

# QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED FOR HOTEL EMPLOYEES IN THAILAND: THE CHANGE AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## ABSTRACT

*Managing hotel workforces during the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as more complex and challenging for the hotel business. This emerges a body of literature exploring appropriate HRM approaches after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, knowledge on qualifications required for hotel employees concerning new HRM approaches and the pandemic remains scarce. This paper employed qualitative research to interview 16 informants from 3 different types of hotels in Chiang Mai, Thailand, including 3 Thai- small luxury hotels, 3 Thai- medium-sized hotels chain, and 2 international hotels chains. This paper identifies 3 categories of qualifications required for hotel employees after the COVID-19 pandemic, namely the core qualification, the additional qualification, and the new requirement. This paper also implies that the design of employee qualification has been influenced by characteristics of the hotel industry and the national culture of hotel setting rather than its size and nationality.*

**Keywords:** Qualification, Hotel employees, Requirement, Thailand, COVID-19.

## INTRODUCTION

It has been recognized that hotel workforce-related issues, such as labor shortages, unqualified workforces, high staff turnover, are the main challenges facing managers and HRM practitioners (Enz & Siguaw, 2000). Managing these workforces during and since the COVID-19 pandemic has now emerged as more complex and challenging for leaders in navigating their companies to ensure business continuity and to help their employees to deal with this uncertain crisis (Kamdi, 2020; Hamouche, 2021; Rooyen et al, 2021). For example, Thailand's hotel industry has suffered a significant financial crisis, and this has caused the closure of 45-50 % of hotel businesses located in 20 tourist cities (Bangkok Post, 2020). The hotels which still run the business mainly employ downsizing strategies, such as; layoffs, reducing staff salaries, terminating employee contracts (Jeaheng et al, 2021; Rooyen et al, 2021). These HRM practices may help address the financial crisis, but it causes feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression amongst employees, and leads to low performance and engagement (Khawaja et al, 2021). This emerges a body of literature exploring the change in HRM after the COVID-19 pandemic (Deloitte, 2020; AM et al., 2020; Hamounche, 2021; Phaopat, 2021; Banchirdrit, 2021) and provides several appropriate HRM approaches after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agarwal (2021) investigates HRM practices under the context of uncertainty crisis in the hotel sector and highlights the importance of flexibility in HRM practice, such as hiring skill flexibility, pay flexibility, and a result-based performance management system (AM et al, 2021). Virtual HRM practices are becoming more common in the hotel industry, including in Thailand's hotel industry (Rooyen et al, 2021). Furthermore, wellbeing-based HRM practices have gained more attention during the COVID-19 pandemic. This practice can positively and collectively impact both employees and hotels, supporting the mutual-gain perspective of HRM (Aeknarajindawat et al, 2020; Rooyen et al, 2020; Agarwal, 2021). Moreover, several HRM researchers (Deloitte, 2020; Hamouche, 2021; Rooyen et al,

2021) point out the change of hotel workforce features, especially, the number of people working in the industry and other human capital attributes. This creates a challenge for the organizations to ensure that they employ qualified employees to meet the requirement of those future HRM approaches. The hotel must redesign and identify employee qualifications and characteristics concerning future HRM approaches and the pandemic (Enback, 2020). However, literature and knowledge that exist in this regard are limited, particularly hotel sector in Thailand, where people slightly have a preference for avoiding uncertainty (Hofstede insight, 2021). Therefore, this paper seeks to contribute to the literature on the hotel workforce and its qualification after the COVID-19 pandemic by identifying the qualifications required for hotel employees after the COVID-19 pandemic particularly in Thailand which is considered an intermediate uncertainty avoidance society (Hofstede insight, 2021).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Qualifications required for hotel employees in Thailand

A review of the literature on qualifications of hotel employees in Thailand reveals the similarities of qualifications required for the operational employee as shown in Table 1.

