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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED EMPLOYABLE COMPETENCY BY RESTAURANT MANAGERS OF TAIWAN

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Abstract

The study compares the difference in employable competency between formal employees and interns as perceived by restaurant managers of Taiwan. A 20-item scale was developed from extensive literature review where the questionnaires were distributed across restaurants in Taiwan. From 117 valid returns, two categories of employable competency were identified for "formal employees" in restaurants: "professional skills" and "general skills". Four categories of employable competency were identified for "interns" in restaurants: "workplace knowhow", "stable", "extra ability", and "people skills". Demographic significance was identified for gender and managerial position among restaurant managers where male managers viewed "workplace knowhow" to be significantly more important than female managers did on "interns". Mid-level managers viewed "stable" to be significantly more important than low-level managers felt on "interns".

Keywords: Management, Competency, Employable, Factor Analysis, General Skills, Professional Skills

Introduction

In the past, employability has been viewed as the solution to employment uncertainty or as management rhetoric within the human resource community. Hallier (2009) suggested employability having resonance with employees as workers rather than as employees of their immediate employer. An individual's' "employability" is said to be obtained through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that are valued by prospective employers and thus encompasses an individual's career potential (Fugate et al., 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Hence, employability may be regarded as an important factor in understanding contemporary career success (Hall, 2002).

The phenomenon of "high unemployment" and "shortage of human resource" coexists in Taiwan where new

graduates cannot find suitable jobs while industries have a hard time finding workers with adequate skills. This may be traceable to inadequate curriculums offered by Taiwan's higher education. Thus, it is imperative for schools to offer curriculums befitting of what each industry wants for employable competency.

Employers typically look for a more flexible, adaptable workforce in response to the volatility of market needs (Clarke, 1997; Bennett, 2002). As part of this flexibility, employers are hiring and firing their employees more readily across industries as life-long employment is now scarce (Nolan & Wood, 2003). At the same time, the notion of graduates developing their "employability" skills in their first job at the expense of their initial employer is also disappearing (Davies, 2000). In addition to subject-specific skills, being ready in work-related skills are essential to a graduate's employability (Dench, 1997).

Many definitions of employability exist in the literatures. Employability is not just about getting a job but rather developing attributes and skills. The emphasis is less on "employ" but more on "ability" (Harvey, 2005). "Ability" or "competency" gained traction in the 1970's when a scholar wrote a paper in the American Psychologist (McClelland, 1973). McClelland moved away from knowledge, skills, and attitude in "competency". Instead, he focused on specific self-image, values, traits, and motive dispositions for "occupational competency". Additionally, Spencer and Spencer (1993) proposed five components of competency: motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skill.

An important role for schools is not just to follow trends in the industry but rather functioning as a medium between potential employers and employees in driving and stimulating industry development. The Ministry of Education in Taiwan recognizes this matter and mandates Colleges and Universities of installing off-campus internship programs in a four-year curriculum. The study is curious to find out if there are cognitive differences in terms of employable competency between "formal employees" and "interns" as perceived by the restaurant industry (managers) in Taiwan. Factor analysis would be performed of employable competency towards "formal employees" and "interns". When applicable, analysis of variance (ANOVA) would be performed as well.

Literature Review

Definitions of employability are abundant (Harvey, 2001; Fugate et al., 2004). For example, Fugate et al. (2004) argued three components of employability: career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital. Generally speaking, a number of studies have related the reality of the job market to employability (Rae, 2007; Guo & Van der Heijden, 2008). There are also studies relating (practical) training to employability (Mamgain & Parashar, 2000; Kagaari, 2007). Nonetheless, most studies pertaining to employability have focused on knowledge, skill sets, and policies across various nations and cultures (Harvey, 2001; Cranmer, 2006; Thijssen et al., 2008).

Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling

work. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Four elements of employability as proposed by Hillage and Pollard (1998) are: employability assets (knowledge, skill, attitude), deployment (career management skills, including job search skills), presentation (job getting skills, e.g. C.V. writing and interview techniques), and personal circumstances (family responsibilities and external factors such as opportunities in the labor market). However, Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) presented an instrument for measuring employability based on a five-dimensional conceptualization of employability.

In the job market, top-level managers prefer conceptual skills while supervisors prefer technical skills to manage employees in their specific area of specialty. People employed at all levels of management need human skills in order to interact and communicate with their employees and other managers, while technical skills have significant importance for newcomers' success (Guo & Van der Heijden, 2008). Bhanugopan and Fish (2009) found employers are generally satisfied with the skill levels of graduates at a technical level but concerned with "general skills" and "personal attributes". In relation to skills development, teamwork is also useful in learning real-world communications and decision-making, as well as in business planning and subsequent tracking and rectification of individuals' and teams' oversights.

