



Original Article

# Building Competence Frameworks for Middle Management in the Vietnamese Hotel Industry

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**Abstract:** Competence frameworks are the trend for human resource management in a dynamic environment. In Vietnam's dynamic environment, the hotel industry is witnessing fast changes to adapt to the development of the Vietnamese economy. This requires a new model for human resource management in the hotel industry, in particular for middle managers. In this research, the author used a quantitative method to analyze the requirements for competence for middle managers in the hotel industry and has proposed a capability framework, including three main clusters: Professional competence, Executive and management competence and Self-management competence - for middle managers in the Vietnamese hotel industry.

**Keywords:** Competence frameworks, middle manager, hotel industry, Vietnam.

## 1. Introduction

To affirm the importance of competence, there is an old Chinese saying that even if there is a fine horse with the potential to run a thousand miles, there has to be someone with the ability to identify and develop this fine potential to satisfy the requirement. In this research, the author employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, which have been affirmed as valid methods and are used to find the important characteristics of

competence and sub-competence for middle managers in the Vietnamese hotel industry based on empirical study acquiring the opinions of top managers and middle managers. The author chose middle managers and top managers in the hotel industry to collect and analyze primary data using a quantitative method and in-depth interviews. The research results affirmed the necessity of building a competence framework for middle managers. Moreover, the research results indicate the detailed competencies needed for middle managers in the Vietnamese hotel industry to meet the requirements of a dynamic environment in Vietnam.

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## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Theory background

That human resources are a competitive advantage in organizations has been confirmed by a large number of studies. Researchers have made strong arguments about those elements, which can be a source for competitive advantage, namely: human resource practice (human resource policies, human resource tools used to manage the human resource capital pool) or human capital in the organization. Barney (1991), confirmed that the firm-level of human capital resources can be a source of competitive advantage [1, 2]. While human resource practice is easily copied by competitors, a human capital pool in the firm (a highly skilled and highly motivated workforce) has a greater potential to constitute a source of sustainable competitive advantage. The human capital pool can be a source of competitive advantage when a firm possesses a high level of skill and a willingness (motivation) of employees to engage in productive behavior. The competence model can be seen as a tool to align the organizational strategy with required competence in the human capital tool in the organization.

### 2.2. Competence and competence framework

McClelland (1973) was the first to propose the term *competence* to argue against evaluating individual ability based on the intelligence test. The author asserted that the true factor contributing to an employee's performance is competence which includes attitude, cognition, and personal characteristic [3]. Long before that, the development of competence had been seen in the 1980s with many approaches. In the development of the competence approach, many components were added, such as motivation, personal characteristics, self-reflection, personal factors, values and beliefs [3-5]. As a scholar who made one of the important findings in competence research, Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011) affirmed that competencies are centered around the individual, so competencies should be viewed as independent of the social context in which

the employee's performance happens [3]. Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011) asserted that the different culture of each country places different emphasis on specific attributions for individual competence [6, 3]. Under the United State approach, competence was generally work-oriented, focusing on the characteristic and behaviors of superior (high-performance) employees while under United Kingdom approach, competence was work-oriented with the emphasis on functions and standards, including tasks, equipment and the work environment of normal performance employees in their job [7]. In this research, the author used the United State approach and defined competence as a combination of employees' knowledge, skills, attitudes, personal characteristics, and values to archive the high performance in their job.

A competence framework can be defined as the combination of a competence group, with sub-competence for each job position with the definition of each competence, level requirement and behavioral guidance for each level. In an organization, a competence framework is implemented for human resource management and human resource development.