<b>Qualifications required for hotel employees in Thailand</b>	<b>Kanjanasilant (2010)</b>	<b>Kallayha et al (2015)</b>	<b>Kasetiam (2016)</b>	<b>Yiumtrakul (2019)</b>	<b>Sonwiang and Lueangnapha (2020)</b>	<b>Sirinet et al (2020)</b>	<b>Hamali and Pasunon (2020)</b>
Professional knowledge and skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Appearance and grooming - personal appearance - communication - behavioral traits - punctuality - enthusiasm and dedication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Language skill
Ethics and moral	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interpersonal and social skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Culture skill
Technological skill	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Information mass media
Interdisciplinary knowledge				✓	✓		
Problem-solving							✓
Generic characteristic: education, experience						✓	
Self-management							✓

Table 1 illustrates 5 similar aspects of operational employees' qualifications required in all hotel departments as discussed below.

### Professional Knowledge and Skills

Onkelinx et al. (2012) distinguish human capital (HC) into 2 types, including generic and specific HC. The term generic HC refers to education, knowledge, and skills that are acquired through formal education. This type of HC applies to different contexts and across

jobs within an organization. In the hotel business, Sirinet et al (2020) use the word generic HC and generic characteristics interchangeably. They identify generic characteristics of hotel employees include education and working experience.

In terms of specific HC, it can be used within the context of a specific job or a specific organization and has less value to other jobs or organizations. Specific HC is generated through, such mechanisms as on-the-job- training, job experience, and knowledge sharing among employees and with customers (Onkelinx et al., 2012). In the hotel business, Thai researchers (Kanjanasilanont 2010; Yiumtrakul, 2019; Sonwiang & Lueangnapha, 2020; Sirinet et al, 2020; Hamali & Pasunon, 2020) used the word technical and operational or professional knowledge and skills regarding specific HC. This type of employee qualification differs in each job. For example, Nakprot (2020) proposes professional knowledge of female bartenders in hotels in Bangkok, such as knowledge and expertise in the category of beverages, managing the correct mix of drinks, have basic knowledge about mixology. Kallayha et al (2015) classify desirable characteristics of a hotel employee in executive's views in Lampang Province and distinguish professional knowledge and skills in housekeeping, and food and beverage. The housekeeping executives focused on patience and appropriate manners in every circumstance. Food and Beverage executives focused on the ability to have a service delivered, selling products, and welcoming guests.

### **Appearance and Grooming**

According to Fairmont Scottsdale Princess (2015), appearance and grooming include various aspects, namely personal appearance, effective communication, behavioral traits, punctuality, and enthusiasm and dedication. Since 2005, Thailand Management Association Center for Competitiveness recognizes appearance and grooming as crucial qualifications for hotel employees in Thailand. Previous literature on hotel employees' qualifications and competency (Kanjanasilanon, 2010; Yiumtrakul, 2019; Sonwiang & Lueangnapha, 2020; Sirinet et al, 2020; Hamali & Pasunon, 2020) has been mentioned this aspect as the core characteristics for hotel employees in Thailand. Furthermore, Hamali & Pasunon (2020) analyze the desirable characteristics of students in the 21st century from the perspective of operative staff in hotels 4-5 star hotels in Bangkok. Not only their study supports previous literature, but also it points out that language and cultural skills are essential for hotel service in the 21st century.

### **Ethics and Moral**

The studies on the desired attributes of hospitality students and graduates in Upon Ratchathani in northern (Sirinet et al, 2020) and Hua Hin in western Thailand (Yiumtrakul, 2019) apply the Thai Qualifications Framework as a guideline for developing the questionnaires. These studies show the same findings that morality and ethics rank the highest level of the desired attribute of graduates in the hotel followed by interpersonal skills and responsibilities, intellectual skills, knowledge, and numerical analysis skills, communication, and information technology. Additionally, the study on desirable personal characteristics of employees required by varied enterprises by Sonwiang & Lueangnapha (2020) highlights that moral and ethics is perceived as the most crucial aspect in the aviation and hotel industry.

### **Interpersonal Skills**

Interpersonal skills are those essential skills involved in dealing with and relating to other people mainly on a one-on-one basis. (McConnell, 2004). Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) mention that social skill and intrapersonal skill is inseparable. Social and

interpersonal skills are the means through which human relationships are initiated, negotiated, maintained, transformed, and dissolved. As discussed earlier, interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, empathy, and understanding self and others, rank the second-highest level of the desired attribute of graduates in the hotel (Sirinet et al, 2020; Yiumtrakul, 2019).

