	
Models behavior he/she would like to see in others	
Commands the respect of others	

The following section is created to obtain demographic information about the participants. Please check the box which corresponds with your most appropriate answer.

What is your gender?

Male ☐   **Female** ☐

What is your age range?

20-30 ☐   **30-40** ☐   **40-50** ☐   **50-60** ☐   **over 60** ☐

How long have you worked in the hotel industry?

1-5yrs ☐   **5-10yrs** ☐   **10-15yrs** ☐   **15-20yrs** ☐   **20-25yrs** ☐   **25-30yrs** ☐   **over**

30yrs ☐

How long have you worked as a manager in the hotel?

1-5yrs ☐   **5-10yrs** ☐   **10-15yrs** ☐   **15-20yrs** ☐   **20-25yrs** ☐   **25-30yrs** ☐   **over**

30yrs ☐

Additional Comments

   1. **Please state your number one item across the blocks and why this item ranks as number one.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your help.