

*An exploratory study in to the use of competencies in recruitment and selection within the
Irish hospitality sector*

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Abstract

The overall purpose of this dissertation is to explore and have an in-depth analysis in to the use of competencies within the Irish hospitality sector, from a recruitment and selection viewpoint. It is fundamental that the correct and most efficient employees are employed in an organisation in ensuring and achieving a profitable business venture, organisational effectiveness and competitive advantage in the marketplace. Using competency or competency-based frameworks are the minimum standards set by an organisation for employees to attain in order to perform effectively within an organisation.

This research question aims to investigate whether organisations within the hospitality sector seek and require certain competencies or characteristics in new recruits, and if so, which are the most common. It also aims to determine any commonalities or differences across the sector as a whole and the benefits, if any, of using a competency-based approach when recruiting. The research uses a quantitative approach for data collection through the use of distributed surveys to numerous different companies in the Irish hospitality sector. When the data returned, Microsoft Excel was used to assess and analyse the findings. The survey was distributed to 30 HR managers across hotels, restaraunts, bars and general event management in Ireland, with 20 responses, meaning there was a 66.6% response rate.

The findings of the research found that the use of competencies, competency-based frameworks and a competency-based approach are still very much evident within the recruitment and selection practices of hospitality organisations in Ireland today. Some competencies are more commonly used when recruiting and selecting, while others are not as frequently used. Employers find the use of competency-based frameworks very beneficial to their organisation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1 1 Title

An exploratory study in to the use of competencies in recruitment and selection within the Irish hospitality sector

1 2 Background

Ensuring the most effective and efficient employees are hired in any organisation or business setting is essential in order to achieve organisational success. Given the fast pace and intensity of the business world today and the increasing emphasis on globalisation, companies need to recruit and select the right human capital into the correct positions. In order to achieve this, it is important that those who have been hired to work in the organisation are competent enough through their technical skills, behavioural knowledge and experience to carry out daily tasks within the company. Essentially, it is the responsibility of Human Resources (HR) and any others on an interview panel to decide who is selected for the appropriate position which is looking to be filled. Having competent employees is not only important for organisational success but for also organisational sustainability.

It is within the role of a HR manager and HR department that the employees working for the organisation are able and competent to meet the daily internal and external demands of the organisation. According to Hawkes and Weathington (2014, p.191), competencies have been adopted and applied globally in the business world; and competencies are measurable, and are represented by sets of behaviours combined with knowledge, skills and personal attributes.

Three major components of competency are the attitude, skill and knowledge of an individual through measurable behaviour and outcomes (Nath and Raheja, 2001, p.27). Kashi and Friedrich (2013) comment “currently now in the time of economic crises it is very important for every business to be able to survive or sustain the competition and employees are one of the most important asset any company can have”. It is essential that organisations recruit and hire the correct staff with the right level of competence through their human capital approach. “Human capital represents the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being” (OECD, 2001, p.18). It is essential that in order for organisations to attract and retain the correct applicants, they need to ensure they are using attractive recruitment techniques (Hawkes and Weathington, 2014, p.190).

1 3 Research topic and objectives

The fundamental aim of this research question is to investigate whether employers in the hospitality sector seek certain competencies before selecting candidates to become a member of their organisation as an employee. Given the large number of organisations being affected by the recession, it is important, not only for organisational success but also for organisational sustainability that they have the most effective human capital in their organisation. The four sub-objectives of this research question are:

- Do employers and HR managers look for certain competencies, such as technical or knowledge-based competencies when recruiting all new employees?
- Which are the most common competencies which employers look for in potential new recruits?

- Is there any commonality or differences in required competencies between different companies (such as hotels, restaurants, event management etc.) within the Irish hospitality sector?
- Finally, what are the perceived benefits of using competencies and a competency-based approach when recruiting new employees?

The objectives mentioned above will provide a representation on the subject matter of the use of competencies in this sector. The author feels this is a topic worthy of study due to the growing nature of this sector.

1 4 The Irish Hospitality Sector

Even though the use of competencies and competency-based frameworks are used globally across numerous sectors, for the purpose of this research question, the researcher will focus specifically at the hospitality sector in Ireland. Grad Ireland (2013) commented that in relation to the hospitality sector that “there are, at the peak of season, between 150,000 and 250,000 employees across all areas (depending on which criteria you use), earning over €6 billion for the Irish economy”.

The Irish hospitality sector covers hotels, tourism, leisure, sports events and general event management. Given the economic downturn since 2008, many business corporations nationwide have gone into liquidation or shut down, the hospitality sector included. Data was collected, through the use of a survey, from a combination of different organisational types to portray a fair representation of the Irish hospitality sector.

Nath and Raheja (2001, p.25) argue with regards to the hospitality sector that “in the given business scenario it is becoming imperative that each of the players in the hotel

industry consciously work towards achieving and maintaining differential positioning based on service standards”. A combination of different hospitality organisations were used to get a fair representation of this sector. According to the Irish Hotel Federation (IHF), “tourism is Ireland’s largest indigenous industry and a critical component of the export economy accounting for €5.7 billion in spending in 2013 and represents 4% of Ireland’s Gross National Product (GNP)”. They proceed to argue that ongoing investment and commitment in tourism and hospitality is required by the government to maintain its visibility and be an international competitor as an attractive destination for holiday goers and business travellers.

1 5 Justification for the Research

Shellabear (2002) comments for most organisations, it is necessary to ensure that its business outcomes are achieved. This can only occur if the correct and most competent of people are employed by the company to carry out the daily tasks and objectives. The Irish government have invested significantly in the tourism product. For example, through the reduction of the Value Added Tax (VAT) rate to 9%. The benefit of this is clear to be seen in the labour market as CSO data shows between the second quarter of 2011 and the first quarter of 2014, 21,633 jobs were created in the Irish tourism and hospitality sector. The researcher feels this is a topic worthy of study due to the increased growth in employment in this sector.

Previous research on competencies in the hospitality sector has been carried out. In 2000, the hotel *Marriott International and Choice* conducted a survey in the hope of identifying leadership competencies which was industry specific and future based. At that time, their research found no model for hospitality leadership. They completed a pilot study and created a competency model for the hospitality industry. A survey,

with likert-scale ranging, was used. Their key findings were competency in self-management, knowledge and strategic positioning, implementation skill and critical thinking were the main competencies identified and a list of 99 competencies was provided. Following analysing this survey, the researcher feels there is a gap in the research as this previous study focused on identifying future leaders as opposed to potential employees, so this research primarily focuses on the use of competencies within the recruitment and selection practices of hospitality organisations in Ireland.

