

Career Competencies and Job Performance of Saudi Employees in Tourism Industry: Intelligent Career Model

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Abstract

Tourism industry is one of the most growing sectors that contributes significantly to Gross World Product (GWP), employment opportunities, and local culture. Saudi Arabia has witnessed a growing number of hotel projects of new international chains and domestic hotels. Studies relevant to career competencies topics are relatively scarce among the first-line staff in Saudi's hotels industry. This study seeks to examine the relationship between career competencies and job performance among frontline staffs at luxury, mid and upper mid-scale hotels in Riyadh and Makkah regions of Saudi Arabia. This study used online questionnaire method and was sent to 700 different hotels with a response rate of 76% (n=499). Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for data analysis. Results showed that reflective, communicative, and behavioral career competencies have a statistically significant positive influence on individual work performance with values of ($\beta=0.3$, $p < 0.01$), ($\beta=0.34$, $p < 0.01$), and ($\beta=0.21$, $p < 0.01$) respectively. A number of practical implications along with the research limitations were discussed.

Keywords: career competencies, job performance, intelligent career competency, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

Globally, one of the most promising industry is tourism; particularly in Saudi Arabia where enormous opportunities are open, especially for foreigner investments. World Travel and Tourism Council (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022) reported that the contribution of tourism and hospitality industry to Saudi GDP in 2022 was 7.2% of total Gross-Domestic Product (GDP) and it is estimated to increase to 17.1% of the total economy. Periodically, there are eight million people visiting Saudi Arabia for religious purposes (Umrah and Hajj) and by 2030, this number is anticipated to approach 30 million (Yezli et al., 2017). Tourism is a labor-intensive industry, and the motto to succeed in this market is service quality and customer satisfaction (Shabir & Sharma, 2019; Teng, 2019). As the quality of service depends on the way they are delivered by employees (Marneros et al., 2020; Temizkan & Yabanci, 2020), competent employees are pivotal for a better service delivery in hospitality settings. There has been some literature that raised the attention of the need to improve tourism services in Saudi Arabia and to promote job performance of hotels staffs (Alhazmi, 2020; Almutairi et al., 2013; Azhar et al., 2018; Bhatti et al., 2022; Talaat & Abdelaal, 2021).

Saudi Arabia has witnessed a growth in religious, leisure and business tourism. Tourism business is an important driver to the Kingdom's economic diversification and infrastructure development. The success and survival of hospitality and tourism services depend primarily on satisfied customers (Chapman & Lovell, 2006; Darvishmotevali et al., 2017), and service encounter determines overall customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Haynes & Fryer, 2000; Teng, 2019). Customer satisfaction can be ensured by improving the functional area of front office employees as they play a critical role in meeting customer expectations during service encounter (Haiyan & Baum, 2006; Suhartanto et al., 2018). Therefore, competent personnel with necessary skills are pivotal for surviving in such a service competitive market. Previous studies have emphasized the need to improve hotel performance in Saudi Arabia (Bhatti et al., 2022), and enhance employees' skills and capabilities for sustainable careers (Ali et al., 2022). Recently, it has been found that staffs skills and competencies such as tourists handling, and communications are fundamental to ensure sustainable transformation development of tourism industry in Saudi Arabia (Shabir & Sharma, 2019). Few studies have examined workplace skills and

career development competencies and to what extent this can predict hotels employees' performance in Saudi Arabia. Up to the best of researchers' knowledge, this is the first study which investigates the application and prospective of the intelligent career model in Saudi Arabia and the proposed framework has not been empirically tested in the Saudi tourism industry.

2. Career Competencies

Competencies have been one of the focal points of importance within human resources management identifying behavioral factors relevant to successful performance and person career development (Akkermans et al., 2013). Inspired by the concept of Intelligent Enterprise of (Quinn, 1992), (Defilippi & Arthur, 1996) defined Career Competencies CCs as the accumulation of skills, knowledge and individual behaviors that facilitate successful career management and career success. Career related skills and knowledge accumulate over time and influence individual's and organization's performance (Eby et al., 2003).