### 2.3. Middle managers in hotel organizations

In the organizational structure, which has been built up to support the organizational strategy, the important roles of all management levels have been affirmed. The more dynamic the environment that enterprises operate in, the more important middle managers become in their structure. Balogun and Johnson (2004) indicated the trend of organizations in a dynamic environment with the decentralization structure including the decentralization responsibility, power and resources in their firms [8]. These changes elevate the roles of middle managers in organizations. In other words, scholars and practitioners have asserted the more pivotal roles of middle managers. An initial definition of a middle manager was proposed by Mintzberg (1989, p.98): Middle management is defined as a position in

organizational hierarchies “between the operating core and the apex”. After that, Huy (2001) defined middle managers as a position two levels below the CEO and one level above line workers and professionals [9]. Harding, Lee, and Ford (2014) indicated that the middle managers in organizations maintain a central position in organizational hierarchies and who take charge of implementing senior management strategies and exercise control functions over junior staff [10]. This research defined middle managers in hotel organizations as any manager’s position one level below the board of directors and one level above line workers and who are experts. Particularly, the middle managers in hotel organizations are functional managers (heads of functional departments in the hotel organization; such as the head of the human resource department or head of the accountant department...) and branch managers in those hotels that have many branches.

#### *2.4. Competence of middle managers in the hotel industry*

A competence approach for middle managers can be found in many previous studies, such as for middle managers in the education sector [11], top managers’ competence in the Taiwanese hotel industry [3], in the Hong Kong hotel industry [12], the hospital industry [13] and so on.

In the hotel industry, the topic of middle managers’ competence has attracted the interest of many researchers. Siu (1998) used eleven managerial competence clusters derived by the Management Development Center (MDC) to find out the competence of middle managers in the Hong Kong hotel industry. These clusters were: Leadership competence; Communication competence; Team building competence; Team membership competence; Result orientation competence; Personal drive competence; Planning competence; Efficiency competence; Commercial concern competence; Decision-making competence; and Customer concern competence. The results showed the important ranking of each competence. The three most important

competencies for middle managers were communication, customer concern and leadership.

In recent years, Suh, West, and Shin (2012) conducted research on competence requirements for managers in the hospitality industry and found that the top ten competences required for future managers include: Listening skills; Tolerance for change; Guest interaction; Openness to new ideas; Personal integrity; Interaction with superiors; Peer interaction; Leadership; Interaction with subordinates; Staff training, and Knowledge in culture differences [14]. Competence frameworks for managers in the hotel industry have attracted many researchers. Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011) found five competence clusters for top managers in Taiwan hotels. They were: generic competence including field management competence; human resource management competence; financial management competence; business and marketing competence, and information competence [3].

Middle managers play more and more important roles in Vietnamese enterprises [15]. The author conducted research for middle managers in the private sector and proposed a competence framework for middle managers in this sector. Middle managers’ competence framework should include 3 clusters: Professional competence; Management and executive; and Self-management and development. There are 21 competencies in this framework.

In the situation of Vietnam, in order to meet the demand for qualified human resources in the tourism industry, the EU-funded Environmentally and Socially Responsible Capacity Development Programme was appointed to rebuild and revise the Vietnam Tourism Occupational Standards (VTOS), developed by the former EU-funded Vietnam Human Resources Development in Tourism Project, to finalize the competency framework for the workforce in the hotel industry. The VTOS covers two main divisions within the tourism sector, hospitality and travel, with six key and four specialist occupational areas. In the VTOS standard, there are 29 competencies for hotel managers that have been implemented

to improve the quality of hotel managers in Vietnam. The hotel managers' competencies are to have the capacity to: Conduct a staff performance review; Provide on-the-job coaching; Deliver a group training session; Ensure team work quality; Plan, allocate and monitor work of a team; Prepare and analyze financial statements and reports; Manage incidents and emergencies; Manage revenue; Manage front office operations; Manage housekeeping operations; Manage food and beverage operations; Identify staff development needs; Recruit, select and retain staff; Handle staff grievances and resolve problems; Implement occupational health and safety practices; Prepare budgets; Procure products or services; Manage budgets; Manage physical resources; Manage daily operations; Manage quality service and customer satisfaction; Coordinate marketing activities; Organize functions; Apply responsible tourism to food and beverage operations; Apply responsible tourism to accommodation services; Establish policies and procedures; Lead, plan and manage

changes; Receive and resolve complaints and Monitor facilities and operations to ensure child protection.

