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Enhancing Human Resource Competency in Service Industry: A Case Study of Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel's Online Instructional Media Initiative

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Abstract

This study examines the online instructional media initiative for enhancing human resource competency in the service industry, using Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel as a case study. The research objectives were to: (1) evaluate human resource competency in the service industry, (2) analyze the efficacy of current online instructional media formats, and (3) formulate guidelines for developing effective online instructional media. The sample comprised 200 participants from various departments at Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel, selected through purposive and simple random sampling methods. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Data were collected via a survey questionnaire online (n=150), semi-structured interviews (n=20), and focus group discussions (n=30). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The obtained results indicated that: (1) personal characteristics were identified as the most critical aspect of human resource competency, (2) the current online instructional media format demonstrated high efficacy in competency enhancement, and (3) recommended guidelines for improving online instructional media include optimizing content density, ensuring content validity, and incorporating engaging elements to sustain learner motivation. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge on e-learning in the service industry and provide practical implications for human resource development practitioners.

Keywords: Human resource competency, service industry, Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel, online instructional media

1. Introduction

In the context of Thailand's 20-year national strategic plan (2017-2036) and the National Tourism Development Plan No. 2 (2017-2021), this research addresses the critical need for enhancing human resource competency in the service industry through innovative online instructional media. Thailand's ambitious goal to maintain its position as one of the world's top four countries in tourism revenue necessitates a strategic focus on developing a sustainable and preferred destination that offers value-driven experiences. This objective

requires a multifaceted approach, including the enhancement of personnel competencies to increase competitiveness in the service sector.

The tourism industry's evolving landscape demands a workforce equipped with advanced skills and knowledge aligned with organizational objectives. Online learning media present a promising solution, offering flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and accessibility. This aligns with previous researchers' perspective on the efficacy of e-learning in supplementing traditional training methods (Laohajarasaeng, 2002; Zhang et al. (2020). The Digital Government Development Agency (2018) earlier emphasized the role of accessible online learning in developing Thailand's tourism potential.

However, the development of effective online instructional media for the service industry presents unique challenges. It requires careful consideration of content design, user engagement, and alignment with industry standards. In this study, the researchers aimed at (i) Evaluating human resource competency in the service industry, (ii) Analyzing the efficacy of current online instructional media formats, and (iii) Formulating guidelines for developing effective online instructional media.

By focusing on these objectives, this research seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on e-learning in the service/hospitality industry and provide practical implications for human resource development practitioners. The findings are expected to generate strategies for enhancing workforce competency, ultimately supporting Thailand's goals on sustainable tourism growth and economic development.

2. Literature Review

This section briefly covers the study background by major previous studies in support of online instructional media for human resource competency development: (i) Meaning and importance of learning, (ii) Electronic learning (e-Learning), (iii) Employee competency concepts and theories, (iv) Human resource development, (v) Information communication technology skills, (vi) A case study of Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel, and (vii) Related literature.

2.1 Meaning and Importance of Learning

Learning is a fundamental process for human development, enabling the acquisition of skills, concepts, and behaviors necessary for adaptation to diverse environments. Bloom's Taxonomy categorizes learning into six levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This taxonomy provides a structured approach to understanding the complexity of learning processes (Gagne et al., 1992; Krathwohl, 2002). Gagne's theory classifies learning outcomes into three groups: factual knowledge, intellectual skills (concepts and principles), and cognitive strategies, with problem-solving abilities representing the highest level of intellectual engagement (Gagne et al., 1992). The knowledge linkage theory, pertinent to the digital age, emphasizes collaborative knowledge creation facilitated by connections between individuals and information through various forms, such as symbols, text, images, and sounds across online networks (Siemens, 2005; Moral et al., 2013; Downes, 2012).

2.2 Electronic Learning (e-Learning)

E-Learning utilizes electronic devices and the internet to deliver educational content. It includes computer-assisted instruction, web-based instruction, and distance learning. Effective e-Learning systems allow for content editing, flexible study schedules, and accessibility from any location, which has increased their popularity for personnel development (Alessi, 1984; Clank & Mayer, 2003). The Learning Management System (LMS) integrates tools for lesson content, tests, questionnaires, and communication (e.g., email, web boards) (Relan & Gillani, 1997; Khan, 2021). WBI (Web-based Instruction) uses web technology to design interactive teaching experiences, fostering meaningful interactions between teachers and students (Driscoll, 1997; Horton & Horton, 2000).