1 6 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation contains six chapters. The introduction is the first chapter of the dissertation and sets out the roots and starting point of this research. It outlines the overall research question and the sub-objectives of the research, background and context of this research and why this research topic is worthy of study. The second chapter contains the Literature Review in which the overall aim of this section is to investigate the existing literature from academics, scholars and those who are expert in this area. The Literature Review will examine the use of competencies and competency-based frameworks and approaches from a recruitment and selection viewpoint, with focus on the Irish hospitality sector.

Chapter Three is the Research Methodology which explains the research approach, philosophy and strategy which the researcher used for the purposes of this dissertation. Also, within this chapter, other elements discussed are the research instrument used, the design of the distributed survey and its advantages and disadvantages and the sample that was targeted.

Chapter Four is the penultimate chapter and the Findings and Analysis section. This chapter shows the results and findings of the quantitative research undertaken. The

findings will be shown through the use of visual aids such as bar charts, pie charts and histograms. Each question on the survey will be discussed in detail, tying in with the research aims outlined in the Introduction chapter. Chapter Five brings the dissertation to an end with the Conclusion section with recommendations for future research. This chapter summarises the research as a whole, from a review of the literature, the research methodology which was used, and a summary of the main findings of this research. The Appendices has two parts: (a) is the cover letter which was used to inform the sample of the purposes of the survey and (b) is the distributed survey itself.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2 1 Introduction

Within this chapter, the researcher will review all the existing literature, comparing and contrasting different viewpoints on competencies and competency-based frameworks from academics and scholars within this area. All of the literature will be reviewed and analysed from a recruitment and selection viewpoint, with focus on the Irish hospitality sector. The Literature Review will also examine the origins of the competencies model, the different types of competencies and competency-based frameworks, competency-based human resource management (HRM) and comment on any evident or emerging themes on the subject matter.

Research suggests it is generally argued that competencies are the skills, knowledge and attributes to undertake a job or task. The literature below leads the researcher to pose the question if employers ascertain competencies when recruiting, which are the most common, are there similarities and/or differences across the different organisations and what are the perceived benefits over using a competency framework or competency-based approach within the Irish Hospitality Sector?

2 2 Competencies Defined

Martin, Whiting and Jackson (2010, p.127) state “competencies are used in many organisations and provide an outline of the skills and abilities an employee must have (or acquire) to do a job and achieve the required standard of performance”. Competencies are the skills, knowledge, abilities and other characteristics that are required to perform a job effectively (Jackson and Schuler, 2003).

From reviewing the literature there is an evident overlap between competency and an employee's performance. Essentially, competencies are the underlying characteristics of a person that results in effective or superior performance (Armstrong, 2012 p.90). If an organisation does not have an idea of what it must expect from its employees in terms of performance, it will not achieve its objectives. It is argued that competencies are the observed characteristics which employees bring with them in order to be successful in the job (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin and Cardy 2010, p.242). Meanwhile, the Training Commission (1988), as cited in Beardwell and Holden (1997, p.297), comment competence is having the ability to perform occupational activities to the expected levels of performance within employment.

The work of Schippmann et al. (2000, p.706) found a range of definitions of 'competency' through comparing subject matter experts and published academic literature and stated it is "the knowledge, skills and attributes that differentiate high performers from average performers and the observable behavioural capabilities that are important for performing key responsibilities of a role or job". Nath and Raheja (2001, p.26) commented competencies are a combination of observable and applied knowledge, skills and behaviours that create competitive advantage for an organisation. Essentially, competence focuses on how an employee creates value and what is actually accomplished. In order for organisations to achieve competitive advantage, companies must have a culture which enforces core competencies. Gupta (2013) suggests having a "pooled skill, knowhow, physical resource or intangible assets that assist in service improvements to its customer by either of: better products or its delivery, faster execution, being more reliable and credible and cheaper". Chung-Herrera, Enz and Lankau (2003, p.17) comment that the identification of skills

and competencies is required for tomorrow's industry leaders and is fundamental for companies that hope to remain competitive.

For the importance of this research and in the effective use of competencies within recruitment and selection, it is important for employers that there is a general understanding of the term, setting out the required expectations and minimum requirements for that company. Edgar and Lockwood (2011) argue the use of core competencies creates products and services resulting in significant and positive contributions towards corporate competitiveness and competitive advantage in the marketplace. The above shows a common thread of language and wording showing it as the admirable and required expectations with regard to levels of performance within an organisation.

According to the Washington State Human Resources (2012), choosing the right competencies allows employers to plan, organise and develop their workforce, determine and enforce business needs, manage and train employees effectively, develop employees to fill future vacancies and most importantly for the purposes of this research question recruit and select the best employees for their organisation.

2 3 History and origins of competencies

Armstrong (2012, p.90) argues the leading figure in defining and popularising the concept of competency was Boyatzis in 1982 identifying numerous differential factors between successful and unsuccessful performance, which are: personal qualities, motives, experience and behavioural characteristics. At the time, Boyatzis noted that despite the importance of the skills and abilities of managers with ensuring future organisational success, little work had been done in the area of competencies. To rectify this, he identified and put forward 21 competencies, including communication

and leadership, in which he divided into six groups which are: goal and action management cluster, leadership cluster, human resource cluster, directing subordinates cluster, focus on others cluster and specialised knowledge. He also argued competencies exist on three different levels: motive and trait, self-image and social role, and skill (Wood and Payne, 1998). However, they go on to comment the work of Boyatzis has been lost on many modern contemporary competency frameworks.

Since the contribution of Boyatzis, three types of competencies have been identified: behavioural competencies, technical competencies and NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications)/SNVQs (Scottish National Vocational Qualifications) (Armstrong 2012, p.90). It is important to note that despite the recent popularity of competencies within organisations, it is not a new concept and has been evident since McClelland's work in 1973, when he proposed testing people for competencies as opposed to intelligence in schools, colleges and work organisations (Hawkes and Weathington, 2014, p. 191). Meanwhile, Sita and Pinapati (2013) also state the competency concept was first introduced by McClelland in 1973, in which he proposed to put more focus on competencies rather than intelligence. McClelland (1973) popularised the notion of competence testing when he suggested that aptitude and intelligence alone were insufficient predictors of high performance (Smith, 2010, p.90). They proceed to comment that following the publication of McClelland's article, numerous authors and academics have shed light on the competencies concept including Klemp (1980), and as mentioned above, Boyatzis (1982), to name but a few, all of whom bring a different definition and viewpoint.

The competency framework and model gained prominence in the 1990s. Woodcruffe (1993, p.29) commented competencies set out the admirable behavioural patterns that

the incumbent needs to bring to a position in order to perform its tasks and functions with competence. However, Lawler (1994) stated the competency-based approach is primarily skilled-based, with the major focus on workers skills as opposed to the position's tasks.