### **Technological Skill**

Sonwiang & Lueangnapha (2020) investigate a set of desirable characteristics in employees from 57 companies operating under 4 major categories of enterprises, including governmental units, private companies, an aviation industry, and a hotel industry. The study reveals that all 4 categories of enterprises agreed that information technology skills are the most important skills needed. Furthermore, the study on desirable characteristics of student in the 21st century from the perspective of operative staffs in hotels 4-5 star hotels in Bangkok by Hamali & Pasunon (2020) point out that information mass media and technology skills are required from 4-5-star hotel in Bangkok in the 21st century.

In short, previous literature highlight 5 aspects of operational employees' qualification required in all hotel departments in Thailand, including professional knowledge and skills, appearance and grooming, ethics and moral, interpersonal skills, and technological skill. Moreover, there are several qualifications have mentioned since 2019, namely interdisciplinary knowledge (Yiumtrakul, 2019; Sonwiang & Lueangnapha, 2020) intellectual skills; creative thinking skills and problem-solving, and self-management (Hamali & Pasunon, 2020). These qualifications are recognized as desirable characteristics of hotel employees in the 21st century. However, the existing knowledge on hotel employees' qualification in Thailand has been undertaken in the ordinary situation and when the organization is concerned with delivering high service quality. The majority of the previous study focuses on the analysis of desirable characteristics of students in hospitality from hotel manager perspectives and apply ASEAN Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals [ACCSTP] and Thai Qualifications Framework to their study, therefore, knowledge on qualifications required for hotel employees concerning new HRM approaches and COVID-19 pandemic remains scared.

### **Qualification required for Hotel Industry after the Pandemic**

There is limited study on hotel employees' qualifications after the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand. Among the limited literature on this matter, the relevant one is a comparative study of HRM strategies of 4–5 star hotels and boutique hotels in Chiang Mai, Thailand during the economic crisis by Pwongsuwan (2012). His study shows that both 4-5 stars' hotels and boutique hotels in Chiang Mai do not have a policy on hiring new employment instead they employ the strategy on career and responsibility adjustment. In case of new employment is required, the hotels adopt the strategy of internal hiring. However, the required qualification of the employee during the crisis is different from the ordinary situation. For instance, the employee with working experience is matters during the crisis than in the ordinary situation because the hotel wants to reduce the training and development costs.

The literature undertaken outside Thailand (Enback, 2020; Browne,2021) reveals new sets of skills required during the pandemic, such as the knowledge and skill on sanitation and hygiene, and digital media communication. Additionally, soft and social skills are considered essential, especially the awareness of and ability to adapt to the change of customer needs and behavior (Enback, 2020). This is similar to the study of Browne (2021) the leadership skill, soft skilskillscial media usage skills, usage of digital technology, and sanitation and housekeeping skill are required for the tourism and hospitality industry after

the pandemic of COVID-19. Browne (2021) states that transferable soft-skill, such as the critical thinking skill, innovatskillskill, creative problem-solving skills, flexibility and adaptability skill, communication and emotional intelligence skill, self-awareness and self-management, and negotiation and relationship management skill, will help hotel employees achieve not only in the hospitality industry but also move into another industry. AM et al (2020) assert that transferable skills, namely digital technology and flexibility and adaptability are vital skills in the future. Thus, this set of skills is in high demand now and will continue in post –COVID -19 in the hospitality industry (AM et al, 2020; Browne, 2021). Therefore, all the above-mentioned qualifications and competencies will be a guide to identifying what the requirement is in the Thailand hotel industry after the COVID-19 pandemic.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based in Thailand where Hofstede insight (2021) identifies Thai society as 64 % of uncertainty avoidance culture. It means an intermediate uncertainty avoidance society where people slightly have a preference for avoiding uncertainty. These values of Thai society are arguably very different from those of Western societies, where the majority of existing research into the requirement for hotel employees during and after the COVID-19 pandemic has been conducted. This study focuses on the hotel sector in Chiang Mai province; one of Asia’s most attractive tourist destinations welcoming both backpackers and high-end tourists (TAT, 2014). According to the study on the role of HRM in fostering knowledge sharing in the hotel sector in Chiang Mai by Promnil (2018), her study recognizes that hotels in Chiang Mai mostly apply a soft HRM approach underpinned by the (Thai) culture in managing people in SME boutique hotels. Therefore, this study anticipates contributing new knowledge of qualifications required for hotel employees outside the low uncertainty avoidance cultures typically epitomized by most Western countries.