A project of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam with the title of: "Research on Human Resource Demand for Tourism Industry for Training Tourism Employees in the Period 2025-2030" defined the components of competence for middle managers in the hotel sector. These included: (I) Fundamental competence: Leadership, management in tourism competence; Communication and negotiation competence; Foreign language competence and Computer competence; (II) Professional Competence: Knowledge of tourism management; Financial management; Human resource management in tourism; Knowledge of the tourism market, marketing, advertising; Hotel management; Service quality control; Risk management [16].

Based on the studies above, the author synthesized the necessary competencies for middle managers in the hotel industry as follows:

Table 1. Suggested competence framework for middle managers in hotel business

No.	Competency	Author
<b>Cluster 1: Professional competence</b>		
1	Specific professional knowledge	Siu (1998), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017); Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
2	Specific professional skills	Siu (1998), Kay and , Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
3	Business environment knowledge	Handbook of Competence (2005), Kang et al. (2015), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
4	Industrial knowledge	Siu (1998), Kay and Russette (2000), Kriegl (2000), Chung-Herrera et al. (2003)
5	Organizational knowledge	Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
6	Hotel management	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
7	Food management	Siu (1998), Chung-Herrera et al. (2003)
8	Tourism service management	Siu (1998), Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
9	Customer service focus	Siu (1998), Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011)
10	Marketing management	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011)
11	Risk management	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
12	Service quality control	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
13	Financial management	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
14	Result orientation	Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)

<b>Cluster 2: Executive and management competence</b>		
1	Strategic advice	Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
2	Building and developing organizational culture	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011)
3	Operation management	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
4	Operation implementation	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011)
5	Plan making and implementation	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Havard (2008), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
6	Human resource management in tourism	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
7	Employee recruitment	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011)
8	Employee control	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
9	Employee performance management	Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
10	Employee training and development	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
11	Team leading	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
12	Conflict management	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
<b>Cluster 3: Self-management management</b>		
1	Integrity	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
2	Innovative products and services	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Kang H. J. et al. (2015), Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
3	Information management	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
4	Time management	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
5	Problem solving	Siu (1998), Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011)
6	Team work	Siu (1998), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Megahed N. (2015), Hilton Honors (2018)
7	Active	Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
8	Negotiation skills	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
9	Communication skills	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011)
10	Adaptability	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011)
11	Continuous learning	Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
12	Stress management	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017)
13	Strong industry interest	Siu (1998)
14	Positive thinking	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003)
15	Energy	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011)
16	Pursuing self-development	Chung-Herrera et al. (2003)
17	Foreign language	Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)
18	Information technology implementation	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017)

Source: Author (2019)

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data sample

In this research, in order to build middle management competence in the Vietnamese hotel industry, a combination of methods was

implemented. In-depth interviews were used with 22 experts. These were researchers in the hotel management field (7 experts), middle managers in five-star hotels in Hanoi (9 experts), and top managers in five-star hotels in Ho Chi Minh City (6 experts). The author used

semi-structured questions for the interview. The interview content includes: (i) the reason why the hotel sector should implement a competence framework for managing their human resources; (ii) the competence group that should be used by middle managers to gain success in their task; and (iii) the result of the questionnaire survey. The interviews were collected over a period of 5 months (from February 2008 to July 2008).