Intelligent Career Framework of Career Competencies

The career capital accumulation perspective by Arthur and colleagues describes CCs in three arenas of knowing: knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom (Defilippi & Arthur, 1996). It assumes that in a modern career environment, individuals should develop three different career competencies which are knowing why, knowing whom, and knowing how competencies to enhance their competitiveness and employability (Park, 2020). Various scholars empirically have demonstrated the significance of the three dimensions of knowing as predictors to career satisfaction, perceived internal marketability, and perceived external marketability. In a service industry such as the tourism industry which is characterized by job mobility and self-directed path (Safavi & Bouzari, 2019; Wang, 2013), career development competencies and working skills are pivotal for career progression (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Reflective Career Competencies (RCC)

Reflective career competencies are the degree to which an individual is conscious of his/ her strengths and weaknesses, and specific career goals. It means individuals' awareness of one's qualities and motivations. For instance, reflection on one's strengths and weaknesses and one's enthusiasm for a certain profession. Self-knowledge skills have been found to predict positively job performance, well-being, and career success (Akkermans et al., 2013; Briscoe et al., 2012; Park, 2020). Employees at the service sector should cultivate reflective career competencies, and this can predict career outcomes (Kong et al., 2012; Park, 2020). Additionally, individuals who are recruited in tourism industry require awareness of job qualities and career motivation as this industry characterized by various mobility patterns and competitive market (Colakoglu, 2011).

Communicative Career Competencies (CCC)

Communicative career competencies pertain to an individual career related networks and contacts that are formed inside and outside the working organization (Defilippi & Arthur, 1996). It has two dimensions; networking and self-profiling (J. Akkermans et al., 2013). There are three major benefits from forming those personal and professional networks through communication skills. First, to utilize those established networks as resources for acquiring expertise from other firms (Nesheim et al., 2017). Second, the value of networks can be used as reputation for job mobility and career advancement. Networks are also a way of new learning and source of competitive advantage (Kong et al., 2012). Organizations can provide series of activities to enhance those interpersonal skills such as mentoring programs, assessment centers, and networking opportunities (Eby et al., 2003; Kong et al., 2012). Substantial studies have demonstrated empirically the value of developmental relationships and its positive impact on task performance and general self-efficacy (Sparrowe et al., 2001); job satisfaction (Kong et al., 2012), job involvement (Kong, 2013) and job crafting behaviors (Akkermans & Tims, 2017).

Behavioral Career Competencies (BCC)

Behavioral career competencies reflect career relevant skills and job-related knowledge that are employed toward achieving successful job performance and task requirements. It involves skills needed to effectively shape a career and knowledge necessary to perform a specific job tasks (Blokke et al., 2019). It includes two proactive behaviors which are work exploration and career control (J. Akkermans et al., 2013). Knowing how combines explicit knowledge from formal education and tacit knowledge reflecting experiential knowledge (Zikic & Ezzedeen, 2015). Organizations can reinforce employees knowing how by providing organizational training, performance appraisal and job analysis (Kong et al., 2012). This type of competency has been recognized as an essential factor of all competency frameworks and have predicted positively several individual work outcomes such as career resilience (Ahmad et al., 2019), work-home enrichment (Akkermans & Tims,

2017), and perceived health (Plomp et al., 2016).

Job Performance

Job performance is one of the most important criteria measured when designing and implementing human resources practices such as performance appraisals, training, and compensation. It has been reported as a significant indicator of organizational performance and efficiency (Johari & Yahya, 2016). Job performance is the set of employee's behaviors that are dynamic and evaluative, helping organizations to reach their goals (Bergeron, 2007; Carlos & Rodrigues, 2016). Employee performance is probably one of the significant topics in the tourism organizations as the outcomes in this context are primarily dependent on the close interaction between employees and customers during service encounter (Karatepe et al., 2006). Thus, the job performance of service employees is crucial to customer satisfaction and organizational survival (Kim & Koo, 2017).

