SALES EXECUTIVE COMPETENCY IDENTIFICATION : A THAILAND'S

INCENTIVE TRAVEL BUSINESS CASE

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

COLLEGE OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

GRADUATE SCHOOL, RANGSIT UNIVERSITY

2014

วิทยานิพนธ์ เรื่อง

การระบุสมรรถนะผู้ประสานงานการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัล : กรณีศึกษาธุรกิจการ
ท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัลในประเทศไทย

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ศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาการจัดการธุรกิจท่องเที่ยวและการบริการ

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Thesis entitled

SALES EXECUTIVE COMPETENCY IDENTIFICATION : A THAILAND'S INCENTIVE TRAVEL BUSINESS CASE

by

NUCHANART CHOLKONGKA

was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts program in Tourism

and Hospitality Business Management

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

5507457 : สาขาวิชาเอก: การจัดการธุรกิจท่องเที่ยวและการบริการ; ศศ.ม.
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นุชนารถ ชลคงคา, SALES EXECUTIVE COMPETENCY IDENTIFICATION : A THAILAND'S INCENTIVE TRAVEL BUSINESS CASE. อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา : ดร. ณัฐพงศ์ โชติกเสถียร, 150 หน้า.

ประเทศไทยได้รับการจัดอันดับอยู่ที่ 43 ของโลก ในด้านความอุดมสมบูรณ์ทางทรัพยากรทางการท่องเที่ยว และวัฒนธรรม รวมถึงโครงสร้างพื้นฐานทางด้านการท่องเที่ยวที่ดี จากการจัดอันดับโดยการประชุมเวทีเศรษฐกิจโลกในปี 2013 นอกจากนี้ เมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับประเทศเพื่อนบ้านในภูมิภาคอาเซียน พบว่า ยอดขายต่อพนักงานในองค์กรไมซ์ของไทยต่ำกว่าประเทศเพื่อนบ้านหลายประเทศ ได้แก่ สิงคโปร์ ออสเตรเลีย นิวซีแลนด์ ญี่ปุ่น เกาหลีใต้ และมาเลเซีย (Barnes Report, 2010) ซึ่งเกิดจากปัจจัยร่วมหลายประการ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่ง ผลิตภาพของบุคลากรไมซ์ไทย

การศึกษานี้ได้เลือกใช้แนวคิดเกี่ยวกับสมรรถนะเพื่อการจัดการ และพัฒนาทรัพยากรมนุษย์ ทั้งนี้เพราะการจัดการและพัฒนาทรัพยากรมนุษย์ฐานสมรรถนะนั้น ทำให้องค์กรสามารถคัดสรรเลือกประเมินและพัฒนาบุคลากรได้เหมาะสมท่ามกลางการเปลี่ยนแปลงของสภาวะแวดล้อมทางธุรกิจด้านต่างๆ นอกจากนี้ การใช้สมรรถนะเป็นฐานในการบริหารทรัพยากรมนุษย์นั้นยังทำให้บุคลากรสามารถปรับเปลี่ยนตำแหน่งงาน ส่วนงาน รวมถึงเลื่อนขั้นไปยังตำแหน่งบริหารได้ประสบความสำเร็จมากขึ้น เพื่อเป็นการพัฒนาศักยภาพของบุคลากรในอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัล ซึ่งเป็นอุตสาหกรรมย่อยของอุตสาหกรรมไมซ์อุตสาหกรรมอาจกำหนดสมรรถนะสำหรับการจำเป็นในการปฏิบัติงานให้ลุล่วง หรือสมรรถนะสำหรับการปฏิบัติงานได้ดีเยี่ยมก็ได้ สมรรถนะประกอบด้วย 3 องค์ประกอบ ได้แก่ ความรู้ ทักษะ และคุณลักษณะส่วนบุคคล

จากการศึกษาครั้งนี้ผู้วิจัยพบว่า สมรรถนะระดับพื้นฐานอาจไม่เพียงพอสำหรับการเป็นผู้ประสานงานการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัลที่ประสบความสำเร็จ แต่สมรรถนะจำแนกระดับและสมรรถนะระดับอุดมคติมีความจำเป็นสำหรับผู้ประสานงานการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัลที่ประสบความสำเร็จและแข่งขันได้ ซึ่งผลการศึกษาของวิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้จะเป็นแนวทางสำหรับการพัฒนาและวางแผนการจัดการทรัพยากรมนุษย์สำหรับอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัล

ลายมือชื่อนักศึกษา.. ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา..

5507457   : MAJOR: TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY BUSINESS

MANAGEMENT; M.A. (TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY BUSINESS

MANAGEMENT)

KEY WORDS   : MICE, INCENTIVE TRAVEL, COMPETENCY, HUMAN RESOURCE

MANAGEMENT

NUCHANART CHOLKONGKA : SALES EXECUTIVE COMPETENCY

IDENTIFICATION : A THAILAND'S INCENTIVE TRAVEL BUSINESS CASE. THESIS

ADVISOR : NUTTAPONG JOTIKASTHIRA., Ph.D., 150 p.

Thailand has been well recognized as one of the top tourism destination and is so famous for its natural tourism resources especially sea shores and islands and was ranked 43st among 139 rated destinations by World Economic Forum (Blanke and Chiesa, 2011). Despite a high recognition of the country as a MICE destination of choice, the figures from Barnes' report on convention and tradeshow organizer in 2010 showed that sales per organization and sales per employee of the country is well below those of Singapore, Japan, Australia, and Japan alarming that the country and the sector has a problem with productivity.

Competency-based human resource management has been recognized for its superiority to a task-based approach due to its ability to facilitate employees' versatility and adaptability to external changes and growth plans. To improve the productivity of Incentive Travel, a component of the MICE industry, threshold and differing competencies must be identified. Through structured in-depth interviews with different groups of stakeholders of Incentive Travel's sales executive about threshold, differing, and ideal performance and competencies in regard to knowledge, skills, and attributes, competencies of such a position were identified.

The researchers found that threshold competencies mismatched the key success factors of the Incentive Travel Industry. The finding of this thesis will be the guidelines for concerns persons to make the most informed and calculated decisions about human resource in the field of Incentive travel industry.

Student's Signature.NUCHANART CHOLKONGKA.........Thesis Advisor's Signature...........................

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Explored and examined in this thesis is the standard of practice, work performance standards, and support competencies of sales executives in the Thai Incentive Travel Business. Its expected findings will be suggested as the basis on which MICE Professional Aassociations and promotion bodies namely Convention Promotion Fund- CPF, Thailand Incentive and Convention Association-TICA, Thai Exhibition Association- TEA, and Event Management Association- EMA develop the country's working standards operation manual for MICE sales and operation agents.

The research background is addressed in this chapter followed by statement of research problems, theoretical frameworks, and the present study's proposition. The contour of the literature review pertaining to the context and parent disciplines of this study were given to ground a basic understanding to readers and examiners. The research topic and methodology outlined were also addressed where the last part in this chapter reports the delimitations of the study geographically, theoretically, and temporally.

Business Travel is an extension of the MICE Industry (Meeting, Incentive Travel, Convention, and Exhibition). This sector of the tourism industry is otherwise known as the Business Event Industry, which has increased in its economic significance worldwide , including Thailand, as it provides higher economic yield per visitor and healthier tourism product consumption behavior (Firoiu et al., 2011). Thailand is investing in the MICE industry in the hope to even-out fluctuated demand of the conventional tourism products due to their seasonal nature. MICE or Business Event Industry is, therefore, highly regarded by both private and public sectors in most destinations.

Looking at Thailand's competitiveness in Travel and Tourism, the country was ranked 43rd out of 139 countries globally and 9th regionally in the Travel and Tourism Competitive Index reported by World Economic Forum (Blanke and Chiesa, 2013). Looking into the gross index, various sub-indices including business law and regulatory environments, business atmosphere, tourism and travel infrastructure, and human resources were related to the competitiveness of Business Travel at different levels (Blanke and Chiesa, 2013). However, there are, however, some indexes that

seem to be problematic. In regard to ICT infrastructure, Thailand was ranked 90th and 77th on legal and regulatory environment,70th in Human Resources.

Human resources comprises several indicators including the education system as well as availability and quality of skilled labor. Human Resources seemed to be a persisting problem that led to the results as shown in Barnes Report on Convention and Exhibition Industries statistics worldwide (Blanke and Chiesa, 2011; Barnes Report, 2010). Table 1.1. presents the average sales-per-employee in Thailand's convention and exhibition business in comparison to the neighboring nations.

Table 1.1 Comparative Sales per Employee and Productivity Ratios of Thailand and its Neighboring Countries

Country	Sales/ Employee	PPP Ratio	PPP Sales/ Employee	Efficiency Ratio
Singapore	340,631	1.377	469,048.89	18.08
Australia	135,533	0.851	115,338.58	4.45
New Zealand	114,590	0.973	111,496.07	4.30
Japan	108,873	0.819	89,166.99	3.44
South Korea	20,549	1.634	33,577.07	1.29
Malaysia	15,191	1.966	29,865.51	1.15
Thailand	12,551	2.067	25,942.92	1.00
China	12,698	1.81	22,983.38	0.89
Indonesia	8,084	1.769	14,300.60	0.55
India	4,026	2.816	11,337.22	0.44
Philippines	4,601	2.006	9,229.61	0.36

Adapted from: Barnes Report, 2010

The above table presents the average sales-per-employee of convention and exhibition firms in Thailand and other neighboring countries in the Asia Pacific Region. The figures were adjusted using parity of purchasing power – PPP to ensure the comparability of the figures across nations with different cost-of-living levels. In 2010, Thailand had 12,551 US$ sales-per-employee, which was PPP, adjusted to 25,942 US$.

As this study focused on Thailand's case, it is used as the basis for the productivity ratio calculation. From Table 1.1, it can be seen that Thailand's tête-a-tête competing destinations are South Korea, Malaysia, and People's Republic of China due to similar productivity ratios. Thailand performed much better than India, Philippines, and Indonesia, with a higher sales-per-employee and efficiency ratio. The upper band of the countries shown in Table I comprise Singapore, Australia, New

Zealand, and Japan. They performed 18.08, 4.45, 4.30, and 3.44 times better than Thailand respectively. Should Thailand aim to be a world class MICE destination, it should use the upper band countries as a benchmark.

The performance deficit can be attributed to several factors including the size and advancement of the real sectors of the economies included in the table, their entrepreneurs' market perspective and several other possible factors. However, one cannot deny the effect of human resource productivity.

As mentioned earlier that personnel productivity plays an important role in competitiveness of the country and individual business organizations, managers must pay closer attention to the attraction, motivation, retention, and talents development of their employees as human capital becomes one of the strategic assets(Testa and Sipe, 2012). In such a light, human resource management and development shifted their roles from support functions to strategic function partially due to the fast changing and unpredictable business environment(Jain and Haley, 2009).

As a part of ASEAN Economic Community where goods, services, capital and international capital and skilled labor are expected to freely flow in and out of the country, threats and opportunities avail themselves to conquer among the operators of Thai MICE and labor market (Economic Ingelligence Center: Siam Commercial Bank, 2011). Through the use of ASEAN Common Competency Standard-ACCS, the Mutual Recognition Arrangement -MRA is now applied to confirm the mutual agreement on the minimal personnel standard in various sectors in accordance with the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement on Services- AFAS that by now covers in seven professional areas including Tourism and Hotel (ASEAN Secretariat Office, http://www.aseansec.org/Fact%20Sheet/AEC/AEC-02.pdf, 10 July 2012; Department of Trade Negotiation, 2012). The Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals have covered for 32 positions in the Hotel and Tourism Industry (Soydhurum, 2012, Tourism Personnel Development Institute: Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2011). However, the completed and ratified competency standards do not yet cover any of the MICE industry positions. It is anticipated that the standard framework will expand its coverage to MICE industry in the near future. Thus, it would be beneficial for the whole industry and the educators as well as the workforce in the future to augment the professional standards through the adoption of an active stance. This would be achieved by establishing its own national professional standard prior to the initiation and imposition by ASEAN Secretariat Office. Convention Promotion Fund (CPF), Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA) and Thai Exhibition Association (TEA) are the three main MICE industry professional associations, with high awareness on these possible challenges, are now proactively forming a job standard of their own at the earliest possible opportunity.

In the present business environment, MICE business operators are required to engage in workforce planning to keep pace with changes, unpredictable working natures, and industry dynamism (Hirvonen, 2011). In other words, employees must be developed and nurtured to be more adaptive and versatile to the industrial and organizational changes. As a consequence, a competency based approach to human resource development is now obtaining more acceptance from the scholars and practitioners in comparison to its task-based counterparts (Bhatawdekar and Bhatawdekar, 2012, Holton III et al., 2008). This approach allows the management to adopt a long-term strategy for their human capital through growth and career path planning as well as succession and promotion plans. (Bhatawdekar and Bhatawdekar, 2012, Soderquist et al., 2010). According to the industrial scope of this study, Incentive Travel, what lies unanswered to both practitioners and scholars are the set of competencies needed for the management and development of job candidates and job incumbents. The research question can, therefore, be stated as: What are the competencies required in a sales agent in the Thai Incentive Travel industry?"

Such a research question did not address the competencies required for further human resource management and development decisions such as task assignment, and promotion decisions. To come up with competency sets that allow such decisions to be made on the most informed basis, performance standard should be included in the research question as well. The major research question, as stated above, can be divided into 3 sub-research questions as follows;

Sub research question I:

"What are the competencies required in a sales agent in the Thai Incentive Travel industry to deliver the threshold-level of job performance?"

Sub research question II:

"What are the competencies which underlie the high performing of sales agents in the Thai Incentive Travel industry?"

Sub research question III:

"What competencies should be focused on when making promotion decisions of sales agents in Thai Incentive Travel industry?"

With the aim to answer the stated research questions, this study is designed to explore the competencies required in a sales agent in Thai Incentive Travel, which will guide practitioners and scholars in the field to make a more informed decision within their respective relevancy to the position.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 Addressing the required competencies for a Thai Incentive Travel Business sales executive.

1.2.2 Addressing the competencies that separate the top performers from the average performers as the Thai Incentive Travel Business sales executive.

1.2.3 Offering the guidelines for recruiting, evaluating, training, andretaining to the human resource managers and job supervisors in Thailand's Incentive Travel Business.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to design a study which effectively addresses the research questions and yields findings that satisfy the three mentioned objectives, the researcher framed the study theoretically through an extensive literature review as presented in Chapter Two. To guide readers with the contour of the theoretical framework governing this study, the author divided the theoretical framework into two parts, namely Incentive Travel, and Competency.

1.3.1　Incentive Travel as an integral part of MICE Industry

MICE industry, an acronym of MEETING, INCENTIVE TRAVEL, CONVENTION, and EXHIBITION, can be used interchangeably with the term Business Travel, while it is contended by many scholars that both terms reserve similar meanings. Despite the similarities, it is also argued that MICE is fundamentally different from the Business Travel in that it's more concerned with tourism activities, infrastructure, and the components of the tourism industry (Firoiu, Dodu, and Patrichi, 2011). As in the case of this study, incentive travel, despite its use as a business tool, is a major component of tourism and hospitality activities that are strategically designed to meet the programs' objectives.

Though Asia is ranked second and holds 23.1 percent of the world MICE market share after Europe, as reported by International Congress and Convention Association-ICCA, with the expected 3.6 percent of annual growth rate through 2019, Thailand was not ranked in the World's Top Ten MICE destinations (Chiang, King, and Nguyen, 2012; Firoiu, et al., 2011). Despite such a fact, Thailand has actively developed this sector through investment incentives and infrastructure developmental projects by relevant authorized government units and public organizations as well as established professional associations in this field. At the global level, MICE industry encounters a lot of challenges including the politico-economic environmental instability, currency fluctuations, natural disasters, new emerging markets, and technological advancement. In response to these challenges, MICE industries actively

upgraded their infrastructure, and embraced new technologies to facilitate and help both hosts and attendants to select and organize the events. In order to keep the sector competitive at the national level, it is important that the government maintain investment to stimulate the total growth, lend more support, and, especially, commit to human resource development (Firoiu, et al., 2011). The issue of human resources seems paramount to this study, affirming the figures reported in Table 1.1, which indicated that Thai MICE Industry was about 18 times less productive than Singapore using sales-per-employees as an indicator.

As a part of MICE industry, Incentive Travel is one of the sub-industries that has a reputation for its high revenue generation power (Ricci and Holland, 1992) as it utilizes a wide range of local businesses and services, be it in hospitality or otherwise(Severt and Breiter, 2010). For Incentive Travel business operators, conflicting points of interest between program participants and clients persist. While Incentive Travel participants expect memorable trophy experiences attached to program components and activities, host organizations and program buyers expect participants' behavioral changes with minimum possible cost(Severt and Breiter, 2010; Shinew and Backman, 1995; Incentive Travel Council and SITE International, 2012). At this point, Thailand can capitalize on its "value for money" image, as it is well recognized among global business travelers as the first destination that provides such a benefit (Future Brand Index, 2011).Such an image tends to communicate the country's ability to create such a balance between two conflicting points of interest. The success of marketing the program and destination depends, largely, on the competence of sales representatives in designing exciting and impressive programs within the constraints of the host organizations. The work standard of sales representatives and competencies must be developed in order that such a standard be used as guidelines for practitioners to evaluate and develop employees, and for educators to develop and nurture the future workforces.

1.3.2 Competency

To cater to the modern business environment, which is governed by the unprecedented rates of uncertainty and change that become a normalcy, the human resource management with a task-based approach seemed to restrict itself as the organizations adopting this approach tended to be incapable of coping with the business versatility and changes demanded by external factors. A competency–based human resource management approach appears more superior in this regard. Competency can be defined as a workplace and industry standard that indicates the superiority and adequacy of inherent and developable skills, knowledge, and attributes of job incumbents and applicants in completing tasks pertaining to the job description (Duad, Ismail, and Omar, 2010; Soderquist, Papalexandris, Ioannou, and Prastacos, 2010; Weber, Finley, Crawford, and Rivera Jr., 2009). However, as the application of

competency is bound to organizational and industrial contexts, a competency identification model must be developed for each organization incorporating different organizational cultures, work flows, and structures.

1.3.2.1 Competency Identification and Model

As a hospitality industry, the MICE labor market is regarded as "weak" in that there is no clear-cut candidate entry selection criteria, multiple entry ports, low skill specificity, weak workplace culture, varied of over-time payment, and flexible responsibility roles (Baum, 2008). The nature of this labour market poses a high threat to the medium to small companies, as they may face obstacles in recruiting and retaining necessary talents for their business operation and strategy realization. Unfortunately, most MICE companies fall within the small and medium enterprise category making the whole industry fragile and rife with human resource complexities (Barnes Report, 2010) when it comes to attracting, maintaining, and developing the talents that lead to the firms' competitiveness (Hamimi Abdul Razak, Kamaruddin, and Abdul Azid, 2012). Langdon and Marrelli, (2002) proposed the model to address employees' required competencies by applying the standard of performance within the organizational contexts as the basis for development of competency model called "Language of work" or sometimes referred to LOW (Langdon and Marrelli, 2002). In the present study, such a model was modified by adding level segregation to identify knowledge, skills, and attributes required to complete tasks at different levels of performance while excluding organizationally specific factors as they are outside the scope of this study (Duad, et al., 2010; Weber, et al., 2009).

1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

There are very few empirical studies conducted in MICE or Business Travel due to the difficulties in accessing sources of information or units of analysis as well as the isolative nature of interaction within MICE industry. There is no empirical study conducted in the area of human resources and competency in the Incentive Study context. The gap of research is evident and reinforces the appropriateness of this study.

Incentive Travel is not only recognized for its significance in the tourism industry in Thailand, but also in other countries as well. Therefore, it is necessary to process the research that would establish the personnel standard within this sector.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

Due to a high restriction on the amount of published sources of empirical study in the field of the competency and human resource management within MICE and

Incentive Travel industry contexts, exploratory research was needed to identify the initial competency factors for incentive travel sales representatives. However, the study's primal objective is to develop an operation manual applicable to all MICE organizations across the nation. Aninterpretivist approach was adopted and a qualitative study was conducted with industry members and experts. In the initial stages, the author conducted the exploratory research via in-depth interviews with five groups of stakeholders of sales agents in the incentive industry, namely colleagues, supervisors, job incumbents, suppliers, and customers. These informants were asked to address the expectations from various points-of-view or the nature of interactions within the studied positions. The tool for data collection here is an interview guide, which was developed from a combination of job descriptions for the position "sales agent" or other positions that assume the same responsibilities within the leading 5 Thai Incentive Travel businesses as nominated by Thailand Incentive and Convention Association- TICA, the most recognized professional association of incentive travel and convention in Thailand. The exploratory study results were triangulated by a panel of experts as nominated by TICA.

1.6 EXPLANATION OF KEY TECHNICAL WORDS

Notwithstanding this research aims to provide the most practical guidelines for Incentive Travel organizations and personnel, there are still some technical terms that may require more clarification. The following terms are explained in order to facilitate the understanding of users.

MICE Industry
MICE is conventionally referred to as Meeting, Incentive Travel, Convention, and Exhibition. It is interchangeably used with the term Business Travel. The Incentive Travel sector is regarded as a sub industry of MICE and is within the scope of this research project as well.

Incentive Travel
Incentive Travel refers to a sub-industry of MICE, which can be defined as the managerial tool used to motivate employees or distributors to achieve an uncommon goal as well as to reward employee's achievement using an extraordinary or "trophy" trip experience as a prize or premium.

Incentive Travel Coordinator
A position in Incentive Travel, MICE Sub-industries and organizations that assume the same roles, but are differently named. This position has been discussed by the working committee as well as the researchers. Both parties agreed that this position is equivalent to a sales executive and customer service agents.

Competency

Competency refers to the enduring capability of an individual to perform certain tasks within a specific context up to a specific standard. Competency comprises three elements namely knowledge, skills, and attributes.

Threshold Performance

Threshold performance refers to the minimum performance standard expected by stakeholders. Those assuming the position of coordinator must perform tasks included in the job description up to this standard as a bare minimum.

Differing Performance

Differing performance refers to the differential of task completion standard between high performers and average performers. Individuals who are high performers should be assigned with projects with high importance or with more complexities.

Ideal Performance

Ideal competencies refer to knowledge, skills, and attributes that underlie ideal performance. They should be used for promotion decisions and training high performers.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

There are very few empirical studies conducted in the MICE or Business Travel sector due to the difficulties in accessing sources of information or the isolative nature of interaction within MICE industry. There is no empirical study conducted in the area of human resources and competency and furthermore the study used in the community of practice is not empirical. Therefore, the research is limited in the following ways:

Geographical Limitations – As this capability set is applicable in Thailand, the most informative were those working in Bangkok therefore, the study will be applicable, especially, for people who are work for a Thailand Incentive Travel company.

Industry Limitations – A group of stakeholders of sales agents in the incentive industry, who were interviewed, were nominated by Thailand Incentive Convention and Association-TICA members. Regarding the Incentive Travel service provider type, the majority of Incentive Travel businesses in Thailand as a host destination are Destination Management Companies-DMC, therefore there might be some Incentive Travel company types not included in this study.

Study Limitations – This study uses a qualitative design, but does not include a quantitative method.

1.8 CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to provide the competencies required in a sales agent in the Thai Incentive Travel business in order to guide practitioners and scholars in the field to make a more informed decision within their respective relevancy to the position. In this chapter the research background was identified, followed by a statement of research problems, theoretical frameworks, and the present study's proposition. The research topic and methodology outlined were also addressed where the conclusion of this chapter reported the delimitations of this study geographically, theoretically, and temporally. In order to design a study, which effectively addresses the research questions and satisfies the research objectives, the researcher framed the study theoretically through an extensive literature review as presented in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter addresses the theoretical framework pertinent to the study by exploring Incentive Travel, which is a context of the study. The second part of the review addresses the parent discipline: competency, which is further divided into two parts; definition and competency identification. The last part of the chapter is dedicated to the statement of the immediate discipline pertinent to the research objectives stated in Chapter One.

2.1 INCENTIVE TRAVEL AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF MICE INDUSTRY

It is well recognized that the MICE industry is a lucrative market for the tourism and hospitality industry. It is actually an extension of the Business Travel segment, which is more lucrative in terms of economic yield per-visitor and less seasonal compared to its leisure counterpart. The term MICE is sometimes referred to interchangeably with business events. Understanding the industry is still limited among both practitioners and scholars. The following paragraphs address the MICE industry.

2.1.1 About MICE Industry

The term MICE is actually an acronym comprising four related hospitality industries namely Meeting, Incentive Travel, Convention, and Exhibition. The term is used interchangeably with Business Travel in which the latter covers a wider scope in that business travellers include those who travel to a destination for private meetings or exploration of market and investment opportunities. While certain scholars contend that both terms have the same meaning, others have argued that MICE is more concerned with tourism infrastructure, activities, and tourism industry components thus, it is essentially different from normal business travel.

Business travel is fundamentally different from MICE as it also concerns leisure tourism activities, infrastructure, and other components of the tourism industry while normal Business Travel does not (Firoiu, Dodu, and Patrichi, 2011). Therefore, from a destination perspective, the MICE industry represents higher revenue potential due to the nature of the product. MICE industry is the fastest growing section in the tourism industry as it generates a significant amount of income, employment and knowledge exchange among participants and industry members for all MICE

destinations. The MICE industry is also highly beneficial for the mainstream tourism industry in that it can incorporate all various types of tourism and hospitality products, both available and unavailable to the organization as long as they help satisfy the needs of clients and participants.

Another characteristic of MICE, which is highly desirable for destinations, is that it helps reduce the fluctuation of tourism and hospitality product demands, which are synonymous with its seasonal nature(Lovelock et al., 2001). MICE travellers tend to participate in MICE events regardless of the climate or season, as their primal objectives for participation are non-leisure related. Consequently, it helps even out the adverse economic effects of the tourism industry especially in off-peak periods (Firoiu D., Dodu, S.P. and Patrichi, i.c., 2011)

As they are normally sponsored by their employers, MICE travelers are usually insensitive to price and tend to visit the host destinations without much consideration about the price of participation and other auxiliary services such as transportation and accommodation. Besides, hosting major MICE events helps destinations improve their respective images in regards to readiness of the tourism and hospitality infrastructure and advancement and stability of local economies (Firoiu et al., 2011)As earlier mentioned, Incentive Travel, which is the industrial scope of this study, is an integral part of MICE industry and the next sub-division discusses incentive travel in more detail.

2.1.2 Incentive Travel

Incentive Travel is a desirable market for all tourism and hospitality operators despite a smaller market size. Due to the high-revenue reputation involved in fantasy experience, host organizations seek to create memorable experiences for participants (Ricci and Holland, 1992). The program usually includes team building activities for earners, a conference and gala dinner to honor the earners' outstanding performance and achievement (Severt and Breiter, 2010; Ricci and Holland, 1992). Although the definition of Incentive Travel is still an issue of debate among academics and practitioners, Incentive Travel can be defined as a *managerial tool used to motivate employees or distributors to achieve an uncommon goal, as well as to reward the employee's achievement through the using of an extraordinary or "trophy" trip experience as a prize or premium* (Ricci and Holland, 1992; Shinew and Backman, 1995). It should also be noted that the reward can be granted to a particular employee as an individual or as a team to recognize their team effort (Severt and Breiter, 2010). Understanding that Incentive Travel is not a leisure product but a managerial tool, stakeholders in this market can design and operate the program according to the objectives of the host organizations.

As a managerial tool, Incentive Travel has been used for wide-ranging purposes from marketing to business operations and supporting functions including human resources, finances, and administration. Corporations commonly use Incentive Travel to 1) motivate their employees, 2) seed and enhance result-oriented corporate culture, and 3) stimulate profit growth through higher efficiency(Ricci and Holland, 1992). From the earners' perspective, reasons for participation include 1) Appeal of the reward and the trip, 2) Prestige gained from being rewarded both as participants or earners, 3) Good memories of the trip and being rewarded, 4) Recognition from top management in their performance and devotion, and 5) Camaraderie with other top performers in the organization (Ricci and Holland, 1992; Severt and Breiter, 2010). *It can be seen here that the success of the program according to the host organization's objectives depends on how the program is designed and implemented according to the benefits sought by program earners.* This fact calls for higher attention to be paid to both sales and operation functions of Incentive Travel businesses.

Actually, Incentive Travel is the motivational scheme of the management through operant conditioning and vicarious learning theories (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010; Robinson, 2001). Trip, awards, recognition, and camaraderie wished by potential participants serve as the positive reinforcement that is supposed to trigger a behavioral change in a desirable way. The success of such learning theories lies in the nature of the reward itself; if it is desirable to the target population and the size of the reward(or punishment) is large enough to induce behavioral change (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010). The trip and the reward pertaining to the Incentive Travel program is therefore of high importance. The following paragraphs discuss how Incentive Travel contributes to a firm's higher overall proficiency.