The author also used the quantitative method with the questionnaire. The author designed the questionnaire based on the literature review by choosing 44 necessary competencies for hotel managers that had been summarized in the literature. After that, the author gave the first version of the survey to 8 research experts and 10 middle managers in the hotel sector. After reviewing the comments, the author chose 44 competencies in the

questionnaire for conducting the survey in Vietnam. The duration for undertaking the questionnaire survey was 6 months (from January 2008 to July 2008). Based on the list of hotels issued by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the author explored 265 hotels in three main areas in Vietnam. They included 94 hotels in Hanoi city, 132 hotels in Ho Chi Minh City and 39 hotels in Da Nang city. After contacting the chief human resource managers and the chief executive officers in these hotels, the author sent 220 paper questionnaires to 198 hotels in the three main areas. One hundred and forty-three answers were collected from middle managers in the hotel industry (accounting for 72.2%) and there were 112 answers from the top managers (boards of directors). The characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of respondents

Criteria		Middle managers		Top managers	
		Number	Ratio	Number	Ratio
Gender	Male	101	70.62	83	74.11
	Female	42	29.38	29	25.89
Age	From 30 to 40	39	27.3	21	18.75
	From 41 to 50	76	53.15	78	69.64
	From 51 to 60	28	19.55	13	11.61
Years of experience	Under 5 years	26	18.18	14	12.5
	From 5-10 years	75	52.44	67	59.82
	More than 10 years	42	29.38	31	27.68
Degree	Bachelor	90	62.93	19	16.96
	Master	51	35.66	74	66.08
	Doctor	2	1.41	19	16.96

Source: Author (2018).

### 3.2. Data analysis

In this research, the author used both qualitative and quantitative methods. After that, the author used the Key Informant Panel (KIP) method for analyzing the competence requirements for middle managers in the hotel industry. The KIP method can be seen as the interview method used with expert and experienced people. In this research, the people

who had been chosen for the KIP method were middle managers (who had more than 5 year experience in their job; top managers in the hotel organization with more than 5 years experience; and experts, lecturers who conducted research about human resource development and the competence development topic. The KIP method has been used in some previous researches for exploring leadership competency in the public sector [18, 19].

Based on the results of KIP, the author affirmed the competencies for middle managers to build the questionnaire survey. The principle of choosing the required competencies is: (1) The total number of middle competencies cannot be more than 18 competencies because of previous research findings [17]; (2) The competencies that have been chosen by middle managers and top managers are chosen for the middle competence framework; and (3) the choices of the top managers are more important than the choices of the middle managers.

Moreover, based on the data collection from the survey, the Relative Importance Index (RII) for ranking the importance of middle manager competencies has been implemented in this research. The Relative Importance Index had been used in previous research, such as that by Ernest, Matthew, and Samuel (2015) to choose entrepreneurial learning competence [20], and that by Ta Huy Hung and Mai Thanh Lan (2018) to find out the important competence of leaders in the public sector [18]. The calculation of the RII method is as follows:

$$RII = \frac{\sum P_i U_i}{N(n)}$$

RII: Relative Importance Index  
 P<sub>i</sub>: Respondent rating of importance  
 U<sub>i</sub>: respondent's placing identical weighting or rating on the importance  
 N: sample size  
 n: the highest attainable score on the importance

#### 4. Research findings

*Firstly*, in this research, the author conducted the KIP interview with 22 experts for the consistency of the competence framework for human resource management with middle managers. Almost all experts (19/22, accounting for 86.36%) agreed on the importance of z competence framework for human resource management in the hotel industry to overcome the incoming challenges. The others reflected the consideration of the

diversity of human resource quality in the hotel industry of leaders (particularly for middle managers) and also the low level of human resource management policies in the hotel industry.

*Secondly*, experts also affirmed the validity of the competence framework for middle managers in the hotel industry with a high level of agreement (18/22 agreed on the importance of a competence framework for middle managers). Indeed, the author used the Cronbach Alpha method to evaluate the reliability of all competencies in three clusters of questionnaires. The Cronbach Alpha of the three clusters is: Cluster 1: Professional competence (0.875); Cluster 2: Executive and management competence (0.851); Cluster 3: Self-management competence (0.866). According to Hair et al (2010), all clusters satisfied the rule of thumb (all the Cronbach alpha exceed the value of 0.70). This explained some reasons to implement a competence framework: A competence framework is the trend for human resource management in the next agenda because technology changes lead to changes of jobs. When the fundamentals of a job change, the middle managers with complex tasks must possess competency to do their task effectively.