This study applies an inductive qualitative and multiple case study approach involving multiple sources of data including relevant documentation and online semi-structured interviews from June to August 2021. While applying semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a list of key themes of questions, additional questions, and prompts to promote more detail and discussion (Saunders et al., 2012). The first interview question is: ‘Please tell me about how your organization was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic’. Additional questions relate to HRM activities during the COVID-19 pandemic associated with human resource planning and requirement. The second question is: ‘How do you hire a new employee in an ordinary situation and why?’ Additional questions relate to qualifications required for hotel employees. The final question is: What is hotel employee qualifications required during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and why?’

They are 16 informants;8 HR managers and 8 operational employees, from 8 case studies who participated in this study as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**THE INFORMATION OF CASE STUDY AND INFORMANTS**

Code of Case study	Hotel type	Nationality	No. of rooms	No. of employees (2019)	No. of employees (2021)	Informants	
						Management	Staff
PH	Stand alone	Thai	30	70	60	HR manager	Guest service agent
TM	Stand alone	Thai	46	80	65	HR manager	Waitress
RY	Stand alone	Thai	38	86	76	HR manager	Waitress
UN	Hotel chain	Thai	147	160	111	HR manager	Guest service agent

DD	Hotel chain	Thai	130	125	70	HR manager	Waiter
AN	Hotel chain	Thai	84	205	80	HR manager	Room attendant
FS	Hotel chain	International	98	320	197	HR manager	Waiter
SL	Hotel chain	International	277	280	185	HR manager	Concierge

Table 2 indicates 3 groups of case studies in terms of hotel types, nationality, and numbers of the rooms as follows:

1. Thai-small luxury hotel refers to hotels that are operated by Thai company and deliver a luxury and personalized service. This group of case studies operates less than 59 rooms which the ministry of tourism and sport [MOT] in Thailand consider a small-sized hotel (MOT, 2019). The Thai-small luxury hotel includes PH, TM, and RY.
2. Thai-medium-sized hotel chain is a hotel chain operated by a Thai company and delivers a luxury and personalized service. This group of case studies operates between 60-149 rooms than 59 consider a medium-sized hotel (MOT, 2019). This group of the case study includes UN, DD, and AN.
3. International hotel chain refers to a hotel chain that is operated by an international company and delivers a luxury and personalized service, including FS and SL.

The collated data were manually analyzed by using a thematic analysis technique involving two steps, individual case analysis and then a cross-case analysis. This paper identifies 3 categories of qualifications required for hotel employees after the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate 3 categories of qualifications required for hotel employees after the COVID-19 pandemic in Chiang Mai. First, the core qualification refers to qualifications required for all types of hotels and in any situation. Second, the additional qualifications are sets of qualifications that all case studies need more from employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Last, new requirements refer to those qualifications that have emerged as critical to the hotel business due to the COVID-19 pandemic as shown in Table 3.

The required qualifications	In ordinary situation			After the COVID-19 pandemic		
	Thai-small luxury hotel	Thai-medium hotel chain	International hotel chain	Thai-small luxury hotel	Thai-medium hotel chain	International hotel chain
<b>Core Qualification</b>						
1. Organizational knowledge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Appearance and Grooming						
- Personal appearance						
- Communication: Thai, English, and Chinese	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Behavioral traits: Smiling, and friendly						
- Enthusiasm and dedication						
3. Interpersonal skills	✓	✓	Teamwork	✓	✓	✓