2.1.3 Impact of Incentive Travel

As earlier mentioned, firms can improve their efficiency through Incentive Travel programs. If the program is attractive to targeted participants (either employees or distributors), they are more likely to change their working or distribution behaviors into the desirable direction wished for by the top management. According to the research conducted by the Incentive Travel Council and http://www.traveldailynews. com, 17 January 2013, incentive program designers and the host organization should be cautious on participants' diversity and fast change of tastes and preferences among them when designing the program (Incentive Travel Council and http://www. traveldailynews.com, 17 January 2013). Designing programs that are attractive to prospective participants with diverse tastes and preferences tend to pose a high challenge for Incentive Travel marketers.

Repeating the old successful program should not always be the case due to the changeable industry natures, situations, time periods, personal tastes, and preferences

of participants. It is, therefore, important for the host organizations and incentive houses to re-design the incentive program suitable for different groups of participants at different points in time. In so doing, thorough participant intelligence is very important in an incentive program design. A formal and informal style of data collection through as many sources as possible would enable the host organizations and incentive houses to accurately pinpoint the needs of participants. This is consistent with the finding from the study conducted by Servert and Brieter (2010) that the effects of the program on participants vary with the design of incentive program. Some participants change their working behavior according to Management's expectation, while others revert to their normal working behavior. The study places high emphasis on a need-based program design in order to ensure that the targeted participants are motivated by the rewards to shift their working efforts towards the organizational goals. It can be argued, hence, that programs that are well researched and designed with flexibilities to allow people with broad backgrounds and preferences tend to be more successful than others. Besides, the host organizations should appreciate that Incentive Travel does not work for every participant. Some will change their behaviors according to the aim of the management while others will not.

Corporate culture is the way that people conduct their behavior in a working context, it is, thus, essential for organizational competitiveness (Robinson, 2001).If any organizations have a corporate culture that is conducive to strengthening competition, such a corporate culture can be said to be an intangible strategic asset (Kotler et al., 2009; Jain and Haley, 2009). The benefit of the productive and constructive corporate culture seeding and enhancement derived from Incentive Travel is profound (Severt and Breiter, 2010). Incentivizing employees is necessary for the company to construct the result-oriented culture, which is a strategy implemented through trips and other awards to their employees. In addition, companies using Incentive Travel as a motivational tool usually enjoy higher performance due to the higher job commitment and job satisfaction (Severt and Breiter, 2010). It can be seen here that Incentive Travel is employed outside marketing and sales scopes which are its primary use. As a managerial tool, Incentive Travel can be used organization wide to nurture a desirable corporate culture.

Incentive Travel, however, is also providing an adverse effect on corporate culture. (Shinew and Backman, 1995). Employees working in functions where performance cannot be quantified and measured easily might be demotivated for not being rewarded, despite their maximum contribution to the firm. Therefore, the organizations that desire to use Incentive Travel, as a motivational tool must be aware of this potentially negative aspect. Designing a performance indicator for support functions might be more difficult for the management as performances are usually measured using a qualitative approach. The management should make sure that they

design a concrete performance indicator appropriate for each function if they choose to use incentive travel as a tool to seed an organic corporate culture.

An organization might apply an Incentive Travel as the retaining tool for the outstanding employees (Severt and Breiter, 2010; Incentive Travel Council and SITE International, http://www.traveldailynews.com, 17 January 2013). Earners tend to be the ones who are committed to the organization with a high level of job satisfaction. The effectiveness of Incentive Travel in exemplifying the behavior and performance of top performers may not translate to that of average performers. The success of using rewards and trip experiences to inspire average performers depends on the success probability perception of average performers. That is, if average performers perceive that the goal to reach the incentive target is too high for them, they might choose not to work harder for the targeted incentive. Those working in support functions whose performance is less measurable or tied with sales outstanding tend to be less inspired to shift their working behavior or stimulate their performance according to the goal of the program (Severt and Breiter, 2010). Nevertheless, all positions in all organizations need to be motivated to keep their working behavior and style in alignment with the organizational goals and desirable culture.

There are four considerations from the work of Severt and Brieter (2010) for host organizations and Incentive Travel planners when setting goals for trips and awarding earnings, these include 1) Evaluability, 2) Separability, 3) Justifiability, and 4) Social Reinforcement (Severt and Breiter, 2010). Evaluability refers to the monetary value of the trip and the award to be gained from work behavior and performance that are changed desirably. Separability refers to the need to separate annual performance appraisal from the incentive program awards. Justifiability refers to the program that inspires the sense of fairness to motivate participants and employees to work towards the goals. Lastly, social reinforcement refers to the value of social recognition to be acquired by earners in achieving such unconventional goals.

The significance of Incentive Travel is affected to earners and participants by means of achievement and satisfaction. The effect of Incentive Travel is considerably varied among participants. (Severt and Breiter, 2010). Earliest earners among the participants tend to be the one who express the delight from the program after earning the reward. They usually feel that they are firmly identified with the top performing clan due to the opportunities to be personally recognized by the top management. Later earners, on the contrary, motivate themselves by directing their work goals towards gaining reputation and status as a high performance member of the organization. The rest of the organization regards both groups of earners as a role model whose working behavior and performances are exemplary. Incentive Travel programs are designed to encourage employees to be goal-oriented,and inspired by the

top performers of the program, in order to construct a corporate culture using the effects of a reference group and peer pressure. (Severt and Breiter, 2010; Incentive Travel Council and SITE International, http://www.traveldailynews.com, 17 January 2013; Ricci and Holland, 1992; Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010). In conclusion, it is clear that Incentive Travel yields an immense benefit to organizations including the penetration growth as a result of higher organizational effectiveness and corporate culture. Nonetheless, there are some critical points to be aware of when employing Incentive Travel as a managerial tool.

Incentive Travel programs are usually concerned with activities that are both attractive to participants and fantasy experiences. The programs comprise of leisure activities and a number of other travel components in which participants and top management of the host organization can take part in -providing a sense of achievement and companionship, as well as receiving the next period's vision of the top management(Severt and Breiter, 2010; Ricci and Holland, 1992; Shinew and Backman, 1995).

Therefore, Incentive Travel normally involves a myriad of travel components and recreational activities. Participants in Incentive Travels benefit from the program differently depending on the level of their involvement and value created by the program. They range from site selection companies, destination management companies, hotels, airlines, ground transportation companies, travel wholesalers and travel retainers (Ricci and Holland, 1992; Severt and Breiter, 2010). For some of the businesses such as incentive house and site selection companies, Incentive Travel accounts for as much as 95% of their business. Others also admit that the Incentive Travel is a lucrative and high margin market (Severt and Breiter, 2010). In conclusion, Incentive Travel is a pivotal market for the hospitality industry due to the demand for luxurious and other additional recreational activities. As in the case of this present study, the focal attention is paid to the performance of sales executives of destination marketing companies- DMC in Thailand.

2.1.4 Incentive Travel Market

During the 1960s, Incentive Travel first emerged in the tourism arena in the USA in order to encourage the sales force and distributors' efforts according to the company's business goals (Ricci and Holland, 1992). Consequently, North America is mainly the source market and Europe has always been the appealing destination for American participants probably owing to cultural proximity(Ricci and Holland, 1992, Pizam, 2000). European markets became the second largest segment in the Incentive market, while Asia is their most desirable host destination. Asian companies, especially the multinational firms from Japan and Korea, adopted Incentive Travel as a motivational tool, but participants from these countries usually regarded Incentive

Travel as a reward for top performers, not as motivational tools. As a result, Asian organizations usually designed the program to mainly encompass recreational activities as their actual purpose was to reward and recognize industrious employees for their end-of-year achievement (Ricci and Holland, 1992). It can also be assumed that incentive houses and other related businesses should adopt different approaches when designing incentive travel programs for firms from different continents. Geographic segmentation, which is shrinking in its relevance to business to customer tourism markets, seems to be applicable in this case.

Incentive Travel programs are applied as managerial tools for American and European companies because they not only motivate employees, but also build desired corporate cultures, creating a shared vision towards organizational successes, retaining high performing employees. The program of Incentive Travel normally involves activities and programs, which reinforce earners' and participants sense of identity, whereas group activities create a sense of affiliation between top management and among high performing peers. With these activities, corporate cultures can be strengthened, while companies' vision can be better embedded in the minds of top performers. Besides, a network of highly devoted employees and distributors can be created (Severt and Breiter, 2010; Ricci and Holland, 1992). The activities and programs included in American and European Incentive trips are high value components especially gala nights that bestow awards for the top achievers. Incentive Travel businesses can, actually, grow the value of their Asian corporate clients by providing the right mindset when proposing the program. One of the ways to create a shift in mindset is through the recommendation of a business consultant, through which Incentive Travels need to find ways to work on such a direction.

As mentioned earlier, it is important that there is a shift in the mindset of Asian companies towards Incentive Travel, from rewarding high performing employees through free trips to using incentive managerial tools that would lead to an increased productivity throughout the whole organization. This mindset shift towards Incentive Travel would not only create value-per-project of incentive travel in Asian markets, but also higher effectiveness of the project in generating higher performance throughout the whole organization and laying the foundations for a more productive culture. Incentive Travel that includes group activities and "trophy" events should, therefore, be more beneficial to all stakeholder groups. Hence a new approach to creating a sales dialogue between Incentive Travel businesses and their corporate clients.

According to Ricci and Holland (1992), the industries namely automotive, pharmaceutical, cosmetics, financial, automotive parts, and computer/electronic industries are main target markets for Incentive Travel, as these businesses tend to

stimulate the sales penetration efforts of their sales forces through motivation and team building. As a result, Incentive Travel tends to come from sales and finance whose targeted performance can be concretely measured. The use of Incentive Travel as a motivational tool for the whole organization might be problematic for other departments where job performance cannot be objectively measured. While motivating the sales or financial control department, incentive travel might demotivate administrative staff with supporting roles. Host organizations and incentive program designers must be aware of this potential problem. Alternatively, incentive travel businesses can grow the value of the clients' original request to cover the whole organization by providing measurable targets for support function employees as well. This is mainly consistent with the new approach to the strategic role of support functions (Soderquist et al., 2010).

Regarding Incentive Travel service providers, there are five types of Incentive companies interactively functioning in the market according to Ricci and Holland (1992), these companies include:

1) Full incentive marketing companies or companies that handle promotional materials, travel administration, and merchandise fulfillment of the whole Incentive Travel program

2) Full service incentive house or companies that specialize on Incentive Travel arrangement, but they are not involved with rewarding merchandising.

3) Incentive Travel fulfillment houses are those who arrange incentive trips while helping the host organization promote the incentive program to the targeted employees or distributors.

4) Travel agencies with an incentive division where the agency specializes in Incentive Travel arrangements, but have no involvement with promoting the incentive schemes to the targeted participants. These players might include both destination selection companies and destination management companies.

5) Retail travel agencies and other service providers who sell certain travel components and activity arrangement services that complete the programs according to the requirement of the host organization.

Successful Incentive Travel business operators recognize that their roles and responsibilities extended well beyond trip planning, but also appreciate that the trip design and arrangement must induce a sense of reward and recognition, which are the two key success factors of an incentive travel program (Incentive Travel Council and SITE International, http://www.traveldailynews.com, 17 January 2013; Ricci and Holland, 1992). Seeing the lucrativeness nature of the Incentive Travel business, travel agencies and tour operators have tried to expand their operations towards the market without a thorough understanding and expertise in the business. Such a phenomenon explained why there are only few Incentive Travel businesses that can claim to be

truly successful. As for the present study, the main focus will be on Destination Management Companies- DMCs, which act as host destinations for the majority of Incentive Travel businesses in Thailand.

Incentive program participants tend to rate their satisfaction higher if such programs combine well the vacation and professional aspects that suit their tastes and preferences, opportunities for self-development, network creation opportunities among high performing peers, and recognition from top management(Shinew and Backman, 1995). According to the study by Shinew and Backman (1995), effective Incentive Travel programs could significantly alter employees and distributors' behavior towards desirable directions as determined by the employers or host organizations. However, the extent to which trip attributes can really alter their behavior in a more desirable way depends on the cash and merchandise awards which are separated from the trip attributes(Shinew and Backman, 1995). As a consequence, it can be assumed that both the awards themselves and the extraordinary trip arrangement, which includes group activities to initiate companionship among peers, and with top management are indispensable for a successful Incentive Travel program. As alluded to above, it is evident that Incentive Travel coordinators need not only to be creative in program designing , but also in designing rewards that help host organizations achieve their objectives.

In doing so, they should be both creative, and thorough when exploring activities, venues, and other trip components that help the project create most memorable experience to participants. In addition, Incentive Travel operators should consider balancing the conflict between their clients' needs and budgeting concerns. A good incentive travel program must provide participants with memorable experiences about the trip and the awards earned while the total budget is being well controlled according to the constraints of host organizations.

This is the conflicting points-of-interest that Incentive Travel operators should be concerned with, as well as the exotic, luxurious and value of activities.

Additionally, there is another aspect that Incentive Travel, which coordinators should be concerned with. They should act in the role of consultant by suggesting solutions to potential problems that clients might have when designing and implementing the program. The unconventionality of activities during the trip is one thing that Incentive Travel operators should be aware of and utilise as up-selling and cross-selling opportunities. As the program implementation might incur additional costs that cannot be formally stated in written proposal, Incentive Travel coordinators must be skillful enough in explaining and justifying the items and tactfully integrate them somewhere with other items.

Knowledge about both "de jure" and "de facto" practices of the venue and activities coordination allows superior performance of Incentive Travel personnel. Consultation and solutions not only create trust and assurance for clients to help close sales for the project, but also an opportunity to up-sell, and cross-sell for a higher value project. Thus, Incentive Travel coordinators need not only to possess knowledge about potential venues and activities to be included in the project, but also a thorough understanding of clients' needs and behaviors and further translate them into additional revenue potential for the business.

As the major objective of this study is to increase the productivity of the Thai Incentive Travel Industry through the heightening of its human capital productivity, critical success factors of incentive travel businesses should, consequently, be discussed to see if employees correctly contribute to such factors through their higher productivity.

2.1.5   Critical success factor and factors affecting Incentive Travel

As discussed earlier, critical success factors of an Incentive Travel project is to create a sense of "honor" or the sense of "recognition" or "comradeship" and network among top performers of the organization, as well as a sense of reward through exotic and "wow creating" trips (Incentive Travel Council and SITE International, http://www.traveldailynews.com, 17 January 2013; Severt and Breiter, 2010). It should not be regarded as merely a travel reward for employees or distributors achieving extraordinary goals (Shinew and Backman, 1995). Sales executives or coordinators in this industry should consider the integration of recreational activities seamlessly with team building and business conferences to share the vision, best practices of working, and a closer relationship with high rank management members of the organization (Severt and Breiter, 2010). In addition, the reward for program earners should be attractive enough (recommended to be cash or merchandise awards) (Shinew and Backman, 1995) to induce behavioral changes. The prospects for Incentive Travel program design tend to be more and more sophisticated as the media reception habits and variation of the society enlarge. The programs that used to appeal to everybody may not be desirable anymore.

Research on the need and the inclusion of a variety of activities for people with different tastes and preferences to choose might be the case when designing the program in the present environment(Incentive Travel Council and SITE International, 2012; Kotler and Lane, 2009). This direction can also be known as mass-customization that can help create higher attractiveness and, hence, satisfaction for participants through the sense of control (Kotler and Lane, 2009, Lovelock et al., 2001). A shift in mindset of Incentive Travel coordinators is crucial for the success of

the business in the new landscape. However, the host organization must always be concerned with not only the designing and operating objectives during the Incentive Travel program, but also realize that budget utilization must be efficient and reasonable. Based on the discussion, critical success factors of an Incentive Travel businesses can be concluded as follows;

1) Ability to capture and understand host organizations' needs and objectives and further analyze and translate such needs into actual activities.

2) Ability to design and create fantastic and unconventional trips appealing to participants with diverse preferences and tastes.

3) Ability to design team building and other team activities that enhance camaraderie and networking among high performers.

4) Ability to include conferences that allow opportunities for participants to learn about the new direction of the company, new goals of the company, as well as the exchanging of ideas and working tips among participants

5) Ability of the coordinators and planners to go beyond the role of suppliers and perform the role of consultant and advisors to clients in order to create the program that meets with the primal objective as well as temporal and monetary constraints of the host organization.

As for a destination to be successful in attracting Incentive Travel groups, there must be some factors that give them more advantages over other destinations. The following are attributes that lend advantages to destinations in attracting incentive travel projects(Xiang and Formica, 2007);

1) High standard hotel and accommodation infrastructure.
2) Price competitiveness of the travel components.
3) Security and safety level of the destination.
4) The attractiveness of the destination from top management's perspective.
5) Information Communication Technology (ICT) advancement level of a destination.

As mentioned earlier, Incentive Travel programs usually include luxurious or high standard trip components, yet there is a budgetary concern from host destinations. Destinations that are more successful in attracting incentive travel projects need to have high standard of travel infrastructure and all hospitality facilities with competitive prices. Apart from it's facilities, the destination itself must be aesthetically impressive. Incentive Travel is another form of corporate outing which usually includes high performers or top distributors of host organizations. Security and safety factors of the destinations are a top priority of both incentive houses and host organizations. Lastly, Incentive Travel usually deals with conferences and team building which necessitate communication back and forth between the destination and

the headquarters, therefore the level of ICT advancement at the destination is one of the key success factors.

Incentive Travel organizers and host organizations expect a high quality, and exotic product yet the price ranges of the trip components must be within the budget range set by the host organizations. Thailand may be advantageous in this respect compared to other destinations of the same socio-economic development level. This is owing to the competitive prices and high quality of the travel components rated in 2011 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index and the country brand rated by Future Brand Index 2012 (Future Brand Index, 2011; Blanke and Chiesa, 2011). According to Xiang and Formica (2007).Thailand inarguably a competitive destination for Incentive Travel business, as it offers value for money for the host organizations. However, safety and security issues seem to be the major problem for Thailand's attractiveness due to political instability which makes the country prone to coup d'états and the potential spread of terrorist attacks from southern provinces to Bangkok and other major cities (Business Monitor International, 2012). Besides, the liberalization of Information Communications Technology or ICT infrastructure and accessibility is a prime importance of a country aiming to excel itself in Incentive Travel market. The advancement and accessibility of ICT is very important for an effective Incentive Travel program, since the program usually contains team building activities, conferences, and other business or task related activities that require for connectivity among participants, incentive houses, and even the host organizations' headquarters.

The success of the Incentive Travel itself is also affected by external and internal forces as well. These forces include 1) Political economic factors 2) Socio-cultural factors 3) Technological Factors and 4) The change of management of the host organization itself (Xiang and Formica, 2007). During the economic downturn, companies face higher constraints in terms of profit and loss, and tend to limit its budget utilization by eliminating or minimizing the expenses indirectly related to the revenue growth stimulation, including Incentive Travel. Therefore, the spending of big corporations, during an economic downturn, on Incentive Travel vary according to economic conditions. Demographic factors concern mainly the participants' diversity, which planners and host organizations need to be aware of. Different levels of travel savvy, cultural diversity of the workforce, and the uprising of feminism in the workplace make the incentive program design much more complex for host organizations and incentive travel businesses. ICT advancement greatly facilitates the trip design and operation as information can be acquired and transmitted on a real-time basis making the trip presentation and decision making process easier and faster. The internal change of management of host organizations also affects the Incentive Travel arrangement as the belief towards the effectiveness and its resource allocation. Xiang

and Formica (2007) suggest Incentive Travel business operators regard the change in these forces as opportunities to adapt themselves with the demands and constraints of the host organization, while always keeping in mind the objectives of the Incentive Travel program of the host organizations and maximizing the utility of the clients' budget with creativity.

This part of the literature review provided context to the study of the Incentive Travel industry, which is considered practically new for tourism and hospitality scholars. To accurately answer the research questions stated in Chapter One, a parent discipline of the study, competency, will now be discussed.

2.2 COMPETENCY

In the previous section, the MICE industry was discussed in conjunction with its respective sub-industry, Incentive Travel. The research intends to identify a job performance standard for the "Sales Executive" position in the Incentive Travel business. This research aims to will provide a clear criteria for stakeholders' decision making and guidelines for the recruitment, evaluation, improvement, and promotion. Apart from the differences in organizational structures, corporate cultural factors, and job-descriptions also affect the whole position performance standard as they could pose additional concerns regarding the extent to which the competency set could be applied in different contexts. Given the formless and directionless changes that take place in current business environments, human resource managers and managements must consider the competency of an individual which comprises their knowledge, skills, and other individual attributes that can fulfill both present and future job requirements. In contrast to the conventional task-based human resource management, competency-based human resource management offers a higher degree of freedom to the employer organizations as the latter tends to allow versatility of the performance across functional and industrial practices. In other words, competency-based HRM tends to embrace changes better. Competency-based human resource management (HRM) and development (HRD) fosters a competitive environment and organizational efficiency since the approach aligns the human capital planning, development, and management with the industrial forces and the goal of the organization (Chapman and Lovell, 2006). To address the research question stated at the end of Chapter One, the major aim of this research is to identify and develop a competency set required in job incumbents and job candidates of Thai Incentive Travel sales executives (otherwise referred to as Incentive Travel coordinators). Consequently, this section deals with the concept of competency, its components, and its use for different human resource purposes.

2.2.1 Competency Defined

The concept of competency is interchangeably applied with the term capability and thus often leads to a confusion of the two concepts (Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell, and Lay, 2001; Rowe, 1995). Nevertheless, this concept is defined by majority of scholars as deep behavior and the enduring abilities of an individual to work on tasks up to a certain required standard set by the organizations and/or the industries (Duad, et al., 2010; Rainsbury, et al., 2001; Soderquist, et al., 2010). However, scholars have not unanimously agreed whether "competency" should focus more on adequacy or superiority of the task performance (Bhatawdekarand Bhatawdekar, 2012; Purdue, Ninemeier, and Woods, 2002). When approaching the concept, competency should be divided into inherent aspects such as motivation, willingness, attitudes, and individual personality traits, while other competencies can be formed both based on internal job training, and external training programs (Purdue, et al., 2002). Therefore, individuals with certain inherent competencies tend to outperform their peers in several tasks that require such competencies as precursor qualities for task mastery.

Competency is a concept that can be used both at individual and organizational levels(Holton III et al., 2008). Organizational competency is interchangeably used with organizational competitiveness, which is synergistically accumulated from individuals' competencies (Baum, 2008, Bhatawdekar and Bhatawdekar, 2012, Holton III et al., 2008). These accumulated competencies help firms distinguish themselves from rivals in a meaningful and sustainable way (Holton III, et al., 2008; Kalargyrouand Woods, 2011; Melaia, Abratt, and Bick, 2008; Soderquist, et al., 2010). The certifying body or professional associations and educational institutions have applied competency as the certified basis for evaluating a persons' knowledge, skills, ethical considerations, attributes, and intellectualities against particular required standards(Koenigsfeld et al., 2011). These competencies must also be updated and verified in regular intervals (Koenigsfeld, Perdue, Youn, and Woods, 2011). The competency application in the practical world normally concerns the models and techniques which are required to be modified according to particular organizational contexts (Langdon and Marrelli, 2002).

The above two paragraphs examined the concept of competency. However there are particular characteristics of the concept that should also be discussed. Firstly, competency guides the evaluation of employees, as individuals and constituents to organizational competitiveness. Furthermore in the workplace context employees are evaluated in regards to whether they have contributed to the predetermined goals and strategies. This evaluation contains both tangible and intangible parts. The tangible parts, which can be observed, are supported by the unobservable intangibles such as inherent qualities of individuals, personality traits, attitudes, and ethical values. It can, therefore, be argued that developable competencies are, in part, supported by inherent

competencies. An individual's knowledge, skills, and multiple intelligence in using such knowledge in achieving the goals of the organization depend on their respective ascribed qualities.

Secondly, the employees' competency assessment should be based on industrial or organizational standards that are well agreed upon among all stakeholder groups, namely the human resource managers and job supervisors. Moreover, the management should appreciate that the competency sets required in the concerned positions are not permanent due to internal and external changes. Therefore, the competency sets must be constantly updated and re-evaluated in order to confirm that such individuals are apt for such positions.

Thirdly, competency can be expressed differently in different settings and contexts. Thus, organizational and industrial factors, such as cultures, structures, and conditions must be considered in an employee's competency evaluation process. When applying competency for human resources or certification purposes, taking such factors into consideration must develop specific standards and models.

Therefore, the term competency must be defined as a "*set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes that are partially inherent, partially developable required in individuals to satisfactorily or superiorly complete tasks included in the job descriptions of a position according to the performance standards and contexts*". This definition is used as the basis on which arguments about competency are made throughout this particular study.

2.2.2 Elements of Competency

Similar to other concepts in social sciences, there are various elements pertaining to competency that have been identified by different scholars in several different ways depending on their purposes and approach to the studies. Typically, competency as accepted by scholars and practitioners comprises three elements including which stands for knowledge, skills, and attributes (Weber, et al., 2009). Actually, there is an inter-connection among these three elements since, someone with particular attributes tends to obtain or build up the particular skills easier or better when compared to those without such attributes. Stronger levels of certain skills is significant for the specific types of task completion that require certain types of knowledge and vice-versa. Apart from the KSA approach, there are a few other well-accepted approaches to elements of competency.

2.2.2.1 Hard Competencies VS Soft Competencies

Competency can broadly be divided into two types so-called hard

competencies and soft competencies. The former refers to the required technical skills and knowledge necessary for particular task completions, while the latter refers to the interpersonal people or behavioral skills, thinking, and other managerial skills that are required in a successful application of hard competencies (Weber, et al., 2009).

Hard competencies tend to be more simple to develop and are more important for frontline employees while the soft competencies are increasingly required when employees progress professionally towards higher managerial levels (M. R. Weber, et al., 2009). With the relevance of the competency concept to the MICE industry, the hard skill competencies are crucial for an employee to provide services to guests at satisfactory levels as determined by the organization(Testa and Sipe, 2012). In order to better impress guests through service experiences and to retain their loyalty to the firms, the frontline employees are required to have soft competencies as well due to the variety and spontaneous nature of the hospitality products (Testa and Sipe, 2012; Lovelock et al., 2001)It can be argued that the fundamental characteristics of hospitality products necessitate both frontline and supervisory level employees to possess both hard and soft competencies. Front line employees with a higher level of soft competencies are believed to perform better.

As mentioned earlier, it is easier to train hard competencies both on-the-job and off the job. Employers should pay greater attention to applicants and employees' soft competencies than the knowledge and technical skills as well as work experience in the field (Baum, 2008; Testa and Sipe, 2012). Good hospitality workforces must recognize and be sensitive to the needs of customers while keeping up with the ethical and professional standards, always maintaining a professional appearance, while possessing good communication skills. According to Jauhari (2006), positive relationships should be formed and maintained with the trade partners, customers, and colleagues. Hence, soft competencies greatly contribute to the organizational competitiveness and service quality. Since attributes and skills are hard to observe in a short period, particularly during a job interview, it is suggested that human resource decision makers employ the standardized aptitude tests to make sure that the candidates' competencies were consistent with the requirements of such positions (Bhatawdekar and Bhatawdekar, 2012, Jauhari, 2006). Despite the fact that aptitude tests are mostly payable, they are worth purchasing as they can help employers accurately assess candidates' and incumbents' competencies and can be repetitively used over a long period. The concept of competency was deconstructed in this part of the review using soft and hard competencies as two broad categories. Other approaches to competency have also been recognized among scholars and practitioners as well.

2.2.2.2 Know Why, Know How, and Know Whom Competencies

Work place competencies are categorized by other scholars into three

types; know-how, know-why, and know-whom (Cappellenand Janssens, 2008; Defillipiand Arthur, 1994). Know-why competencies referred to the individuals' personal, professional and organizational identifications. Know-why also encompasses the compatibilities between personal characteristics, personal and professional motivations and job requirements(Cappellen and Janssens, 2008). Work motivation and intent to accomplish tasks and duties to the required quality standard demanded by an organization seem to be the most prominent factor in the effective completion of tasks and the goal achievement(Asree et al., 2010; Melaia et al., 2008) . Self-identification with the professions or organizations, and career or personal objectives compatibility also serves as one of the key factors in their efforts and result-oriented attitude; these factors constitute the attribute element of the competency construct (Defillipiand Arthur, 1994). Without know-why competencies, employees tend not to put maximum efforts into performing tasks. This type of competency is, therefore, a prerequisite, to the other two competency types; Know-how, and Know-whom.