Methodology

The literatures review and interviews with scholars and restaurant managers provided the basis of a 20-items scale. Since the sample population was comprised of restaurant managers with limited English proficiency, the questionnaire would be presented by Chinese exclusively. From the review of literatures (in English), a blind translation – back – translation technique was performed according to the procedure of Brislin (1976) for the finalized questionnaire in Chinese. Two hundred copies of the questionnaires were distributed randomly to restaurant managers in Taiwan from February to May of 2017. A total of 117 valid returns were obtained from June to December of 2017, representing 58.5% response rate. The questionnaire was rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). Data were analyzed by SPSS 20.0 statistical software for Windows. After factor analyzing attributes of employable competency separately for "formal employees" and "interns", analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed as well to identify demographic differences among restaurant managers of Taiwan.

Table 1 illustrates the sample's demographics. Majority of the respondents were female, at 55.1% (n = 65). By age, 76.1% (n = 89) of the respondents were between 30 and 45 years old. By marital status, 54.7% (n = 64) of the respondents were married. By education, 78.5% (n = 91) of the respondents had an undergraduate degree. By managerial position, 56.4% (n = 66) of the respondents were lower level managers. By restaurant locations, 43.6% (n = 51) of the respondents were located in northern Taiwan,

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents (n = 117)

Demographic Characteristics	Number of Respondents	Demographic Characteristics	Number of Respondents
Gender		Education	
Male	52 (44.9%)	High school or less	16 (12.9%)
Female	65 (55.1%)	4-year college	91 (78.5%)
		Post graduate	10 (8.6%)
Age		Managerial position	
Under 30	1 (0.9%)	Top-level	10 (8.6%)
30 to 45	89 (76.1%)	Mid-level	41 (35.0%)
Over 45	27 (23.1%)	Lower-level	66 (56.4%)
Marital status		Location	
Single	52 (44.4%)	North	51 (43.6%)
Married	64 (54.7%)	Central	31 (26.5%)
Divorced/Widowed	1 (0.9%)	South	35 (29.9%)

which reflect the fact that Northern Taiwan has much more population than other parts of Taiwan. Due to culture sensitivity regarding an individual's salary, the sample did not ask respondents' income level.

Results and Discussions

Mean ratings of the 20-item scale as perceived by restaurant managers toward "formal employees" and "interns" are shown in Table 2. Among the items, restaurant managers viewed Q1 "attitude" to be the most important employable competency for both "formal employees" and "interns". On the other hand, restaurant managers viewed Q6 "culinary creativity" to be the least important employable competency for both employee groups. Additionally, Q18 "technology operation" is an employable competency that represents the widest disparity of opinions by restaurant managers (i.e. the highest standard deviation, S.D.). Overall, the average of the 20 attributes are higher for "formal employees (4.25)" than for "interns (3.86)" as perceived by restaurant managers, implying managers tend to hold higher standards on formal employees than interns.

To examine the difference of perceived employable competency towards "formal employees" and "interns" further, factor analysis was performed for both two groups of employees, "formal employees" and "interns". Table 3 shows two constructs of employable competency for "formal employees": professional skills and general skills. Professional skills were composed of 10 items where the mean is 4.035, with Cronbach's alpha at .933, Eigenvalue at 11.327, and explained by 32.21% of variance. Of the 10 items, Q19 "culinary professional skill" has the highest factor loading (FL) at .818, followed by Q6 "culinary creativity (FL = .762)", Q17 "utilization of culinary knowledge (FL = .753)", etc. Here, the author needs to point out that Q6 "culinary creativity" received the lowest mean (3.86), as shown in Table 2. The lowest mean only represents the fact that restaurant

Table 2. Restaurant managers' perceived competency toward employees

Items of measurement	Formal employees		Interns	
	Mean	*S.D.*	*Mean*	*S.D.*
Q1. Attitude	4.68	0.858	4.71	0.708
Q2. Ethic	4.56	0.824	4.56	0.636
Q3. Teachable	4.32	0.936	4.32	0.806
Q4. Resist pressure	4.49	0.826	4.38	0.764
Q5. Problem solving	4.36	0.905	3.68	0.797
Q6. Culinary creativity	3.86	1.082	3.14	0.982
Q7. Knowledge curiosity	4.00	1.122	3.93	0.989
Q8. Presentation skill	4.24	0.887	3.91	0.836
Q9. Communication skill	4.50	0.867	4.12	0.790
Q10. Teamwork	4.55	0.825	4.34	0.822
Q11. Interact with others	4.24	1.072	3.63	1.031
Q12. Career planning	4.00	1.067	3.46	0.996
Q13. Cognition of culinary workplace	4.02	1.106	3.48	0.970
Q14. Lifelong learning	4.21	0.918	3.79	1.079
Q15. Self-marketing	4.30	0.893	3.90	1.020
Q16. Foreign language ability	4.04	1.003	3.57	0.994
Q17. Utilization of culinary knowledge	4.21	1.071	3.87	0.961
Q18. Technology operation	3.92	1.233	3.34	1.168
Q19. Culinary professional skill	4.03	1.148	3.42	1.052
Q20. Emergency skill	4.38	0.869	3.68	0.963