The required qualifications	In ordinary situation			After the COVID-19 pandemic		
	Thai-small luxury hotel	Thai-medium hotel chain	International hotel chain	Thai-small luxury hotel	Thai-medium hotel chain	International hotel chain
<b>Additional Qualification during COVID-19</b>						
1. Professional knowledge and skills	✓	✓ ( AN hotel)	Excellence	- Multi-skills <b>except</b> for the kitchen - being able to work hard - Work across department	- Multi-skills <b>except</b> for the kitchen - being able to work hard - Work across department	- Multi-skills <b>except</b> for the kitchen - being able to work hard - Work across department
2. Generic characteristics - Education - Working experience		✓	Higher education and High experiences	Required candidate with service experience during COVID-19	Required candidate with service experience during COVID-19	Required candidate with service experience during COVID-19
<b>New requirements due to the pandemic</b>						
1. Sanitary and Hygiene about the virus and social responsibility				✓	✓	✓
2. Adaptability and Flexibility			✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Technology Skill			✓	✓	✓	Digital and mass media skills

### **Core Qualification of Hotel Employee**

The findings reveal the similarity of the requirements for the hotel industry in Chiang Mai, Thailand in all 3 groups of the case study. Furthermore, these requirements are in demand both in the ordinary situation and in the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 3).

### **Knowledge and Understanding of the Organization**

All 8 case studies required candidates who understand and know about the organization as noted by the HR manager from UN hotel (2021) that ‘Our organizational culture is helping and living as a family. We eat the same pot of rice [...] we hiring one who understands this way of living in this hotel’. Interviewing with HR managers from 8 case studies reveal the same that they consider the knowledge and understanding of organization is still essential qualification for their employees during COVID-19 and is going to continue in demand in the future as captured ‘once our income is decreased more than 80 % caused by the crisis, we talk frankly to our staff that we need to cut off about 15 % of their salary and reduce the working day to 3-4 days a week [...] we appreciate an employee who understands our organization’ ( HR manager from FS hotel, 2021). All case study considers knowledge and understanding of organization is essential for their employees at all time because it might create a sense of belonging as captured from RY’s HR manager (2021) that ‘knowing and understanding organizations shows that you are ready to work with us even when this situation (COVID-19) [...] this aspect is important at all time’.

### **Appearance and Grooming**

The evidence shows that all case studies consider employees’ appearance and grooming as key characteristics of hotel employees in any situation. The HR manager of SL hotel (2012) point out that ‘appearance and grooming in particular smiling and friendliness still the key for employees in Thailand’. Similar to the HR manager of TM hotel, she mentioned the importance of appearance and grooming in the hotel industry in Thailand that

‘apart from organizational and task knowledge we need a good looking person with smiling face and friendly including good communication both in Thai and English [...]’ (TM’s HR manager, 2021). HR manager from DD and AN hotel mentioned that they consider cut off employees who have a lower level of dedication in the past as captured ‘By a right –sizing strategic, we cut off employees who have low performance in terms of absence, punctuality, and customer complaint’ (AN hotel). The findings of appearance and grooming, such as personal appearance, communication in Thai, English, and Chinese, behavioral traits: smiling, and friendly, and enthusiasm, and dedication, is a core qualification for the hotel industry in Thailand, is consistent with previous literature (Kanjanasilanon 2010; Yiumtrakul, 2019; Sonwiang and Lueangnapha, 2020; Sirinet et al, 2020; Hamali and Pasunon, 2020) that appearance and grooming the core characteristics for hotel employees in Thailand.

### **Interpersonal skills: Teamwork**

The study found that interpersonal skills, for example, teamwork within the department, communication, and listening well with team members and customers, are a set of soft skills needed for hotel employees before the crisis, particularly international hotel chains. However, the pandemic forces all case studies to need their employees to work multi-task across the department. It means employees required to work as a team within and across departments, as captured ‘Our GSA sometimes required working in the restaurant [...] if they have fewer skills in communication or interpersonal skill, they would not be able to work in different teams’ (HR manager of PH hotel, 2021). This finding supports previous literature undertaken in Thailand (Sirinet et al., 2020; Yiumtrakul, 2019) that interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, empathy, and understanding self and others, rank the second-highest level of the desired attribute of graduates in the hotel. Furthermore, the finding is significant with the work of Browne (2021) who suggests the up skilling in 2021 for a post-COVID-19 hospitality career in Australia. Her study points out that interpersonal and soft skills, including teamwork, communication, and emotional intelligence, negotiation, and relationship management, are going to continue to be in high demand in the hotel industry in the post-COVID -19.