Know-how competencies refer to job-related knowledge and skills that are strongly linked to the professional experiences of particular employees. Normally, required know-how competencies are stated as job descriptions of job positions as demanded by the organizations. However, an employee also needs skills and attributes that allow them to be flexible enough to work in diverse and versatile environments, which have become the characteristics of the present-day MICE industry (Cappellen and Janssens, 2008). Therefore, employers and the management should focus on screening and developing knowledge, skills, and attributes that do not only allow employees to perform their tasks as appeared in the job description, but also to cater for potential changes that might occur in the future both at organizational and industrial levels(Koenigsfeld et al., 2011).

Given that they are more simple to observe, MICE employers should focus more on know-whom and know-why competencies than know-how competencies.

Career-related networks reflect the know-whom competencies that can be either the network inside or outside one's working organizations that aid or influence the firm's success. The professional and personal network of employees help to strengthen the competitiveness of the firm. The networks can be used to get things done or obtain pertinent intelligence in numerous regards(Defillipi and Arthur, 1994). For a person to have efficient personal and professional networks beneficial to their careers, industry experience together with interpersonal skills are very much needed (Asree et al., 2010; Riggio, 1986). This competency type is particularly important for positions related to sales and marketing and other positions that require high levels of coordination with third parties, other divisions, and customers(Melaia et al., 2008). Forthe role of the sales executive in the Incentive Travel industry, and any role in the

MICE industry itself, know-whom competencies or networking must be stressed in the candidate selection process. Despite the additional challenges it may bring, job incumbents should be trained with social skills as well.

This approach to competency offers a similar conclusion to the hard and soft competency model in that technical skills and knowledge seem to be less significant in the new global business environment.

2.2.2.3 Business Savvy, People Savvy, and Self-Savvy

Workplace competency as identified by Testa and Sipe (2012) is divided into three elements, including self-savvy, people savvy, and business savvy competencies. Their study identified competencies required by the hospitality workforce with the aim to create service leadership for the organization (Testa and Sipe, 2012). People savvy competencies mainly dealt with the interpersonal skills which enabled the hospitality employees to perform, initiate and undergo appositive, effective interaction with others parties. This interaction incorporated cultural alignment, services expression, interpersonal communication, coachingand training, team orientation, and, networking(Testa and Sipe, 2012). In all fields, interpersonal skills are known for their primal importance especially in the MICE industry. Unfortunately, these skills are often associated with the personal traits that are inherent or ascribed in a person. Most development and formal educational programs have often fallen short in building up such skills(Kay and Rusette, 2000).

Principally, the self-savvy competencies deal with self-concept, an internal locus of control, together with the conscience, discipline, and ethical consideration. This also includes self- development, professionalism, accountability, spirit of optimism, time management, and change management(Testa and Sipe, 2012). With a strong similarity between self-savvy competencies and know-why competencies as discussed in the former section, these competencies were somewhat inherent in a person or required development from early childhood. However, both self and people savvy competencies, which are equivalent to soft competencies, tend to be more difficult to observe and measure. If these competencies did not exist, one could hardly achieve the task completion required by their positions. These competencies seem to be more and more essential when employees climb up the career ladder; thus they should be evaluated and improved for the succession or promotion plan.

Business savvy competencies, on the other hand, relate to skills, planning and the thinking process that facilitates business-wise decision making. Included in these competencies are planning, number wise, systematic thinking,

technical service, strategic decision-making, continuous improvement and a result-oriented attitude. Testa and Sipe, 2012 argued that most competency models in the hospitality and tourism fields over-focus on technical skills and service qualities while overlooking the essence of business part which determine the saliency and the whole business (Jotikasthira and Jotikasthira, 2012; Testa and Sipe, 2012)

This part of the literature review dealt with competency element identification, which guided both the data gathering and interpretation process. Therefore, the argument can be made that the competency elements can be differently identified from different angles: know-how, know-who, know-why competencies, hard versus soft skills, and self-people-business savvy competencies. The general theme that can be found is that most human resources development activities and formal education should not focus only on technical and hard skills, but also nurturing soft skills and other fundamental attributes. The personal attributes related competencies such as, attitude, value, personal traits, and human relations seem to obtain similar recognition both by scholars and practitioners since they directly affect the mastery of hard skills and business knowledge application. However, they seem to be difficult to observe and develop. When using the competency concept to determine a performance standard in the MICE industry, it is imperative to discuss how the competency should be identified and the competency models in the next section.

2.2.3 Competency Models and Competency Identifications

The constructs of "competency" and its components have been explored in the former sections of this review, alluding to the studies of various scholars. Among the studies of competency characteristics were models that guide human resources in recruitment, retention and development. These models are used in direct correlation with a firm's competitive ambitions (Baum, 2008). Therefore, the development of a competency model can be argued to be a part of talent management which mainly constitutes to long-term competitiveness of a firm. The "talent management" term is now interchangeably used with the term "human resource management" as it is more aligned with competitive strategies. However, the term talent connotes a wider scope than skills and knowledge, encompassing emotional aesthetics, analytical skills and informational processing capabilities as well (Baum, 2008). The review in this part began with the competency identification. After, various competency models and the one chosen as pertinent in this study were discussed.

Normally, the downside of the competency identification process and models is that it seems to over emphasize hard competencies while the role of soft competencies and other ascribed attributes is overlooked (Langdon and Marrelli, 2002; Testa and Sipe, 2012). In this study, the development of a competency model must take into account the more crucial role of the know-why, and know-whom

competencies that are a precursor to the know-how competencies in order to ensure excellent application. Despite opposing views of whether competency models should be for adequacy or superiority of performance standard, it is deemed suitable by the researcher to adopt both approaches for competency identification from various levels. This will aid pinpointing a set of skills, knowledge, and attributes required for different levels of performance and the competencies that distinguish top from average performers. The ideal competencies are also addressed to guide the promotion decision. The study of Duad, Ismail, and Omar (2010) applied the Delphi Technique to classify the competencies into two classes so called the threshold competency and differing competency. The former means the essential competencies that a person required in task performing while the latter refers to the factors or characteristics that separate the top performers from the average ones (Duad, et al., 2010). This study will include these two levels of competency while adding the ideal competency as another level to facilitate a training program for MICE industry top performers.

Normally, the competencies required in a job position are associated with the task performance standard being at the expected level, according to the job description, which is the beginning of competency identification process (Chapman and Lovell, 2006; Langdon and Marrelli, 2002). The application of a performance-based approach on job description development, human resource management, career planning, and job appraisal processes tends to be risky and leads to unpredictable results. A common flaw in many job descriptions is that they are vaguely written with arguable loopholes (Langdon and Marrelli, 2002). Very often this predominantly focuses on the technical skills that preoccupy the assumed position, while the soft-skills and personal attributes which are normally disregarded are more difficult to detect during the job interview (Cappellen and Janssens, 2008; Soderquist, et al., 2010). Job description, despite such flaws, seems to be an indispensable starting block in competency identification. According to Soderquist, et al., (2010), the job description analysis usually does not include asks that the firm expects from the job incumbent. The items as mentioned in the job description will be listed and split by the researchers before grouping them in terms of function. Certain questions should also probe what skills and knowledge are required in performing each task. (Madera, 2012). When such questions are asked, the researchers shall adapt the questions in conjunction with the competencies and performance level to be addressed: threshold, differing, and ideal competencies (Duad, et al., 2010). This study in the initial stages would therefore, be accumulated and grouped with job-description. Through the focus group and in-depth interview, each level of the Incentive Travel coordinator or sales executive's expected performance will be identified. Therefore, it is essential to have the competency model to identify on both the standard competencies and the human resource issues supporting the decision. This includes searching, selecting, recruiting, job appraisal, promotion, and plan succession despite the related issues of over-focusing and under-focusing on particular competency types that are not directly associated with the studied

position. (Testa and Sipe, 2012). The incomplete competency model problem results from the data gathering with only one group of informants, who are normally either the top performers, or job incumbents who are assuming such positions. As argued by Langdon and Mareilli (2002), the validity and practicality of the competency model within the organization and industry context results from the imperative of such an interview with various groups of stakeholders. Organizational differences and conditions must be integrated as well into the model (Langdon and Marrelli, 2002; Soderquist, et al., 2010). Employees' skills and performance benchmarking across organizations in similar positions usually yields null results due to a lack of organizational factors during the organization wide brainstorming. This can increase the risk of an inadequate job scope coverage (Langdon and Marrelli, 2002). The findings within this research shall be constantly developed to fit within each condition in the organization and the scope of job description as designed by the management.

In developing the competency model, developers should ensure there is a sufficient, flexible and dynamic model, which account for the unexpected industry conditions and dynamism synonymous with MICE tasks (Baum, 2008). The great competency model characteristics in the hospitality industry as defined by Chapman and Lovell (2006) also includes the MICE industry and hard and soft competency skills, while emphasizing the importance of how well an employee performs according to their job title expectations. The development of the competency model for each position in the organization, however, sis a time-consuming process and involves a myriad of models for whole organization coverage. The decisions are made based on the chosen priority position. Since the front-line employees or entry-level employees have direct contact with the suppliers and customers, it is recommended for them to be a priority inthe competency development. Additionally, the employees with direct contact to customers in service organizations such as MICE, should be assessed on their attitudes, social skills, demeanors, and other attributed qualities during the evaluation in the selection process. The competency model is advised to encompass the generic skills that enable the employees to be flexible in the firm as it required by the management when considering when on-site transferability and career advancement. To confirm the model usability, grading is essential in job assignment, evaluation of performance, and promotion decisions.

The good competency model as contended by Rowe (1995) should assess not only what can be done by the incumbent but also on how they achieve each of the specified tasks in the job description as well as their willingness to adopt some unexpected changes (Rowe, 1995). It seems this point has a high significance, as it is consistent to the modern world business environment where change is a typical new.

As suggested by Hamimi Abdul Razak et al (2012) the organization's

workforce competency is developed by the management in parallel with the competency of individual employees, so that the decisions related to human resources can be made in a knowledgeable fashion. It seems this argument is valid since each employee role is to contribute their knowledge, skills, and work effort toward the long-term competitiveness of the organization(Hamimi Abdul Razak et al., 2012).

The competency model as developed by Langdon and Marrelli (2002) incorporates the organizational comprehensive view so called as – LOW that stands for "Language of Work Model". LOW refers to the performance-based competency models that measures the four key factors to enable individuals to perform in particular positions including the attributes and behavior, job standard, human relations, and other department support (Langdon and Marrelli, 2002). In the model analysis, there is, however, a part that is external to each employee's control as supported by another department. Figure 2.2 illustrates the Language of Work Model.
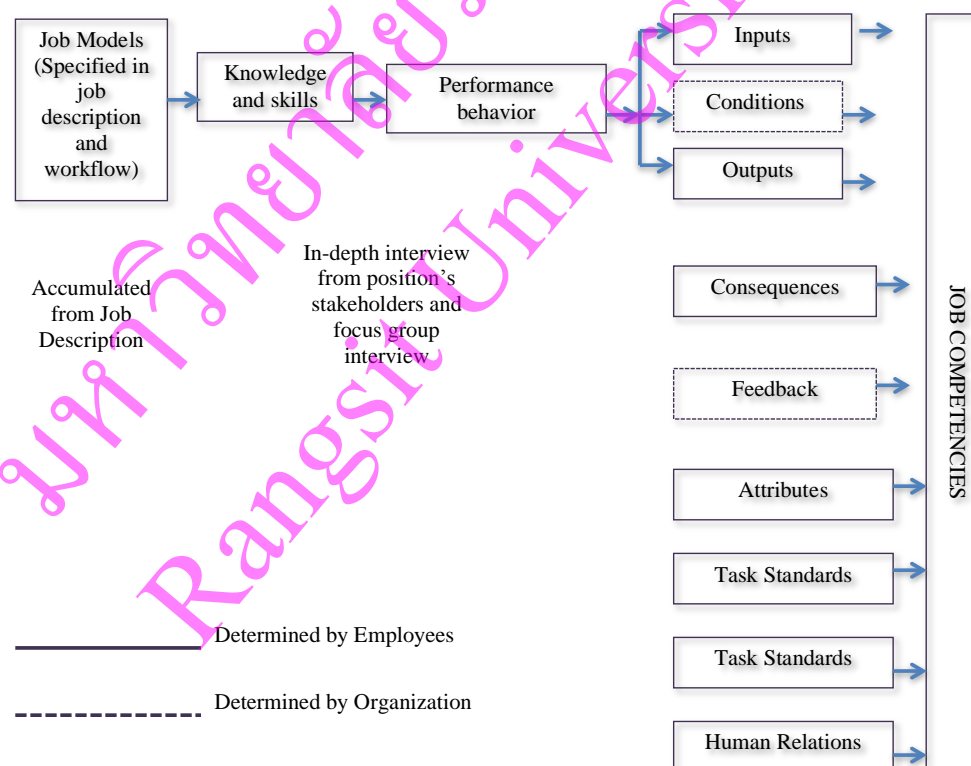
Figure 2.1 Language of work model
Adapted from : Langdon and Marrelli, 2002

According to Jones (2011), the Language of Work model is a competency model that gained wide acceptance in aiding the managers and the firms to improve their organization and respective department performances in a specific time. LOW, is

to consider how the organizational top performers assumed such positions, perform their tasks and fit within the job model(Jones, 2011). The job description analysis alternatively can also be processed to decide the job model as well. Since the required competencies of an Incentive Travel Coordinator shall be identified in the research, the various firms' job description as selected from Thai Exhibition Association and Thailand Incentive and Convention Organization are accumulated, combined, and analyzed to address the job model via grouping together the similar task functions and setting the logical sequence to form the guidelines for data collection. Table 2.1 illustrates the job description of an Incentive Travel Coordinator.

Table 2.1 Job Description of Incentive Travel Coordinator

Areas of responsibility	Job Description
Sales and Marketing	Provide advice and assistances to sales team members
	Follow-up and evaluate customer satisfaction after the event
	Approach/ coordinate/ undertake sales project from the beginning to the end of the project
	Meet with key potential customers to receive a brief about the project details
	Respond to business calls on the telephone and other sources
	Survey new business opportunities
	Follow up with unclosed sales and negotiate the best deal
	Cross-sell/ up-sell where possible and appropriate
	Prepare bidding proposal
	Coordinate and follow-up the bidding procedures
	Assist the site inspection and report to Sales
	Design the program by aiming for excellence in experience and quality of service – price is a secondary issue
Operations	Search, acquire information and specification about services needed by customers from 3rd party suppliers
	Develop action plan for the project
	Once the project is finalized, pass the file to operations
	Arrange meetings with operation department together with Sales

Table 2.1 Job Description of Incentive Travel Coordinator (cont.)

Areas of responsibility	Job Description
	Coordinate the project from beginning to end while paying extra attention-to-detail to ensure profitability and firm's reputation
	Coordinate with venues about electrical structure of the venue and HAVC for venue arrangement
	Co-develop the action plan and timeline of the function throughout the process and coordinate with customers and operations
	Verify action plan with customers and communicate to Operations in case of change
Operations	Verify the readiness of the venues and all the services included in the project
	Check and verify for adjustment for future events
Human Resource	Maintain highest standard of professionalism, ethics, and attitude towards guests
	Maintain highest standard of professionalism, ethics, and attitude towards hotel clients
Finance and budget	Check and verify the price list from outside suppliers
	Verify bills and approve payment
	Communicate the cost and details to clients and relevant parties within the organization
	Follow up payment from clients according to the contracts and policies
Administrative	Prepare breakdown quotation according to the procedures
	Pay extra attention to detail about all documents proposed to customers
	Rank and riles
	Carefully, meticulously, and prepare documents about each project for the operation department to follow

Considering LOW components as shown in Figure 2.1, we can make two inferences namely, the employees, themselves cannot perform their full potential competencies with no organizational and management facilitation. Second, the model reflected components covers both the hard and soft competencies that can also be separated into skills, knowledge, and attributes.

In the first notion, the human resource department and the management shall ensure that the structure, culture, and policies of the firm are aligned with the strategies and surrounding environment (Jain and Haley, 2009). Without the organizational constructive restructuring and good management, it is impossible for the firm to maximise their employees' potential competencies at the most advantageous level. In fact, the firm shall treat their talents like in-house customers to attract and retain them with the firm for a long period of time to maximize the market share and productivity. Figure 2.3 presents the relationship between customer and employee satisfactions and profitability.
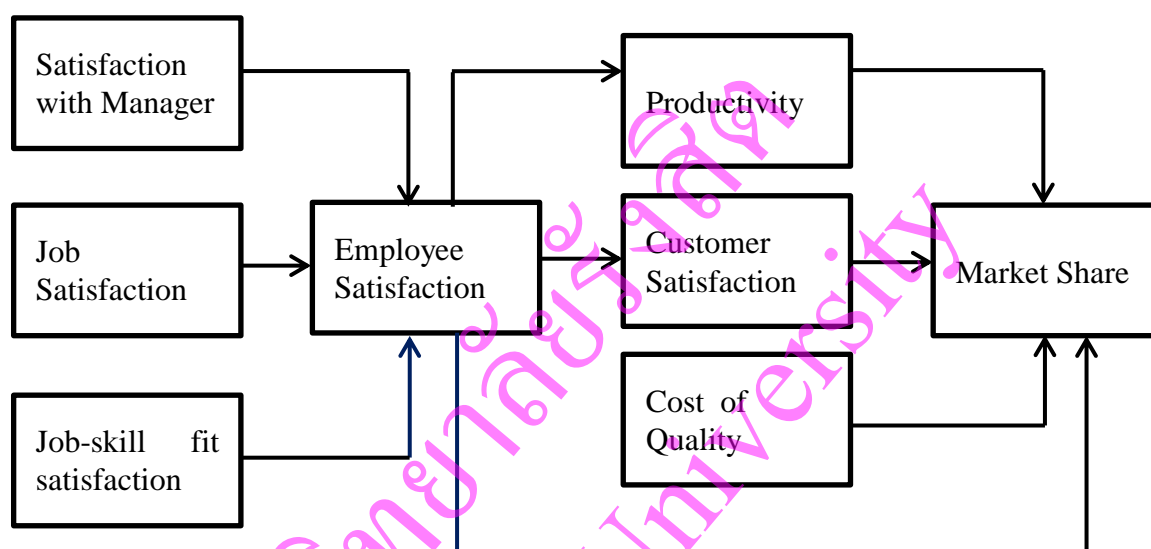
Figure 2.2   Relationships between market share, customer satisfaction,
and employee satisfaction
From : Jauhari, 2006

Figure 2.2 presents the significance of human resources policies for the incumbent, candidate job-fit characteristics and the additional factors in the organization. These factors assist the firm in boosting its capability to satisfy its customers during quality cost reduction, which can further contribute towards an increase in market share. Job-fit satisfaction can be a consequence of one's competencies that match with the job requirements which are pertinent to competencies as possessed by one, in particular the soft competencies. According to Jauhari (2006), applying the competency-based approach in human resources management, whose role is to match the candidates and incumbents' competencies with the job requirements can lead to the higher profitability and market share.

In reference to Figure 2.1, LOW is adopted by this study as the key study framework beginning with job models in the Incentive Travel industry forconventional task identification in anticipation of their coordinator performing at three different levels: threshold (candidate screening), differing (job appraisal with the incumbents

and the required training program for the employees at their entry level), and ideal (a training program for top performers), jointly with their knowledge, skills, and competencies respectively.

In order to confirm that the identified competencies are comprehensive enough, the expectation data of the positional stakeholders, related to personal performance, will be collected. The informant groups consist of the incumbents, colleagues from other functions, and their immediate supervisors, as well as the suppliers, and customers.

2.3 OVERVIEW AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

Paradigm is actually a set of assumptions that one bases his/ her beliefs and logics on. Such an action also guide our actions, thought, inquiry method, prove things to be true or false (Guba and Lincoln, 1991; Neuman, 2006). In the scientific community, three major paradigms are identified namely positivist, post-positivist, and critical paradigms (Guba and Lincoln, 1991).

2.3.1 Positivist Paradigm

Positivist paradigm posits that there is only one single form of reality which explains the relationship of actors and forces which are universal across contexts. This paradigm is borrowed the logic of natural science and explains things from cause-effect relationship (Guba and Lincoln, 1991; Neuman, 2006; Davis, 2005). Therefore, researchers believe that positivism tend to borrow from the laws of nature and causal relationships to explain social phenomena across time, places and contexts by assuming that humans are rational decision agents, whoreact to the external forces.

The positivists, as for the epistemology, tend to approach on the interested event with the dualist objective epistemology (Guba and Lincoln 1991) where social phenomena remains distant from the researchers to censor their own view from the studied situation as they aim to explain the reality "as it is." The pre-existed theories adopted to capture the situation, at least were formed with the grounded value.

Positivist researchers conduct research in quantitative methodology by testing in order to find an absolute relationship of constructs according to the previously existed theories relevant to the research topic. According to positivists, there are no such things as absolute reality as fact can always be proved wrong in different data collection. Something can always be added to or deleted from the previous theories.

The ability to generalize findings is another key to positivist research. Therefore, the finding must be simple and parsimonious enough to explain similar social phenomena across settings. Future behavior or phenomenon is predicted based

on the present findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1991). With a cause-effect relationship, positivist researchers normally find the relationship of variables by categorizing them into two broad categories namely dependent and independent variables.

This paradigm is criticized for being too simplified and not taking into account situational factors and complexities of human thoughts.

2.3.2 Post-Positivist Paradigm

Alternatively, the post-positivist paradigm is known as the constructivist or interpretative paradigm. This paradigm posits that social reality relies on the way people assign the meaning to things around them, thus, one event can be explained differently depending on subjective interpretation; creating a multitude of social realities. Apart from the multiple realities, the holders of an interpretative paradigm sense that the behavior of humans is infinitely complex since it is derived from many underlying factors. Therefore, the theory describes situations as multifaceted and crossways, never straight-forward.

According to Neuman (2006), personal reasons or motives are strongly emphasized by Weber's "Verstehen" as the underlying factors in human's feelings, which is the specific behavior. Interpretative ontology emphasizes the complexity in the human behavior and constructions of meaning according to the specific event insiders – relativist ontology (Guba and Lincoln 1991). The social phenomenon as described by the relativist ontology is the interaction between things and actors in a specific environment, which is a very specific context. Here, the context where the phenomenon takes place commands supreme significance in the situation. Epistemological concern of constructivist paradigm focuses on the inquirer and inquired's interlocking relationship (Guba and Lincoln 1991). The researcher of the constructivist paradigm believed that through the eyes of outsider, one cannot make real understanding on the situation since a person's motive on particular habits may be unable to observe. For the positivist paradigm in other extreme, the constructivists must plunge themselves in the explored event to reach an insight understanding on the phenomenon with a magnificent viewpoint (Neuman 2006).

Therefore, the constructivist researchers are principally concerned with the Hermeneutic methodology that researching things on the profound level to reach to the idiographic sense (Neuman 2006). Considering the great importance of context in post-positivist thought, the qualitative research finding seems so specific and it is hardly appropriate to make further predictions unless the phenomenon would take place with the two most similar objects in the greatly comparable situations.

2.3.3 Critical Paradigm

According to Esterby, Thorpe and Lowe, (1991), quite the same perspective to

the world is held by the critical theory as the constructivist paradigm, where the social reality definition is offered by the particular group member in a specific event. The belief of critical paradigmS is based on the assumption that there is a strong presence of inaccuracy in society which needs to be fixed. The personal value or biases will never be held by the critical researchers' aside the study (Neuman, 2006). In contrast, on both positivism and post-positivism, the critical paradigm has gone beyond merely describing situations, and reveals a shift in the social structure, where conditions are changing in favour of the oppressed people.

Ontological concerns, which are realist-oriented comprise three layers of reality; empirical, real and actual (Bhaskar 1975; cited in Neuman, 2006 : 96). From the causal layer of reality, there could be the structural paradoxes that lead to poor social structure, while understanding on such paradoxes can be the core in critical research. The human being is viewed as the rational agent, whose the social contexts have shaped their decisions. Since there is a strong belief that oppression is suffocating particular social groups, supreme importance is placed by the critical researcher on the emancipatory direction of projects. Though the socially oppressed members may not sense that they are being exploited, the critical researchers remain firm in the belief that social forces blind them and it's the responsibility of the researcher to circulate changes (McMuarray, 2007). At this point, the American action towards the freeing of Iraqis from the Sadam's administration oppression can make sense. This paradigm may be risky in particular events since the researchers might take some risks to adopt their own personal value to capture the external world to their realities.

Epistemological concerns are quite the same as constructivist research, in that the researchers explain about the social phenomenon according to Weber's Verstehen. However, they seek to scale down their research to focus on the underlying social structure which fosters a society of oppression (McMuarray, 2007). Totalism has been adopted; which is the interrelation of various concepts as opposed to understanding a situation in isolation. Therefore, we consider social phenomenon with a broad perspective. It is claimed by the critical research that change will be brought about by moving from theabstract to concrete (Lee, 1990).

The critical researchers adopted the methodologies which are either explanatory or abduction critique with the praxiological concerns and their findings lead to the praxis or something that aids for global change. Critical research principally presents two activities; reconstruction and deconstruction. The essence of social relations is identified in detail and reveals the social structure via dialectic reconstruction and deconstruction (Lee, 1990) through the transformative perspective (Neuman, 2006)

The research discussion on three paradigms; ontology, epistemology, and methodology presents that each of the paradigms possesses its own constructive point; to understand the world by the holders via diverse ways of inquiry. One should not dispute over their holding paradigm's merit as practically their argument is an expression used worldwide held by them and many others.

Two paradigms are adopted in this present study since due to the restriction in a number of theoretical frameworks, which have been empirically formed in the field of competency for the MICE industry. The multitude and complexity of realities in the anticipation of different informants relate to the ten positioned studies. The post-positivism paradigm is firstly adopted to achieve the rich expression on the studied situation. For the positivism paradigm, in the later stages, where the outside reality "as it is" is the paradigm epistemological approach, quantitative studies will be processed in the final stages to ensure a general result throughout the whole industry . Alongside this background, the elements of the three paradigms are concluded in Table 2.2

Table 2.2   Ontology, epistemology, and methodology of three research paradigms

Element	Dominant Paradigm		Alternative Paradigm
	Positivist	Constructivist	Critical
Ontology	Objective and external reality determined by natural mechanisms Investigator and reality are independent	Reality constructed by people (and researchers) No objective 'truth'	Reality shaped by social and other forces Research should emancipate the perceptions of co-researchers and participants
Epistemology	Disinterested scientist ('one-way mirror observer')	Passionate participant	Transformative intellectual within a group
Methodology	Testing theory through survey, experiments, and verification of hypotheses	In-depth unstructured interviews, participant observation, action research, and grounded-theory research	Focus groups, participant observation, and action research

Table 2.2 Ontology, epistemology, and methodology of three research paradigms (Cont.)

Element	Dominant Paradigm		Alternative Paradigm
	Positivist	Constructivist	Critical
Direction of research enquiry	Measurement and analysis of generalisable causal relationships between variables	Development of knowledge about reality that is difficult to apprehend	
Respondents' perspective	Emphasis on outsider perspective and being distant from data	Emphasis on 'insider's' perspective and being part of the research process	
Data-collection orientation	Outcome/verification oriented	Process/discovery oriented	

Source: Adapted from (Neuman, 2006)

2.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

2.4.1 Definition and types of research design

A research design means the 'blueprint' or the structure which presents the procedural details to be confirmed in the research project in order to gain the required information (Davis, 2005; Maholtra, 1999). A research design involves: (i) identifying the required information in the research question addressing; (ii) the designing of any exploratory/descriptive/ research that was needed prior to process the substantive research; (iii) definition of measurement and constructing techniques (iv) the proper data collection instruments development; (v) sampling issues considerations; and (vi) data analysis planning (Maholtra, 1999). To make decisions on these, usually trade-offs are required with the reliability and validity with regards to the economic and time consequence, andthe limitation and constraints in accessing certain information types (Davis, 2005).

The research designs can be classify two types: (i) exploratory research with the aim of offering general insights and (ii) the conclusive research that intends to help the decision-makers to determine, evaluate and choose the tasks in a given situation) (Maholtra, 1999). Here in this study, both research design types are used.

In the initial phase, exploratory research is adopted by the project, since the

theoretical bodies available limit the authors in confidently forming the instruments to verify or falsify the statement pertained in the hypotheses on such frameworks (Neuman, 2006).

For this conclusive research, the research designs can be additionally subdivided into two minor-groups: (i) descriptive research designs that intend to express about some relevant things in research questions); and (ii) causal research designs that intends to address the existing causal relationships between the variables) (Maholtra, 1999). Initially, the current study has adopted the exploratory research via the approach of in-depth interview and triangulated with the opinion of experts who verify the obtained data at the exploratory stage. The last part of the research is the conclusive description that normally is the part in triangulation (Ezzy, 1999) which are quantitatively conducted via survey.