2 4 The use of competencies within recruitment and selection

This research question aims to focus on the use of competencies and competency-based frameworks within recruitment and selection. Suff (2006) comments “competencies are playing an increasingly strong role in recruitment and selection as it is believed that competencies are still the best and most accurate way to base assessment”. She proceeds to argue that using competences for recruitment and selection practices proves to be more cost effective and efficient than other methods. Many organisations are developing a competency profile as a means of setting the criteria against which to select, replacing the use of person specifications (Torrington, Hall, Taylor and Atkinson 2011, p.181). The overall objective of this research is to investigate whether or not hospitality organisations use a competency-based framework or approach to their recruitment and selection practices.

The use of competencies and competency-based frameworks within the recruitment and selection process remain very evident in the business world today. Armstrong (2012, p.94) comments competencies are used in many organisations to support a person specification through the use of competency headings found in a role analysis. These competencies mentioned are used as a framework for recruitment and selection. Competency-based interviews are structured and based around the competencies listed in the specification.

The use of competency models within recruitment and selection can identify the requirements needed to do well in a job. Organisations can place recruitment focus on finding the greatest number of prospective employees who have the right mix of competencies for the job in question (Chung-Herrera et. al., 2003, p.18). Many organisations in the last decade have introduced competency profiling within their organisation for recruitment and selection practices, training and development and internal promotional opportunities. Shellabear (2002) stated competency profiling is ultimately an approach for the identification of specified skills, knowledge, attitude and behaviour required to fulfill a task within a certain position. He argues when organisations categorise competence, firms make distinctions between different competencies, such as overall competence, behaviour, knowledge and skill. These competencies are of assistance in the selection process in deciding who is the most suitable person for the position they are filling.

Wood and Payne (1998) put forward numerous advantages of using competencies with the recruitment and selection process; including: experience with a range of organisations' show improvements in accuracy in assessing people's suitability or potential for different jobs, they facilitate a closer match between a person's skills and interests and the demands of the job, they help prevent interviewers and assessors from making 'snap' judgments about people or from judging them on characteristics that are irrelevant to the job in question.

Other advantages of using competencies in recruitment and selection include: it has been shown that they can underpin and structure the full range of assessment and development techniques – application forms, interviews, tests, assessment centres and appraisal ratings and by breaking down an individual's profile into specific skills and characteristics, development plans can more accurately be targeted to developmental

areas (Wood and Payne, 1998). Hawkes and Weathington (2014, p.193) comment “organisations that use the competency-based approach can take advantage of a more flexible workforce by recruiting, selecting and training individuals with the skills required for successful performance”. Competencies are used in many organisations through the use of person specifications, competency headings and role analysis. The competencies defined for a role are used as a framework for recruitment and selection and competency-based interviews. The use of a competency-based approach within recruitment and selection allows for a structured interview, meaning the interviewer or HR manager can structure questions around the key competencies identified and required for the role through the use of a framework (Roberts, 1997, p.188).

The use of competencies and competency-based frameworks within organisations must shadow the company’s values and needs, as established by a framework. In ensuring this occurs, combined with employee behaviour, will lead to high and successful performance (Armstrong, 2012, p.96). According to Nath and Raheja (2001, p. 28), there are numerous advantages of using a competency-based approach to recruitment and selection including: “prioritisation of critical competencies based on identification of competencies that are cost-effective to select as opposed to training, it ensures better job-person match thus lower turnover rate and higher productivity and career planning and individual development could start from the recruitment stages itself as the need for training is determined at the entry stage”. Competencies are in place to ensure the most competent and appropriate person is chosen to fill the position or role which the company are hoping to fill. Competencies are used in recruitment, selection and assessment, job descriptions, performance management, training and development and in career and workforce planning (Washington State Human Resources, 2012).

The past number of years has seen a growing interest in understanding the most important management competencies for the recruitment and selection of management in hospitality and tourism organisations. Research has been carried out in the hope of finding the skills and abilities which are fundamental to achieving effective work performance within the hospitality and tourism industry. This research shows that soft-skills or human relations are fundamental and there is decreasing importance been placed on technical competence. The research shows more emphasis has been placed on competencies such as: people management, interpersonal, leadership and corporate and strategic skills (Nolan, Conway, Farrell & Monks, 2010, p.44). Besides recruitment and selection, Herrera et. al (2003) state competency-based frameworks and models can be used in training and development, performance appraisals, coaching, counseling and mentoring, reward, change management and for career development and succession planning.

The use of competencies and the competency-based approach developed more in the 1980s and became more popular in the 1990s as a way of recruitment and selection and measuring employee performance in the day-to-day activities of HRM and general management in organisations. To enforce the use of competencies within recruitment and selection, and if and when hired saw the introduction of the Management Charter Initiative (MCI) in the UK, which specified the minimum standards for the achievement of set organisational tasks, through assessment and observation and with an opportunity to receive certification and qualification upon completion (Roberts, 1997, p.68).

2 5 Types of Competencies

Armstrong (2012, p.90), commented that the most common competencies in organisational frameworks are primarily having people skills, commonly referred to as outcome-based skills - such as focusing on results or problem-solving. He also identified eleven competency types:

- Team Orientation
- Communication
- People management
- Customer focus
- Results Orientation
- Problem Solving
- Planning and organising
- Technical skills
- Leadership
- Business awareness
- Decision-making

However, Gomez-Mejia et al. (2010, p.243) identify four main competencies: knowledge, skills and capabilities, work management and character and commitment. Whereas Competencies and Emotional Intelligence (2007) established that the 49 frameworks reviewed had a total of 553 competency sub-headings (Armstrong, 2012, p.90).

From reviewing and analysing the literature, it is evident there is a correlation between the use of competencies and emotional intelligence. Dulewicz and Higgs (1999, p.53) commented the “emotional intelligence elements of self-awareness, emotional management, empathy, relationships, communication and personal style correspond to competencies such as sensitivity, flexibility, adaptability, resilience, impact, listening, leadership, persuasiveness, motivating others, energy, decisiveness and achievement motivation”. However, one of the leading researchers on emotional intelligence Daniel Goleman in 1998 analysed competency models from 188 companies, suggesting that ‘emotional intelligence’ components of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill play an increasingly important role in highest-level positions of a company – more so than intelligence and technical skills (Smith, 2010, p.91).

Whereas, Patterson, Ferguson and Thomas (2008) put forward a number of competencies they found as part of their research, including: technical knowledge and expertise, conceptual thinking, coping with pressure, learning and personal development, ethical awareness, personal attributes, planning skills, vigilance and situational awareness, team involvement and professional integrity and respect for others.