It can be said that knowledge and understanding of the organization, appearance, and grooming, and interpersonal skills is core competency and qualifications required in all types of hotel and any situation in Chiang Mai, Thailand. It might be due to hotels in Chiang Mai mostly applying a soft HRM approach underpinned by Thai culture in managing people in hotels (Promnil, 2018). Thailand is recognized as a highly collectivist society where the needs, wants and goals of a group are greater than that of each individual. Helping others and asking for help from others is not only encouraged but viewed as essential. Having strong families and friendship groups is important in these societies and people may sacrifice their happiness or time for the benefit of someone else or the greater good of a group (Hofstede insight, 2021).

### **Additional Qualification required for Hotel Employees after Covid-19 Pandemic**

In an ordinary situation, there are some qualifications required differently in 3 groups of the hotels. It is evident that the generic characteristics, including education and experience, have less concern in Thai- small luxury hotels than in Thai-medium-sized hotel chains and international hotel chains. Only international hotel chain mentions adaptability and flexibility, technology skill, and creativity. However, the evidence shows the higher level of qualifications and competencies required by all groups of case studies after the pandemic (Table 3).



## **Generic Characteristics: Service Experience during COVID-19**

All groups of case study agreed that they have less concern on a candidate with high working experience than before, rather they required a candidate with service experience during COVID-19 pandemic as HR manager from AN hotel stated:

*'We are a welcome candidate who experiences working during COVID-19 crisis [...] So they may have skills about the pandemic related to social distancing, safety, and infection control. It means we do not need to train them that much'*

This finding supports the study of Pwongsuwan (2012) on HRM strategy applied by 4-5 stars' hotels and boutique hotels in Chiang Mai in economic crisis. Pwongsuwan (2012) noted that the required qualification of the employee during the economic crisis differs from an ordinary situation. For instance, the employee with experience is more required during the crisis than those without experience. It is due to the policy on reduction of training and development costs.

## **Professional Knowledge and Skills: Multi-skills Related to the Hotel Industry**

The evidence shows that all case studies will always need employees with professional knowledge and skill such as specific procedures, sequences, actions, and strategies used to fulfill tasks. As a result of the pandemic, all case study has employed downsizing strategies, such as layoffs, reducing staff salaries. This leads to the change in organizational structure and streamlines with smaller teams with multi-skills to work within and across departments. HR managers from 8 case studies similarly stated that 'not only are employees doing well in their tasks, but also they now need to be multi-skilled both within and across department'. It means multi-skilled and hardworking employees are currently imperative for the hotel industry since the pandemic. However, it excepts kitchen staffs which need a high level of task-specific knowledge and skills for food quality control as captured from DD and RY hotel '[...] only in the kitchen, such as demi chef, and chef de parties, that need very specific skills and cannot work multi-tasking because the customers can tell the difference of food quality' said HR manager of DD (2021).

The findings of multi-skills have emerged as critical to the hotel industry in Thailand due to the pandemic support of the existing studies undertaken outside Thailand (AM et al, 2020; Enback, 2020; Browne, 2021). Those studies indicate that hospitality staff that can adapt to work in a smaller team and can work multi-tasks across departments will be more imperative during the pandemic than before. In sum, all case studies require a higher level of expectation in employees' qualifications and competencies during the COVID-19 pandemic. All case study requires employees who have working experiences, especially service experiences during COVID-19. Not only professional knowledge and skills necessary for all types of the hotel industry but also multi-skilled and hardworking characteristics were found to be a critical requirement after the pandemic. It might be because all case study attempts to navigate their companies to ensure business continuity by reducing labor cost (Pwongsuwan, 2012), putting HR under pressure to create more value with the fewer resource (AM et al, 2020), and requiring favours from their employees greater than before (Santi et al, 2021).

## **New requirement for Hotel employees due to COVID-19 Pandemic)**

The findings identify a new set of qualifications and competencies for hotel employees in Chiang Mai that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is evident that all case studies found health and infection control, adaptability, and digital technologies as a

new critical set of skills in the new normal era. The evidence shows that knowledge of social distancing, sanitation, and hygiene, as well as social responsibility is critical knowledge and skill concerning the COVID-19 pandemic as captured below.