2.5 SAMPLE DESIGN

This is a mixed-method research project that tends to be dominated by the qualitative approach. As mentioned in the Language of Work Model- LOW as an adopted model, the stakeholders feedback on the studied positions results from the interviews, which grasp the anticipation of job incumbents and things that lead them toward the high performance. The sample selection parameter is associated with the possible informants on the positions studied in four diverse statuses and the job incumbents themselves (Zikmund, 2003). Apart from the incumbents, these four statuses are the colleagues, job supervisor, supplier, and customer respectively. While case study is the key methodological approach in this project, the in-depth, semi-structured interview is applied as the first stage data collection followed by a focus group interview. Now, the "case study" approach is discussed.

2.5.1   Case Studies as the major methodological approach

The case studies as mentioned by Lincoln and Guba (cited in McMuarray, 2006), involve the discussion of problems within specific contexts via close observation on the behavioral pattern. In forming the case studies, normally, the qualitative researchers will review the relevant topics of interests on the existing literatures followed by an interview with the experts to obtain the case insider's perspective. From the secondary researches, the authors use the theoretical model that can be the interview or observation template in the cases of studied. The findings would be researched and the total cycle might be repeated again in order to ensure the model is constructed (Merriam, 1988). It can be argued that normally case studies can combine the process of induction and deduction. In the comparison of cases, the model constructed is used by the authors in the pilot studies based on the similarities and

differences of terms and the differences justification (Merriam, 1988). In the current study, the preliminary theory has been formed as the initial data collection guideline, which is processed via the informant group in-depth interview with as the mentioned parameters in the former paragraph. The aim of the researchers is to explore five various cases as attached to Incentive Travel Coordinator positions as stated in Chapter One. As stated by Merriam (1988), five cases suffice for the requirement to seek the significance according to the inductive approach. There is no intention from the qualitative researchers to generalize their respective research projects findings with population, the case study finding validity is therefore not the amount of cases being studied but the affluence information (Merriam, 1988).

2.6 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

In this study, the authors choose the two data collection; in-depth interview, and group interview, where each method is discussed below.

2.6.1 Interviewing

The in-depth interview's fundamental objective is to make the non-observable concepts explicit within the framework that the researchers determined (Patton, 2002). According to Neuman (2006), in the qualitative research where the multiple realities are persevered, the role is taken by the interviewees as the "tour guide" that direct the interviewers to examine their worlds. The more comfortable the atmosphere and the freer from judgment the interviewees perceive they are, the more accurate and meaningful the information as anticipated in the report. A standardized, open-ended approach is adopted by the author, and the researcher confirms the free and relaxed atmosphere which was formed between the interview sessions (Patton, 2002).

2.6.2 Standardized Open-ended Interview

The interviewers in this approach prepare the questions word-by word to ask verbatim in a pre-determined sequence. Usually, this approach is applied if the interviewers are novices or in case that it can help the multiple interviewers to lessen the variation and the interviewers' bias. The approach was adopted in this project as some of the interviewers were well experienced in the interview. Additionally, each researcher is trained in the art of asking questions and taking control in the interview.

2.6.3 Asking questions

A good interview should include four (4) criteria: being truly open-ended, neutral, and singular and clear (Patton, 2002).

2.6.3.1 Being truly open-ended

Qualitative research aims to achieve the informants' given meaning without any interviewer hint or clues. Absolute freedom should be given to the interviewees while they report information through their own perspectives. Dichotomous questions are seen as inappropriate for open-ended questions, though it is expected by the interviewers to request further elaboration or justification for the answers. Respondents being pressurized into a yes or no answer would restrict the natural flow of conversation and prevent it going deeper as the conversation goes on. Inversion questions can be assumed to direct interviewees towards a response as well. Interviewers shall use interrogative pronouns during the qualitative interview. In this research, all questions are truly the open-ended and further probed by the interviewers.

2.6.3.2 Being Neutral

Interviewers were instructed to use the interpretative paradigm (constructivism) in forming their interview questions. The neutrality of questions is therefore an indispensable part of the qualitative interview. It is implied by the neutrality that the respondents have the independence to report the information without being concerned with what the interview wants/expects to hear (Patton, 2002). Interviewers refrained from giving any signals during the interview session and the language in the questions gave no indication of the interviewee being judged. . Examples that may direct the questions were also avoided while, in the unavoidable circumstances, both positive and negative examples were given by the interviewers on the situations to remain within their neutral position.

2.6.3.3 Being Clear

To achieve the authentic responses, the interviewers should be clear in their questioning. Interviewees also must be clear on what is being asked and this is the crucial part in forming rapport (Patton, 2002). Before drafting the questions for the interview and forming the interview, the interviewers are to research the informant's native language, the terms they use and the pertained concepts on the interesting topics, plus their connotations. These considerations will aid the interviewers in achieving a richer response in their interview about the social realities. (Neuman, 2006). As a post-positivist paradigm reveals the importance of contextual factors, simulation questions assist the respondents in understanding the implied context of the researcher.

The subject matter's prefatory statement and announcement aids the interviewer in knowing what shall be further asked and the significance of those particular questions. It also aids in topics transiting. For the interviewer, it is suggested to make the content brief as reported from interviewees prior to the topic transiting

(summarizing transition) (Patton, 2002). Besides, the prefatory statement also helps in calling the attention of interviewees on the next question, which again, the interviewers must be sure that the unfinished dialogue will not be cut off. Before concluding or transiting into another topic, they shall confirm that the particular point of dialogue has reached maturation.

2.6.3.4   Being Singular

All the qualitative research aims to achieve a richdescription of social reality. The questions to be asked must explore one single point and all of them should only contain the point of interest.

The four criteria are taken into account by the interviewers when asking and forming the questions for the qualitative interview. Asking the truly open-ended and truly neutral questions will give the respondents anenvironment conduciveto reporting their realities in free manner. The singular and apparent questions will allow for the explicit understanding on what is the anticipated answers from the interviewees.

1)   Probing

Patton (2002) stated that probes could be done for the purpose of further detail, clarification, or elaboration. In this study, the in-depth interview sessions seem to be lengthy and consume largeamounts of the informants' time. The informants' answers in the second half of the session seems to fall short and not provide a wholesome description of the average and high performing job incumbents in the Incentive Travel industry. The interviewers were instructed and trained to probe the proper points where the informants' answers in their first response were not obvious. The interviewees were taught to apply both the normal and dialectic probe.

2)   Conducting the Interview

All interviewers were trained to be professional and friendly and create an informal atmosphere in order to form a proper rapport with the informants prior to beginning the questions.

Prior to asking the questions, the study objectives were stated by the interviewers clearly and made obvious that the information to be given would be very useful. As well as being pleasant, the interviewers were instructed to have respect and be good listeners , reflecting through their body language a non-judgmental attitude. (Patton, 2002).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter elaborates the way through which data was collected and analyzed. The three purposes of this chapter are (1) to explain the study's research methodology, (2) to describe sample selection, and (3) to express the application procedure in the instrumental designs and data collection.

3.2 ADOPTED RESEARCH PARADIGM RESEARCH DESIGN

The constructivism paradigm is adopted by the researchers in this study with the aim to achieve a rich and intense description on the job performance expectations of an Incentive Travel coordinator, while describing reasons why things have become as they are(Maholtra, 1999; Neuman, 2006).

Constructivist paradigms contend that there is no absolute reality in social sciences as realities depend on how people attach meaning to the stimuli and situations around them (Guba and Lincoln, 1991). Therefore, one can assume that one situation or phenomenon can be differently interpreted depending on one's social and situational contexts where actors and factors are interrelated and cannot be approached in isolation(W.Lawrance Neuman, 2011). To understand a social phenomenon, researchers using this paradigm have tended to adopt a qualitative research design in order to reach at a comprehensive description of the interested social phenomenon (McMuarray, 2007; Neuman, 2011). Due to the research gap in the area, an inductive approach to the research topic was chosen over a deductive approach due to the insufficiencies of existing theories in the field. A qualitative approach would yield a thick and rich description of how coordinators in the Thai Incentive businesses should perform and reveal the underlying competencies required.

As mentioned in the above paragraph, this study adopted the constructivist paradigm and used a qualitative research design. The research design discusses the nature of information needed to answer the research questions, the objective of research whether the finding is to explore, describe or experiment with the social phenomenon of interest, data collection tools, and plans for data analysis within the time and access constraints (Davis, 2005; Maholtra, 1999).

3.2.1 Identification of Required Data and Research Design

This study aims to explore the expected performance levels with their associated attributes, skills, and knowledge of coordinators in Thai Incentive Travel businesses. The validity of the findings was verified from a panel of experts. Partially, the study adopted the model developed by Langdon and Merelli (2002)called Language of Work (LOW) that is the backward process of competency identification based on the anticipated job performance levels. Later, the attributes, skills, knowledge that underlie the performance levels in question are discussed. However, organizational factors such as organizational culture, working process and input were excluded since the study aimed at identifying competencies at the industry as a whole. Its finding was supposed to serve as guidelines for every business in this sector. To distinguish superior from average performers and to pinpoint the required training for job incumbents, this study selected the study design by Duad, Ismail and Omar (2010) to query on what would be the required competencies (attributes, skills, and knowledge) for an employee of the interested position to perform particular tasks at threshold, differing, and ideal levels. 'Threshold performance level' refers to the minimum acceptable level of performance expected by an organization and other stakeholders. 'Differing level of performance' is the differential quality of task completion that distinguishes top performers from average performers. Additional to the work of Daud, Ismail, and Omar (2010), another level of performance, the ideal level of performance was added. This is to make sure that performance qualities and underlying competencies can be used to support promotion decisions.

It can be asserted, therefore, that the data needed to address the research questions stated in Chapter One is 1) performance levels expected in Thai Incentive Travel Coordinators, and 2) their underlying competencies.

This study is both exploratory and confirmative in design. Due to the limited amount of research available in the field of competencies in Incentive Travel, no available theories and findings can be used as the basis for further study. The finding of the exploratory research was used as the basis for a confirmative study by industry experts. This study is, therefore, of both exploratory and conclusive design.

3.2.2 Sample Design

As earlier mentioned in the above paragraphs; this study is of both exploratory and conclusive research design with the aim to uncover the expected performance levels of Thai Incentive Travel coordinators and their underlying competencies, the data was, consequently, to be collected from as many groups of informants from reliable sources as possible.

Problems with most competency models being used by practitioners are usually the over-focus on technical skills and incomprehensive data collection (Langdon and Marrelli, 2002; Priyadarshini and Dave, 2012). To counter the flaws of most competency models while adopting the LOW model of Langdon and Merielli (2002), the researcher collected data from all groups of stakeholders who have direct interaction with Incentive Travel Coordinators. Informant groups of stakeholders with direct interactions to the studied position can be identified into five groups namely 1) job incumbents, 2) job supervisors, 3) colleagues, 4) suppliers, and 5) customers. Exhibit 3.1 shows the informant groups designated in this study.
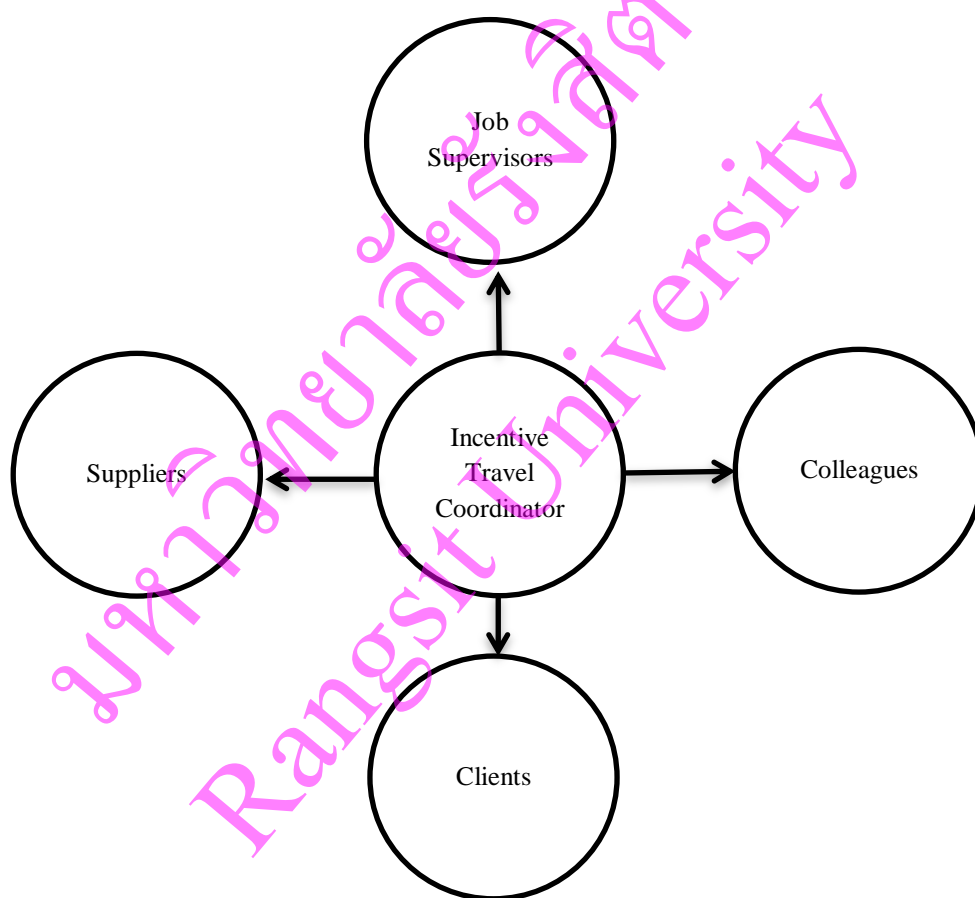
Figure 3.1 Informant Groups of the Study

Figure 3.1 reports the informant groups or stakeholders, who have direct contact with those in the studied position, Incentive Travel Coordinators. Fitting these groups of informants to the adjusted LOW model, which is the immediate discipline as stated at the end of Chapter Two, they serve as feedback providers. To ensure that the competencies identified are applicable to the actual work situations, as many groups as possible were designated to the study (Langdon and Marrelli, 2002).

As for the sample size, there were no concrete criteria for qualitative studies about the sufficiency of sample size. However, the sample size of qualitative studies tend to be much smaller than quantitative studies due to the depth of information required to address qualitative research questions (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011; W.Lawrance Neuman, 2011). As for this study, five case studies were set as the targeted sample size. However, the researcher appreciated well that Incentive Travel industry members are little in number and the industry culture is isolative. Very few active member organizations seemed to be cooperative in disclosing information about their companies. Data saturation was also adopted to indicate the sufficiency of the sample size. Table 3.1 reports the sample size of the original design of this study.

Table 3.1 Sample Size According to the Research Design

Organization	Role	Number
A	Incentive Travel Coordinators	1
	Job Supervisors	1
	Colleague	1
	Suppliers	1
	Clients	1
B	Incentive Travel Coordinators	1
	Job Supervisors	1
	Colleague	1
	Suppliers	1
	Clients	1
C	Incentive Travel Coordinators	1
	Job Supervisors	1
	Colleague	1
	Suppliers	1
	Clients	1
D	Incentive Travel Coordinators	1
	Job Supervisors	1
	Colleague	1
	Suppliers	1
	Clients	1
E	Incentive Travel Coordinators	1
	Job Supervisors	1
	Colleague	1
	Suppliers	1
	Clients	1

According to Table 3.1, a total of 25 participants from five different Incentive Travel businesses in Thailand would be interviewed in the exploratory phase of the study. With this direction, the competency model that would be developed from the research findings could be comprehensive as it would be developed from data collected from all groups of participants with direct interaction with Incentive Travel coordinators.

The findings from in-depth interviews would be used to conduct another phase of the data collection, a group interview. A group interview would be conducted with Incentive Travel industry experts with the aim of confirming or amending the initially collected data from in-depth interview. The results of the group interview would be the final result of the study. A panel of six to eight experts would be recruited for the focus group interview. Groups fewer than six members tend to face difficulties in sustaining discussions while groups larger than eight members tend to limit opportunities of panelists to evenly participate in the discussion (Hennink, et al., 2011; Kitzinger, 1995). Hennink, Hutler, and Bailey (2011) contended that confirmative studies using focus groups should use groups with six members. Therefore, it was deemed preferable to include only six members in the focus group interview.

3.2.3 Sample Recruitment Criteria and Methods

Sample recruitment criteria refers to the identification of the selection criteria of informants to be included in the study which is otherwise known as sample parameter (Hennink, et al., 2011; W.Lawrance Neuman, 2011). As this study is aimed at collecting feedback from as many feedback provider groups as possible in the Incentive Travel industry in Thailand, the parameters of the informants could be identified as;

1) Incentive Travel Professionals actively working in the industry who were working as 1) job incumbents, 2) job supervisors, 3) colleagues, 4) suppliers, and 5) clients.

2) Incentive Travel Professionals working for Thailand Incentive and Convention Association organizations.

The sample design is purely purposive and uses only deductive recruitment criteria due to time and access to the community constraints. As the aim of the study is to identify performance standards and underlying knowledge, skills, and attributes of coordinators in the Thai Incentive Travel industry, only informants with the two aforementioned parameters, who were considered to be "information-rich" were included in this study. This was to safeguard the quality of the collected data.

Participants can be recruited for several objectives including maximum diversity, homogeneity, typical cases, critical cases, and theory development (Hennink, et al., 2011).

Recruitment diversity refers to the participant recruitment approach to reach the sample that covers participants with as many characteristics as possible. Recruitment for homogeneity refers to the participant recruitment approach to ensure that samples contain participants with common characteristics of interest. Recruitment of typical cases refers to the participant recruitment approach to get samples with profiles similar to the whole population. Recruitment for critical cases refers to the participant recruitment approach to get samples that contain participants with extreme qualities in certain characteristics of interest. Finally, recruitment for theory development refers to the participant recruitment approach that ensures that the study collects data from information rich and reliable sources to develop emerging theories.

As for the present study, the findings from the first stage of data collection will be used as the basis for the interview with industry expert panelists. With that in mind, the researcher selected the recruitment strategies, which wouldsatisfy the recruitment objectives.

Five strategies can be used for recruiting participants; namely: 1) using gatekeepers, 2) using formal networks and services, 3) snowball recruitment, 4) advertisement, and 5) research-based recruitment (Hennink, et al., 2011).

Using formal network and services as a strategy for participant recruitment refers to the identification of a network or service that most members of the interested population use or affiliate to. These networks and services can range from local service providers, professional associations, and community centers. Researchers can recruit participants by intercepting cases from the list, or seeking assistance from the networks and service providers to persuade the participations (Davis, 2005; Hennink, et al., 2011). Despite the fact that this study is a part of a large project partially commissioned by the Thailand Incentive and Convention Association- TICA, the most prominent Incentive Travel and convention professional association in Thailand, this strategy is not appropriate for this case due to the isolative and mistrustful cultures of the Thai Incentive Travel industry.

Advertisements are another strategy for participant recruitment. Researchers can place advertisements on local or professional media to seek voluntary participations from informants with interested parameters (Hennink, et al., 2011). The cultural constraints within the industry, as mentioned in the above paragraph, were found to be the major obstacle in using advertisements to recruit participants.

Research-based recruitment is another viable strategy for participant recruitment for longitudinal action research projects (Hennink, et al., 2011). With this recruitment, new groups of participants were added to the research design as the data was collected from original groups of informants as deemed appropriate by the

researchers or suggested by original groups of informants. Due to time limitation and the nature of the research design, an exploratory and descriptive research design, this strategy is not viable for this particular study.

Snowball participant recruitment refers to recruitment strategy that uses social networks of existing groups of participants as the way through which additional participants are reached (Hennink, et al., 2011). This strategy is more suitable for recruitment of participant groups with hard-to-observe parameters. Despite the fact that the parameters of this study are easy to observe, certain participant groups can be extremely hard to access, especially clients and suppliers. This strategy is, therefore, complementarily used with the main strategy in order to reach certain groups of participants.

The last recruitment strategy is the use of gatekeepers, which is the major participant recruitment strategy adopted by this study. Gatekeepers are those with leading roles in the communities or industries with great access to interested groups of participants. They are also highly respected members of the community (Hennink, et al., 2011). Despite potential sampling bias, using gatekeepers is beneficial for researchers as participants would know that the project is well endorsed by the gatekeepers. Besides, gatekeepers can also be a good indication of who should be approached and how. As mentioned above, the Thai incentive travel industry is characterized by isolative and mistrustful cultures, therefore the researchers decided to seek assistance from Thailand Incentive and Convention Association –TICA, the most recognized Incentive Travel and Convention professional association in Thailand as the gatekeeper.

TICA assisted in selecting the organization members and also coordinating the appointments with three primary groups of participants, job incumbents, job supervisors, and colleagues. Furthermore, job supervisors were asked to suggest suppliers and clients for the researchers to interview.

With these combined strategies, the use of a gatekeeper and snowball participant recruitment, it was expected that participants with desired parameters would agree to cooperate in the project.

As for the second phase of data collection, focus group interview was meant to confirm or amend the findings from the first phase of data collection. The focus group collected the data from Incentive Travel industry experts. As being an expert can be subjective and there was no concrete measurement of expertise, the proxy parameters of expert panelists were senior membership to Thailand Incentive and Convention Association- TICA.

The recruitment of experts was conducted with the assistance of the gatekeeper, TICA. A TICA manager was responsible for coordinating with its senior members, board members or their representatives. She was also responsible for fixing the interview appointment.

3.2.4 Data collection tools

As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, this study is of both exploratory and descriptive design, therefore the data collection tool was designed in two phases; in-depth interview, and focus group interview.

The first phase of data collection, in-depth interview, was exploratory by nature due to inexistence of empirical studies, to date, in the field of human resources management in Incentive Travel businesses. Identifying competencies and performance standards of Incentive Travel coordinators in Thailand needed an in-depth interview with the five groups of stakeholders as previously stated in Figure 3.1.

A standardized in-depth interview was chosen as the major data collection administration method in this phase of the study due to limited experience of the researcher in conducting research. To form the interview frame, job descriptions of sales executives or customer service agents from four major players in the Thai Incentive Travel sector selected by TICA were analyzed. Task items were sorted and collapsed as shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Scope of Responsibilities of Incentive Travel coordinators (accumulated from selected organizations by TICA)

Areas of Responsibility	Task Items
Sales and Marketing	Help plan, acquire insights, provide input and help team members in planning and implementing tasks
	Meet with key potential customers to receive brief about the project detail
	Always seek for new potential business opportunities from all possible sources
	Regularly visit and follow-up business opportunities with clients
	Follow-up with unclosed sales and negotiate the best deal
	Update project component information from all possible sources
	Follow-up with unclosed sales and negotiate the best deal
Sales and marketing	Cross-sell/ up-sell where possible and appropriate
	Prepare bidding proposal
	Coordinate and follow-up the bidding procedures
	After confirmation from clients, conduct service level agreement with all concerned
	Assist the site inspection and report to sales
	Design the program by aiming for excellence, experience and quality service – price is a secondary issue
	Search and acquire information and specification about services needed by customers from 3rd party suppliers
Operations	Develop action plan for projects
	Once projects are finalized, pass the file to operation
	Arrange meetings with operation department together with sales
	Coordinate projects from start to finish, while paying extra attention-to-detail in ensuring profitability and the firm's reputation
	Coordinate with venues about the electrical structure of the venue and HAVC for venue arrangement
	Co-develop an action plan and timeline of the function throughout the process
	Coordinate with customers and operations

Table 3.2 Scope of Responsibilities of Incentive Travel coordinators (accumulated
from selected organizations by TICA) (cont.)

Areas of Responsibility	Task Items
	Verify action plan with customers and communicate to operations in case of change
	Verify the readiness of the venues and all the services included in the project
	Check and verify adjustments for future events
	Act according to and verify the operation team's performance in professionalism and ethics.
Finance	Check and verify the price list from outside suppliers
	Solicit bids from supplies
	Verify bills and approve payment
	Follow-up payment from clients according to the contracts and policies
Administrative works	Prepare breakdown of quotations according to the procedures
	Rank and file

Table 3.2 lists task items as specified in the job descriptions of Incentive
Travel coordinators from four major Thai Incentive Travel businesses. Task items
were sorted into functional areas namely marketing, operation, finance, and
administrative works. The task items listed in Table 3.2 are numerous and might pose
problems with duration of the interview session and the flow of conversation in the
interview. Thus the task items analyzed are reduced into a manageable number. Table
3.3 lists the reduced number of task items.

Table 3.3   Reduced task items number for data collection

Areas of Responsibility	Task Items
Marketing	Sales call making
	Receive briefs from clients
	Co-design projects and prepare sales proposals
	Coordinate with suppliers
	Following up unclosed-sales
Operation	Co-plan the operational plan with other departments
	Be the center of coordination throughout project implementation
	Facilitate the site inspection
Finance	Summarize quotation
	Verify third party's services and products
	Follow-up late payment
Administrative works	Document preparation and rank and file

After reducing the number of task items, the list of tasks was checked by the research commissioner committee to see the saliency of the task items to the actual situations. Having agreed on the tasks that a coordinator of Incentive Travel business does in his/her daily working days, the interview questions were formulated as appears in Figure 3.2

Good morning/ Good Afternoon sirs, madams,

I am currently a Master's degree student of the College of Tourism and Hospitality Industry. I am currently undergoing my thesis about identifying the task performances and their underlying competencies of Incentive Travel coordinators. Incentive Travel coordinators are those who are responsible for pitching sales projects for Incentive Travel organizations. The task performances and competencies would be identified in three different levels; namely threshold or minimum acceptable level, differing, and ideal levels. You will be asked about what kind of performance standard you expect a sales executive in Incentive Travel to perform in completing the tasks as well as the knowledge, skills, and other attributes you think underlying them. This project is a part of the working standard manual for MICE coordinators and MICE operation planners commissioned by Convention Promotion Fund, Thailand Incentive and Convention Association, Thai Exhibition Association, Business of Creative and Event Management Association, and Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau. I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. By accepting the interview appointment, we assume your voluntary participation.

The questions included in these interview sessions do not indicate your identity nor your organization. You are free to answer or not to answer any of the questions. If you feel uncomfortable with the questions or the interview, you are free to withdraw from the interview sessions without having to give reasons. After completing this thesis, the study will be available at the Rangsit University library. If you agree, we shall proceed to the interview questions.

1. What is your position?
2. How many years have you worked in this position?
3. The responsibilities of Incentive Travel coordinators are divided into five areas, which are sales and marketing, operations, finance and quotation, human resources management and administration. Researchers will conduct the interview for performances and competencies that are required for Incentive Travel coordinators as follows;

3.1 Task : Marketing
3.1.1. Sales Call Making
3.1.1.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators in your respective organization, how do you think a coordinator in your respective organization should perform when making a sales call?
3.1.1.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?
3.1.1.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

Figure 3.2 Standardized in-depth interview question frames

3.1.1.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.1.2. How do you think high-performing coordinators in your respective organization would make a sales call differently from average performing ones?

3.1.1.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.1.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.1.2.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.1.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should make a sales call?

3.1.1.3.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.1.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.1.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.2. Receiving briefs from clients

3.1.2.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators would perform when receiving briefs from clients?

3.1.2.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.2.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.2.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.2.2. According to you, how do you think a high-performing coordinator in your respective organization would perform when receiving briefs from clients compared to average ones?

3.1.2.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.2.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.2.2.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.2.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should receive briefs from clients?

3.1.2.3.1. What is the knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.2.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.2.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.3. Co-design the project and prepare sales proposals

3.1.3.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators would perform when co-designing project and preparing sales proposals?

3.1.3.1.1. What isthe knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.3.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.3.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.3.2. How do you think high-performing coordinators in your respective organization should perform when co-designing projects and preparing sales proposals compared to average ones?

Figure 3.2 Standardized in-depth interview question frames (Cont.)

3.1.3.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.3.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.3.2.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.3.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when co-designing projects and preparing sales proposals ?

3.1.3.3.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.3.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.3.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.4. Coordinate with suppliers

3.1.4.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators should perform when coordinating with suppliers?

3.1.4.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.4.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.4.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.4.2. According to you, how do you think high-performing coordinators in your respective organization would perform when coordinating with suppliers compared to average ones?

3.1.4.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.4.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.4.2.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.4.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when coordinating with suppliers ?

3.1.4.3.1. What is the knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.4.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.4.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.5. Following up unclosed-sales

3.1.5.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators would perform when following-up unclosed-sales?