Armstrong (2012, p.94) identifies three different competency approaches that organisations adopt. These are: the ‘menu’ approach, role-specific competencies and graded competencies. The ‘menu’ approach is where by some organisations provide guidelines on the required competencies (usually between four and eight) and others combine their core competency framework with a competency menu. Role-specific competencies are specific competencies depending on the individual role itself. The third and final competency approach that is adopted, although less so, is graded

competencies which is applied in graded career or job family structures. Whereas Nath and Raheja (p.30) identified four competency types: industry specific competencies, core competencies, functional competencies and leadership/role competencies.

Armstrong (2002), as cited in Gold, Holden, Iles, Stewart and Beardwell (2010, p.111), suggests there are three key aspects of competencies: input, process and output. Input relates to knowledge, skills and personal attributes, process relates to the behaviour required to convert the input into outputs; and output are the outcomes achieved. There are a number of common competencies that are generic for most jobs which are; communication, interpersonal, problem-solving, team working, initiative, planning and organising and customer focus (Dooley, 2013).

Three generic competency type clusters are knowledge competencies, skill and ability competencies and behavioural competencies. Knowledge competencies are having a practical or theoretical understanding, skill and ability competencies relates to having natural or learned capabilities to perform acts and behavioural competencies regards understanding the patterns of actions and conduct (Washington State Human Resources, 2012).

2 6 Behavioural and Technical Competencies

Behavioural competencies are the types of behaviour that the organisation expect and require from employees, whereas, technical competencies relate to what people have and know, in the form of knowledge and skills to carry out organisational tasks. NVQs and SNVQs relate to the recognition and awarding of certificates to employees for meeting and exceeding in their performance in set organisational tasks (Beardwell and Holden, 1997, p.320). Armstrong (2012, p.97) comments with regard to

behavioural competencies that it refers to the expected behaviour in a professional work environment, i.e. the type of behaviour that is required to deliver results under such headings as teamworking, communication, leadership and decision-making. Behavioural competence relates to how the person holding the role is expected to behave when carrying out the role covering areas such as teamwork, communication, customer relations and people management and development (Armstrong, 2012, p.539). Essentially, they are the expectations regarding behaviour and types of behaviour within an organisation taking into account different competency principles and are also referred to as 'soft-skills'. It is argued that competence is as a combination of numerous factors such as personal qualities, motivation and experience (Câmpeanu-Sonea, Sonea, Gabor-Supuran, Roxana, Muresan, and Anamaria, 2011, p.303).

It must be noted the term 'technical competency' is a recent phenomenon to differentiate evident confusion which existed between the terms 'competency' and 'competence' arguing 'competency' relates to behaviour, while 'competence' refers to the skills and abilities needed to meet organisational performance requirements (Armstrong, 2012, p.90). Essentially, technical competencies define what employees must know and be able to do through their knowledge and skills to perform their job effectively and are also known as 'hard-skills' (Câmpeanu-Sonea et al., 2011, p.303).

A survey carried out by the Competency and Emotional Intelligence (2007) shows that 95% of respondents use behavioural competencies and 66% of respondents use technical competencies. This survey also found that 85% of respondents use competencies within recruitment and selection.

2 7 Competency-based frameworks

A competency-based framework can be defined as:

“Competency-based HRM is about using the notion of competency and the results of competency analysis to inform and improve HR processes, especially those concerned with recruitment and selection, learning and development, performance and reward management. It has an important part to play in a number of HR activities”

Armstrong (2012, p.90).

Armstrong (2012, p.90) defines competency frameworks as “the definitions of all behavioural competencies used for all employees in an organisation or for particular occupations such as managers. It provides the basis for the use of competencies in areas such as recruitment and selection”. Whereas, others identified the use of competencies to identify training and development needs, as whereby the required skills and behaviours in the workplace can provide information against which employees can be assessed for training needs (Gold et. al 2010, p. 112).

Wood and Payne (1998) argue one of the main reasons that organisations use competencies is because it allows them to develop frameworks that encompass nearly every aspect of the HR procedure. Competency management within an organisation is the integrated set of HR activities put in place to optimise the development and the effectiveness of both individual employees and the organisation as a whole (Sita and Pinapati 2013).

Nath and Raheja (2001, p.25) argued that a “competency-based approach focuses on how an employee creates value and what is actually accomplished and has thus provided a much needed lynch-pin that will help drive and reinforce desired behaviour”. With such emphasis on HRM within organisations being aligned with the strategic objectives and vision of the organisation, competency modelling arrived on the HR radar just in time for a business environment that requires strategic alignment of practices (Lievens, Sanchez and De Corte, 2004). “Competency models are much easier to use in creating HR systems than traditional job analysis information” (Campion, Fink, Ruggerberg, Carr, Phillips and Odman 2011, p.251). Meanwhile, Lucia and Lepsinger (1999) commented that competency models are descriptive tools that are used to identify and recognise the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviour that are needed and required to perform effectively in an organisation.

Becker and Huselid (1999) argue competency management if successfully implemented and well embedded can bring a lot of advantages to the organisation. A survey undertaken in 2006 in Great Britain showed both types of competencies – behavioral and technical, are equally common within organisations that have introduced competency frameworks (Suff, 2006).

2 8 Competence with Human Capital pools

From reviewing existing literature, there is an evident link between competence and human capital within business environments. As mentioned in previous chapters, organisations must ensure they have the most competent staff in the correct positions to ensure organisational sustainability, success and competitive advantage. Work competency is defined as a worker’s ability to meet and exceed a job role’s requirements in the hope of performing a task successfully (Boyatzis, 1982). It is

widely argued that intangible assets such as human capital are essential to sustainable business growth and differentiation and there is a clear relationship between human capital, strategy, performance and competence (Ugeto, Martha, Cordozo and Neyda, 2007).

2 9 CIPD Viewpoint

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD, 2013) competency and competencies are defined “as the behaviours (and, where appropriate, technical attributes) that individuals must have, or must acquire, to perform effectively at work – that is, the terms focus on the personal attributes or inputs of the individual”. They proceed to argue that competencies are the behaviours that employees must have or acquire, in any organisational situation in order to achieve high levels of performance. Whereas, a *competency framework* is a structure that sets out and defines each individual competency (such as problem-solving or people management) required by individuals working in an organisation or part of an organisation (CIPD, 2013).