- We consider cut off employees who have non-vaccinated (DD hotel, 2021)
- Responsible to other for example, wearing a mask, social distancing, become a basic requirement in today situation' (AN hotel, 2021)

Similarly, Enback (2020) assesses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the needs of the hospitality, retail, travel, and aviation industry across the UK. His study names knowledge and skill related to health, safety, infection control, and social distancing as green skills. This kind of knowledge and skill will be more crucial hospitality industry in the future (Browne, 2021). The study also found that adaptability and flexibility skills, such as being able to identify new needs of customers (DD hotel), managing uncertainly (FS hotel), taking the initiative to deal with the ordinary situation (RY and TM hotel), and multi-tasking (PH, UN, AN, and SL hotel), is new qualifications needed for Thai-hotel after the pandemic. Moreover, it is evident that technology skill is a new requirement for Thai-hotel and digital technologies, and mass media skills recognize new skills for the international hotel chain. These findings support the literature undertaken outside Thailand (Enback, 2020; AM et al, 2020; Browne 2021) that soft and social skills are considered transferable skills (AM et al, 2020). This set of skills, namely the awareness of the change of customer needs and behavior, digital technology, and flexibility and adaptability, are vital skills in the future. Thus, this set of skills is in high demand now and will continue in post –COVID -19 in the hospitality industry.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been recognized that managing hotel workforces during the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as more complex and challenging for the hotel business. This emerges a body of literature exploring appropriate HRM approaches after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, knowledge on qualifications required for hotel employees about new HRM approaches and the pandemic remains scarce, in particular Thailand where people slightly have a preference for avoiding uncertainty (Hofstede insight, 2021) and have low intention to adopt digital technology (Kanchanatane, 2012). This paper employed inductive qualitative research with multiple case studies to conduct the research in Chiang Mai, Thailand. By interviewing 16 informants including HR managers and front-line employees from 8 hotels; 3 small luxury hotels, 3 Thai-national and medium-sized hotels chain, and 2 international hotels chains, this paper identifies 3 categories of qualifications required for hotel employees after the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the core qualification refers to the qualification required for all types of hotels and in any situation, namely organizational knowledge, appearance and grooming, and interpersonal and teamwork skill. This paper implies that this set of core qualifications is influenced by the (Thai) culture and the characteristics of the hotel industry.

Second, the additional qualification is a set of qualifications that all case studies require favours from their employees greater than before, such as working experience plus service experience during COVID-19, professional knowledge and skills plus multi-skills. It might be due to the hotel business's attempts to navigate their companies to ensure business continuity and reduce all costs (Pwongsuwan, 2012), creating more value with the fewer resource (AM et al, 2020; Santi et al, 2021). Last, new requirements refer to those qualifications that have emerged as critical to the hotel business due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including digital technology, and flexibility, and adaptability. This set of qualifications was found to be a new qualification needed for Thai-hotel (in any size) after

the pandemic. Therefore, this paper implies that the design of hotel employee qualification has been influenced by characteristics of the hotel industry and the national culture of the hotel setting rather than its size and nationality. Since this study reveals adaptability and flexibility skills and technology and mass media skills have emerged as critical for the hotel industry globally during the pandemic. However, most hotels in Chiang Mai, Thailand employ a soft HRM approach underpinned by the (Thai) culture in managing people in their hotels (Promnil, 2018). Hofstede insight (2021) identifies that Thai society is an intermediate uncertainty avoidance society. Thai people slightly have a preference for avoiding uncertainty. Moreover, uncertainty avoidance culture and social norms influence Thai SMEs to have low intention to adopt E-marketing and digital technology (Kanchanatane, 2012). This means the hotel industry in Thailand is going to face with skill shortage challenge. This is an interesting issue for academics and HRM practitioners to explore how to enhance employee skills and competency as well as to deal with particular challenges.

Furthermore, this study employs inductive qualitative research with multiple case studies. This method may contribute new knowledge of qualifications required for hotel employees in intermediate uncertainty avoidance cultures such as Thailand. However, due to the limitation of the research methodology, the results may be difficult to generalize or extend to represent the hotel industry in Thailand as a whole. This is because this study was conducted only in one famous tourist destination in northern Thailand. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted across the country. However, it may be difficult to conduct qualitative research with wider samples and therefore a mixed research methodology might be more appropriate (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

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