3. Methods

A quantitative, explanatory research and utilized a purposive sampling technique to reach out frontline employees at Riyadh and Makkah regions in Saudi Arabia. Using established and validated scales adopted form Career Competencies Questionnaire (CCQ), job crafting scale (JCS) and Employee Performance (EPERF). Online questionnaire was used to collect the data. Data were collected from 3-stars, 4 stars and 5 stars hotels in Riyadh and Makkah regions between February and June of 2022. Around 700 hundreds electronic questionnaires were distributed to 70 different hotels in Makkah and Riyadh regions. Of the 700 questionnaires, 499 were completed, yielding a 71% response rate. prior to data collection, King Saud University IRB approved this research design with reference number of KSU-HE-21-384. SPSS and Smart PLS were used to achieve the study objective. Descriptive analysis was generated by SPSS and inferential statistics were performed by Smart PLS.

4. Results

The respondents' demographic details are shown in Table 1. The sample includes 75% male and 24% female. Saudi participants outnumbered non-Saudi ones. The tremendous majority 65% of the respondents are aged between 21-30 years old.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Profile	Category (n = 499)	Frequency	Percent
Age	20 years and less	38.0	7.6
	21-30	326.0	65.3
	31-40	119.0	23.8
	41-50	15.0	3.0
	51 or more	1.0	.2
Gender	Male	378.0	75.8
	Female	121.0	24.2
Nationality	Saudi	423.0	84.8
	Non-Saudi	76.0	15.2
Marital status	Single	316.0	63.3
	Married	163.0	32.7
	Divorced	19.0	3.8
	Widower	1.0	.2
Level of education	Not educated	3.0	.6
	High school or less	95.0	19.0
	Bachelor's degree	325.0	65.1
	Master's degree	15.0	3.0
	Others	61.0	12.2

Reliability of the measures are shown in table 2 and Cronbach's alpha values superseded 0.80, indicating good construct reliability. Additionally, the AVE values for all the study variables are above 0.50 therefore, convergent validity is verified (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity

Latent Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite (rho_a)	reliability	Composite (rho_c)	reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
RCC	0.924	0.926		0.939		0.688
CCC	0.902	0.906		0.923		0.633
BCC	0.935	0.936		0.947		0.719
JobPerf	0.879	0.886		0.909		0.625

Fornell-Larcker criterion method and the Heterotrait-Monotrait method ratio (HTMT) were used to evaluate discriminant validity. Table 3 verified that the square roots of AVEs are greater than the correlation among latent variables, which means discriminant validity is established for all measure. HTMT values are all lower than the cut off 0.90, satisfying the criteria of discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Criteria

Latent Construct	Fornell-Larcker Criterion				HTMT Ratios		
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3
RCC	0.83						
CCC	0.790	0.796			0.864		
BCC	0.787	0.770	0.848		0.845	0.838	
JobPerf	0.737	0.742	0.712	0.790	0.808	0.831	0.777

Table 4 shows that all items load higher (bolded values) on their assigned constructs than their loadings with other constructs confirming discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021). Further, cross-loading condition for determining multicollinearity was met since no items had a bigger cross-loading than their loading on their latent parent construct (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4. Factors Cross-Loading