managers do not view "culinary creativity" to be an important attribute of employable competency. Nonetheless, "culinary creativity" is a key ingredient of "professional skills", based on its high factor loading (.762). Additionally, it should also noted by the researcher that Q16 "foreign language ability" has the lowest factor loading (FL = .510) among the 10 items by a significant margin when compared with other items. This is not to say that "foreign language ability" is not an important employable competency but rather that "foreign language ability" may fall into the gray area or "hybrid" between "professional skills" and "general skills".

Similarly, general skills were composed of the other 10 items where the mean is 4.448, with Cronbach's alpha at .948, Eigenvalue at 1.042, and explained by 31.44% of variance (as shown in Table 3). Combined with the first construct (professional skills), 63.65% of total variance is explained for formal employees' employable competency. Of the 10 items, Q1 "attitude" has the highest factor loading (FL = .874), followed by Q4 "resist pressure (FL = .779)", Q2 "ethic (FL = .767)", Q5 "problem solving (FL = .754)", etc. Hence, it is apparent that "attitude" is a key tread in terms of employable competency for all types of employees (i.e. highest means for both formal employees and interns as perceived by restaurant managers in Table 2), in addition to being an important attribute of "general skills".

Table 3. Factor analysis of employable competency towards "formal employees"

Attributes of Employable Competency	Factor Loadings	
Professional Skills (*Mean* = 4.053)		
Q19. Culinary professional skill	.818	
Q6. Culinary creativity	.762	
Q17. Utilization of culinary knowledge	.753	
Q7. Knowledge curiosity	.729	
Q12. Career planning	.723	
Q13. Cognition of culinary workplace	.668	
Q18. Technology operation	.654	
Q14. Lifelong learning	.640	
Q11. Interact with others	.618	
Q16. Foreign language ability	.510	
General skills (*Mean* = 4.448)		
Q1. Attitude		
Q4. Resist pressure		.874
Q2. Ethic		.779
Q5. Problem solving		.767
Q10. Teamwork		.754
Q3. Teachable		.747
Q20. Emergency skill		.694
Q9. Communication skill		.618
Q15. Self-marketing		.615
Q8. Presentation skill		.610
Eigenvalue	11.327	.599
Cronbach's alpha	.933	1.042
Cumulative variance explained (%)	32.210	.948

Shifting to factor analysis of employable competency for "interns" as perceived by restaurant managers, four rounds of factor analysis had to be performed for all criteria to fit (i.e. factor loadings, Eigenvalue, and cumulative variance explained). After the eliminating Q5 "problem solving", Q6 "culinary creativity", Q8 "presentation skill", Q13 "cognition of culinary workplace", Q14 "lifelong learning", and Q15 "self-marketing", necessary criteria for factor analysis were finally met, as shown in Table 4. Four constructs were identified in the factor analysis: "workplace knowhow", "stable", "extra ability", and "people skills". In the first construct, "workplace knowhow" is composed of five items: Q12 "career planning", Q19 "culinary creativity", Q17 "utilization of culinary knowledge", Q11 "interact with others", and Q7 "knowledge curiosity". This five-item construct is explained by 17.711% of variance, with a mean of 3.664, Eigenvalue at 2.480, and Cronbach's alpha at .829. It is very interesting that the highest factor loading attribute Q12 "career planning" did not receive a high mean (3.46) compared with other attributes (as shown in Table 2). Although restaurant managers viewed "career planning" to be more important for "formal employees

Table 4. Factor analysis of employable competency towards "interns"

Attributes of Employable Competency	Factor Loadings			
Workplace knowhow (*Mean* = 3.664)				
Q12. Career planning	.749			
Q19. Culinary professional skill	.690			
Q17. Utilization of culinary knowledge	.688			
Q11. Interact with others	.581			
Q7. Knowledge curiosity	.496			
Stable (*Mean* = 4.492)				
Q1. Attitude		.743		
Q3. Teachable		.685		
Q2. Ethic		.664		
Q4. Resist pressure		.595		
Extra ability (*Mean* = 3.530)				
Q18. Technology operation			.775	
Q20. Emergency skill			.635	
Q16. Foreign language ability			.537	
People skills (*Mean* = 4.230)				
Q10. Teamwork				.734
Q9. Communication skill				.705
Eigenvalue	2.480	2.118	1.638	1.609
Cronbach's alpha	.829	.780	.731	.760
Cumulative variance explained (%)	17.711	32.840	44.541	56.034