3.1.5.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.5.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.5.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.5.2. According to you, how do you think high-performing coordinators in your respective organization would perform when following up un-closed sales compared to average ones?

3.1.5.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.5.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

Figure 3.2 Standardized in-depth interview question frames (Cont.)

3.1.5.2.3. What are the personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.1.5.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when following up un-closed sales?

3.1.5.3.1. What is the knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.1.5.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.1.5.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.2. Task : Operation

3.2.1. Co-plan the operational plan with other departments

3.2.1.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators would perform when co-planning operational plans with others departments?

3.2.1.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.2.1.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.2.1.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.2.1.2. According to you, how do you think high-performing coordinators in your respective organization would perform when co-planning operational plans with other departments compared to average-performing ones?

3.2.1.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.2.1.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.2.1.2.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.2.1.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when co-planning operational plans with other departments ?

3.2.1.3.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.2.1.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.2.1.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.2.2. Be the center of coordination throughout project implementation

3.2.2.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators would perform when being the center of coordination throughout the project implementation?

3.2.2.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.2.2.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.2.2.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.2.2.2. According to you, how do you think high-performing coordinators in your respective organization would perform when being the center of coordination throughout project implementation compared to average-performing ones?

3.2.2.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.2.2.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

Figure 3.2 Standardized in-depth interview question frames (Cont.)

3.2.2.2.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.2.2.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when being the center of coordination throughout the project implementation?

3.2.2.3.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.2.2.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.2.2.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.2.3. Facilitate the site inspection

3.2.3.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators would perform when facilitating the site inspection?

3.2.3.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.2.3.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.2.3.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.2.3.2. How do you think high-performing coordinators in your respective organization should perform when facilitating the site inspection compared to average-performing ones?

3.2.3.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.2.3.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.2.3.2.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.2.3.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when facilitating the site inspection?

3.2.3.3.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.2.3.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.2.3.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.3. Task : Finance

3.3.1. Summarize quotation

3.3.3.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators should perform when summarizing quotation?

3.3.3.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.3.3.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.3.3.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.3.3.2. According to you, how do you think high performing coordinators in your respective organization should perform when summarizing quotations compared to average ones?

3.3.3.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.3.3.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

Figure 3.2 Standardized in-depth interview question frames (Cont.)

3.3.3.2.3. What are the personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.3.3.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when summarizing quotations?

3.3.3.3.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.3.3.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.3.3.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.3.2. Verify third party's services and products

3.3.2.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators should perform when verifying a third party's services and products?

3.3.2.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.3.2.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.3.2.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.3.2.2. According to you, how do you think high-performing coordinators in your respective organization would perform when verifying a third party's services and products compared to average-performing ones?

3.3.2.2.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.3.2.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.3.2.2.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.3.2.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when verifying a third party's services and products?

3.3.2.3.1. What is the knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.3.2.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.3.2.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.3.3. Follow up late payment

3.3.3.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators would perform when following-up late payments?

3.3.3.1.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.3.3.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.3.3.1.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.3.3.2. How do you think ahigh-performing coordinators in your respective organization perform following-up late payment compared to average-performing ones?

3.3.3.2.1. What is the knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.3.3.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.3.3.2.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

Figure 3.2 Standardized in-depth interview question frames (Cont.)

3.3.3.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when following-up late payment?

3.3.3.3.1. What is knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.3.3.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.3.3.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.4. Task : Administrative works

3.4.1. Document preparation, rank and file

3.4.1.1. At the minimum acceptable level of performance of coordinators or sales agents in your organization, how do you think coordinators should perform when doing document preparation, rank and file?

3.4.1.1.1. What is the knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.4.1.1.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.4.1.1.3. What are the personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.4.1.2. How do you think high-performing coordinators in your respective organization would perform document preparation, rank and file compared to average-performing ones?

3.4.1.2.1. What is the knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.4.1.2.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.4.1.2.3. What are the personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

3.4.1.3. Ideally, how do you think a coordinator in your business should perform when doing document preparation, rank and file?

3.4.1.3.1. What is the knowledge that underlies such a performance?

3.4.1.3.2. What are skills that underlie such a performance?

3.4.1.3.3. What are personal attributes that underlie such a performance?

Figure 3.2 Standardized in-depth interview question frames (Cont.)

Figure in 3.2 is the in-depth interview framework for the in-depth interviews which were an exploratory study. By agreeing to meet with the researcher, voluntary participation was assumed. They were informed before the project of the nature of the questions and their rights to withdraw or reserve their information. The researcher then started asking them about the threshold performance of the tasks following the competencies that underlie the performance. The researcher probed for the differing performance and competencies and finally ideal performance and competencies. The interview moved from the first task item to the last. Each of the interview sessions lasted 90 -120 minutes depending on the nature of the information given by the participants.

3.3 ADMINISTRATION OF DATA COLLECTION

3.3.1 In-depth Interview

To ensure the validity of findings when applying the research questions addressed in chapter one, the researcher adopted a professional, friendly approach and created an informal setting, which served as a conducive environment for rapport building. The interviewers mentioned the objectives of the study and made clear the confidentiality of information about to be given before starting to ask the questions. The interviewers were instructed to be respectful and listen to the informants as well as showing the body gestures that conveyed their genuine interest in them. They spoke with on a non-judgmental basis and opinions were reserved to ensure the conversational nature interview sessions (Patton, 2002). In case that the interviewers felt that the informants answers were ambiguous and required for clarification, this would be probed by asking the further questions to acquire more information (Patton, 2002). The findings from the interview were in the recorded form so; it required the author to transcribe it onto paper. Then coding and data interpretation involved a particular theme or idea of code assigning, and then marking the code next to the transcript text that concerns the applicable theme.

3.3.2 Focus Group Interview

Another method for data gathering was applied to validate the acquired results from the focus group interview in the exploratory stage. The focus group interview refers to the qualitative method used to make clear the belief, attitude, and behavior towards specific issues of informants. Normally it is applied in the exploratory research for ideas testing and specific problem solving, and evaluation (Ezzy, 1999). As the objective in this research project is to form a standard of competency to be adopted by organizations. The expert panel for the focus group interview deems it appropriate in finding validation as there is no opinion from a single expert (who normally are the leading firm management in each sub-industry of MICE) to dominate the standard of competency. Focus-group interviews were conducted with informants who were regarded as expert panels as they are professionals and entrepreneurs who have served in the Incentive Travel sub-industry for a long period with high recognition and professional success. The panel comprises of seven members of which three are company owners and four are high rank management in the field of marketing for Incentive Travel businesses in Thailand. They were briefed with the detail of job performance and associated competencies. Focus group moderators read the task and threshold job performance and associated competencies. Panelists were asked to voice their concerns if the performance and competencies reported from the in-depth interview sessions were appropriate. They were encouraged, if they would like, to add or remove items, words, clauses or any other modifications they deemed

necessary. The discussion was moderated by researchers and resulted in changes, cutting, adding, and the modification of both performances and competencies.

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to social science research, when human potential respondents participate in business research they should be treat with respect, justice, integrity and beneficence (Australian Research Council, 2007). The researchers must be cognisant of the fact that it is important to acquire the permission to intrude on the privacy of these people, and obtaining *informed consent* to participate. There are five ethical principles according to Bouma (2000) that researchers should consider in conducting a study, which are presented in this thesis. The explanation of these five principles as the application in the context of this study are described below.

3.4.1 Principle 1: Dignity and respect

Firstly, the ethical principle is that all respondents must be treated with dignity and respect.(Bouma, 2000). The physical and psychological well-being, especially in the participants' privacy, were a primary concern when designing this thesis. Moreover, the questions on the in-depth interview were designed to ensure the preservation of individual identities. As the researcher has discussed this issue with a supervisor, the strategy of reaching potential participants was acquired with assistance of the Thailand Incentive Convention and Association using an ethical approach.

3.4.2 Principle 2: Literature review

The second ethical principle is that research must be based on an extensive literature review controlled by the supervision of qualified and experienced people by (Bouma, 2000). In this thesis, an extensive review of literature from previous studies in all fields related to this research has been taken while being closely supervised by a highly qualified and experienced supervisor. Such a literature review enables a researcher to see how other scholars have dealt with similar problems in the past. Supervision by a qualified and experienced person ensures that the researcher seeks appropriate guidance in dealing with various issues.

3.4.3 Principle 3: Benefits and risks

Thirdly, the ethical principle is that the benefits of the research must justify the risks involved (Bouma, 2000). Considering the benefits, no quantitative study of the identified competencies of an Incentive Travel coordinator has previously been conducted. The potential benefits of the findings were therefore extensive in terms of efficiency in productivity for the Incentive Travel industry.

Considering risk, this research can be described as a the risk in terms of time because the only detriment suffered by participants was the loss of time involved in responding to the in-depth interview questions (Australian Research Council, 2007). However, the questions included in the interview did not require participants to divulge any confidential information about personal or socially sensitive issues.

It was therefore felt that the benefits to be derived from this research justified the level of risk.

3.4.4 Principle 4: Voluntary and informed participation

The fourth ethical principle is that participation must be both informed and voluntary (Bouma, 2000)

Informed consent for the in-depth interview was certified by providing introductory letters outlining the nature of the study. Every essay was made to ensure that participation in the present study was an informed decision (Australian Research Council, 2007). These communications indicated: (i) the identity of the researcher and the university; (ii) the purpose of the research; (iii) the nature of the questions; and (iv) the approximate length of time required to complete the interview.

Regarding *voluntary participation*, the participation of all respondents was totally voluntary; as a result of this there were no constraints of any kind nor were incentives used. In addition, the introductory communications include a clause stating that they were free to withdraw from participation at any time during an interview.

3.4.5 Principle 5: Public and informative research

The fifth ethical principle is that research must be made public and must contribute to the knowledge of the scientific community (Bouma, 2000). Any scholars who are interested in this topic of research will have completely access to this thesis when copies of the completed thesis are made available in the library of Rangsit University.

3.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter has provided the explanation of a qualitative study in this thesis in accordance with the positivist paradigm. This study adopted a constructivist paradigm and used a qualitative research design when outlining the various job performance expectations of Incentive Travel coordinators in Thailand, while describing the reasons why things become as they are. The target population of this research includes those who are: (i) Incentive Travel Professionals actively working in the industry who

were working as job incumbents, job supervisors, colleagues, suppliers, and clients; and (ii) Incentive Travel Professionals working for Thailand Incentive and Convention Association organizations. Judgmental sampling and snowball sampling were chosen as the sampling methods, and an in-depth interview including a focus group interview was chosen as the major method of data collection administration. From the beginning to the end of the design process, ethical principles have been applied in this study.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter results of the data analysis are presented. The data was collected and then processed in response to the research questions outlined in chapter one of this thesis. A total of 14 participants were received from the Incentive Travel professional association (Thailand Incentive and Convention Association-TICA). Initially this chapter provides the profiles of the participants by analyzing their company details and the types of Incentive Travel companies interactively functioning in the market. This is followed by findings and analysis of data, which has been analyzed to identify, describe and explore the job performance and competencies necessary for the position of Incentive Travel sales coordinator. Finally this chapter concludes with a summary

4.2 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS
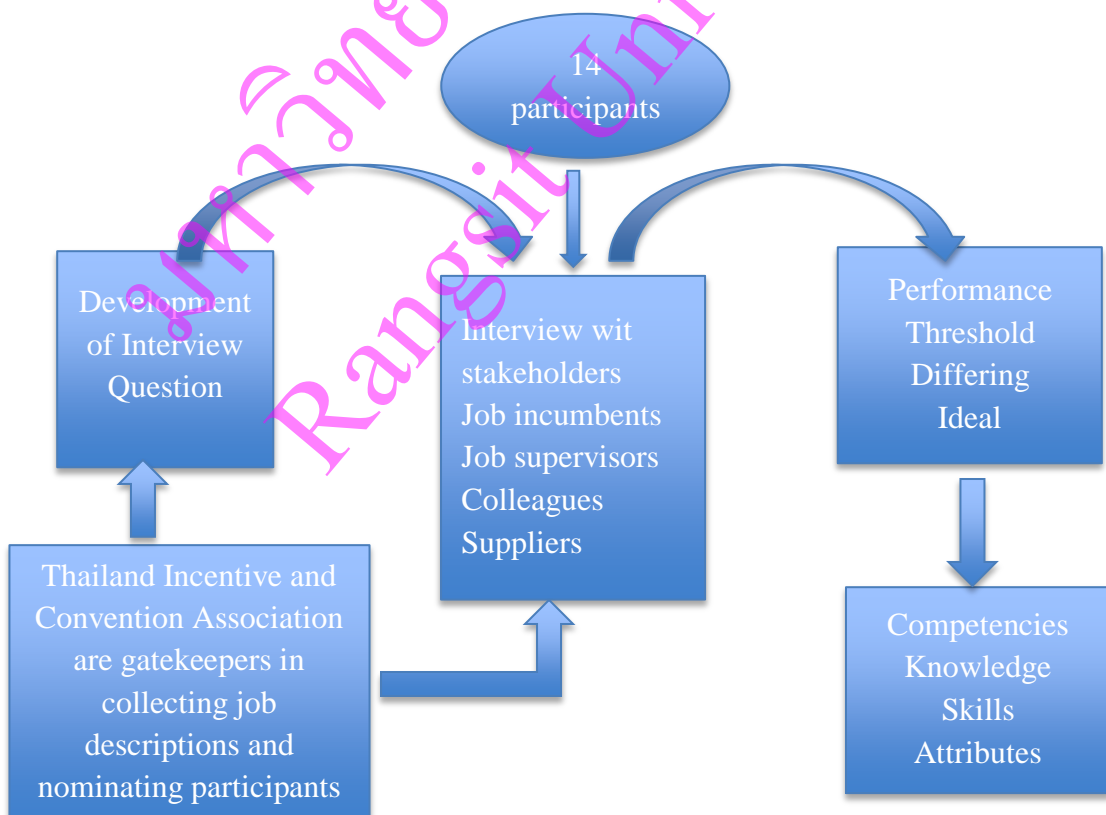
Figure 4.1 Data collection process

The Figure 4.1 shows the data collection process. Based on the job description sent from the Incentive Travel professional associations, the interview questions were formed while the tasks were gathered into five functional areas; sales and marketing, operations, budgeting and financing, human resources (including ethics) and administrative work.

Table 4.1   Incentive Travel Coordinator Job Descriptions

Areas of Responsibilities	Task
Sales and Marketing	Make sales requests for the business development
	Receive the summary
	Project co-designing to bid for the proposal development
	Potential suppliers conditions of prices and service coordination
	Follow up the opening sales
	Facilitate the site inspection of clients
	Brief quotations
Area of responsibilities Operation	Co-plan with the other department colleagues on the operational plans
	Perform as the center of coordination role with suppliers, clients, and colleagues
	Verify the product and service of suppliers for the payment approval
Administration	Coordinate and prepare the required documents with the colleagues both from internal and external, as well as the suppliers, and clients
	Maintain the information and file documents

The Incentive Travel Coordinator job description is illustrated in table 4.1. Here an in-depth interview was formed to ascertain the minimum (threshold performance) of an incumbent in specific task completion (as shown in Tables 4.1) and the required knowledge, skills and attributes (KSA) for this task completion. Furthermore, researchers posed the same questions in relation to the high performers in similar tasks and the KSA that leads them to a superior manner in task completion. Finally, interviewers asked what the ideal KSA-related performance by the incumbent in their task completion would be. Most of the interviewees could not offer ideal competencies and performance while the others were also unable to report on the specific task expectations due to the differences in their respective organizations and the wide spectrum of responsibilities which are required in the roles.

In order to achieve a rich description of the required competencies of the sales executive in Incentive Travel business, the Incentive Travel Professional Association (TICA) selected knowledgeable participants that worked as the gatekeeper of the informants (Hennink et al., 2011; Neuman, 2006). With the approval of TICA, snowball recruitment was also applied to add to the amount of informants. Fourteen participants were recruited and we can group them as follows;

Table 4.2   Group of informants

Group of Informants	Number
Job incumbents	3
Job supervisors	3
Suppliers	3
Colleagues	1
Clients	1

4.2.1   Conducting the Interview

To ensure the validity of the results in relation to the research questions addressed in the first chapter, the researchers dressed professionally and created a friendly, informal setting which was conducive to rapport building with the informants. The interviewers mentioned the objectives of the study and made clear the confidentiality of the information to be given before starting to ask the questions. The interviewers were instructed to be respectful as well as showing the correct body language to convey their genuine interest in them so they could talk on a non-judgmental basis and the opinion were reserved to ensure the interview sessions were conversational in tone (Patton, 2002). In cases where the interviewers felt that the informants' answers were ambiguous and required further clarification, this could be probed by asking the further questions to acquire more information (Patton, 2002). In reference to the informants' information, each session lasted between 150-250 minutes.

4.2.2   Focus Group Interview

Another method for data gathering was applied to validate the acquired results from the focus group interview in the exploratory stage. The focus group interview is a qualitative method that reveals the belief, attitude, and behavior of informants on specific issues. Normally it is applied in the exploratory research for ideas testing and specific problem solving, and evaluation (Ezzy, 1999). As the objective in this research project is to form the standard of competency to be adopted in widespread organizations, the expert panel focus group interview deemed it appropriate that no opinion from a single expert (who are normally the leading firm management in each

sub-industry of MICE) will dominate the standard of competency. If such of items belong to the task, the performance level and competencies will be discussed. Also, members of panel were asked to fill in and delete the items as the report of performances and competencies from the initial targeted participant's in-depth interviews.

The findings from the interview are in recorded form so; it requires the author to transcribe it onto paper. Then coding and data interpretation involves a particular theme or idea of code assigning, and then marking the code next to the transcript text that concerns the applicable theme.

4.2.3 Profile of participants

The fourteen participants recruited for the interview in this thesis are from an Incentive Travel company in Thailand who are affiliated with the Incentive Travel professional association (Thailand Incentive and Convention Association-TICA). There are four companies that were selected by TICA. They are travel agencies including both destination selection companies and destination management companies with an incentive division where the agency specializes in Incentive Travel arrangements, but have no involvement with promoting the incentive schemes to targeted participants.

4.3 PERFORMANCE AND COMPETENCIES OF INCENTIVE TRAVEL COORDINATORS

The term of coordinator should be understood as the position, which refers to junior staff in sales and operation departments who have direct contact with clients and are able to close sales, coordinate with team members and suppliers as well as being center of all information provided to customers as well as to team members.

The first task being focused on is the sales call for making business development. At the threshold level, an Incentive Travel coordinator is expected to acquire and source information about each potential customer before submitting a proposal and a sales follow-up. Additional expectations include being able to communicate with clients through different modes of communication in terms of pinpointing demands as well as being able to present different project components for clients. Incentive Travel coordinators are expected to have sales skills in terms of good rapport-building and possess good memories of what has been done in the past and what has already been discussed. Moreover coordinators need to have creativity in terms of the operational program, know potential project components and their respective project components and their respective strengths and weaknesses, be adaptive to different profiles and customers' characteristics. Incentive Travel coordinators are also expected to have a balance between firm benefits and customer satisfaction, maximize yield in each project and be able to internalize knowledge and skills into their natural working styles and thinking processes.

From the in-depth interview sessions, further requirements for Incentive Travel Coordinators are to make good impression and be able to close sales in the first encounter moreover possess additional knowledge including MICE sub industries.

The second task under scrutiny is "receiving briefs for task and business development". At the threshold level, Incentive Travel coordinators need to be able to read and analyze emails and other correspondence, as well as ask appropriate information from the customers. Moreover, Incentive Travel coordinators must be able to pass complete information to other parties third party colleagues, team members and subcontractors to detect potential problems and achieve good end results.

From the in-depth interview sessions, it can be assumed that Incentive Travel coordinators can anticipate the demands of a project from the initial email. They need coordinators who can design creative and out-of-the-box thinking projects and propose creative solutions to overcome the obstacles and limitation of the venues and equipment. Finally they should be able to develop proposals that are distinctively differentiated with assistance from personal and professional networks at this level.

The third task in question is "co-designing projects". At the threshold level the Incentive Travel Coordinator must be able to coordinate with internal and external team members by brainstorming to end-up with a distinctive, complete and impressive proposal by proposing something creative and new. More than that coordinator must be able to search and select appropriate project components of different product selection with a price range that is within or close to a customers' budget. They should also propose with high value and justify the recommendation from a clients point-of-view. Finally they should develop project proposals according to the format specified by the company and submit them within or before the deadline.

The fourth task is "coordinating with suppliers". At the threshold level Incentive Travel coordinators must search for alternative suppliers to suit the majority of customers' needs and the constraints of each client. They also must be able to negotiate with suppliers on a case-by-case basis for the best deal in terms of price, conditions, complimentary products and service for high margin. Coordinators must be able to inform clearly and completely customers' needs and conditions to suppliers in order to meet customer requirements. Moreover coordinators must be able to convince suppliers to adapt their product services and working styles according to each project. Coordinators must follow-up the progress from suppliers and verify the correctness of their work in order to avoid any problems and meet with customer satisfaction.

The Fifth task is "following-up the unclosed sales". At the threshold level coordinators must follow-up unclosed sales by email to check-up if clients have received all the information and need any clarification as well as giving them consultations,

recommendations. Moreover in case of a proposal failure coordinators can identify the main points f for future improvement.

From the depth interview session it can be assumed that Incentive Travel coordinators must be able to source the internal decision process of clients and be able to approach to the key decision makers in order to close deals.

The sixth task is "planning the projects with other departments". At the threshold level coordinators must be able to sort out the information and topics with their team. They must also complete information regarding the availability and quality of services and products and pass the information on to their team. Additionally, coordinators must acknowledge clients project requirements be receptive and welcome others' opinions and co-analyze so the ideas and plans are crystalized among team. These ideas and plans should then be used to search for the best practice of the program operation and implementation, with the coordinator remaining assertive in their opinions and suggestions when seeing flaws or potential problems with the operation plan. Moreover coordinators must create a strong working atmosphere of diversity and welcome difference among team members.

From the depth interview session it can be ascertained that Incentive Travel Coordinators must be able to assume the role of lobbyist and persuade team members to mediate conflict of interest among team members from different work functions.

The seventh task analysed is "being the center of coordination", since coordinators tend to be the center of information and deal directly with clients. Informants reported that Incentive Travel coordinators must study the project information well so all issues and concerns are clear. They must be able to convince clients to comply or modify their work process according to company advice and suggestions. They should also coordinate team member operations and suppliers to verify mutual understanding about the objective of the project, details of the activities, and potential problem to avoid in the circumstances. Coordinatorsmust verify third party products and services which are relevant to the contract or proposals. Coordinators must also have soft skills in order to coordinate with other parties smoothly. They must be a good planner by remaining one step ahead and making sure that things are ready before schedule as well as organize documents and correspondence ready for immediate use and reference.

From the in-depth interview session it can also be concluded that Incentive Travel coordinators must be able to give a visualized presentation of information in a logical sequence, and retrieve information to follow up and be able solve problems immediately.

The eighth task under scrutinyis "facilitating site inspection". As coordinators tend to have direct contact with clients they must facilitate clients for site inspection. At the threshold level, coordinators need to asses appropriate venues for each project before

recommending and inspecting them. Prior to the visit, the coordinator must give all relevant the information about the project and customers to concerned suppliers. Coordinators must search and prepare for alternative venues equally attractive for clients incase they do not like the previously agreed one. Additionally coordinators should present the venue by focusing on angles or points that are relevant to the project objectives and attractiveness and assure that clients have made the right choice. Coordinators must use potential and professional networks to facilitate the site inspection or source the alternative venue. Coordinators give the impression to clients that they are familiar with the venue and its arrangement.

From the in depth interview session, it can be concluded that it is the coordinator's prerogative to search for opportunities to up-sell or cross-sell additional services and able to turn concerns or problematic issues into sales opportunities.

The ninth task is "summarizing quotations". At the threshold level this study found that Incentive Travel coordinators must give a distinctive proposal prior to a quotation proposal. They must allocate responsibilities to team members, source all information and verify the accuracy of the figures. Coordinators make sure that the proposed of price is appropriate and in line with the customer's budget and must attach pictures or evidence that justify the price quoted. Additionally they must possess knowledge about international financial transactions as well as reminding the accounting department of the due date for each account.

The tenth task in question for Incentive Travel coordinators is "verifying 3nd party products before approving payment". At the threshold level the study reported that Incentive Travel coordinators must check and verify if third party products or services are installed according to the safety requirement of the venue, checking quality of service.

The eleventh task is "following up payment". At the threshold level Incentive Travel coordinators must submit invoices to customers according to the conditions specified in the contract and other agreeable services as well as follow up payment diplomatically in order to maintain long term relationship with clients. Coordinators must be able to justify all items appeared in the invoice with a clear explanation.

From the depth interview session it is necessary that coordinator must tactfully put psychological pressure on customers yet being able to maintain a long term relationship.

The final task for Incentive Travel coordinators is "document coordination and correspondence". Coordinators must be able to organize information into topics and arrange everything into a simple format. They must also make documents on a timely basis with accuracy, skill in written communication, use of appropriate business language

andsort all these documents and correspondence according to topics and dates for future retrieval.

Table 4.3   Competencies Required in Incentive Travel Coordinators

Competency Components	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Knowledge	Product Knowledge: in the contract list/ other potential project components/ safety measures/ logistic requirement/ cost	How to adapt/ use/ mix/ and match to create phenomenal experience	
	Market Intelligence: Consumer Trends/ Competitors' moves	Market intelligence of other MICE business	
	Customer Knowledge: need/ objective/ business goals/ key success factors/ industry trends/ mission/ value/ key decision makers	Good memory about customer records and what has been preferred and problems about customers' past events	
	Knowledge about socio-economic affairs	Most updated international affairs	
			Knowledge about natures and key success factors of other MICE events
	Knowledge about program organization and operations: Logistic/ time/ Safety requirement/ Crowd management	Adaptive to conditions and constraints	

Table 4.3   Competencies Required in Incentive Travel Coordinators (cont.)

Competency Components	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Skills	Market Intelligence: Consumer Trends/ Competitors' moves		
	Communication: concise/ precise/ accurate/ persuasive/ audience appropriate	Imagery	Charismatics
	Social Skills: appropriate for people from broad backgrounds/ well-mannered/friendly dialogue	Social Acumen: High level of interpersonal skills	
	Critical Listening		
	Negotiation skills: Fair and Systematic	Comprehensive/ Consider long-term relationship	Integrative
	Teamwork skills: Task coordination/ Collaborative/ Decision making/ Collaborative Problem Solving	Openness to opinions and criticism/ Conflict Management	Integrative Conflict Management
	Problem Solving skills: Systematic/ Responsive	Comprehensive: Unplanned/ Anticipative	Contingency/ complex situations/ Integrative
	Basic financial skills/ Mathematic skills	Comprehensive estimation of hidden costs/ Profit-Loss Instincts	Strategic Pricing/ Pschological pricing
	English Proficiency	Third Language Mastery	
	Presentation skills: Vivid and Logical	Imagery	

Table 4.3 Competencies Required in Incentive Travel Coordinators (cont.)

Competency Components	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Skills	Document preparation: logical sequence/ easy to understand format and language appropriate to audience/ appropriate insertion of social skills	Appropriate for recipients and objectives	
	Planning skills: Systematic	Anticipative of scenarios	Integrative contingency
	Relationship Management		
	Project Management Skills: Project knowledge/ Contract Timeline/ Manpower Planning/ Profit and Loss	Anticipation of problems/ accurate calculation of figures/ Positive attitudes on team members	
	Tactful Questioning	Strategic Questioning	
		Time management skills	
	Computer Literacy	Virtual Reality Presentation	
Attributes		Having the world as market perspective	
	Cross-cultural consciousness		
	Observant/ Detail Oriented	Meticulous	Scrutinizing
	Personality: Agreeable/ Friendly	Compromising/ sense of humor/ open to new experience	Calm/ Prudent

Table 4.3 Competencies Required in Incentive Travel Coordinators (cont.)

Competency Components	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Attributes	Attitude: Optimism/ Goal Oriented	Persistence on goal achievement/ Excellence oriented attitude/ Customer Oriented Attitude	Optimism about obstacles and limitations
	Look and manner that command respect and trust	Self-confidence and esteem	Charisma and Prudent Look
		Organizational Loyalty	
		Service Mind	Service Psychology Skills
		Wide and quality professional and personal network	Personal network with high ranking governmental authorities
	Politely assertive	Open to opinions of others	Constructive conflicts
	Well-organized	Work discipline	
	Well-prepared		
	Work attitude: enthusiasm/ patience/ devotion to work		
	Adaptive to change and uncertainties/ Flexible on process but firm on quality	Optimism and obstacles/ Result oriented attitude	
		Long-service year in Incentive Travel Business	Experience from Several Organizations
		Acumen	
		Professionalism	
	Change welcoming/ Active learner		
	Emotional Control		

Table 4.3 Competencies Required in Incentive Travel Coordinators (cont.)