Indicators	RCC	CCC	BCC	JobPerf
Motivation_1	0.81	0.657	0.664	0.58
Motivation_2	0.846	0.652	0.677	0.622
Motivation_3	0.845	0.691	0.718	0.634
Qualities_1	0.86	0.655	0.637	0.636
Qualities_2	0.76	0.606	0.569	0.534
Qualities_3	0.861	0.67	0.644	0.646
Qualities_4	0.821	0.655	0.655	0.621
Networking_1	0.697	0.826	0.626	0.645
Networking_2	0.536	0.678	0.611	0.522
Networking_3	0.615	0.769	0.548	0.565
Networking_4	0.678	0.831	0.642	0.632
SelfP_1	0.627	0.836	0.63	0.621
SelfP_2	0.6	0.823	0.629	0.567
SelfP_3	0.631	0.794	0.604	0.57
CRR1	0.638	0.58	0.827	0.558
CRR2	0.602	0.587	0.815	0.552
CRR3	0.669	0.659	0.881	0.591
CRR4	0.715	0.663	0.869	0.635
WExplore_1	0.695	0.725	0.837	0.627
WExplore_2	0.664	0.67	0.858	0.599
WExplore_3	0.674	0.671	0.844	0.651
JBPRF_1	0.636	0.613	0.598	0.839
JBPRF_2	0.617	0.618	0.589	0.807
JBPRF_3	0.579	0.578	0.599	0.804
JBPRF_4	0.663	0.616	0.627	0.813
JBPRF_5	0.407	0.507	0.409	0.684
JBPRF_6	0.556	0.58	0.522	0.784

To evaluate the model's predictive power, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is computed. R^2 of JobPerf is 62 %, indicating that approximately 62% of variation in the Job Performance is accounted by career competencies and the higher the value of coefficient of determination is the better explanatory power (Hair et al., 2019). Likewise, the predictive relevance of the model was assessed using the Stone Gaizer's Q². Given a value of 0.619 for JobPerf, we can infer that the model has high predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2019). Further, as recommended by (Henseler et al., 2016), calculating standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is an appropriate criteria to assess the model fit in PLS analysis. SRMR value of 0.054 indicates adequate model fit as the SRMR value should be less than 0.08 to ensure a good model fit.

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R2) and (Q2) and Model Fit (SRMR)

Determination	R-square	R-square adjusted	Q ² predict
JobPerf	0.626	0.624	0.619
Fit Indices (SRMR)	0.054		

From the bootstrapping of the structural model, table 6 shows the results of the path analysis testing relationships between three types of career competencies and job performance. All hypotheses are significant with *P* values less than 0.05 and t-values above threshold of 1.96 (Hair et al., 2021). The results the application of these three forms of knowing is influential and predict job outcomes.

Table 6. Path Analysis

	Hypotheses	Beta (β)	Std Err	T Stat	P values	L95% BCa CI	U95% BCa CI	Results
H1	RCC → JobPerf	0.3	0.068	4.437	0	0.163	0.431	Accepted
H2	CCC → JobPerf	0.341	0.061	5.594	0	0.229	0.468	Accepted
H3	BCC → JobPerf	0.214	0.053	4.057	0	0.112	0.316	Accepted

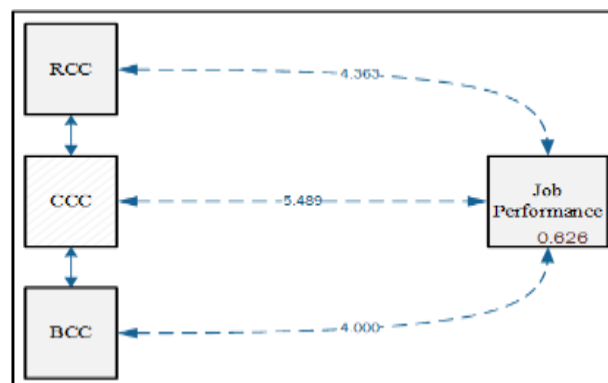


Figure 1. Inner Model Showing t-values and R2 in Construct using Smart PLS

Note. RCC = Reflective Career Competencies; CCC = Communicative Career Competencies; BCC = Behavioral Career Competencies.

5. Discussion

This research investigates the association between three types of modern career competencies and individual performance in the Saudi hotel industry. In addition, dominance analysis was performed to examine the relative importance of each career competency on predicating perceived job performance among line staffs of various types of hotels. Using the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory as our conceptual framework (Demerouti et al., 2001), we examined the role of career competencies in enhancing individual resources affecting job performance. The findings indicate that all three types of career competencies positively predict perceived job performance. The results support that all ways of knowing have positive influence on individual job performance. Prior researchers have demonstrated the positive influence career competencies have on several job outcomes such as career success, job satisfaction and turnover intention (Ali et al., 2022; Kong et al., 2012; Kuipers et al., 2006; Park, 2020). This study supports the notion that intelligent framework of competencies is capable of predicting perceived job performance at service industry. Additionally, knowing whom has the greatest influence on job performance than knowing how and why, and this is consistent with the other empirical research targeting service industry (Ali et al., 2022; Eby et al., 2003; Park, 2020).