2 10 Summary

The review of the literature looked at the different understandings of competencies and competence from academics and scholars in this area, the history and origins of the term and its roots, the use and importance of competencies and competency-based frameworks from a recruitment and selection viewpoint, the different types of competencies, behavioural and technical competencies, competency-based frameworks, the importance of human capital with competence and the CIPD viewpoint on the subject matter. It also looked at the Irish hospitality sector.

The general emerging theme amongst the practitioners on the matter is competencies are the skills, knowledge and attributes to undertake a job or task. They have been in use since 1973 when McClelland proposed to put more focus on competencies rather than intelligence. It gained prominence in the 1980s through the work of Boyatzis, and became more popular in the 1990s as a way of recruitment and selection for assessing employee suitability and measuring employee performance. Many agree that the term *competency* relates to the underlying characteristic or behaviour of a person that results in effective or superior performance.

The overall objective of this study is to investigate whether the use of competencies and the competency approach is still evident today within hospitality organisations in Ireland, primarily in hotels, restaurants and bars. This chapter has given a review of the literature in to the use of competency-based approach and framework with emphasis on recruitment and selection. According to a 2007 survey, 85% of respondents stated they applied competencies for recruitment and selection practices. A major component of the Literature Review is determining what competency, a competence approach and competency-based frameworks are, but this study aims to investigate whether they are used within the Irish hospitality sector.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3 1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted in this research project. It details the research approach and design, and the research philosophy and strategy used. The researcher also examines the research instrument used, the survey design, advantages and disadvantages of surveys, and the population and data sample targeted. Finally, the ethical considerations, limitations of the study and the implications for future research. Also, this chapter will include a data analysis section.

There are thousands of definitions of *Research* in the academic world amongst practitioners but it is generally viewed as “the systematic collection and interpretation of information with a clear purpose - to find things out” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.680). On the other hand, Pugh (1983) commented that the research task entails the collection of data that can be later tested. According to Quinlan (2011, p.69), the research process has ten different steps:

1. Begin with an idea
2. State research question/statement in one sentence
3. Specific aims and objectives
4. Literature Review
5. Select Methodology
6. Devise data collection methods
7. Gather data
8. Analyse data

9. Draw conclusions

10. Complete write up of thesis/report.

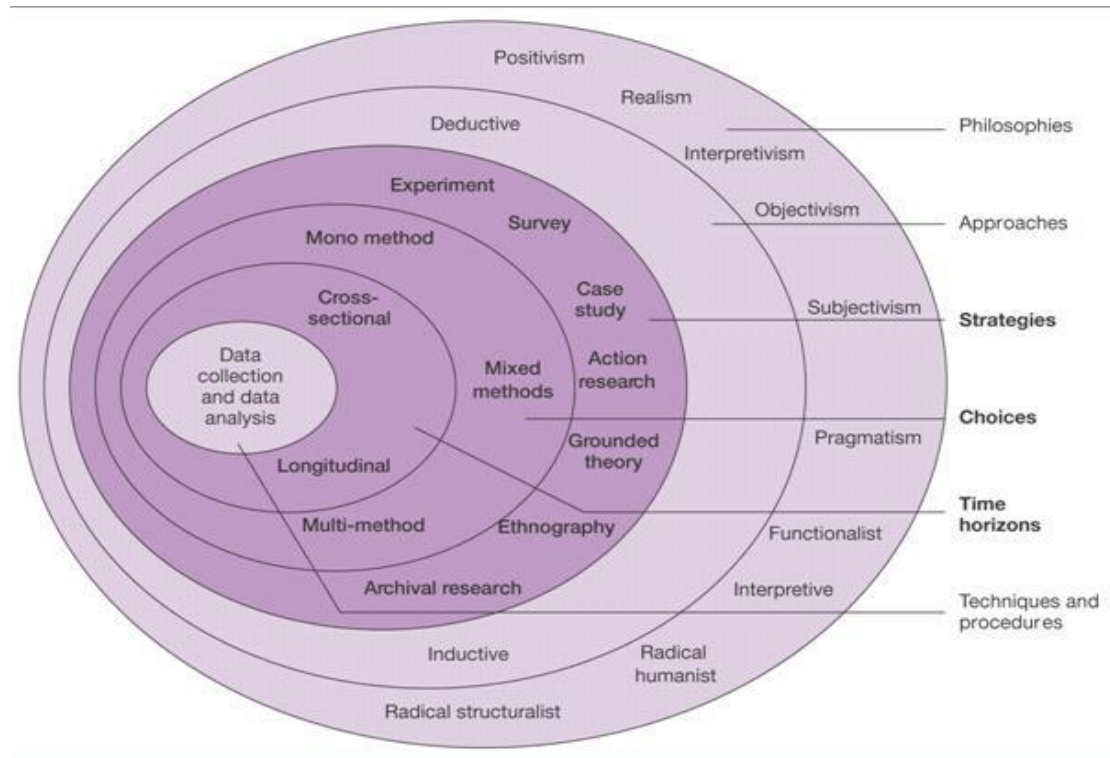
The methodology research design was chosen carefully to correlate with the research objectives. A methodology is “the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted” (Saunders et. al 2007, p. 602). Whereas; Fisher, Buglear, Lowry, Mutch and Tansley (2007, p.40) state “methodology is the study of methods and it raises all sorts of philosophical questions about what is possible for researchers to know and how valid their claims to knowledge might be”.

The research objectives were to; explore whether employers and HR managers look for certain competencies - such as technical or knowledge-based competencies when recruiting all new employees, to investigate which were the most common competencies which employers look for in potential new recruits and to explore any commonality or differences in required competencies between different companies (such as hotels, restaurants, event management etc.) within the hospitality sector in Ireland. Finally, to explore the perceived benefits (if any) of using competencies and a competency-based approach when recruiting new employees.

The overall objective of this research was to investigate whether major organisations across the hospitality sector in Ireland look for and require competencies within their recruitment and selection phase and if so what are the most common, the differences and the benefits of using a competency-based frameworks when recruiting and selecting new organisational members.

3 2 Research Framework

For the purposes of this research, a framework by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.128), known as the ‘Research Onion’ was used.



‘The Research Onion’ (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.128).

3 3 Research Philosophy

There are a number of reasons which justify the choice of data collection and analysis. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, given the downturn in the economy for the past few years, the researcher feels it is even more essential that organisations recruit the right people to work in their company. This requires recruiting and selecting the most effective and efficient staff in order to essentially avoid liquidation and to ensure the firm achieves organisational success, profitability and competitive advantage in the market. Because of this, the researcher felt this was a topic worthy of study.