Competency Components	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Attributes		Entrepreneurial Instincts	
	Ethics		
	Be fair		
	Pride in One's Organization		
	Honesty		
	Courage to accept mistakes		
	Avoid negative opinion voicing		
	Refrain from price cutting		
	Dependability	Leadership	

Table 4.3 reported seven hard skills competencies and 42 soft skill competencies. It can be seen that soft skill competencies outnumber technical skills. This confirmed the conventional understanding about the hospitality labor market where soft or transferable skills tend to be more crucial for job incumbents to perform the tasks effectively. Screening and developing of people in this position should focus on soft skill competencies.

Another approach to competency is inherent and developable competencies. The former refers to competencies that attach to personal characteristics while the latter can be developed through training programs and experience. Screening and promotion decisions should be based on the former while development decisions should be based on the latter. The next position included in this study is Incentive Travel operation planner

4.4 DATA FROM FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

In order to validate the results gained from the in-depth interview sessions about job performance, here we define the competencies in Incentive Travel business entrepreneurs to respectively approach their firm concerning the issues of sales executives. The focus group interview was formed with the informants who have been professionals in the Incentive Travel sub-industry for years with the strong credentials in the specialized success department. There are seven members in the panel where three of them are the owners of the firm and another four are high-ranking marketing

management for Thailand Incentive Travel business. Job performance and relevant competencies were briefed in detail. The moderator of the focus group that is the researcher has studied the threshold job performance, task, and the associated competencies. Panelists were queried to speak out over their concerns whether the reports on performance and competencies from the in-depth interview sessions were proper or are there any things they want to add, cut-off some of words, clauses, or item or additional modifications. The researchers moderated the group flow from the panelist's discussion which leads to changes, additions, cuts, and modifications of both the competencies and performance.

The findings from the focus group interview displays some performance that differs from the following in-depth interview details. Thai Incentive Travel business' average sales coordinator must recognize the possible project components and see the logistics side of the project, and the rules and regulations of the "venue." Consistency is needed in the management for customer relationships and for a cultural differences understanding. An Incentive Travel coordinator with strong performance must balance on the firms' benefits and the satisfaction by customers on the knowledge and skill internalized into their natural styles of work and reflection process.

This project has been co-designed by an Incentive Travel sales coordinator with strong performance after getting the brief by proposing the new project components with more expensive value and the recommendation is justified via the customer's point-ofview. In addition, they must be capable of providing the different product selection components with the price range agreed by clients. It was stated by the experts that an ideal sales executive for Incentive Travel must form up the distinctive proposal that is assisted by the individual and professional networks in project quotations and co-planning.

After the proposal is submitted, the high performing Incentive Travel sales coordinator follows up on the unclosed sales by providing clients with consultancy and asking them to probe the strategic questions for the successful projects and suggest for additional services prior to closing the deal. Plus, they must consider asking for the reason that the client does not select the firm for future improvement.

After the deal is closed, the average Incentive Travel sales coordinator joins in the operational planning and receives the opinions from others as well as co-analyzes the idea before searching for the best practice for the program implementation. Moreover, no priority must be set in term of what shall be completed at first in the operation plan and to communicate about the objectives, components, and venues with the team members internally. The Incentive Travel sales coordinator with high performance assists on the operation planning by being neutral in conflict circumstances and forming a good working atmosphere among the differences in

backgrounds and diversity of profiles. The recipient information should be followed-up to ensure mutual understanding on the project. Ideally, the Incentive Travel business' sales coordinator must make sure that the complete and correct information is given to the whole team to avoid the possible mistakes in the operational phrase.

Next is to become the coordination center. The Incentive Travel business sales coordinator at the threshold level must have a profound understanding of the project information thus all issues and concerns will be clarified. The coordinator must call for a meeting with allconcerning parties in the project, including the suppliers to ensure the correct mutual understanding on project goals.. The Incentive Travel sales coordinator with the high performance must be capable of making clients believe and comply with their work process and change with the suggestions as made according to the Request for Proposal (RFP) operational plan. The company benefits and customer's satisfaction must be balanced. The ideal Incentive Travel sales coordinator must offer the visualized information presentation with a logical sequence at the same time acquiring respect and trust from the colleagues and clients.

In particular Incentive Travel firms, the sales coordinator shall follow up the late payment as well and the ideal sales executive must tactfully raise the psychological pressure on the client, yet remain capable ofmaintaining a long-term relationship with them.

The following table displays the performance according to job description task that was edited by an expert panel from the Incentive Travel Industry. The panelists were asked to discuss the performance for completing this task by starting from threshold performances followed by differing and ideal performances respectively.

4.5 PERFORMANCE OF INCENTIVE TRAVEL COORDINATOR (MODIFIED BY THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW)

Table 4.4 Performance for sales call modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Sales Call	Acquire and source information about each potential customer before submitting proposals or following up sales		

Table 4.4 Performance for sales call modified by focus group interview (Cont.)

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Communicate with clients through different modes of communication	Able to pinpoint unaware and incipient demands	Make good impression and is able to close sales in the first encounter/ or being shortlisted
	Present different project components for clients to choose	Possess consumer and market intelligence and key success factor of their industries	Strategically probe necessary information to make the perfect project
	When making sales dialogue, insert marketing skills- establish relationships	Possess good memories about what have been done in the past project and what have been discussed	
	Include operational gimmicks that excites customers- wow creating / wow factors	Possess higher level of project components especially those that are unconventional as well as assessing possibilities	Possess other knowledge including MICE sub industries
	Know potential project components and their respective strengths and weaknesses	Be adaptive to consumers' different profiles and characteristics	
	Consider logistic side of the project, venues' rules and regulations	Be creative	Possess detailed knowledge of operation process
		Balance benefits of firms and customer satisfaction	
		Maximize yield of each project	
		Internalize knowledge and skills into their natural working styles and thinking process	

Table 4.4   Performance for sales call modified by focus group interview (Cont.)

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Consistently do Customer Relationship Management in order to create trust from clients		
	Understand cultural differences		

At the first task, sales call, the chair of the group stated that the performance, coordinate information from potential suppliers and negotiate should be moved to negotiate and deal with suppliers.

> *"They have to comprehensively study customer profile and be excellent in the quantitative background that supports the data to better understand customer dynamics before submitting a proposal…they should prepare information well and develop the way to assess the customer type by identifying customer's needs that could be considered from demographics, education, experience or their interests"* (Interviewed, 23 September, 2013)

At the basic level, the chair of the panel argued to add to the performance that Incentive Travel coordinators should perform at the threshold level. It was "Acquire and source information about each potential customer before submitting proposal or following-up sales". Incentive Travel Coordinators research general information about prospects to determine the potential and prepare a discussion document when making the sales call.

At an ideal level, one of the panel experts stated that there is one more important thing thatthe ideal sales agent or Incentive Travel coordinators should perform. It was to "make good impression and be able to close sales in the first encounter/ or being shortlisted " They should possess excellent presentation skills with the ability to make an impression on the customer. Perhaps they should inspire the customer with their imaginative plan design for points to be made"

"...Display interest through appropriate use of body language such as eye contact or gestures, then shows respect and empathy ...that sales agent will gain trust. It is an Ideal person. They have to maintain professional and technical knowledge by attending educational workshops; reviewing professional publications; establishing personal networks; participating in professional societies. " (Interviewed, 23 September, 2013)

Table 4.5   Performance for receiving briefs modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Receiving Briefs	Read and analyze e-mails and other correspondence and ask for appropriate information before project design	Propose what is completely new to clients	Can anticipate and guestimate project requirements from initial e-mail and contact from their known sources market and repeated customers
	Contact appropriate person to acquire additional information for project design	Able to propose something beyond customers' expectations	Design project from creative and out-of-the-box thinking framework autonomously
	Analyze the actual needs of each client	Analyze what might not be verbalized, wanted or demanded - read between the lines	
	Pass on complete information to relevant parties to brainstorm with team members from other functions	Detect potential problems and inform customers in advance	
	Possess logistic and operational knowledge of the project	Appropriately select project components that can truly satisfy needs	

Table 4.5 Performance for receiving briefs modified by focus group interview (Cont.)

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Complete all tasks within minimum of time or number of contacts and develop proposal to submit in time	Clearly inform conditions and limitations of each venues and program components proposed to clients	Propose creative solutions to overcome the obstacles and limitations of the venues or equipment
			Developed proposal are distinctively differentiated with assistance from personal and professional networks

The next task was reported for the performance of Incentive Travel coordinators (sales executives/ customer agents) in receiving briefs from customers. The panelists were asked to discuss the performance for completing this task by starting with the threshold performances followed by differing and ideal performances respectively. During the discussion, the chair of the panel urged the researchers to move the level of the phrase "Complete all tasks within minimum of time or number of contacts and develop proposal to submit in time" from differing performance to threshold level. He justified his urge by arguing its fundamental purpose in the task. Another panelist who served as a vice president of Incentive Travel companies also stated the idea of the performance.

> *"To achieve task completion in the minimum amount of time, they need to*
>
> *be sure they're well prepared to avoid mistakes as well as keep*
>
> *management informed by submitting activities they have already*
>
> *completed"* (Interviewed, 23 September, 2013)

As for differing performances of Incentive Travel coordinators, the informants reported that high performers have to be able to propose something beyond the customer's expectations. More specialized trip-planning experience for example, high-end travel or knowledge of international destinations would be a plus. Most employers look for a combination of experience and skills in selling, hospitality and the travel industry. Additionally, some employers want someone with broad travel experience, especially if they offer global packages.

During the discussion, one of the panels members, who is the director of an Incentive Travel company in Thailand, stated his opinion about the differing level of sales agents. He said that they should also detect potential problems and inform customers in advance. In doing so, Incentive Travel coordinators should review the industry trends, challenges, and issues that concerned the program design of their customer.

"They should know the gaps, know the competition, know their competitive

position, know the value proposition, so that they can be able to provide the

solutions to the customers when problems may occur. (Interviewed, 23

September, 2013)

Finally, at an ideal level, all panelists reviewed and discussed each performance, then agreed that there is acceptable for this stage.

Table 4.6 Performance for co-design project and quotation modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Co-design Project and quotation	Brainstorm with internal and external team members to end up with distinctive, complete and impressive proposal	Propose something new and creative not included in the first RFP (Request for proposal)	
	Appropriately search and select project components that are within or close to clients' budget range	Propose something (project components) with higher value and justify the recommendation from clients' point of view	
		Neatly develop project proposal according to the format specified by the company and submit within or before the deadline	

Table 4.6 Performance for co-design project and quotation modified by focus group
interview (Cont.)

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Follow the instructions of job supervisors about program design and pricing		
	Possess basic knowledge about market price of major project components	Able to propose components of different product selections/ price ranges for clients to choose	
		Expect other unexpected costs	
	Correctly and accurately identify the hidden costs		

The table above reports the performance of Incentive Travel coordinators in co-designing projects and quotations. The panelists were asked to discuss the performance for completing this task by starting with threshold-level performances followed by differing and ideal performances respectively. At the threshold level, the panel reviewed the performance step-by-step, and agreed it was acceptable for this level.

One panelist who works as the CEO of a large Incentive Travel firm contended that we should add the performance "able to propose components of different product selections/price ranges for clients to choose" in the high standard or differing level category.

"General knowledge of the Incentive Travel industry is not enough, they have to provide an expert guide for the clients and help to plan the program design while selling a full range of travel products and services. In this position, coordinators will build relationships with the clientele while serving as a consultant. In addition, coordinators will counsel clients on all aspects of travel planning to research, literature, maps and provide assistance with visas. They will also provide air, car, hotel, cruise, and tour reservations and offer general problem-resolution support to clients while on their travels" (Interviewed, 23 September, 2013)

The same panelist asserted that Incentive Travel coordinators who are differing from average should consider all the unexpected costs. "What if someone gets sick? What if it rains unexpectedly? And what if the only way to get from the hotel to a must-see destination is by a cab or rental car? There are a number of unexpected -- and sometimes hidden -- costs that can quickly spike the total cost of the trip to an uncomfortable height" A differing coordinator with a little awareness and wise pre-planning can help mitigate the worst of these unexpected travel costs.

Table 4.7 Performance for coordinate with suppliers modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Coordinate with suppliers	Adapt the proposal by searching alternative suppliers to suit the needs and constraints of each client.		
	Negotiate with suppliers for the best deal on a case by case basis for the best deal and highest margin	Get best deals in terms of price, conditions and complimentary products/ services	
	Inform clients' needs and conditions to suppliers clearly and completely		

Table 4.7 Performance for coordinate with suppliers modified by focus group interview (Cont.)

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Follow up the progress from each supplier and verify the correctness of their work.		
	Able to convince suppliers to adapt their products services/ working styles according to each project requirement		
	Coordinate information from potential suppliers and negotiate the best deal before proposing to clients		

The next task in question was the performance of Incentive Travel coordinators (sales executives/ customer agents) in coordinate with suppliers. The panelists were asked to discuss the performance for completing this task by starting from threshold performances followed by differing and ideal performances respectively. During the discussion, the chair of the panel stated that the performance is acceptable.

Table 4.8 Performance for follow up the unclosed sales modified by focus group
interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Follow up the unclosed sales	Follow up unclosed sales via e-mail to check up if clients receive all information and if there are points to be clarified	Act as clients' consultant by asking and probing strategic questions to clients' project success and recommend additional services before the deal is closed	
	Clarify unclear points or provide support information		Source internal decision process information of clients' organization and approach the key decision makers
	Be responsive to queries and concerns from clients	Ask questions about reasons not to choose the company for further improvement	
	Inform the confirmation date required by the schedule prior to option date (same as cut-off date)		

The table above displays the task "follow up the unclosed sales for Incentive Travel coordinator. The panel stated that "source internal decision process information of clients' organization and approach the key decision makers are impenetrable. It should be moved from differing level to ideal level due to this performance depending on a long term experiences and good connections within this industry"

Table 4.9 Performance for follow up the unclosed sales modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Plan the project with other departments	Meet with full teams and sort information into topics		
	Make available complete information about third party services/ products in regards to cost/ quality/ availability to inform at the meeting	Be neutral in conflict situation	
	Be knowledgeable about clients and their project requirements and share to the meeting	Source and provide competitive intelligence to the team and provide in-depth customer knowledge	
	Be receptive and welcome others' opinions and co-analyze so the ideas and plans are crystalized among team members	Be assertive in providing opinions and suggestions when seeing flaws or potential problems with the operation plans	
	Use initiatives and suggestions from the meeting to search for the best practice of the program operation and implementation	Be able to convince team members to comply to their suggestion	Assume roles of lobbyist and persuade team members to mediate conflict of interest among tem members from different work functions
		Create a working atmosphere which cultivates diversity and welcomes difference	

Table 4.9 Performance for follow up the unclosed sales modified by focus group
          interview (Cont.)

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
		Be able to solve problems and facilitate co-team members and other colleagues	
	Pass on complete and comprehensive information about the projects, what has been discussed and agreed with clients as well as potential problems and their solutions from other previous projects	Complete all tasks needed before passing on the information to operation department in a timely fashion	
	Priority setting in terms of what to do and what needs to be completed first		
	Internally communicate information to team members regarding objectives/ components/ and venues	Follow up with the information recipients to ensure mutual understanding of the projects and add/ clarify if needed	Make sure that the whole team receive the information completely and correctly to avoid potential mistakes during the operation phase

In the task of planning the project with other departments, the panel changed
the item by movingthe performance "Be neutral in conflict situations" from ideal level
to differing level.

"When conflict arises, they have to remain neutral even though it is difficult

to deal with it. I believe that whether or not we can remain neutral, It will

help to establish trust, credibility, and respect. That is the point for a higher

standard of Incentive Travel coordinator to perform. Nevertheless, it is not

appropriate for the ideal level because it is not considered impossible"

(Interviewed, 23 September, 2013)

Table 4.10 Performance for planning the project with other department modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Be the center of coordination	Study project information well so all issues and concerns are crystalized	Convince clients to comply or modify their work process according to advices and suggestion	Able to give visualized presentation of information on a logical sequence
	Call for meeting between operation team members and suppliers to verify the mutual understanding about the project objectives, and other activities ,potentially rising problems and points that still need clarification	Convince and mange team members to make progress and perform according to the RFP	
	Avoid giving too much attention to trivial points	Plan one step ahead and make sure that things are ready before the schedule or progress as planned	

Table 4.10 Performance for planning the project with other department modified by
focus group interview (Cont.)

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Verify third party products/ services/ personnel if they are according to the contracts/ proposals	Make tactical decline of request if necessary. Respond to clients requests responsively and appropriately	
		Help colleagues and customers solve problems with a good temperament	
	Immediately respond to requests and concerns	Be responsive to all parties' concerns and mediate conflicts that create win-win feelings	
	Sort/ organize documents and correspondence ready for immediate use and references	Conclude and dispatch information relevant to each team functions	Able to retrieve information to follow up or solve problems immediately
			Gain respect and trust from clients and colleagues
	Smoothly co-coordinating with other parties		
		Can mediate conflicts among task force members and by balancing the firm's interests and customer satisfaction	

The above table reports the performance of different levels of Incentive Travel
coordinators when being the center of coordination between the operation side of the

task and the clients. One of the panelists, who is the chair of the group, asserted that Incentive Travel coordinators have to immediately respond to requests and concerns.

Moving on to another level of performance, differing performance, the panelists voiced their concerns that this person must also have the ability to formulate and implement procedures, as well as the ability to help colleagues and other team members. Proven leadership and management skills are imperative as is the focus on details.

In addition, a differing coordinator often has to intervene to resolve conflicts between the firm's interests and customer satisfaction. When coordinators intervene to resolve conflicts, they should consider several objectives. Naturally, the primary objective in many conflict situations is to find a good quality solution to the problem that's causing the conflict. In order to achieve that objective, the coordinator should create a win-win situation towards finding the best possible solution.

At the ideal level to perform being center of the coordination, the coordinator must gain trust and respect from clients and colleagues. A professional of the Incentive Travel industry should provide the superior product knowledge to serve the customer's interest first. Acting as a consultant will gain trust that the coordinator can generate more deals. Moreover, the coordinator should have proper communication with colleagues and co-workers for a healthy environment. The coordinator can offer help spontaneously and assist others member in a way that will help to build a stronger bond with them.

Table 4.11 Performance for facilitate the site inspection modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Facilitate The site inspection	Assess appropriateness of venue for each project before recommending and inspecting		Search for opportunities to up-sell / or cross-sell additional services
	Prior to visiting, give all relevant information about the projects and customers to concerned suppliers		

Table 4.11 Performance for facilitate the site inspection modified by focus group
interview (Cont.)

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Source and prepare alternative venues which are equally attractive for clients in case they do not like the previously agreed venue	Use personal and professional network to facilitate the site inspection or to source alternative venues	
	Present the venue by focusing on angles or points that are relevant to the project objectives and attractiveness	Can solve any problems with venue during the site inspection	
	Assure clients that they have made the right choice	Assure/ make impression to clients that the firm/ the coordinator him/herself are familiar with the venue and their management	Able to turn concerns or problematic issues into up-selling/ cross-selling opportunities

The next task is facilitating the site inspection. The group panel reviewed each
item, starting with phrase "assess appropriateness of venue for each project before
recommending and inspecting" was moved from differing level to the basic
performance.

> *""Every coordinator must know how to choose the right venue as*
> *location can make or break the success of an event. Site selection*
> *is often the most challenging part of planning process, since even a*
> *small oversight can cause major setbacks for attendees"*
> (Interviewed, 23 September, 2013)

Then, at the differing and ideal levels, there were some corrections from the
panel. Firstly, the ability to search for opportunities to up-sell or cross-sell additional
services is regarded as an exceptional performance for Incentive Travel coordinators.
One of the most challenging issues for managers with selling on the front line is that

you need strong people on the front line to ensure the success. Some coordinators are natural sales people, but others need to be supplied with the words or a script until they are comfortable in that role. Therefore, this performance was adjusted to an ideal level.

Besides this correction, another panelist, who is the CEO of an Incentive Travel company, was concerned that there would be some limitations and conditions during site inspection.

> *"A common Incentive Travel coordinator would be able to find out or provide the better solutions to handle such problems, but as an ideal person, they should do more than that. They can turn the crisis into opportunities as an up-sell or cross-sell…that's perfect"*
> (Interviewed, 23 September, 2013)

Table 4.12   Performance for summarize quotation modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Summarize quotation	Given the distinctiveness of the proposal, the proposed price is appropriate and within the budget range	Revise quotation after the site inspection	
	Attach pictures or evidence that justify the price quoted of all project components	Allocate responsibilities to team members to source all information and verify the figure correctness before submitting the quotation	
	Pay special attention to details to ensure the correctness of the purchase order		
	Possess knowledge about international financial transactions		
	Remind accounting department of the due dates of each account		

The next task to be analyzed was summarizing quotations. The sentence was changed from "prepare quotation" into "summarize quotation" according to the consensus of the group. At the threshold level, there is one correction to be adjusted. It was the word of quotation that was changed to be purchase order. It is deemed a more suitable technical word or this performance.

Table 4.13 Performance for verify 3rd party products before approving payment modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Verify 3rd party products before approving payment	Check and verify if third parties' products or services are installed according to the safety requirement of the venues	When necessary deduct some money from payment by fairly communicating the reason to suppliers with their agreement	
	Check qualities of services and products. Ensure they are according to the agreement and appropriate to the price to be paid		Be friendly and facilitating when verifying products or services
	If services or products are complicated, bring in experts		

The next task, verify 3rd party products before approving payment was presented to the group for discussion. There was one discussion on the ideal level, which concerned the phrase "be friendly and facilitating when verifying products or services". It was agreed that this should be moved from differing level to ideal level. The reason for this change was that it is difficult to build friendships and good working relationships between the sales agent and the suppliers. Sometimes conflicts arise due to the conditions and limitations on both sides.

Table 4.14   Performance for follow up payment modified by focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Follow up payment	Submit invoice to customers according to the conditions specified in the contract and other agreeable services on-site during operation		
	Follow-up payment successfully yet being able to maintain long-term relationship with clients	Able to justify all items which appear in the invoice with clear explanation	
	Diplomatically follow up balanced invoice		Tactfully put psychological pressure on customers yet being able to maintain long-term relationship

The next task in question was the performance of Incentive Travel coordinators (sales executives/ customer agents) in following up payments. The panelists were asked to discuss the performance for completing this task by starting from threshold performances followed by differing and ideal performances respectively. During the discussion, the chair of the panel urged researchers to add the detail of submitting an invoice to the customer. This should be achieved not only according to the conditions specified in the contract, but while considering other agreeable services as well. l. In addition, Incentive Travel coordinators should be polite and diplomatic in dealing with customer at the follow up payment stage.

Table 4.15   Performance for document coordination and correspondence modified by
focus group interview

Tasks	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Document coordination and correspondence	Organize information into topics and arrange in a simple, coherent format		
	Make documents on a timely basis and correct	Be time efficient in preparing and filing documents	
	Appropriately insert social skills in written communication		
	Use Business language appropriate to recipients		
	Insert opinion or suggestions in the message appropriately		
	Sort all documents and correspondence according to topics and dates for future retrieval	Do it along the project development and implementation	
		Make sub category within same topics and highlights important or critical points	

Finally, the last task, document coordination and correspondence were presented to the panelist to consider, the panelists contended that the performance set looked acceptable. However, the chair to the panel who is also the CEO of an Incentive Travel firm contended that the phrase "adding up more details to make documents more insightful for future planning" is not a part of the working discipline.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Chapter Four discussed the data collection of this study which was divided into two stages namely in-depth interviews and a group interview. The findings were

sorted into categories in order to answer the research questions stated in chapter one. According to the focus group, the panel of experts did not change the required competencies other than the shift in standard performance. To give the research objectives, the standard of competencies and performance was addressed by the informants and adapted in the expert panel together with the key factors of the Incentive Travel business. It was considered whether the job incumbents and the employer anticipations had truly lead to the firm's competitiveness. It was revealed from the findings that the identified threshold competencies are consistent to the key factors of success. In particular with regards to creativity, needs, and the operational knowledge, as well as the social skills and insight that enhance their client consultant role. In consideration of these factors, we normally pertain to the dimensional attributes of the competencies that are usually inherent in individuals. The human resources managers must measure these inherent qualities via the commercially available aptitude tests to measure the qualities that can't be observed or measured (Duad et al., 2010). The component of knowledge in competencies can be formed either on or off the job, however, with none of these inherent qualities; it might be hard for the sales executives to contribute to the firm's competitiveness.

<center>CHAPTER VI</center>

<center>DISCUSSION OF RESULTS</center>

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the results from the study that was conducted. The final results are used to answer the research questions stated in chapter one, which provide a competency-based, human resource-related, decision model. This can be used for the purpose of increasing the competitiveness of the Thai Incentive Travel industry as a whole, and has implications for academia and practitioners, limitations of the study, and the conclusion of this thesis study.

5.2 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this section, the findings of the study are correlated with each of the three research questions stated in chapter one.

Table 5.1 Competencies required for Incentive Travel sales agent or coordinator

Level of Performance/ Competency Components	Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
Threshold	Product Knowledge : Characteristics, Costs, Availability	Thinking Skills: Logical, Understanding, Application, Analytical, Critical	Acumen
	Customer Knowledge: Their objectives, needs, business goals, key success factors, and decision process	Communication Skills: Concise/ Precise/ Logical	Honesty

Table 5.1 Competencies required for Incentive Travel sales agent or coordinator
(cont.)

Level of Performance/ Competency Components	Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
Threshold	Market Intelligence: Market Trends, Competitive Intelligence	Teamwork and Team Planning	Optimism towards problems and obstacles
	Knowledge about Current Affairs: Domestic and International	Presentation Skills: Clear and Logical	Observance and Detail Oriented
	Market Knowledge: Domestic and International	Basic Cost and Revenue	
	Knowledge about Travel Program Arrangement: Planning, Operation, Logistical Requirement, Timing, Safety and Security Specification and Requirements, and Crowd Management	Task Coordination	Service Minded
		English Proficiency	Change Adaptation
		Computer Literacy	Fairness and Professionalism
		Communication Skills: Audience appropriate (Diverse Backgrounds)	Good Personality: Agreeable and Friendly
		Presentation: Imagery	Business Instinct and Business Mind

Table 5.1 Competencies required for Incentive Travel sales agent or coordinator
(cont.)

Level of Performance/ Competency Components	Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
Threshold		Relationship Management: Consumers and Suppliers	Intercultural Conscious
		Revenue and Cost Management Skills	Assertiveness but polite
		Crowd Management Skills	Pride in Working Organization
			Avoid Price Cutting
			Refrain from Negative Opinion Voicing about Third Person
			Work Experience in Incentive Travel Business
			Being a fast learner
Differing	Knowledge about adaptation, mixing, matching project components to create phenomenal experience	Strategic Questioning	Neatness and meticulosity
		Negotiation: Systematic, Fair	Goal Oriented Attitude
		Problem Solving Skills: Systematic, Responsive	Patience to work under high pressure situation
		Problem Solving: Unplanned Situation	Service Psychology and Customer-Oriented Mindset
		Presentation skills through virtual reality program	Dependability

Table 5.1 Competencies required for Incentive Travel sales agent or coordinator
(cont.)

Level of Performance/ Competency Components	Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
Differing		Correspondence preparation that include social skills appropriate for recipients	Open to Criticism and Opinion from Others
			Conflict Management Skills
Ideal	Knowledge about Other MICE events and their success factors	Communication: Tactical with Social Acumen	Professional and Personal Network
		Communication Skills: Charismatic and Persuasive	Meticulosity in work
		Manage Conflict to create best practice for the project	
		Conflict Management: Systematic, Integrative	

5.2.1 Research Question #1: What are the competencies required in a sales agent in the Thai Incentive Travel industry to deliver the threshold-level of job performance?"