2.3 Employee Competency Concepts and Theories

Competency, a concept introduced in 1973 by David C. McClelland, involves the personality traits that drive high-performance outcomes (McClelland, 1973). McClelland's work was followed by Spencer's Iceberg Model that further delineates competencies into visible aspects--knowledge and skills--and such hidden aspects as motivation and character traits (Dawson et al., 1993). According to quite a few researchers, core competencies are crucial for organizational growth and competitive advantage, comprising basic competencies and differentiating competencies that enable superior performance (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Wongthongdee, 2016; Zhang et al, 2020; Sukiam, 2021).

2.4 Human Resource Development

Human resource development (HRD) encompasses decision-making, and practices aimed at maximizing personnel effectiveness. Khunthongchan (2016) defines HRD as organizing and managing personnel to utilize their knowledge and abilities fully, aligning with the organization's strategy (Khunthongchan, 2016; Laohan, 2016). Competency application in HRD includes strategic planning, enterprise bargaining, training, career development, performance management, job design, and recruitment (Rylatt & Lohan, 1995). HRD promotes continuous learning and development, enhancing individual knowledge, skills, and attitudes to benefit the organization (Novelia et al., 2019; Thepwan, 2011).

2.5 Information Communication Technology (ICT) Skills

Proficiency in *ICT* includes computers, data communication systems, and digital tools, as essential skills for 21st-century learning. Information literacy involves accessing, evaluating, and creatively using information from various sources. Educational reforms stress practical skills, with UNESCO recommending skills in basic life functions, work-related tasks, and career-specific competencies (Secondary Education Administration Bureau, 2015). Effective information technology skills enhance communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, fostering efficient and modern organizational workflows (Thompson, 2016; Salem, 2017).

2.6 Case Study: Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel

Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel exemplifies luxury service in the hospitality industry, blending Thai elegance with modern amenities. The hotel's comprehensive facilities and services underscore the importance of continuous development in the service industry, necessitating well-trained and competent human resources (Dusit Thani Public Company

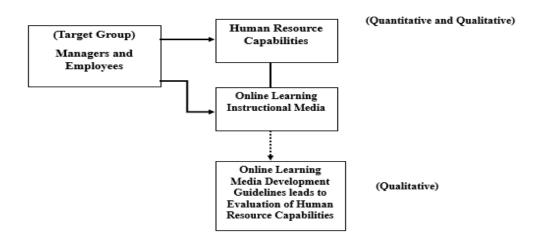
Limited, 2020). It should be noted that the hotel's online instructional media initiative has included all major aspects mentioned under 2.2 to 2.5 as shown above.

2.7 Related Literature

Sookwin & Suntornthanaphol (2023) identifies social context, crisis situations, financial issues, and policy problems as barriers to accessing learning media. Their study also discusses the application of Kurt Lewin's model for managing these problems. Two previous studies by Pin Kaew et al. (2018) and Phiphatpong-ampai et al. (2023) emphasize the significance of digital literacy, self-efficacy, and academic participation in effective online learning. Their findings indicate that well-rounded digital literacy enhances students' ability to learn online, and positive self-efficacy boosts students' confidence and response to online learning. Promsuth et al. (2021) focus on the need for developing human resource competencies to support the Thailand 4.0 initiative, emphasizing creativity, innovation, technology, and high-level service skills. Sarmento (2010), Singala (2010), and Chaisri (2020) examine the benefits of competency-based human resource management, highlighting its importance in recruitment, selection, performance evaluation, and career advancement in the hospitality industry. Kongthong (2019) and Boonmak et al. (2022) address counseling needs and competency development in specific sectors, suggesting tailored approaches to meet these needs. Pin Kaew et al. (2018) particularly advocate for an outcome-based E-learning system to enhance teaching and learning experiences, indicating high user satisfaction with the system.

As seen in these previous studies, online learning media play a significant role in developing human resource competency in the service industry (Collins et al., 2003). Different online media formats can enhance competency, promoting proactive strategies for organizational efficiency (Kim et al., 2011; Methalak et al., 2019). In this regard, the present research therefore utilizes a developmental approach with participatory action from the subjects under study to gather quantitative and qualitative data for creating guidelines for effective online learning media development. The focus is on fostering a learning environment that integrates technological advancements, thereby enhancing the overall competency of human resources in the service industry. As shown in Figure 1, this research and development with its participatory action research techniques (Participatory Action Research: PAR) collects both quantitative and qualitative data as responsive to its specific research objectives.

Figure 1: Research and Development Framework



3. Research Methodology

This study has its final goal on developing guidelines for online instructional media to enhance human resource competency at Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel using a Research and Development (R&D) model with Participatory Action Research (PAR). The researchers adopted data collection stages for the participants after those used by Relan & Gillani (1997) and Khan (2021), as shown in the research procedures below.