The research philosophy refers to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge in relation to the research (Saunders et. al., 2012, p.680). There are two different *philosophical positions* in research – epistemology and ontology. Epistemology relates to what is acceptable knowledge in a particular field of study – and depends on whether one takes a positivist, interpretivist or realist outlook. “Questions about the methodology and methods used in the research project relate to our understanding of knowledge and how it is created, and to the value we ascribe to knowledge. Such questions relate to the validity of new knowledge created by research projects arise questions of Epistemology” (Crotty, 2005, p.2). Whereas, ontology refers to the nature of reality; and is composed of three aspects – objectivism, subjectivism and constructionism (Saunders et. al., 2012).

For the purposes of this research, a positivistic approach was used where by only observations provide for credible and reliable data to answer this research question. “Only phenomena that you can observe will lead to the production of credible data” (Saunders et. al., 2012, p.138). Essentially, they state positivism is an epistemological position that works with observing social reality. *Positivism* originated in the 19th century, and was a statement about the power of science and rational thought to view the world (Fisher, 2004, p.15). Whereas, Remenyi, Williams, Money and Swartz (1998, pp.32-33) state positivism first came into effect with the work and studies of Auguste Comte between 1830 and 1842 who put forward an approach to positivism.

“A paradigm is a cluster of beliefs which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.24). It is a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explained (Saunders et. al., 2012, p.140).

“Phenomenology is a philosophy that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the philosopher should bracket out preconceptions concerning his or her grasp of that word” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.717). It does not relate to measurement or facts but more so to the understanding and explanation of people’s behaviour and actions. Essentially, phenomenology is the way in which we, as humans, make sense of the world around us (Saunders et. al., 2012, p.137).

3 4 Research Strategy and Approach

“Research is simply the process of finding solutions to a problem after a thorough study and analysis of the situational factors” (Sekaran and Bougie 2010, p.2). Research is broken into research ideas and research projects. According to Quinlan (2011, p.139) a research idea is the broad area within which you want to work and a research project is a carefully defined and refined research statement or question. A major objective within this research is the hope of achieving the research objectives and proving the hypothesis of this research, as outlined in Chapter One. There are two approaches to research, known as Inductive and Deductive research used. Inductive research is defined by Saunders et. al. (2012) as the “research approach involving the development of a theory as a result of the observation of empirical data” (p.672). It was the wish of the researcher to explore the topic and use of competencies and competence within an organisational setting through the distribution, collection and analysis of online surveys to the targeted population. Therefore, an inductive approach was used for the purposes of this research.

On the other hand, within the survey design of the research, a competency framework model proposed by Armstrong (2012, p.91) was used in order to compile a list of

generic competencies to include in the survey. This would suggest that there was also an element of the deductive approach involved, as the collection and analyses of data adopted a theoretical position through examining the effectiveness of Armstrong's model.

De Vaus (2002) states a questionnaire is a general term to include all techniques of data collection in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a pre-determined order. Saunders et. al (2012, p.363) suggest there are numerous different types of questionnaire including:

- Internet and intranet-mediated questionnaires
- Postal questionnaire
- Delivery and collection questionnaire
- Telephone questionnaire
- Structured interview

For the purpose of this research question, and to get a fair as possible representation of the hospitality sector, the researcher used both internet questionnaire/survey and/or delivery and collection questionnaire/survey. Saunders et. al (2012, p.362) argue questionnaires tend to be used for descriptive or explanatory research before going on to comment “descriptive research, such as that undertaking using attitude and opinion questionnaires and questionnaires of organisational practices will enable you to identify and describe the variability in different phenomena. In contrast, explanatory research will enable you to examine and explain relationships between variables”. The Economist as cited by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) advise that a minimum number of 30 answers per survey or questionnaire for statistical analysis is a useful rule of thumb for the smallest number category within an overall sample size.

3 5 Research Instrument and Survey Design

Due to the hospitality sector in Ireland being so vast, providing employment for nearly 250,000 people across hotels, restaurants, bars, tourism, and event management, the researcher felt that the use of an online survey would be most effective in the hope of gathering sufficient data for this research question. Other alternative research approaches were considered such as focus groups and interviews but due to both time and access constraints, one went for the use of surveys instead. The use of surveys brought much convenience to the research process and in the finding and analysis phase.

According to Saunders et. al (2007, p.612) a survey is a “research strategy that involves the structured collection of data from a sizeable population”. Whereas a questionnaire is a pre-formulated written set of questions to which respondents record their answers, usually within rather closely defined alternatives. Questionnaires are an efficient data collection mechanism when the researcher knows exactly what is required and how to measure the variables of interest. “Questionnaires can be administered personally, mailed to respondents, or electronically distributed” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010, p.197).

Before the official surveys were distributed, an email was sent out to a number of hospitality organisations inquiring whether they would be interested in filling out the survey for the purposes of this research. This was achieved through the use of a Pilot Test. “The purpose of the pilot test is to refine the questionnaire so that the respondents will have no problems in answering the questions and there will be no problems in recording the data” (Saunders et. al., 2012, p.451). Meanwhile, Quinlan

(2011, p.481) comment the purpose of a pilot study is to improve the rigour and validity of the research and tests the data gathering instrument(s) used in the research.

In designing the survey, it was essential that the respondents were aware of the reasoning of this survey so a cover letter and a reminder at the top of the survey once the URL (Universal Resource Locator) link was opened was included. This reassured them that their answers given were for the purposes of this research only and full confidentiality and anonymity would be given. The work of Dillman (2009) shows that the information contained in a cover letter does impact on the number of responses.

The design and delivery of survey was completed through free online software available to Gmail users, known as Google Docs. The simple and user-friendly setup of Google Docs allowed for the researcher to design, style, collect, compare and generally analyse both individual and the overall responses. Saunders et. al (2012, p.444) comment it is important to spend time considering the order and flow of your questions. Jankowicz (2007, p.296) argues you begin a structured survey with “an explicit statement of your purpose which will suggest a major topic or issue which you wish to explore and you spend some time in mapping out a number of questions, each of which will provide you with data about various aspects of the major topic”.

The survey had 3 sections and opened with six demographical questions including: job title, name of organisation, whether the respondent was male or female, length of service with the company and how many people worked in the organisation. The opening question on the survey was arguably the most important for the purposes of this research – whether their organisation actually uses a competency-based framework or not. The researcher found these demographical questions important, for

both statistical comparison purposes and it being one of the objectives of this research project, as mentioned in Chapter One.

The second part of the survey was a list of 12 competencies on a rating scale of 1-5, from 'Very Important' to 'Not Important at all'. A Likert Scale was used, where by "respondents are typically asked their degree of agreement with a series of statements that together form a multiple-indicator or item measure" (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.715). The researcher thought it would be a good idea to vary the scaling throughout to prevent getting all 'Very Important' boxes ticked and it would also require for the respondent to give full concentration in reading and answering each question.