Table 5.1 reported the competencies for three different levels of performance for Incentive Travel sales agents or coordinators. It can be seen that at the minimal expected level they need to be knowledgeable about their own product in regards to its characteristics, costs, and availability. They also need to know their customers well in their business, business's objectives, key success factors in their respective industries, the needs and objectives of the MICE events and also the decision process in participating or hosting MICE events. They also need to have market intelligence both about consumer trends and competitive situations in their respective MICE sub-industries. Incentive Travel

sales agents or coordinators need to be knowledgeable about travel arrangements in terms of logistics and safety requirements, timing and crowd management. They also rely on crowd management and cost and revenue control skills to perform their tasks due to custom-made working natures. They also need to be fast learners as there are various events and activities compiled at the same time constituting an Incentive Travel project. It is therefore important for them to capture concepts and information fast before acting upon the situations effectively. In order to perform their work according to the minimally expected performance, according to the stakeholders included in this study, an Incentive Travel sales agent or coordinator needs to be knowledgeable about their respective markets. They also need communication skills that are audience appropriate. They should be able to make a presentation that creates imagery. Besides, they should be aware of the importance of the relationship between the company with clients and suppliers as well as other colleagues. Consequently, they need relationship management skills to perform their task. As for ascribed qualities, they should possess an agreeable personality trait with business instinct and mindsets. Finally, they need to be updated with socio-economic domestic and international affairs. The knowledge mentioned here allows Incentive Travel personnel to provide services to clients in a distinguished fashion, thus higher competitiveness of their represented firms can be assumed.

Apart from socio-economic affairs, it would be very difficult for newcomers to be knowledgeable about MICE markets, their clients, and especially have the adequate product knowledge. MICE companies should provide training sessions or educate their new employees instead of screening them based on these contents.

Instead, MICE employers and educators should pay more attention to the skills of candidates and incumbents when making human resources-related decisions. At the threshold level, employers should screen new candidates by using their thinking skills. Candidates should express their systematic thinking process and logic when capturing ideas. They should also be able to apply the information to the situation, analyze the information and criticize the information accordingly.

They should also be assessed for their teamwork and team planning skills, presentation skills in the most logical and precise manner, cost and revenue management, task coordination, English proficiency and computer literacy. For ascribed qualities, candidates should be screened for their acumen, honesty, attitudes towards problems and obstacles, service mindset, change adaptation as well as their observance and work neatness.

5.2.2　Research Question #2: What are the competencies which underlie the high performing sales agents in the Thai Incentive Travel industry?"

According to Table 5.1 at the differing level of performance, no knowledge was reported to be important. However, high performing Incentive Travel employees must be able to pose questions wisely to acquire the information needed. They need to be able to make a systematic and fair negotiation. Besides, they should be able to solve problems on an unplanned basis. Attitudes and ethical values about fairness and professionalism as well as their work meticulosity should also be observed. For differing competencies, they need presentation skills that can portray virtual reality to colleagues and clients to convince them to adopt the proposal. Therefore, they need to be able to make presentations using virtual reality programs. High performers are also adept in making correspondences that are appropriate to recipients of broad and diverse backgrounds. They should have goal-oriented attitude and should be patient when working under high pressure situations. In addition, they should have service psychology and consumer oriented mindsets.

5.2.3　Research Questions # 3: What competencies should be focused on when making promotion decisions of sales agents in the Thai Incentive Travel industry?"

When making promotion decisions for sales agents and Incentive Travel employees, important job assignments and succession plans should be based on ideal skills and attributes. At the ideal level, as the Incentive Travel industry comprises other events and MICE activities, the knowledge of other MICE events make their performances ideal. Besides, they need to be able to convince and negotiate with others. Therefore, charismatic communication skills used to persuade audiences also make the performance ideal. Moreover, the promotion decision evaluation should assess Incentive Travel employees in their ability to tactically communicate with others by utilizing their social skills. They should be able to manage the conflict in the most integrative manner and focus on goal achievement. Finally, ideal performance in the Incentive Travel sector also depends on how personnel in this sub-industry manage the conflicts and work meticulosity.

5.3 COMPETENCY-BASED HUMAN RESOURCE RELATED DECISION MODEL

The level of competencies pertaining to Incentive Travel coordinators are important when making astute human resource related decisions in order to increase the competitiveness of the Thai Incentive Travel industry as a whole. The following parts propose models that guide human resource decisions based on the competencies identified. Inherent skills and attributes for threshold performance will be used for hiring new candidates while knowledge and developable competencies will be used to guide

human resource development activities for newly hired employees. Promotion, important job assignments and succession plans should be based on differing and ideal skills and attributes. Continual human resource development for job incumbents and executives should be based on knowledge and developable skills for differing and ideal performances.

Table 5.2 Competency-based Human Resource Related Guidelines for Incentive
Travel Coordinators

Human Resource Purposes	Relevant Competencies
Hiring new candidates	Thinking Skills: Logical, Understanding, Application, Analytical, Critical
	Communication Skills: Concise/ Precise/ Logical
	Teamwork and Team Planning
	Presentation Skills: Clear and Logical
	Basic Cost and Revenue
	Task Coordination
	English Proficiency
	Computer Literacy
	Acumen
	Honesty
	Optimism towards problems and obstacles
	Observance and Detail Oriented
	Service Minded
	Change Adaptation
	Fairness and Professionalism
	Communication Skills: Audience appropriate (Diverse Backgrounds)
	Presentation: Imagery
	Relationship Management: Consumers and Suppliers
	Good Personality: Agreeable and Friendly
	Business Instinct and Business Mind
	Revenue and Cost Management Skills
	Crowd Management Skills
	Intercultural Consciousness
	Assertiveness but polite
	Pride in Working Organization

Table 5.2 Competency-based Human Resource Related Guidelines for Incentive
Travel Coordinators (cont.)

Human Resource Purposes	Relevant Competencies
Hiring new candidates	Avoid Price Cutting
	Refrain from Negative Opinion Voicing about Third Person
	Work Experience in Incentive Travel Business
	Being a fast learner
Training New Staff	Product Knowledge : Characteristics, Costs, Availability
	Customer Knowledge: Their objectives, needs, business goal, key success factors, and decision process
	Market Intelligence: Market Trends, Competitive Intelligence
	Knowledge about Current Affairs: Domestic and International
	Market Knowledge: Domestic and International
	Knowledge about Travel Program Arrangement: Planning, Operation, Logistical Requirement, Timing, Safety and Security Specification and Requirements, and Crowd Management
Promotion, Job Assignment, Succession	Strategic Questioning
	Negotiation: Systematic, Fair
	Problem Solving Skills: Systematic, Responsive
	Problem Solving: Unplanned Situations
	Communication: Tactical with Social Acumen
	Conflict Management: Systematic, Integrative
	Neatness and meticulosity
	Goal Oriented Attitude
	Patience to work under high pressure situations
	Service Psychology and Customer Oriented Mindset
	Professional and Personal Network
	Communication Skills: Charismatic and Persuasive
	Open to Criticism and Opinion from Others
	Conflict Management Skills
	Manage Conflict to create best practice for the project
	Presentation skills through virtual reality program

Table 5.2   Competency-based Human Resource Related Guidelines for Incentive
            Travel Coordinators (cont.)

Human Resource Purposes	Relevant Competencies
Promotion, Job Assignment, Succession	Correspondence preparation that include social skills appropriate for recipients
Continual training for job incumbents and high performers	Knowledge about adaptation, mixing, matching project components to create phenomenal experience

5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIA

The findings actually demonstrate points that are beneficial for both academics and practitioners. The aim of this study, however, is to providing guidelines for Thai Incentive Travel firms in dealing with Incentive Travel coordinators amid the changes of the external environments. An implication for academia in this study is that scholars can use this thesis in their future study and develop desirable attributes, which are the qualities, and competencies underlying the standard of this position in the industry. A competitive candidate for MICE employers is the graduate in MICE programs, who has a comprehensive knowledge of the nature of industry concept and the Travel Program Arrangement. According to table 5.1, specific competencies for Incentive Travel sales agents or coordinators, the skills and attribute are more significant than knowledge within the competencies context. The curriculum design should not focus only knowledge of MICE and Incentive travel but developing skills and attributes that that also emphasize soft-competencies comprising of inherent skills and attributes that are intangible and hard to assess. These skills allow students to develop, upgrade, and adapt their skills and knowledge in the college. Although the knowledge of MICE will be advantageous for graduate students, there are three factors worth consideration for the universities or education institutions to develop their graduate students into MICE industry.

First, the universities should consider ways of reflecting and promoting students skills and attributes in their course frameworks and practical guidance. The program not only allows students to round out their core curriculum courses but it should have additional courses in areas to create some skills and attributes. For example, the ability to work effectively as a team member is a highly valued skill in the global marketplace. Embedded within the curriculum in departments and teamwork can also be an effective vehicle for inclusive learning. From an academic skills perspective, collaborative learning groups offer students opportunities for sharing information, reinforcing learning, peer mentoring, developing support

networks and working toward a common goal and greater understanding for different cultures and preferences of taste. In addition, the program study of educators should focus on the student's thinking skills. They should be trained to express their systematic thinking process and logic when capturing ideas. They should also be able to apply the information to the situation, analyze the information and criticize the information accordingly.

Second, the crucial measures the universities can adopt to promote the students are to incorporate appropriate internships and work-based learning opportunities of significant duration into their courses. The program should integrate practical experience into the curriculum with the assistantship requirements. Therefore, they become practitioners by learning and doing.

Third, the university or institution should develop the aptitude test center for MICE educational guidance. The test will assess the students' abilities and provide student with knowledge of their aptitudes that will help them in making decisions about curriculum program and work in the future.

Finally, the university or institutions should develop the assessment in order to gauge student learning and understand their experiences, by a variety of assessment tools, including a review of student work and anonymous surveys. The purpose of data collection will help the university design a program which fits-in with the student's background in order to encourage and promote student's skills and attributes that are suitable for MICE or Incentive Travel sub-industries. Moreover, the university should create the tools for developing awareness of student's skills, values, interests, and personality traits. Assessment tools can help students gain a better understanding of themselves, expand their career options, find a good match with employers, and identify strengths for the ever-shifting workplace.

5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Implications to be given in this part are, consequently, for practitioners and relevant regulatory bodies. Incentive Travel industry employers must adopt a radical approach in screening candidates for Incentive Travel coordinator positions from a performance and experience-based approach to a competency-based approach. In doing so, a long-term and strategic point-of-view is needed. Employees should be viewed as a strategic asset that constitutes a company's future competitiveness through their respective talents or competencies. They should be carefully selected, trained, and retained. Therefore, from hiring some candidates with well written curriculum vitaes and considering what have they done in the past through simple questioning during job interview, a more in-depth and critical assessment is necessary.

Employers should focus on soft-competencies comprising of inherent skills and attributes that are hard to assess and develop. These skills allow incumbents to develop, upgrade, and adapt their skills and knowledge in the future. Therefore, employers should invest in purchasing aptitude test scales that measure such skills in the most accurate manner. Moreover, they should use case studies that require intensive contributions from the candidates together with other candidates or job incumbents. However, case studies should be very well and very carefully written so that all skills and attributes necessary for the job completion can be measured. Besides, the nature of job interviews should change from simple socialization and basic questions to complicated problem-based questions requiring candidates to verbalize their thinking processes. These suggested methods should be used in correlation. Although it makes the recruitment process harder and longer, employers can be assured of the suitability and potential of the recruited employees and that can contribute to the success factors.

The recruitment process should be in two rounds. First, shortlisted candidates should be selected based on threshold skills and attributes reported in the competency set. However, from the competencies reported in threshold level of performance, it can be seen that they tend not to support the key success factors of most Incentive Travel industries. Consequently, the admission decision should be made in two folds. The shortlisted candidates should be further screened through differing competencies. This approach makes the admission process of new staff lengthy and burdensome but ensures the result of admission criteria. The two points addressed signify that there is no need to recruit candidates who are formally trained with MICE or Incentive Travel knowledge as the knowledge trained in colleges and other educational institutions might be obsolete shortly after admission and recruitment anyway.

Training of the new staff should be task specific, knowledge and skills that require the support from other transferable skills and attributes. These skills and knowledge tend to be easier and shorter to train and develop. As some of the skills and knowledge tend to require mentors, a mentor system that provides on-the-job training for new staff should be in place as well.

Project assignment decisions should be made based on differing competencies as important projects tend to require high performers to deal with more complicated conditions. Therefore, competencies should always be observed, retained, and developed at all times for existing employees so that they are ready for more demanding task assignments.

Promotion decisions should be based on ideal competencies as most of them contain skills and attributes that allow team and large project management with complexities.

Well written case studies assessing competencies should be developed. However, it is not easy to compile good case studies that are not only up-to-date but also assess the competencies of candidates and job incumbents at different levels. Therefore, TECB or MICE Professional associations should take the lead as certifying body using central case studies as assessment tools. Employers can select candidates with these certificates from the professional associations as the basis for selection and negotiation criteria for remuneration package.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This thesis study has certain practical limitations that must be taken into consideration when drawing inferences from the findings.

Firstly, the competency model used in identifying competencies required in the Incentive Travel coordinator position has excluded the organizational factors that form the working context that affects the competencies that are needed by individuals to work in such contexts. Therefore, further elaboration in the organization level that brings their specific organizational factors into consideration is needed.

Secondly, the data is collected from prescreened participants nominated by professional associations concerned with particular MICE sub-industries. These participants tend to come from high standard and large companies where majority of the companies in the field are smaller size companies. The findings might, therefore, be subjected to sample bias.

Thirdly, experimental studies validating the effectiveness of the competency set reported in this study have not yet been conducted. Therefore, an adjustment of competency set should be done when it comes to actual use by individual employers and MICE business planners.

Finally, the competency set reported in this study is collected only for the position of Incentive Travel coordinators. In fact, competency identification should be conducted with all key positions in the MICE business to increase the competitiveness of the whole sector.

5.7 RECOMMENDATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the propositions found in this thesis, organizational factors should also be considered when performing decision tasks regarding human resources. Further development of an organization-specific competency model is suggested and further quantitative study to explore the relative importance of competencies is recommended for scholars and practitioners who are interested in the areas of competency-based human resources management. Each Incentive Travel Organization should conduct their own Competency Model that incorporates organizational factors. Through the research identified the competencies required in sales agent in Incentive Travel, Future research could be conducted to identify the promotion decision process based on the ideal competencies identified by this thesis. In addition, longitudinal study following up the results of competency based human resource development and human resource management should also be undertaken to verify the saliency of competency units identified in this study.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This thesis study has provided the competencies required in a sales agent in the Thai Incentive Travel business in order to guide practitioners and scholars in the field to make a more informed decision within their respective relevancy to the position. The rationale of the study was identified within the chapter one, followed by a statement of research problems, theoretical frameworks, and the present study's proposition. The research questions were also addressed as: What are the competencies required in a sales agent in the Thai Incentive Travel industry?" However, such a research question did not address the competencies required for further human resource management and development decisions. To come up with competency sets that allow such decisions to be made on the most informed basis, performance standards should be included in the research question as well. The major research question, as stated in chapter one, can be divided into 3 sub-research questions as follows;

Sub research question I:
> "What are the competencies required in a sales agent in the Thai Incentive Travel industry in order to deliver the threshold-level of job performance?"

Sub research question II:
> "What are the competencies which underlie the high performing sales agents in the Thai Incentive Travel industry?"

Sub research question III:
> "What competencies should be focused on when making promotion decisions of sales agents in the Thai Incentive Travel industry?"

In order to design a study, which effectively addresses the research questions and satisfies the research objectives, the researcher framed the study theoretically through an extensive literature review as presented in chapter two. Then, chapter three provided the explanation of a qualitative study in this thesis and explains the study's research methodology. Chapter four presented the findings and analysis of data, which has been analyzed to identify, describe and explore the job performance and competencies necessary for the position of Incentive Travel sales coordinator. Lastly, chapter five summarized the findings from the study that was conducted. Included in this summary are findings that underlie each of the three research questions from chapter one. A competency-based, human resource related decision model that guides astute human resource decisions for the Incentive Travel coordinator position was proposed. As earlier mentioned, these models need to be adjusted to fit each organization's context for the best use. The implications for academia and practitioners were also alluded to in this chapter. Scholars who are interested in this topic should expand the study boundaries towards other key positions in the MICE industry. Besides, longitudinal studies to explore the effectiveness of the proposed models should also be conducted so that the most salient models that help increase the competitiveness of the firm and productivity of the whole MICE sector can be identified.

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Appendix

Sales Competency Identification: A Thai Incentive Travel Business Case

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Abstract

Thailand strives to promote the MICE sector in order to even off the seasonal demand of the tourism industry, which has secured the economic and social welfare of the nation for decades through foreign income and employment. However, the productivity of Thailand its MICE human capital is considerably lower than that of many other leading MICE regional destinations (18 times lower than Singapore, for example). Human resource management and development warranted urgent attention from stakeholders of the industry. Competency-based human resource management has been recognized for its superiority to a task-based approach due to its ability to facilitate employees' versatility and adaptability to external changes and growth plans. To improve the productivity of Incentive Travel, a component of the MICE industry, threshold and differing competencies must be identified. Through structured in-depth interviews with different groups of stakeholders of Incentive Travel's sales executive about threshold, differing, and ideal performance and competencies in regard to knowledge, skills, and attributes, competencies of such a position were identified. The researchers found that threshold competencies mismatched the key success factors of the Incentive Travel Industry. Only differing and ideal competencies, which can rarely be found in job incumbents, would contribute to the achievement of success factors. Discrepancies of stakeholders' expectations were found. Job descriptions were developed from a task-based approach and were vaguely formulated. Apart from competencies, organizational conditions, especially

organizational culture and leadership styles, might enhance or decrease the competency potential of employees. A competency-based approach to human capital management is advised by focusing on competencies that contribute to the key success factors

Key words: Thailand, MICE, Incentive Travel, Competency, Human Resource Management

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INTRODUCTION

Business Travel, which is a broader view of MICE (Meeting, Inventive Travel, Convention, and Exhibition), otherwise known as the Business Event Industry, has increased its significance in most destinations, including Thailand, over decades. Thailand used the MICE industry to even out the demand for its tourism products due to seasonality of its reputable leisure tourism markets. This sector also attracts much attention from business operators for business travelers' reputation of high spending and their destination friendly behaviors (Firoiu, Dodu, & Patrichi, 2011). Considering the Thailand Travel and Tourism Competitive Index 2013, in which Thailand was ranked 43rd out of 140 countries and 9th in the Pacific Asia sub-region, the sub-indices also showed impediments to its competitiveness in regard to Business Travel and MICE (Blanke & Chiesa, 2013). Thailand was ranked 90th in regard to ICE infrastructure and 77th in regard to regulatory and legal environment, and 70th in regard to human resources. Within the human resources index, quality of education system and availability of skilled labor also seemed problematic, which is consistent with the results shown in the Barnes Report about the statistics of Convention and Exhibition Industries worldwide (Barnes Report, 2010; Blanke & Chiesa, 2013). Table 1 illustrates the average sales per employee of Thailand's convention and exhibition business as compared to its neighboring countries.

Table 1   Comparative statistics of sales per employee of Thailand with neighboring countries

Country	Sales/ Employee	PPP Ratio	PPP Sales/ Employee	Efficiency Ratio
Singapore	340,631	1.377	469,048.89	18.08
Australia	135,533	0.851	115,338.58	4.45
New Zealand	114,590	0.973	111,496.07	4.30
Japan	108,873	0.819	89,166.99	3.44
South Korea	20,549	1.634	33,577.07	1.29
Malaysia	15,191	1.966	29,865.51	1.15
Thailand	12,551	2.067	25,942.92	1.00
China	12,698	1.81	22,983.38	0.89

Table 1 Comparative statistics of sales per employee of Thailand with neighboring
countries (Cont.)

Country	Sales/ Employee	PPP Ratio	PPP Sales/ Employee	Efficiency Ratio
IIndonesia	8,084	1.769	14,300.60	0.55
India	4,026	2.816	11,337.22	0.44
Philippines	4,601	2.006	9,229.61	0.36

Adapted from: (Barnes Report, 2010)

Table One shows sales per employee of average Thai convention and exhibition companies adjusted by the purchasing power parity (PPP) to ensure comparability of the number of countries of different levels of cost of living. Thailand had 12,551 US$ sales per employee, equivalent to 25,942 US$ after adjusting the outstanding figure by PPP. Using Thailand as the basis for comparison, it can be seen that Thai convention and exhibition employees are 18 times less productive than those of Singapore and 4-5 time less productive than those of Australia and New Zealand. The statistics also show that the peer competing destinations of Thai convention and exhibition firms are South Korea, Malaysia and China.

It can be argued, however, that the productivity ratio as compared to neighboring countries cannot be attributed to employees' productivity alone. There might also be industrial, market, and organizational as well as destination factors that influence the figures shown in the above table. Despite such facts, personnel productivity cannot be left out of consideration when determining strategic ways to increase the competitiveness of the Thai MICE sector.

Competition among firms and nations is not limited only to market factors but also to the development, attraction, retention, and motivation of talents (Testa & Sipe, 2012). Human resource management and development has increased its role in the modern business environment, where changes are happening at an unprecedented rate (Jain & Haley, 2009) in from unpredictable directions (Roland Berger Strategy Consultants GMBH, 2011), and humans are now regarded as a type of major capital, which can be appreciated or depreciated with good or bad management like other types of assets.

Thailand's entrance to the ASEAN Economic Community, when skilled labor and foreign capital are expected to fluctuate in the country, means that opportunities and threats avail themselves for Thai MICE operators and labor market to conquer (Economic Ingelligence Center: Siam Commercial Bank, 2011). The Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA), through the use of the ASEAN Common

Competency Standards (ACCS), is now used to ensure mutually agreed minimal standards for personnel in different sectors, according to the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement on Services (AFAS), which now covers seven professional areas including Tourism and Hotel (ASEAN Secretariat Office, 2009; Department of Trade Negotiation, 2012). The Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals cover 32 positions in Hotel and Tourism Industry (Soydhurum, 2012; Tourism Personnel Development Institute: Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2011). Although the completed competency standards and reinforced do not yet cover any positions in the MICE industry, it is expected that the standard framework will expand itself to positions in the MICE industry in the foreseeable future. It would, therefore, be more beneficial for the whole industry as well as for educators and the future workforce to increase the work standards by taking an active stance through the development of its own professional standards at the national level before the standard framework prescribed by ASEAN secretariat is imposed on it, which will lead to the country competing with other destinations from a reactive stance. The two major MICE industry professional associations, the Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA) and the Thai Exhibition Association (TEA), have been well aware of these potential challenges and are acting to set their own job standards at the earliest possible opportunity.

Within the MICE industry, Incentive Travel is one of the major sub-industries with high revenue generating power reputation (Ricci & Holland, 1992) and a wide range of services consumed from local businesses (Severt & Breiter, 2010). Despite the fact that incentive travel clients and the participants want to create an experience that awes participants while inducing desirable behavioral changes towards exceptional performance through recognition and trophy experience, one conflicting point of interest between host and participants can be identified, namely budget and quality (Incentive Travel Council & SITE International, 2012; Severt & Breiter, 2010; Shinew & Backman, 1995). On this point, Thailand can capitalize its "value for money" image it has been well recognized by business travelers from all over the world as the first destination that offers such a benefit (Future Brand Index, 2011) by offering a trophic experience for participants within the budget range of the host organizations. It is the sales agent or sales representative's competence in designing the program that excites and impresses the clients' organization within their constraints that determines the success of business. The work standards of sales representatives should, hence, be a priority to be developed to serve as guidelines for personnel management and development, both by practitioners and educators nurturing graduates to serve the sector.

Amid changes, working natures and industry dynamism need to plan the workforce to be adaptive and versatile to uncertainties of the industry and the market (Hirvonen, 2011). Competency-based human resources and development are gaining

higher acceptance from both scholars and practitioners as compared to their task-based counterparts (Bhatawdekar & Bhatawdekar, 2012; Holton III, Coco, Lowe, & Dutsch, 2008). A competency-based approach to human resources management and development also allows the management to take a long-term approach to each human capital it has by planning their career path, growth and succession plans (Bhatawdekar & Bhatawdekar, 2012; Soderquist, Papalexandris, Ioannou, & Prastacos, 2010). Considering both the importance of the Incentive Travel subsector's role in MICE and Tourism as a whole and the uncertainties of working and competitive environments, this particular study aims to

- Identify competencies required for a sales executive in the Thai Incentive Travel Business
- Identify competencies that distinguish top performers and average performers as Sales Executives in the Thai Incentive Travel Business
- Provide decision guidelines for human resources managers and job supervisors in recruiting, evaluating, training, and retaining Sales Executives in the Incentive Travel Business in Thailand

Theoretical Background

Incentive Travel

Among the MICE sub-industries, Incentive Travel is the most desirable market in regard to destination tourism management bureaus due to the high spending power of clients and the number of services and products consumed by both clients and participants thanks to their nature of fantasy experience creation and other team-building activities included in the program to further motivate already exceptionally productive performers to shift their behaviors towards another level desired by the companies' management (Ricci & Holland, 1992; Severt & Breiter, 2010). As a managerial tool primarily used in the fields of sales and marketing, Incentive Travel is used to motivate employees or distributors, both as individuals or teams, to achieve an uncommon goal by promising rewards and trips that offer them an extraordinary, or "Trophy", experience (Severt & Breiter, 2010; Shinew & Backman, 1995). Currently, Incentive Travel is used outside the scope of sales and marketing, located instead in other functional areas of big corporations, including finance and administration, with the primary objectives of not only motivating employees but also of seeding a desirable culture, and of stimulating profit growth through higher productivity and efficiency of resources utilized (Ricci & Holland, 1992). Practically, it can be said that Incentive Travel is meant to motivate the behavioral shift of key staff or distributors towards exceptional goal achievements.

The effectiveness of behavioral shifts influenced by Incentive Travel depends on a number of factors, including the appeal of the rewards and the trip, prestige associated with the "earners's" status, good memories of the trip, recognition by top management, and camaraderie among top performers (Ricci & Holland, 1992; Severt & Breiter, 2010). However, the Incentive Travel programs that appeal to all targeted participants become harder and harder to design due to cultural and social diversity as well as to fast evolving tastes and preferences (Incentive Travel Council & SITE International, 2012).

The use of Incentive Travel as a managerial tool started in the 1960s, initially to stimulate sales forces and distributors to work extra miles to stimulate sales to the market followed by European. For Americans, the preferred destination is Europe while Asia was reported to be the preferred destinations for Europeans (Ricci & Holland, 1992). Unlike Europeans, Asian companies tend not really to understand the primary objective of Incentive Travel and do not use it as a reward for top-performing employees (Pizam, 2000; Ricci & Holland, 1992). Therefore, the European market should be a target market for Thailand and other Asian destinations as they are inherently attractive to Europeans. Given the global economic downturn, which affected Europe more severely than other continents, Incentive Travel business operators should even out the declined demand by focusing on Asian multinational corporations, but they might have to apply greater effort educating such firms about the full potential use of incentive travel as a managerial tool to create a fantasy and trophy experience in order not only to motivate employees but also to seed desirable corporate cultures and communities of best practice among top performers.

Players in the incentive travel markets fall into five categories, namely full incentive marketing companies, full incentive service houses, incentive travel fulfillment companies, destination selection companies and destination management companies, and, finally, travel agencies that sell certain travel components to the incentive travel programs (Ricci & Holland, 1992). For most Thai incentive travel businesses, destination management companies (DMC) seem to be the most common. Seeing the lucrativeness of the market, many tour operators in Thailand established incentive travel departments within their leisure mainstream tour operating businesses, making them unable to fully capture the core essence of the incentive travel concept as a managerial tool. One of the points that should be noted, however, is the need and the willingness of most corporations to invest in incentive travel programs, especially during the economically challenging period, and the need and desire to stimulate the performance and productivity of the organizations and to seed constructive corporate cultures still seemed contradictive. The price-value dimension is, hence, usually one of the considerations of the host organizations (Severt & Breiter, 2010; Shinew & Backman, 1995). In this regard, Thailand should be in an advantageous position given that one of its most prominent images is the value for money given to travelers and

tourists (Blanke & Chiesa, 2013; Future Brand Index, 2011). Thai destination management companies should, therefore, capitalize on this image despite the fact that such an image is not the most desirable one for the destination.

From the above paragraphs pertaining to incentive travel, critical success factors of incentive travel businesses can be listed as follows:

- Ability of incentive travel companies to thoroughly understand client organizations' needs and demands as well as the concerns and constraints about incentive travel programs
- Ability to translate such an understanding into activities and program components that can best satisfy the needs and meet the constraints of the host organizations
- Ability to create fantastic and memorable trip experiences for the participants yet constructive enough to induce behavioral changes
- Ability to appropriately integrate conference and team building activities that enhance the objectives of the host organizations
- Ability to perform the role of clients' consultants, not just service providers, so as to allow clients to achieve their objectives and maximally satisfy their constraints.

The success factors listed above should serve as the benchmark in talent or personnel management for the whole organization and its employees if they contribute to these factors. In the modern business environment, where the job nature of each profession or business has changed at an unprecedented rate, competency which looked into inherent and developed characteristics that allow individual to perform certain tasks in adequate or superior manner.