3.1 Research Procedures

Explanatory Meeting: An initial meeting was held with stakeholders to explain the research's significance, process, and introduce the research team. This session aimed to address questions and gather preliminary suggestions. This method was earlier used by Moral et al. (2013).

Document Study and Tool Creation: Relevant documents were reviewed as a basis to construct research tools. Data was then collected using questionnaires and informal group interviews, followed by data checking and analysis. This method was earlier used by Gagne et al. (1992) and Downes (2012).

Focus Group Discussion: Results from the initial data analysis were used in leading focus group discussion, where employees participated in developing guidelines for online instructional media. This method was earlier used by Spencer (1993).

3.2 Population and Sample Size

The researchers selected 200 participants by purposive sampling from the departments using online learning media in Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel as a case study. The participants were assigned randomly into three groups for three types of data collection: (i) 150 persons to respond to the *survey questionnaire*, (ii) 20 persons to give information via *informal group interviews*, and (iii) 30 persons to provide information on desired guidelines for online instructional media in focus *group discussion*. These three groups were to provide data as specified in the research instruments.

3.3 Research Instruments

Based on three identified research objectives, the researchers developed a set of specifications for the *questionnaire* items, questions used in the *informal group interview*, and guiding/prompting questions in *focus group discussion*. Three instruments for data collection--a survey questionnaire, informal group interview, and focus group discussion-were constructed and validated by five experts in online learning and human resource development in the hospitality industry.

The specifications of the three instruments primarily cover four dimensions of core competencies by roles: knowledge, skills, performance and attitudes. Other specific aspects are included to cover data collection via interviews and focus group discussion: specialized knowledge, awareness of high-service standards, document management skills, interpersonal coordination skills, problem-solving skills, skills in event activities/ product promotion, positive traits, openness to feedback, perception and experience with their roles within the hotel business. It should be noted that all three instruments carry a section on the participants' demographic variables.

The survey questionnaire containing two sections on demographic information of the participants and 20 question items on core competencies, respectively. It was checked for content validity by five experts and then tested for reliability by administering it to a sample of 30 persons with demographic variables similar to those of the real participants. As for group interviews with five members per group in one hour, the researchers used a set of 10 questions aligned with the specifications used in the survey questionnaire—also checked for content validity by five relevant experts. With the participants' consent, the interview data were audio-recorded for subsequent transcription. As for the third research instrument, focus group discussion incorporated 8 guiding/prompting questions based on specifications on the participants' viewpoints and suggestions for competency-based online instructional media formats as guidelines for efficiency in human resource competency training in the service industry. Discussion time was set as one hour per group of 10 members. With the group members' consent, the group discussion data were also audio-recorded for subsequent transcription.

Data was collected from the survey questionnaire online, informal group interviews, and focus group discussion to obtain comprehensive information about the general information of the sample group, human resource performance, and online learning media formats, which would be used to create guidelines. From the instrument trial using 30 persons with demographic variables similar to those of the real participants, the reliability test result of the survey questionnaire was 0.962; the questions with a confidence value at or above 0.6 were considered stable and consistent. As for content validity analysis of all items used in the three instruments, five experts' check yielded the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) with a quality criterion of .50 or higher. The opinions and suggestions obtained from the experts were used to revise the questions.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers used three instruments to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in the first half of 2024. The survey questionnaire was distributed online; the researchers arranged with the hotel's coordinator for access to the participants for informal group interviews and focus group discussion. Data analysis was divided into: (i)

quantitative data analyzed by percentage, mean, standard deviation, and factor analysis, and (ii) qualitative data analyzed by thematic analysis techniques for classified data types and typological data.

4. Results

The data obtained from three instruments are reported in a sequence of three research objectives on (i) evaluated human resource competency in the service industry, (ii) the efficacy of current online instructional media formats, and (iii) recommended guidelines for developing effective online instructional media for competency-based training in the service industry.

4.1 Human Resource Competency in the Service Industry

The findings on the participants indicate a near-even *gender distribution* among respondents, with 49.3% males and 50.7% females. Most respondents *were aged* between 31-40 years, followed by those in the range of 20-30 and 41-50 years, each constituting 26.0%. Only 7.3% of the respondents were over 50 years old. In terms of *income*, the largest segment earned between 15,001-20,000 baht, with other significant groups earning less than 15,000 baht and between 20,001-25,000 baht. As for *education*, the majority of respondents had a diploma or equivalent (48.7%), followed by those with a bachelor's degree (44.0%), a master's degree (2.7%), and other qualifications (4.7%).