These competencies were chosen from a framework proposed by Armstrong (2012, p.91), in which he put forward generic competency headings such as: team orientation, communication, people management, customer focus, results orientation, problem solving, planning and organising, leadership, business awareness and decision-making. A few minor additions were included at the end by the researcher to make the survey more industry specific, through the inclusion of the attitude of new recruits and their technical competence.

The third and final section of the survey was three further open-ended questions in which the respondent could put forward competencies they use which may not have been in the questionnaire or in Armstrong's model, the organisational benefits of using a competency-based framework and if they feel there are big differences with competencies depending on the job role they are filling, for example, chefs in a hotel kitchen and managerial positions.

The researcher found the use of online surveys very useful as the data received could be reviewed and analysed before any inputting in to the chosen software package. It was important for the researcher to ensure the survey was clear, concise, and short, knowing many managers and HR professionals are often too busy to answer them, but also designed in a way that could collect as much data as possible to answer this research question.

3 6 Advantages and Limitations of Surveys

As with all forms of data collection mechanisms, questionnaires and surveys bring their own unique advantages and disadvantages which will have to be brought into consideration. Sekaran and Bougie (2010, p. 212) state some advantages of personally administered questionnaires and surveys including: less expensive when distributed to groups of respondents, nearly always 100% response rate is ensured and anonymity is high. As this research used a total of 30 organisations to gather data and gather and present conclusions and findings, the researcher feels this is a good representation of this vast sector. However, they also identify a major disadvantage in organisations may be reluctant to give up valuable company time for the survey with groups of employees taking part in the survey.

3 7 Population and Sample

“A sample is a sub-group or part of a larger population” (Saunders et. al., 2012, p.681). For the purposes of this research, the sample was both HR managers within hospitality organisations and recruitment agencies in the instances where by their recruitment practices were outsourced.

The population targeted were hotels, restaurants and bars primarily in the Dublin region, however, the online questionnaire was also distributed nationwide. It was important in order to gather a fair representation of this sector that all hospitality types were brought into consideration so the researcher ensured to distribute the questionnaire to a combination of hotels, restaurants, bars and others. A mix of three star and four star hotels were targeted. This particular sample of HR managers and recruitment agencies were targeted for this research as they are the entities and people responsible for recruiting, screening and selecting people who have applied for vacant positions within these hospitality organisations.

3 8 Ethical Considerations

There were various ethical considerations which the researcher was aware of in conducting this research. First and foremost, it was important that issues such as confidentiality and full anonymity were given to the respondent when answering the questionnaire. It was in my interest that the respondents were fully aware of why the research was being carried out, what would be done with their responses and to enforce the questionnaire was for academic purposes only. All of this information was given on the cover letter of the questionnaire and in the opening introductory lines of the online version. The researcher required the names of the organisation and their job titles for statistical and analysing purposes but decided not to publicise this information in the Analysis and Findings section. The data collected was for academic purposes only and this was reassured to the respondents.

3 9 Analysis of Data

Once the questionnaires returned to the researcher via both email and post, all the data was inputted in to Microsoft Excel, which can be used as statistical software, which is

provided by the institution in order to review and analyse the data received. A cut-off point or deadline was provided, in order for there to be sufficient time to review and analyse the data. Once the deadline passed, the researcher gathered the data from both the hard copies and soft copies and used Microsoft Office suite Excel for the analysis stage. A mixture of graphical illustrations was used to summarise the data – graphs, tables and charts.

3 10 Research Limitations

The researcher is aware of a number of limitations evident in order to represent a fully accurate representation and well-rounded analysis on this research question. Due to time and access constraints, one felt the use of an online survey would be most effective in the collection of data. Also, the researcher is aware that due to the sheer size of the hospitality sector in Ireland this is just a minor representation of the sector itself. To conclude, research is a systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information in order to increase our understanding of the phenomenon about which we are interested are concerned. It was of vital importance to the researcher that the data and analysis captures the research objectives which are outlined in the Introduction chapter.

3 11 Summary

To summarise the methodological approach used for the purposes of this research was the *Research Onion* (Saunders et al., 2012, p.128). This chapter showed the research approach, design, philosophy and strategy used in this research. Also, the research instrument used, the use, advantages and disadvantages of using surveys and the population and data sample that were targeted to explore the use of competencies and competency-based frameworks within the Irish hospitality sector.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

Within this chapter the data collected from the surveys distributed to the different hospitality organisations will be analysed and discussed. The findings will be shown through the use of visual graphs such as bar charts, pie charts and histograms. A variation of each of these will be used throughout to analyse each question in the survey. As mentioned in previous chapters, the researcher used a framework by Armstrong (2009) to compile a suitable list of generic competencies to use in the survey, which some minor adaptation at the end to ensure the survey was as industry specific as possible in order to gather sufficient and suitable data. The survey was designed ensuring it corresponded to the main sub-objectives of this research, which were to find out:

- Do employers and HR managers look for certain competencies, such as technical or knowledge-based competencies when recruiting all new employees?
- Which are the most common competencies which employers look for in potential new recruits?
- Is there any commonality or differences in required competencies between different companies (such as hotels, restaurants, event management etc.) within the Irish hospitality sector?
- Finally, what are the perceived benefits of using competencies and a competency-based approach when recruiting new employees?

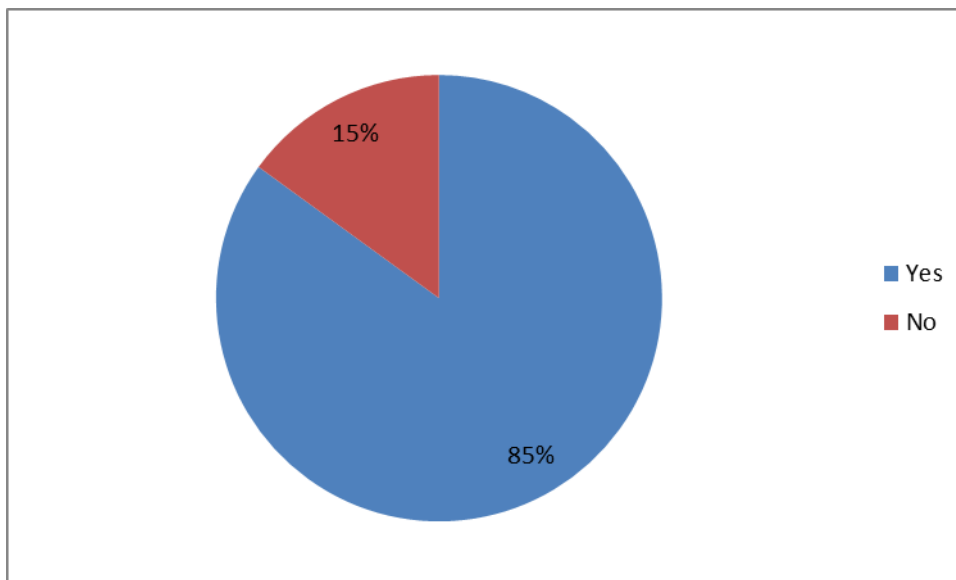
4.2 Analysis of Results

As the primary objective of this research question is with regard to the use of competencies and competency-based frameworks, the researcher felt the following question should be at the forefront of the survey.