The study results support the hypothesis that reflective career competencies positively predict job performance. Individuals who are aware of their qualities and source of motivation are more satisfied with their careers (Kong et al., 2012) and subsequently feel healthier (Plomp et al., 2016) and can balance work-home interactions (Akkermans & Tims, 2017). Employees, who have sense of purpose and identification with the work they perform, are more likely to craft their jobs and mobilize resources (Akkermans & Tims, 2017), increasing their perceived control over the job (King, 2004) which ultimately fostering career resilience (Ahmad et al., 2019). However, the lack of significant relationship between RCC and turnover intention (Ali et al., 2022) was surprising as majority of empirical research demonstrated positive effects of developing career resources on individuals' career success (Akkermans et al., 2013). It is necessary to examine subjective career success of competent employees to determine if a person has an intention to leave the job as recent empirical research reported that competent workers with high subjective career success have low turnover intention (Talluri & Uppal, 2022).

Communicative career competencies are employees' ability to build developmental relationships inside and outside the job and their ability to expand this for job related purposes (Akkermans et al., 2013). Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of networking on individual outcomes such as job involvement (Kong, 2013), and career resilience (Ahmad et al., 2019). Establishing connections is beneficial to enhance workers sense of career autonomy and security (Colakoglu, 2011) which can subsequently influence turnover intention (Ali et al., 2022). Our results affirm the conclusion that knowing whom competencies predicts positively subjective career success in the hotel industry.

The findings of the current study also provided empirical support for the positive relationship between behavioral career competencies and perceived job performance. This is on the line of multiple studies demonstrating the importance of job-related knowledge and skills on job satisfaction (Kong et al., 2012) and employability (Blokker et al., 2019). Knowing how competencies become paramount in such a boundaryless work environment that is characterized by high job mobility such as tourism industry (Colakoglu, 2011). Developing transferable work-related knowledge and skills are essential for career success at the hospitality and tourism industry and organizations should invest continuously on employees' training and skills development (Wang, 2013).

6. Conclusion

This research aims to examine the effects of the three modern career competencies on job performance among frontline staff in Saudi tourism industry particularly at hotels. Customer contact employees determine customer satisfaction, therefore, knowledge and skills needed by those workers have been extensively the focus of industry experts and scholars. According to the theory of job demand- resources, career competencies are personal resources that can motivate employees and enhance job outcomes. This research found that all three career competencies predict significantly individual job performance and communicative career competency has the greatest effect on job performance among all other career competencies.

7. Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, all data collected are self-reported which might cause the issue of common method bias. Second, this research is cross-sectional design, which may affect our causal inferences. Third, this study was conducted on a sample of hotels in two regions of the kingdom therefore, our findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions. Lastly, this research only focusses on the relationship between career competencies and job performance. Future research should examine other individual outcomes such as job commitment.

8. Practical Implications

The study provides several recommendations for hotels management. First, the results indicate that all three types of career competencies are crucial for employees' assessment of their career outcomes. Human resource managers can help employees developing career related skills through training sessions, mentoring and assessment centers. Additionally, hotel managers should guide employees to develop specific career goals and explore their areas of strengths, weaknesses, and motivation. This would enhance their reflective career competencies and work performance (Kuvaas, 2007). Third, human resource managers can plan training courses and educational opportunities to enhance employees' knowledge and skills. Lastly, Tourism and hospitality establishments should provide the opportunities for workers to expand their career related networks as this ability to building relationship and communicate with others in field have been found to predict career success and critical thinking (Shabir & Sharma, 2019).

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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