(Mean = 4.00)" than "formal employees (Mean = 3.46)", "career planning" was found to have the highest factor loading at .746 in the five-item construct of "workplace knowhow" for "interns". The second construct (stable) for "interns" is composed of four-items, Q1 "attitude", Q3 "teachable", Q2 "ethic", and Q4 "resist pressure". This four-item construct received a mean of 4.492, with Cronbach's alpha at .780, and Eigenvalue at 1.638, which explained 15.129% of variance. The third construct "extra ability" is composed by three attributes, Q18 "technology operation (FL = .775)", Q20 "emergency skill (FL = .635)", and Q16 "foreign language ability (FL = .537)". The three-item construct is explained by 11.701% of variance, with a mean of 3.530, Cronbach's alpha = .731, and Eigenvalue at 1.638. "Technology operation" is not only the top attribute for "extra ability" in employable competency but also the highest factor loading among all attributes of employable competency for "interns". Finally, the last construct is composed by two items, Q10 "teamwork (FL = .734)" and Q9 "communication skill (FL = .705)". The two-item construct is explained by 11.493% of variance, thereby a cumulative variance of 56.034% for the four constructs.

From ANOVA, most of demographic differences showed insignificance among restaurant managers in the perceived employable competency

for "formal employees". However, two social demographic differences were identified for "interns", by respondents' "gender" and "managerial position". As shown in Table 5, male managers viewed "workplace knowledge" to be more important than their

Table 5. Gender difference of restaurant managers toward employable attributes

Construct	Gender	*Mean*	*S.D.*	*F-value*	*Sig.*
Workplace knowledge	Male	3.8500	0.655	5.648	.019*
	Female	3.5138	0.834		
Stable	Male	4.5288	0.562	.404	.526
	Female	4.4615	0.575		
Extra ability	Male	3.4679	0.886	.503	.479
	Female	3.5795	0.811		
People skills	Male	4.1827	0.761	.411	.523
	Female	4.2692	0.696		

Table 6. Managerial positions difference toward employable attributes

Construct	Managerial position	*Mean*	*S.D.*	*F-value*	*Sig.*
Workplace knowledge	High-level managers	4.00	0.760	2.770	.067
	Mid-level managers	3.81	0.587		
	Low-level managers	3.52	0.855		
Stable	High-level managers	4.68	0.409	3.564	.032*
	Mid-level managers	4.64	0.399		
	Low-level managers	4.37	0.648		
Extra ability	High-level managers	3.67	1.257	.974	.381
	Mid-level managers	3.65	0.641		
	Low-level managers	3.43	0.881		
People skills	High-level managers	4.25	0.766	.638	.530
	Mid-level managers	4.33	0.619		
	Low-level managers	4.17	0.791		

female counterparts did (3.85 > 3.51, F-value = 5.648, p = .019* < .05). Male managers felt interns should have significantly higher "workplace knowledge" than what female managers felt about interns. Although statistically insignificant, female managers viewed "extra ability" and "people skill" to be important for interns than their male counterparts did. In terms of managerial position, statistical significance was only identified in "stable" where F-value = 3.564, p = .032* < .05, as shown in Table 6. From post hoc analysis, significance by LSD was identified in that mid-level managers tend to have higher views about "stable" than low-level managers do about interns (mean difference of 0.26903 with p = .016* < .05). Although the

mean difference between high-level managers and low-level managers was higher by 0.30379, the post hoc analysis showed insignificance (p = .110 > .05) due to much lower sample number of high-level managers (n = 10 as compared to mid-level and low-level managers, 41 and 66, respectively).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study identified two constructs of employable competency for "formal employees" in restaurants, professional skills and general skills. Similarly, four constructs of employable competency were found for "interns" in restaurants, workplace knowhow, stable, extra ability, and people skills. Restaurant managers tend to have a stronger cognition toward perceived employable competency for formal employees, as explained by 63.65% of variance. On the other hand, restaurant managers have less cognition toward perceived employable competency for interns, as explained by 56.03% of variance. While two constructs (professional skills and general skills) near equally represent employable competency for formal employees, the same cannot be the explained for interns. Data showed that "workplace knowhow" and "stable" represented more than "extra ability" and "people skills" for employable competency (17.711% and 15.129% versus 11.701% and 11.493%, respectively). The researcher suspects that restaurant managers view interns as temporary employees, thereby more of a short-term tryout experiment which is different from formal employees.

Tremendous implication of the result should serve notice to school administrators when designing curriculums. While both professional skills and general skills are equally important in the workplace, school should pay more attention to students' competency of "workplace knowhow" and "stable". "Extra ability" and "people skills" may serve as a bonus in a student's competency. Due to limited resources, the sample was limited by both the total sample number and the limited number of samples from top-level managers. It is desired that more samples from top-level managers in future studies can be useful in determining more detailed findings.

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