*Thirdly*, the competence-based human resource management in recent years instated task-oriented human resource management. As the competitive advantages of organizations are based on the quality of the human resources, human resource policies should be person-oriented. A competence framework can be seen as the backbone for all of the human resource policies (recruitment policy, training and development policy, performance management policy and reward policy, and all of them should be built based on the competence framework).

*Fourthly*, the results of the questionnaire survey are shown in Table 3.

Based on the results of the survey of top managers, the author explored 7 competencies in Cluster 1 - Professional competence. The highest mean score of Cluster 1 - Professional competence is specific professional skill in the hotel industry (Mean: 4.509; RII: 0.902, Rank 1) and the second highest is specific

professional knowledge of the hotel sector (Mean: 0.428; RII: 0.857, Rank 2). The middle managers' perspective also affirms the importance of specific professional skill and knowledge (the first rank and second rank in the professional cluster).

Table 3. Research result

No.	Competence	Middle managers					Mean	RII	Top managers					Mean	RII
		Number of chosen							Number of chosen						
		1	2	3	4	5			1	2	3	4	5		
Cluster 1: Professional competence															
1	Specific professional knowledge	0	8	17	44	74	4.28	0.85	0	2	9	41	60	4.42	0.88
2	Specific professional skills	0	4	21	51	67	4.26	0.85	0	2	6	37	67	4.50	0.90
3	Business environment knowledge	5	22	45	56	15	3.37	0.67	2	14	56	34	6	3.25	0.65
4	Industrial knowledge	3	19	67	41	13	3.29	0.65	0	11	23	41	37	3.92	0.78
5	Organizational knowledge	0	16	30	44	53	3.93	0.78	0	8	22	39	43	4.04	0.80
6	Hotel management	1	15	31	46	50	3.90	0.78	6	23	33	46	4	3.17	0.63
7	Food management	11	23	39	48	22	3.32	0.66	11	14	39	48	0	3.10	0.62
8	Tourism service management	12	22	38	51	20	3.31	0.66	3	25	38	44	2	3.15	0.63
9	Customer service focus	1	13	21	48	60	4.07	0.81	1	13	21	33	44	3.94	0.78
10	Marketing management	8	25	33	38	39	3.52	0.70	5	22	39	41	5	3.17	0.63
11	Risk management	2	9	31	42	59	4.02	0.80	3	21	56	24	8	3.11	0.62
12	Service quality control	0	14	54	54	21	3.57	0.71	0	7	23	37	45	4.07	0.81
13	Financial management	7	22	45	43	26	3.41	0.68	4	16	54	34	4	3.16	0.63
14	Result orientation	3	26	54	43	17	3.31	0.66	0	7	24	26	55	4.15	0.83
Cluster 2: Executive and management competence															
1	Strategic advice	5	21	43	39	35	3.54	0.70	2	18	43	39	10	3.33	0.66
2	Building and developing organizational culture	8	33	36	37	29	3.32	0.66	2	21	48	37	4	3.17	0.63
3	Operations management	2	16	21	57	47	3.91	0.78	0	13	21	39	39	3.92	0.78
4	Operation implementation	1	15	23	42	62	4.04	0.80	3	25	38	39	7	3.19	0.63
5	Plan making and implementation	0	8	41	47	47	3.93	0.78	0	5	27	34	46	4.08	0.81
6	Human resource management in tourism	2	21	65	43	12	3.29	0.65	0	5	25	43	39	4.03	0.80
7	Employee recruitment	4	21	67	12	39	3.42	0.68	2	16	64	21	9	3.17	0.63