In terms of *professional roles*, a significant number of respondents were employees in various non-operational departments (24.7%), followed by food and beverage management employees (18.0%), executive-level managers (17.3%), cooks (15.3%), housekeepers (14.0%), and both receptionists and luggage service personnel (10.7%).

From the participants' survey responses, the study found the high-performance levels of hotel business personnel, who demonstrated extensive knowledge and skills relevant to their roles. This included understanding hotel operations, adherence to regulations, negotiation skills, conflict resolution, and proficiency in various technical and service-related competencies.

The overall analysis further reveals that online learning media have significantly enhanced the knowledge, skills, and performance of hotel employees, fostering a positive work attitude. The participants particularly identified a positive attitude toward work as a common characteristic among employees at the hotel under study. They frequently mentioned other positive traits, such as customer care, responsibility, interpersonal relations, honesty, dedication, and openness to feedback. Employees generally possess 70%-80% of the required knowledge for their roles, but additional training in areas like *event services* and *product promotions* is necessary. On-the-job training (OJT) is consistently organized to maintain high service standards, especially amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Core competencies observed include strong document management skills, basic knowledge of food menus, and effective interdepartmental coordination. The practical application of online learning is emphasized, particularly in problem-solving scenarios (Chaisri, 2020; Phromsuth et al., 2021).

The majority of participants (80%+) identified department-specific insights as follows:

- **Spa Department:** Emphasis on wellness transition, English communication, and problem-solving skills.
- **Housekeeping Department:** Training on room care measures and English communication, despite a predominantly Thai guest base.
- **Kitchen Department:** Focus on raw material selection, cost management, and teamwork.
- **Store Department:** Knowledge of products, order processing, and inventory management using the FIFO system.
- **Telephone Operator Department:** Data storage, equipment usage, paperwork, and listening skills for efficient service.
- **Event Department:** Proficiency in computer skills, data storage, and document organization.
- **Fire Life Safety Department:** Observation skills, loss analysis, and adherence to safety protocols.
- **Dusit Club Department:** High service attitude and proficiency with operating systems.
- **Maintenance Technician Department:** Multitasking and problem-solving skills supported by comprehensive work manuals.
- **Front Desk:** Effective communication, customer feedback receptivity, and a positive attitude.

4.2 Efficacy of Current Online Learning Media Formats

The qualitative analysis from informal group interviews and focus group discussion provides deeper insights into the efficacy of online instructional media and its impact on hotel employees' knowledge, skills, performance, and attitudes (Phromsuth et al., 2021). The interviews obtained information from the participating employees in various departments--operations, finance, food and beverage, housekeeping, and management. The participants' responses revealed employees' perceptions and experiences with their roles within the hotel business.

Knowledge and Skills: Group discussions revealed that most hotel employees possess around 70%-80% of the required knowledge for their roles. However, there is a strong need for additional training in specific areas, such as event services, new promotions, and product knowledge (as earlier emphasized by Chaisri, 2020). Employees highlighted the importance of continuous on-the-job training (OJT) sessions, which cover various standards and operational procedures to ensure service excellence. It should be noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, training sessions were adapted to include social distancing measures, often conducted outdoors or via digital platforms like LINE applications.

Performance and Adaptability: Employees demonstrated high levels of performance and adaptability, often taking on multiple roles due to reduced staff numbers during the pandemic. For instance, some employees diversified their skills to include such

tasks as gardening and maintaining common areas. Departments like the sports and housekeeping sections introduced standard operating procedures (SOPs) to enhance service quality and customer satisfaction. Training on spa product knowledge and service standards was provided to front desk staff, while the steward department focused on chemical use and safety protocols (also earlier suggested by Phromsuth et al., 2021).

Attitudes and Team Dynamics: The participants identified a positive attitude toward work as a common characteristic among employees. They frequently emphasized traits, such as customer care, responsibility, interpersonal relations, honesty, dedication, and openness to feedback. The focus groups pointed to the importance of teamwork, with employees from different departments collaborating to address challenges and improve service delivery. For example, the housekeeping department highlighted the use of checklists for room inspections and guest education on housekeeping measures (also highlighted by Chaisri, 2020).