The concept of competency and competency-based human resources management

The concept of competency has been approached at both individual and organizational levels. The former refers to individual characteristics that constitute his/her capabilities in performing certain tasks while the latter refers to the accumulated competencies of individual employees within an organization that contribute to its competitiveness vis-à-vis competitors (Jauhari, 2006). Using competency as the basis for human resources related issues allows an organization to be more efficient and productive as its competencies are aligned with its strategies and key industrial success factors (Chapman & Lovell, 2006). As a consequence, a sales executive in an incentive travel business should possess the competencies that allow the organization to possess such factors.

Competency can be defined as a set of standards in a workplace that specifies the adequacy and/or superiority of an individual to perform tasks under the scope of

responsibilities of a position within a workplace setting, comprising inherent and developed knowledge, skills and personal attributes (Holton III, et al., 2008; Purdue, Ninemeier, & Woods, 2002; Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell, & Lay, 2001; Soderquist, et al., 2010). Incentive travel business in Thailand, which is the context of this study, need to identify competencies that allow incumbents and applicants to perform their jobs in an adequate or superior way. Therefore, competencies to be identified for incentive travel sales executives should be identified against the job performance standards.

Like various other social science constructs, scholars define different dimensions and components of competency. Competencies of an individual comprise two broad categories, namely hard and soft skills, and hard skills competencies (Weber, Finley, Crawford, & Rivera Jr., 2009). The former refers to technical skills while the latter refers to human and managerial skills which are believed to enhance one's capability to perform the former. Besides, as one climbs up the organizational ladder, the more important the soft skill competencies become (Weber et al., 2009). However, for hospitality professions where uncertainties and ambiguities come with human factors and direct encounters with customers, soft skill competencies are required in the front-line positions as they greatly contribute to higher service quality and smooth task coordination with colleagues and suppliers (Baum, 2008; Jauhari, 2006; Testa & Sipe, 2012). Despite the difficulties in observing soft-skill competencies, it is advisable for human resources managers to assess these skills in job incumbents and applicants in order to support recruitment, appraisal, promotion, and succession decisions by using aptitude tests that are commercially available in the market as they have been proved for accuracy in measuring these soft skills in employees (Bhatawdekar & Bhatawdekar, 2012).

Defillipi and Arthur (1994) contended that for individuals to successfully fulfill their duties as required in their job position, they need to be competent in performing the tasks associated with the position by possessing "know-how", "know-why", and "know-whom". While "know-how" competencies refer to technical knowledge and skills required by the job, "know–why" and "know–whom" competencies refer to self-motivation, identification discipline, and personal network that contribute to the fulfillment of a job in a superior manner (Defillipi & Arthur, 1994). Of the three dimensions, "know–why", which refers to self-identification with a profession, industry, and motivation and devotion to work, seems to be the predominant factor in success. A special characteristic of incentive travel and the nature of sales agent work that deals with uncertainties, variety, ambiguity, diversity, and high competitiveness, "know-whom" competencies or personal and professional network that contribute to sales pitching success (Defillipi & Arthur, 1994; Melaia, Abratt, & Bick, 2008). When making decisions regarding incentive travel sales agents, "know-why" and "know-whom" competencies seem to be the priority criteria in decision-making.

In order to pinpoint what the criteria should be to support human resources related decision-making, managers should be able to accurately identify the competencies that are requisite for the job and competencies that distinguish top performers from average ones (Testa & Sipe, 2012). Most competency models are in the form of matrixes and emphasize too much the hard skill competencies, which might be appropriate for short term decision-making but do not support the long-term plan of an employee (Langdon & Marrelli, 2002). Looking into soft-skill competencies offers benefits to the organization in ensuring that the applicants and incumbents do contribute to the organization's competitiveness despite changes in work natures and managerial levels. Competency models usually help managers identify threshold or minimum required competencies for the job and differing competencies which distinguish top performers from the rest of the crowd (Duad, Ismail, & Omar, 2010; Soderquist et al., 2010). These models usually require each organization to identify their respective competency models that align with their strategies by incorporating the marketing strategies, corporate cultures, organizational structures, and workflows within the organization in order to ensure that the developed competency models fit well with their organizations and contribute to the competitive advantage of the company (Chapman & Lovell, 2006; Langdon & Marrelli, 2002). Before identifying competencies for a job position, job performance standards must first be identified from as many groups of stakeholders in the job position as possible to make sure that the performance and competency identified would be realistic, comprehensive, and applicable to the position (Duad et al., 2010; Langdon & Marrelli, 2002). However, as this study has been developed for the whole industry, it does not touch on the organizational factors that vary from one organization to another. The findings of this study do, however, provide guidelines for general incentive travel businesses in Thailand in making their own decisions related to hiring, appraising, promoting, developing, and remunerating their respective sales executives. Further development by taking strategic and organizational issues into consideration needs to be done in a customized fashion suitable for specific firms.

Methods

This study adopted a constructivism paradigm as the researchers wished to reach, from different angels, a thick and rich description of what is expected at different levels of job performance of sales executive in the Thai incentive travel business while being able to explain why things are as they are (Maholtra, 1999; Neuman, 2006). The study was designed to explore the expected performance of incentive travel sales executives in Thailand and the associated knowledge, skills, and attributes, and the validity of the findings was verified with an expert panel. It partially adopted the model proposed by Langdon and Marelli (2002) called Language of Work (LOW), which is a backward study from expected job performance, tracing back their enabling knowledge, skills and attributes. However, half of that model, which

investigates organizational factors, has been excluded due to the scope of this study, which aimed to identify competencies for the whole industry to serve as guideline for all businesses in this sector. To distinguish top from average performers as well as to pinpoint the training needs of job incumbents, this study has also adopted the design of Duad, Ismail and Omar (2010) by asking what competencies (skills, knowledge, and attributes) are needed in an individual to perform certain tasks at threshold, differing, and ideal levels. The designs of these two studies have been combined to serve as the data collection structure of this study.

The first part of the data collection is an in-depth interview on a semi-structure basis conducted on a face-to-face basis with five different groups of stakeholders, namely the job incumbents, job supervisors, inter-departmental colleagues, suppliers and clients. Interview questions were constructed from job descriptions of incentive travel sales executives from four companies selected by the Thailand Incentive and Convention Organization (TICA), combined, collapsed and reorganized into areas of responsibilities. The typical duties of incentive travel sales executive are listed in Table 2.

Table 2   Typical Job Description of Incentive Travel Sales Executive in Thai
Destination Management Companies (Incentive Travel)

Areas of Responsibilities	Task
Sales and Marketing	Making sales calls for business development
	Receive brief
	Co-design projects for bidding proposal development
	Coordinate prices and service conditions of potential suppliers
	Follow up on unclosed sales
	Facilitate clients' site inspection
	Summarize quotations
Operation	Co-plan operational plans with colleagues from other departments
	Perform the role of center of coordination between colleagues, clients and suppliers
	Verify suppliers' services and products to approve payment
Administration	Coordinate with internal and external colleagues, clients and suppliers, and prepare necessary documents
	Maintain and file documents and information

From the job descriptions of the four companies as given by TICA, the task can be grouped into three areas of responsibility, namely sales and marketing, operation, and administration. Informants were nominated by TICA to ensure the parameter and appropriateness of informants in providing detailed and extensive information about both performance and its associated competencies of sales executives for incentive travel businesses (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Informants were asked how they think a sales executive in an incentive travel business, at the threshold level, should perform the job and what knowledge, skills and competencies they considered necessary for such a performance. Next, they were asked how a high-performing sales executive in an incentive travel business performed such a job differently from an average executive and what knowledge, skills, and attributes constituted the difference. Finally, informants were asked how an ideal sales executive in an incentive travel business would perform certain tasks differently from a top performer and what competencies they required. Then the next tasked were asked to informants until the lass job specification.

To reach a rich and thick description of competencies of different levels demanded of a sales executive in an incentive travel business, knowledgeable participants were selected by the incentive travel professional association (TICA), who served as gatekeeper to the informants (Hennink et al., 2011; Neuman, 2006). Snowball recruitment, with approval from TICA, was also used to add to the number of informants. The interview findings were transcribed, compared, combined and condensed. To ensure the reliability of the findings, the interview guide of Patton (2002) was used, including open-ended questions, neutral, clear and singular. In cases where the interviewers felt that the answers given by informants were still unclear or needed further clarification, they were probed with further questions to provide more information (Patton, 2002). Each session lasts between 150 minutes and 210 minutes, depending on the information provided by the informants. The next level of data collection aimed to ensure the validity of the findings by using a focus-group interview with an expert panel selected by TICA. Performance and competencies were discussed if such items belong to the task, level of performance. Panel members were also asked to add and delete items in both performances and competencies reported in the initial in-depth interviews with targeted participants.

Findings and Discussion
In-depth Interviews

Sixteen participants were recruited after nomination by the Thailand Incentive and Convention Association. They can be grouped as follows; 3 job incumbents, 6 job supervisors, 2 suppliers, 3 colleagues and 2 clients. The interview findings show that an average sales executive of a Thai incentive travel business should acquire information about each potential client before communicating with them through

various channels, using social skills in order to create and retain a constructive relationship. In a sales call after receipt of the Request for Proposal (RFP), the communication should be analogous, allowing two-way communication and introducing an initial brief of the project design to arouse the client's interest while mentioning project components that suit the needs and conditions of the prospective client.

A high-performing incentive travel sales executive is expected to make a sales call by pinpointing clients' subconscious needs by analyzing both clients' information and market intelligence and referring to past successful projects (in the case of repeat clients) and responding to them promptly by referring to what had been discussed on previous occasions. The initial project design proposed or discussed with clients should include project components (for example accommodation, team-building activities and special events)that are unconventional yet accessible. Executives should show how creative they are in designing the program and be adaptive to clients' needs and constraints.

An ideal sales executive for incentive travel should make a sales call by referring to their knowledge of other types of MICE activities that are relevant to the incentive travel project as well as to the operation process. As a consequence, they should be able to close a sale during the first contact without any need for further discussion.

Usually, sales executives for the incentive travel business need further discussion to develop a quotation through various means of communication. At a minimally acceptable level, a sales executive should carefully read and analyze the initial Request for Proposal (RFP) and request additional information from the appropriate person in the client's organization if the given information is insufficient to design the whole project. After obtaining adequate information, the sales executive should share such information with colleagues and brainstorm the design of the project with all others concerned by considering logistical and operational issues. The designed proposal must be submitted within the timeframe determined by the clients.

A high-performing sales executive handles a brief from a client differently, by analyzing non-verbalized needs of clients through a close analysis of the RFP and the conversation. The brainstormed project should be something new, including project components that exceed the expectations of the client. The client should also be informed of the conditions and limitations of the venues proposed or specified by the clients to prevent unrealistic expectations.

Ideally, a sales executive in an incentive travel business receives the brief for a project design by accurately inferring the actual needs and objectives of the clients

without having to request additional information. A high level of creativity should be used in designing the project and overcoming obstacles and limitations of venues and other project components. Executives should utilize their personal and professional networks in designing a breakthrough project that creates excitement in the clients and participants.

After receiving a brief, incentive travel sales executives co-design the project with colleagues from within and other departments as well as potential suppliers. At the threshold level, executives brainstorm with colleagues both within and from other departments the design of a project that can make the proposal impressive for clients by following the strategic directions determined by job supervisors or management. They also need to select appropriate project components that are within the clients' budget range yet suit well their objectives and needs before starting negotiations with them based on the market price of such components. They should also accurately estimate the hidden costs before strategically pricing the project.

High–performing sales executives would design the project with their colleagues by proposing something new and creative through the inclusion of components that are completely new to clients. They add value to the project by incorporating some supplementary project features that would make the project better satisfy clients' needs and they provide a sound justification for their additions. This part is of value to both clients and companies as it serves as up-sell opportunities. Their proposals are prepared neatly and according to the company's format, and are electronically and physically submitted to clients within the timeframe specified by clients.

None of the interviewees could report on their expectations of the ideal performance of a sales executive for the incentive travel business with regard to the co-planning of and quotations for projects.

After the design process, average-performing sales coordinators start coordinating with suppliers. They negotiate with potential suppliers on a case-by-case basis in order to ensure that the company obtains the best deal with the highest margin for the company. During the negotiation process, they also communicate clients' detailed needs and conditions in the clearest and most complete fashion while convincing potential suppliers to adapt products or services to such needs and constraints. If the initially proposed suppliers do not agree with the deal and adaptation, sale executives normally propose alternative suppliers that are of equal value to clients. After choosing the best suppliers, executives also consistently monitor the quality and progress of suppliers' work.

High-performing sales executives coordinate differently with various potential suppliers as this tends to result in the best deal for the project in terms of price and conditions. They always seek to negotiate complementary products or services from each supplier for the use of current or future projects.

After submitting the proposal finalized by the team, an average-performing sale executive follows up the unclosed sales with the client's key contact person via non-personal modes of communication (e-mail or telephone) to check if the proposal has been well received and if all points pertaining to the proposal are clear. Clarification should be provided if there are unclear points or concerns. If clients contact them to ask for clarification of unclear issues or to voice concerns, executives should respond promptly to such issues. They should also remind potential clients of the option date (the day until which the proposal and its conditions would still be valid). It can be seen that each client's insights regarding their decision-making process are important; therefore, executives should source and acquire such insights in advance.

High-performing sales executives follow up unclosed sales differently by probing strategic questions in order to induce up-sell and cross-sell opportunities. They also source well information about clients' organizations and key decision makers before following up. None of the ideal performance was reported.

After closing the deal, sales executives participate in formulating an operational plan with colleagues and suppliers. At the threshold level, they normally call for meeting with all parties concerned with the project, including suppliers. In such a meeting, they summarize and list information about the project and deals made with suppliers as well as the clients' information. They should be receptive to and welcome others' opinions to ensure that the ideas are crystalized among team members. All initiatives and opinions voiced by team members should be considered and discussed to ensure that the operation part of the project is practicable. Apart from anticipating operational problems, they also need to facilitate solutions to potential problems for team members and suppliers.

High-performing sales executives help formulate the operation plan by providing competitive intelligence about competitors and clients to the meeting. In the meeting with the full team, they should be assertive in voicing their opinions and should provide suggestions when seeing the necessity for doing so, and should be able to persuade the team to comply with the direction they propose. Among team members of different backgrounds and profiles, they should create a working atmosphere that welcomes differences and diversity.

Ideally, sales executive for the incentive travel business should assist with the formulation of operational plans by ensuring that all parties concerned, including suppliers, have a mutual understanding and obtain the information pertaining to the project. When persuading the team members to comply with their suggestions, ideal sales executives mediate conflicts among team members with different points of interest to achieve coherent work by seeing the project success as a mutually desirable goal.

One of the final steps that make or break the deal with clients is summarizing the quotation. Average sales executive of incentive travel businesses summarize the quotation by proposing a price appropriate to the project objectives and clients' constraints. To back up the proposal, pictures or solid evidence that support and justify the price quoted should also be attached. Special attention should be paid to the detail and correctness of the quotation, especially in regard to figures. As most clients of incentive travel are international firms, sales executives should possess knowledge about the best methods for international financial transactions. Conditions and terms should inform accounting department accordingly.

High-performing sales executives summarize quotations differently by allocating responsibilities to team members to source information and verify the correctness thereof before submitting. Ideally, they adjust the figures to evaluate the attractiveness of the proposal/ quotation and adjust the figures to make it more competitive.

Once the deal is made with the clients, the clients' representatives normally need to inspect sites to be used as venues and other activities for the project. At the threshold level, a sales executive should prepare relevant information about all venues to be inspected and coordinate well with the venue's management or representatives. They should prepare alternative venues that are equally attractive in case the venues do not meet with the clients' approval. During inspection visits to venues, the sales executive should present the aspects that help satisfy the clients' needs and objectives while assuring them that the right choice has been made.

High-performing sales executives conduct site inspection visit differently by using their networks to source alternative venues in case of problems. During the inspection visit, they should assure clients by showing that they are well acquainted with the venue's management and can solve problems that might arise during the operation phase. They should also turn problematic situations into up-selling opportunities. None of the informants reported on the ideal performance of sales executives in assisting clients during site inspections.

Being the first point of contact with clients and the ones who make promises to them, sales executives are expected to be the center of coordination between clients, operation and suppliers throughout the project. At the base level, a sales executive should study the information well so that all issues pertaining to the project become clear and crystalized. They should call for a meeting of the whole team, including clients and suppliers' representatives, to verify mutual understanding about the projects and activities as well as other potential problems and other issues that still need clarification. They should stay focused on the core issues of the project and avoid becoming embroiled in details of trivial issues. As they have to help colleagues, customers and suppliers to solve problems and mediate conflicts, they should have all information needed at hand and easy to retrieve or refer to.

High-performing sales executives perform the coordination task differently by convincing clients that the changes or modifications to the program operation would be the best solution for the situation. At the same time, they should convince and motivate the team to comply with the timeframes and quality of work as specified in the agreement or as requested by clients. They should also plan the operation one step ahead and ensure that everything goes according to the agreement with clients, especially when problems arise.

Ideally, sales executives for incentive travel businesses should be able to explain and present things and ideas in such a way that allows information recipients to visualize the picture in a logical sequence. As coordination concerns solving problems for clients and colleagues, sales executives should be able to respond immediately to concerns and instantaneously retrieve information to support decisions. As regards personality, they need to be liked by all parties concerned.

In some incentive travel businesses, sales executives are required to perform the process of suppliers' services and products before approving the payment. Average sales executives check and verify both the suppliers fulfillment of the agreement as well as logistical and safety requirements of the venues. They also check if the services and products are according to the agreement and worth the money to be paid. In the case of complicated items, they bring in certified experts to perform these tasks.

A high performing sales executive performs such a task differently by being friendly and facilitating the work and checking the services and products provided by suppliers. If some money is to be deducted from the total sum, the reason needs to be clearly and fairly communicated so that suppliers do not feel they are being taken advantage of.

Some companies require sales executives to follow up on the late payments as well. Average sales executives for incentive travel businesses usually submit invoices

to customers according to the conditions specified in the contract. They remind clients in an appropriate way when the due date is near. If the payment is settled late, they should follow up on the payment tactfully in order to maintain a long-term constructive relationship.

High-performing sales executives usually follow up on payment by justifying all items that appear on the invoice while, ideally, they pressure clients psychologically so as not to make them feel that they are being forced to pay.

One of the functions that is required in all job positions is document communication and rank and files. Generally, a sales executive should prepare documents that organize ideas and information into topics and arrange them in a format that is easy to understand. The dispatch of or response to documents should be on a timely basis and involve social skills to induce a positive relationship with colleagues, clients and suppliers. When filing the documents, they should sort the documents according to topics and dates of receipt.

High-performing sales executives usually add additional details to documents to make the document insightful in a time-efficient manner. They also continue updating their document files as the project progress and sort documents into sub-categories and insert opinion notes so that the future planning can be done effectively.

Table 3 Threshold, differing, and ideal competencies required in Incentive Travel Sale Executives

Competency Components	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
Knowledge	Product knowledge: in the contract list/ other potential project components/ safety measures/ logistic requirement/ cost	How to adapt/ use/ mix/ and match to create phenomenal experience	
	Market intelligence: Consumer trends/ Competitors' moves	Market intelligence of other MICE businesses	
	Customer knowledge: needs/ objectives/ business goals/ key success factors/ industry trends/ mission/ value/ key decision makers	Good memory about customer records and what has been preferred and problems about customers' past events	
	Knowledge about socio-economic affairs	Most updated international affairs	

Table 3 Threshold, differing, and ideal competencies required in Incentive Travel
Sale Executives (Cont.)

Competency Components	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Knowledge about program organizing and operation: Logistics/ time/ safety requirement/ crowd management	Adaptive to conditions and constraints	Knowledge about natures and key success factors of other MICE events
Skills	Market intelligence: Consumer trends/ Competitors' moves Communication: concise/ precise/ accurate/ persuasive/ audience appropriate	Imagery	Charismatics
	Social skills: appropriate for people from broad range of backgrounds/ well mannered/friendly dialogue Critical listening	Social acumen: High level of interpersonal skills	
	Negotiation skills: Fair and systematic Teamwork skills: Task coordination/ collaborative/ decision making/ collaborative problem solving	Comprehensive/ Consider long-term relationship Openness to opinions and critism/ conflict management	Integrative Integrative conflict management
Skills	Problem solving skills: systematic/ responsive Basic financial skills/ Mathematic skills English proficiency presentation skills: vivid and logical	Comprehensive: unplanned/ anticipative Comprehensive estimation of hidden cost/ profit-loss instincts Third language mastery Imagery	Contingency/ complex situations/ integrative Strategic pricing/ psychological pricing Integrative contingency

Table 3 Threshold, differing, and ideal competencies required in Incentive Travel Sale Executives (Cont.)

Competency Components	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Document preparation: logical sequence/ easy to understand format and language appropriate to audience/ appropriate insertion of social skills	Appropriate for recipients and objectives	
	Planning skills: systematic	Anticipative of scenarios	
		Anticipative of problems/ accurate calculation of figures/ Positive attitudes on team members	
Attributes	Relationship management	Strategic questioning	
	Project management Skills: project knowledge/ contract timeline/manpower planning/ profit and loss	Time management skills	
	Tactful questioning	Virtual reality presentation	
	Computer Literacy	Having the world-as-market perspective	
	Cross-cultural consciousness		
	observant/ detail oriented	Meticulous	Scrutinizing
	Personality: agreeable/ friendly	Compromising/ sense of humor/ open to new experience	Calm/ prudent
	Attitude: optimistic/ goal oriented	Persistence on goal achievement/ Excellence oriented attitude/ Customer oriented attitude	Optimism about obstacles and limitations
	Look and manner that command respect and trust		

Table 3 Threshold, differing, and ideal competencies required in Incentive Travel
Sale Executives (Cont.)

Competency Components	Threshold	Differing	Ideal
	Politely assertive	Self-confidence and esteem	Charisma and prudent Look
	Well-organized	Organizational loyalty	
	Well-prepared	Service mind	Service psychology skills
	Work attitude: enthusiasm/ patience/ devotion to work	Wide and quality professional and personal network	Personal network with high-ranking governmental authorities
Attributes	Adaptive to change and uncertainties/ Flexible on process but firm on quality	Open to opinions of others	Constructive conflicts
	Change welcoming/ active learner	Work discipline	Experience from several organizations
	emotional control	Optimism and obstacles/ Result oriented attitude	
	Ethics		
		Many service years in Incentive Travel Business	
	Be fair	Acumen	
	Pride in one's organizaiton	Professionalism	
	Honesty	Entrepreneurial instincts	
	Courage to accept mistakes	Leadership	
	Dependability		
	Avoid negative opinion voicing		
	Refrain from price cutting		

Focus Group Interview

To validate the job performances collected from the in-depth interview sessions as the competencies defined here are supposed to be the starting point for incentive travel business operators to apply to their respective organization in regard to human resource issues concerning sales executives, a group interview, otherwise known as a focus-group interview, was conducted with informants who were regarded as experts as they are professionals and entrepreneurs who have served in the incentive travel sub-industry for a long period with highly recognized professional success. The panel comprised seven members, of whom three were company owners and four were high-ranking management in the field of marketing for the incentive travel business in Thailand. They were briefed on the details of job performance and associated competencies. The focus-group moderator, the second author of this paper, read the task and threshold job performance and associated competencies. Panelists were asked to voice their concerns if the performance and competencies reported from the in-depth interview sessions were appropriate and if they wished to add something, cut some items, words or clauses, or make other modifications. Group flow from the discussion of the panelists was moderated by the researchers, resulting in changes, cuts, additions, and modifications of both performance and competencies.

The focus group interview findings show the differences performance from in-dept interview as detail following. An average sales executive of a Thai incentive travel business should know potential project components and consider in logistics side of the project, "venue" rules and regulation. They should consistently do customer relationship management and understand cultural differences. A high-performing incentive travel executive should be balance benefits of firms and customer satisfaction with internalize knowledge and skill into their natural working styles and thinking process.

After receiving brief, a high-performing incentive travel sales executive co-design the project by propose something new (project components) with higher value and justify the recommendation from client's point of view. Moreover, they should be able to offer components of different product selection with the price ranges for client to choose. The experts say an ideal sale executive incentive travel should develop proposal that is distinctively differentiate with assistance from personal and professional networks in regards to co-planning and quotations for the project.

After submitting the proposal, a high-performing sales executive incentive travel follow up unclosed sales by act as client's consultant by asking probing strategic questions to client's project success and recommend additional services before the deal is closed. In addition, they should concern to ask the questions about the reason why the clients not choose the company for further improvement.

After closing the deal, an average sales executive incentive travel participate in an operational plan by receptive other's opinions and co-analyze the idea, then search for the best practice of the program operation and implementation. In addition, they should do priority setting in terms of what is to be completed first according to the operation plan and internally communicate with team members about the objectives, components, and venues. High-performing sales executive incentive travel help operate the operation plan by be neutral in conflict situation and create welcoming working atmosphere from the diversity and difference of backgrounds and profiles. They should follow up with the information recipients to ensure mutual understanding of the project. Ideally, sales executive for the incentive travel business should be ensure that the whole team receives the information completely and correctly in order to avoid potential mistakes during the operational phrase.

The next step is being a center of coordination. At the threshold level, sales executive incentive travel should study the project information profoundly therefore, all issues and concerns are crystalized. She/he should call for meeting with all parties concern with the project including suppliers in order to verify the mutual understanding about the project objectives. She/he should clarify more on issue that are potential problems. A high-performing sales executive incentive travel should be able to convince clients to comply or modify their work process according to advices or suggestions as well as convince the team member to progress and perform operation plan according to Request For Proposal (RFP). They should balance the company's benefit and customer's satisfaction. Ideally, sales executive incentive travel should propose the visualized presentation of information in a logical sequence while gain trust and respect from the clients and colleagues.

In some incentive travel company, sales executives are required to follow up on the late payment as well. An ideal sales executive is required to possess the tactfully put psychological pressure on customers, yet being able to maintain long-term relationship with clients.

From the focus group interview, the expert panelists did not change the competencies required in a sales executive despite the change of performance standard. In order to address the research objectives, the competencies and performance standards identified by informants and adjusted by the expert panel with the critical success factor of the incentive travel business to see if the expectations of employers and job incumbents really contribute to the competitiveness of the company. The findings show that the threshold competencies identified are not fully consistent with the key success factors, especially in regard to analytical parts of clients, needs, creativity, the knowledge of operation parts, and social skills and acumen that allow them to assume the role of client consultant rather than service provider. Considering that these factors usually pertain to the attribute dimension of

competency which are normally inherent in individuals, human resource managers should measure inherent qualities through the use of commercially available aptitude tests that allow the measurement of qualities that are hard to observe and measure (Duad et al., 2010). The knowledge component of the competency can be developed both an on and off the job basis but without these inherent qualities, sales executives can hardly contribute to the competitiveness of the company.

During the in-depth interviews, from the number of performance standards reported by different groups of stakeholders researchers found that job supervisors and customers tend to have higher expectations of sales executives than the job incumbents and colleagues do. The group interview also support this proposition as seen by the movement of performance standards from differing to threshold level. This proposition can, probably, explain why the productivity of Thai MICE employees is lower than that of employees in Singapore, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Malaysia. Job incumbents might not be aware of what is expected of them as the job descriptions given by TICA were written so broadly that no specific standards of performance were mentioned. Job descriptions should be clearer and more detailed and should specify the task standard to ensure a common ground of understanding of what is expected of employees.

Despite the fact that incentive travel requires sales executives who are highly creative, adaptive and versatile, leadership style and corporate culture tend to play a role in regard to the capitalization of incumbents' competencies in contributing to the organization's competitiveness. One of the job supervisors with an authoritative leadership style working in a very structured, multi-layered organization asserted that he did not expect his sales executive to be creative or recommend any project components that were not included in the contract as he, as job supervisor, knew better how to make things happen. In contrast, a job supervisor with a participative style working in a cooperative culture organization asserted that creativity was everything and he welcomed all initiatives from employees as there might be some hidden great idea under his nose. This proposition contended that a competitive incentive travel business should have a less structured style of management with cooperative and participative cultures.

A competency-based approach to human resources decisions is recommended for incentive travel businesses as the critical success factors require performances that are enabled by mostly inherent qualities of individuals, which are harder to observe, develop, and measure. Hiring new employees with the required attributes usually allows firms to develop skills and knowledge required to perform the tasks up to differing level through human resources development schemes.

Despite the above-mentioned propositions found in this study, organizational factors should also be considered when performing decision tasks regarding human resources. Further development of an organization-specific competency model is suggested and further quantitative study to explore the relative importance of competencies is recommended for scholars and practitioners who are interested in the areas of competency-based human resources management.

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