8	Employee control	1	12	35	39	56	3.95	0.79	3	22	54	22	11	3.14	0.62
9	Employee performance management	0	11	55	67	10	3.53	0.70	0	9	44	56	3	3.47	0.69
10	Employee training and development	6	26	53	45	13	3.23	0.64	0	7	24	45	36	3.98	0.79
11	Team leading	0	16	27	48	52	3.95	0.79	0	12	24	38	38	3.91	0.78
12	Conflict management	8	16	51	35	33	3.48	0.69	6	13	51	38	4	3.18	0.63
Cluster 3: Self-management competence															
1	Integrity	2	21	54	21	45	3.60	0.72	3	24	45	32	8	3.16	0.63
2	Innovative products and services	1	19	56	37	30	3.53	0.70	2	16	65	27	2	3.09	0.62
3	Information management	3	23	44	45	28	3.50	0.70	4	21	56	25	6	3.07	0.61
4	Time management	1	15	41	59	27	3.67	0.73	1	13	46	36	16	3.47	0.69
5	Problem solving	0	12	33	47	51	3.95	0.79	0	12	51	34	15	3.46	0.69
6	Team work	0	11	43	61	28	3.74	0.74	0	11	55	32	14	3.43	0.68
7	Active	0	14	43	56	30	3.71	0.74	2	16	52	34	8	3.26	0.65
8	Negotiation skills	4	21	33	56	29	3.59	0.71	2	23	44	31	12	3.25	0.65
9	Communication skills	0	6	32	76	29	3.89	0.77	0	3	26	44	39	4.06	0.81
10	Adaptability	0	15	31	61	36	3.82	0.76	0	13	27	37	35	3.83	0.76
11	Learning continuous	3	21	45	42	32	3.55	0.71	2	17	52	29	12	3.28	0.65
12	Stress management	4	15	76	32	16	3.28	0.65	0	5	31	38	38	3.97	0.79
13	Strong industry interest	0	12	68	43	20	3.49	0.69	0	3	33	35	41	4.01	0.80
14	Positive thinking	3	17	65	31	27	3.43	0.68	2	15	55	26	14	3.31	0.66
15	Energy	0	9	35	56	43	3.93	0.78	0	6	36	38	32	3.85	0.77
16	Pursuing self-development	3	16	72	31	21	3.35	0.67	2	21	56	22	11	3.17	0.63
17	Foreign language	0	12	33	65	33	3.83	0.76	0	5	33	42	32	3.90	0.78
18	Information technology implementation	6	21	78	33	5	3.07	0.61	2	18	55	25	12	3.24	0.64

Source: Author (2018).

It means that the middle managers in the hotel sector must possess deep knowledge and skills in their job. These results also match with the research of Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017); Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017) in tourism literature review [3, 15, 16] and Do Vu Phuong Anh (2017) in research about the competence of middle managers in Vietnamese enterprises [15]. Deep analysis of these results in Vietnam shows that almost all middle managers in the hotel industry

are promoted from an expert position or from line managers who mostly take charge of professional tasks. In the middle position in the hotel industry and in general, middle managers must deeply understand their jobs and they even can directly do functional tasks.

However, some different perspectives were found in some competencies. While service quality control (mean: 4.071, RII: 0.814, rank: 3) has been chosen by top managers because service quality is the key success factor in the

hotel industry. However, service quality has not been chosen by middle managers. Interviews with some middle managers indicated that middle managers think that they just need to focus on the functional tasks without thinking about the overall quality of the hotel services. Based on this middle managers' mindset, they also did not choose result-oriented competency, while the top managers have high requirements about the task results. Thus, top managers chose result-oriented competence as the most important competence for middle managers.