The majority of participants (80%+) identified department-specific insights as follows:

- **Spa Department:** Transitioning to wellness-focused services required enhancing employees' knowledge in this area. Emphasis was placed on improving English communication and problem-solving skills.
- **Housekeeping Department:** Training on post-checkout room care measures and English communication was essential, despite the majority of guests being Thai.
- **Kitchen Department:** Key competencies included raw material selection, condiment storage, and cost management based on guest numbers.
- **Telephone Operator Department:** Proficiency in data storage, equipment usage, and listening skills was necessary for efficient service.
- **Event Department:** Employees needed strong computer skills, data storage proficiency, and document organization abilities.
- **Fire Life Safety Department:** Observation skills, loss analysis, and safety protocols were critical for ensuring property safety.
- **Dusit Club Department:** A high level of service attitude and proficiency with operating systems was required.
- **Maintenance Technician Department:** Multitasking and problem-solving skills, supported by comprehensive work manuals, were essential.

4.3 Guidelines for Developing Effective Online Instructional Media for Competency-Based Training in the Service Industry

The focus groups provided specific online instructional media feedback to the formats used by Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel. All employees expressed satisfaction with the overall content and its applicability to their work. However, some challenges were noted for improvement, particularly small font sizes, distracting backgrounds, and fast-paced videos. Based on feedback derived from the participants' responses in informal group interviews and focus group discussion, their suggestions on incorporating interactive elements, enhancing font readability, and providing more engaging content, were integrated into the recommended guidelines.

5. Discussion and Implications

The study highlights the need for continuous *evaluation and improvement of online instructional media* to meet employees' evolving needs, as shown in the case study reported in this paper. From the majority of participants' responses (80%+), they valued online instructional media as significantly enhancing knowledge, skills, and performance as required in hotel employees. They particularly identified a positive attitude toward work which is part of personal characteristics and as the most critical aspect of human resource competency.

The research findings can benefit the development and implementation of online instructional media in the hotel industry. Firstly, the integration of technology and mobile devices has facilitated easy access to learning resources, allowing employees to engage in continuous learning anytime and anywhere. This accessibility promotes a more efficient and knowledgeable workforce, as employees can regularly update their skills and knowledge (Zhang et al., 2020; Phromsuth et al., 2021). The lessons provided cover general knowledge and department-specific content, which are crucial for maintaining high service standards. These resources have significantly contributed to enhancing work performance and fostering team efficiency. This approach aligns with the research of Phromsuth et al. (2021), which emphasizes the importance of human resource competencies, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

By engaging in online learning, employees acquire knowledge that is directly applicable to their jobs, leading to *improved skills and efficiency*. This reduces errors, expedites task completion, and enhances customer service quality, ultimately contributing to customer satisfaction, repeat patronage, and positive word-of-mouth promotion. These improvements in organizational performance also help in reducing turnover rates, as satisfied employees are more likely to remain in their roles, reducing recruitment and training costs (Chaisri, 2020; Khan, 2021).

Effective *online instructional guidelines* obviously offer cost-saving benefits by reducing the need for traditional classroom training. Employees can engage in self-paced learning, which saves time and resources. This method also minimizes environmental impact by reducing paper usage and conserving energy typically used in classroom settings (Phromsuth et al., 2021; Sookwin & Suntornthanaphol, 2023). To enhance *employee engagement and satisfaction*, online instructional media can offer a wider range of topics and provide employees with the autonomy to select topics of personal interest. Continuous evaluation of learner satisfaction and human resource competency is essential for refining online learning media.

In particular, Sukiam (2021) highlighted the importance of developing employee work competencies to create high-quality products and services in the hospitality industry. As expressed by most of the participating employees under study, strong competencies contribute to maintaining business competitiveness. Maintaining personnel with improved knowledge and skills to perform their assigned tasks or follow job descriptions can significantly enhance the organization's service quality.

Overall, the present study proves by empirical evidence from the hotel staff under study that effective use of online instructional media can noticeably strengthen the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of hotel employees, leading to improved work performance and overall organizational efficiency.

6. Conclusion and Future Research

As reported in this paper, the researchers showed the impacts of online instructional media on human resource competency development in the service industry, using Dusit Thani Hua Hin Hotel as a case study. The findings in response to three research objectives were: (i) employees' positive attitude toward online instructional media used to enhance human resource competency in the service industry, (ii) the confirmed efficacy of current online instructional media formats as perceived by employees in various departments, and (iii) guidelines for developing effective online instructional media regarding knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward work, with considerations of content density, validity, and learning engagement. Despite the limited result generalizability of such a case study, the obtained findings can contribute to the body of knowledge on e-learning in the service industry and provide some practical implications for human resource development practitioners concerned.

As for future research, those who are interested in pursuing studies in online instructional media may consider investigating the impact of varied sizes of staff members on expected behavioral or learning outcomes, problems encountered in implementing online instructional media on selected platforms for human resource competency development, and comparative training programs of specific skills as required in hotel staffs in different cultural contexts.

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