Organizational knowledge is the third competency, which has been chosen by both top managers and middle managers. This result reflects that organizational knowledge is the key competence for doing middle management tasks. With a deep understanding of organizations, middle managers can do their job better. The distinction has been seen in the research results. The middle managers choose hotel management and risk management as the required competence for their tasks. This means that in the middle managers' mindset, they pay much attention to functional tasks. However, these two competencies have not been highly evaluated by top managers.

From the top managers' perspective, they focus on the results of middle managers' tasks. The results mention that all positions at the middle manager level (front and back office) must have a customer-oriented mindset to serve the internal and external customers.

Cluster 2: The author found that most middle managers in the hotel industry have been promoted from being high-performance employees or high-performance line managers. In their previous position, they were mostly concerned with their professional task. However, in the middle manager position, they must think and act as managers, not as experts. Thus, executive and management competence become more and more important for middle managers.

From the top managers' point of view, executive and management competence has five highest scores which are: (1) Plan making and implementation (mean: 4.080; RII: 0.816); (2)

Human resource management in tourism (mean: 4.306; RII: 0.807); (3) Employee training and development (mean: 3.982; RII: 0.796); (3) Team leading (mean: 3.911; RII: 0.782); (4) and (5) Operations' management (Mean: 3.929; RII: 0.786).

The result of the middle managers indicated that the five important competencies in executive and management competence are: (1) Operations implementation (mean: 4.042; RII: 0.808); (2) Employee control (mean: 3.985, RII: 0.792); (3) Team leading (mean: 3.951; RII: 0.790); (4) Plan making and implementation (mean: 3.930; RII: 0.786); (5) Operations' management (3.916; 0.783).

The result showed the lower score of the mean in executive and management competence than the professional competence (cluster 1) from both top managers' and middle managers' perspective. This result reflects that the middle managers in the hotel sector are required to possess more knowledge and skills in their task than the executive and management functions. In other words, professional competence required for middle managers is more important than executive and management competence. This result can be explained by the low level of autonomy in the Vietnamese hotel industry, in other words, the centralization structure has been explored.

In more detail, the author found the human resource management in the hotel industry and some related human resource management competencies, such as employee training and development and team leading, are also chosen by middle managers. This result shows the great importance of human resource management in Vietnam's dynamic environment. In the hotel industry, human resources can be seen as sources for competitive advantage. Thus, mastering human resource competencies becomes more and more important for middle managers.

The reason why human resource management competence is important for middle managers is the low competence of their employees. Almost all hotel employees in Vietnam lack essential/basic training before

working in this industry. Therefore, middle managers must possess human resource management competence (recruitment, training and development of employees) to manage and support their employees in doing their tasks. Moreover, in order to do the middle managers' tasks with high performance, team leading and plan-making and implementation are more and more important competencies for middle managers in the Vietnamese hotel industry.

In Cluster 3, the author discovered the same competence requirements in both top managers and middle managers. These are Communication skills, Adaptability, Energy and Foreign language ability. All of these have been chosen by middle managers and top managers in this research. In the Vietnamese hotel industry, adaptability and energy are very important for middle managers because of the high pressure of the hotel industry in recent times. These competencies are required because middle managers must deal with the high requirements of customers and they must solve many uncertain circumstances in this fast-changing industry. Moreover, communication skill and foreign language ability are very important to serve their jobs and improve the customers' satisfaction, especially in the globalization context and transformation stage of the hotel industry in Vietnam. According to

the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism report (2017), tourism and the hotel industry have experienced fast changes in the last 10 years with high requirements for human resources who work in this industry [16].

Some distinctions have been found between middle and top managers. In the survey with middle managers, they choose Problem-solving as the required competence to deal with operational tasks. This is easy to understand from the middle manager perspective, however, top managers do not choose other competencies (Stress management and Strong industry interest) as the requirements for middle managers, because they think in the near future, with the fast changes in Vietnamese hotel industry, middle managers must possess stress management skills to balance their work and their life to develop their career. In order to succeed in their job and make huge contributions to their companies, they must have strong industry interest to overcome the difficulties in their jobs.

In general, after the survey, the author found the middle management in the hotel industry had 3 competence clusters: 7 competencies in Cluster 1 - Professional competence; 5 competencies in Cluster 2 and 6 competencies in Cluster 3. The definitions of all chosen competencies are seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Middle manager competence definition

No.	Competence	Definition
I	Cluster 1	
1	Specific professional knowledge	Having achieved a satisfactory level of technical and professional knowledge in position-related areas; keeping up with current developments and trends in areas of expertise.
2	Specific professional skill	Having achieved a satisfactory level of technical and professional skill in position-related areas; keeping up with current developments and trends in areas of expertise.
	Industrial knowledge	The extent of a job-related industry and professional knowledge base translatable to practicable, applied experience, necessary to execute essential job functions successfully.
3	Organizational knowledge	The extent to which one understands and utilizes the knowledge of the hierarchical and vertical organizational structure, the organizational culture, role definitions, and position relationships, and factors in internal and external political, social and economic issues in carrying out work activities and achieving desired personal and organizational outcomes.

4	Customer service focus	Making customers and their needs a primary focus of one's actions; developing and sustaining productive customer relationships.
5	Service quality control	The extent to which one actively works toward discovering and addressing the need for services among organizational members and stakeholders, client groups, and the general public.
6	Results-oriented competence	Setting high standards of performance for self and others; assuming responsibility and accountability for successfully completing assignments or tasks; self-imposing standards of excellence rather than having standards imposed.
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II Cluster 2		
1	Operations management	Effectively managing resources and working processes to ensure that work is completed efficiently.
2	Plan making and implementation	Establishing courses of action for self and others to ensure that work is completed efficiently.
3	Human resource management in tourism	Effective recruiting, organizing, training and developing employees to achieve hotel organization target.
4	Employee training and development	Planning and supporting the development of individuals' skills and abilities so that they can fulfill current or future jobs/roles and responsibilities more effectively.
5	Team leading	The extent to which one utilizes appropriate interpersonal styles and employs teambuilding strategies, for the purpose of enriching the development of a group of people, to become a well-functioning unit, which achieves desired goals and objectives.
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III Cluster 3		
1	Communication skill	The extent to which one composes and verbally delivers information of varying levels of technical complexity and speech formality, using appropriate grammar, tone, inflection and non-verbal cues (e.g. eye contact, facial expressions, etc.) to achieve desired communication results, while listening to and correctly deciphering verbal communication delivered by others.
2	Adaptability	The willingness and capacity to simultaneously accept and adapt to change, as well as remaining effective and task focused in a fast and constantly changing workplace environment.
3	Energy	Consistently maintaining high levels of activity or productivity; sustaining long working hours when necessary; operating with vigor, effectiveness, and determination over extended periods of time.
4	Stress management	The extent to which one can function productively under varying degrees of pressure and frequency of recurring and newly arising stressors that impede completion of one's job duties/responsibilities.
5	Strong industry interest	Deep interest in their job and their field in which they working.
6	Foreign language ability	Ability to read, write and use oral communication in a foreign language to effectively perform their task.

Source: Author (2019).

## 5. Conclusion

In this research, the literature was studied and analyzed to find a competence framework for middle managers in the hotel industry. Based on the literature review, the author implements mixed methods combining a qualitative method (in-depth interviews) and a

quantitative method (survey questionnaires from both sides: top managers and middle managers) to find the required competence for middle managers in the Vietnamese hotel industry. The author focuses much more on the dynamic environment in the in-depth interviews to attract the attention of the dynamic

environment and the fast changes in this industry. The findings of this research not only support the research by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2017), but also suggest to middle managers in the hotel industry which competencies they need and which competencies they should improve in the future to satisfy the dynamic environment. Given the limitations of this research, researchers can continue to find the gaps between the current competencies and the required competencies for the next research.

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