Does your organisation use a competency-based framework?*...

- Yes
- No

Figure 4-1



Of the 20 responses, 17 answered 'Yes' when asked did their organisation use a competency-based framework in their recruitment and selection practices. 85% of respondents use a competency-based framework. This shows the use of a competency-based approach is still very evident within the recruitment and selection phases of hiring new employees within the hospitality sector in Ireland.

Another question on the survey was related to the gender of the respondent, as one felt it would be interesting to review and analyse different male and female perceptions in relation to the use of competencies. 13 of the respondents were female and 7 were male meaning 65% were female and 35% were male. Other questions which were used on the survey were job title, name of the organisation, length of service and how many people are employed in the organisation. These questions were included to assist the researcher in his analysis stage. Other areas the researcher thought were important for both research and statistical purposes were: job title, name of the organisation, length of service and how many persons are employed within the organisation. The researcher felt these questions would show any comparisons of similarities and differences, depending on who completed the survey, and on their approach or outlook on the use of competencies within the interview process in their organisation.

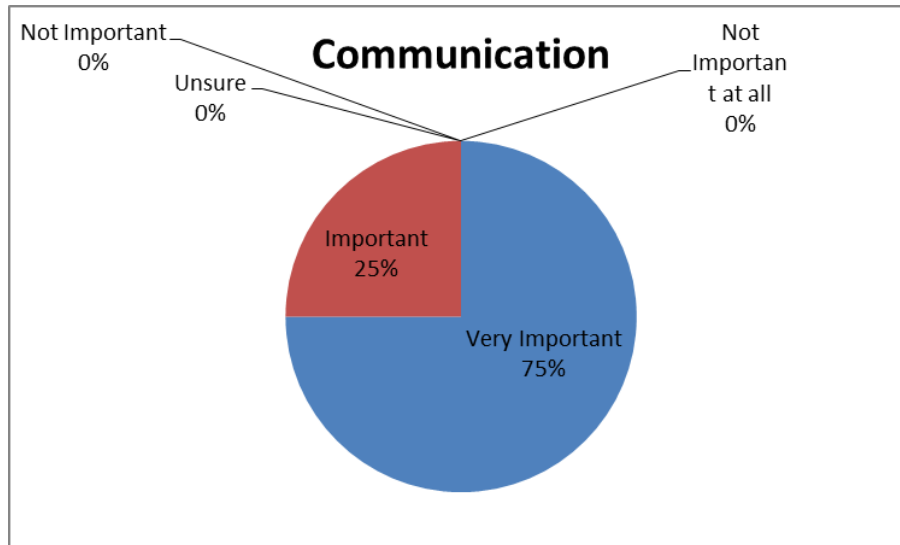
The second part of the survey was the beginning of Armstrong's 2009 competency framework. This framework is composed of 12 generic competencies which can be used in most professional environments such as communication (question 7), teamwork (question 8), problem-solving (question 9), decision-making (question 10), customer focus (question 11), people management (question 12), results orientation (question 13), planning and organising (question 14), leadership (question 15), business awareness (question 16), attitude (question 17) and technical competence (question 18). As mentioned above to Armstrong's model, there was a minor adaption towards the end of the survey, this can be seen in Questions 17 and 18. A visual of each question with a corresponding graph can be found in the following pages, but the survey in full can be found in the Appendices chapter of this dissertation.

Question 7: Communication *_How important, to your organisation, is having good and effective communication skills in new recruits?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important Not Important at all

Figure 4-2



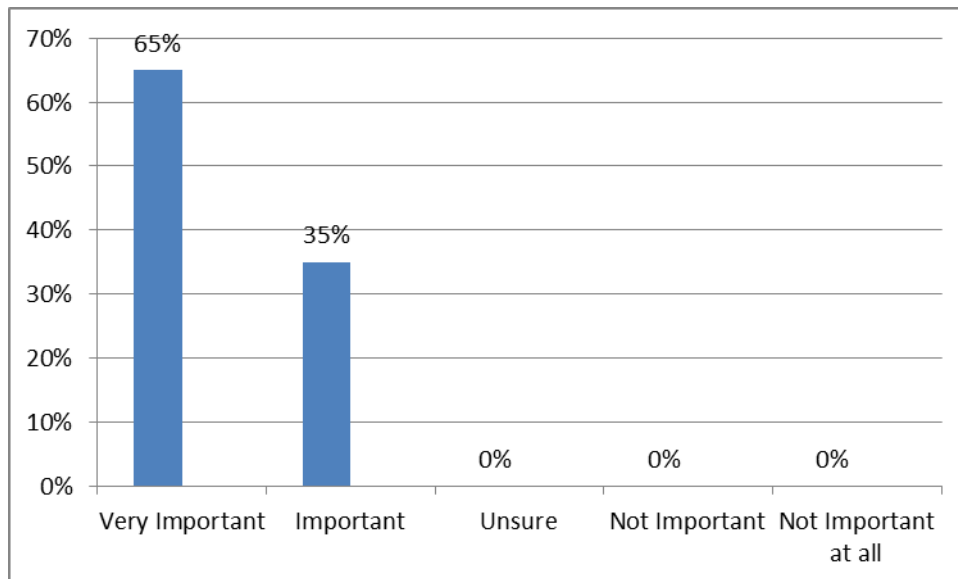
Of the 20 participants, 15 respondents ticked 'Very Important' and 5 ticked 'Important', whilst there were no responses in the other options provided. This shows the researcher that having effective and good communication skills is fundamental in both potential recruits and in day-to-day organisational life. This makes sense to the researcher given the large amount of interacting within all forms of hospitality organisations, between fellow colleagues, senior management, clients and customers. Suter, Arndt, Arthur, Parboosingh, Taylor and Deutschlander (2009) argue the ability to work with other professionals and understand and appreciate professional roles and responsibilities and communicate effectively are two core competencies.

Question 8: Teamwork* How important, to your organisation, is being a good team-player?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all Very Important

Figure 4-3



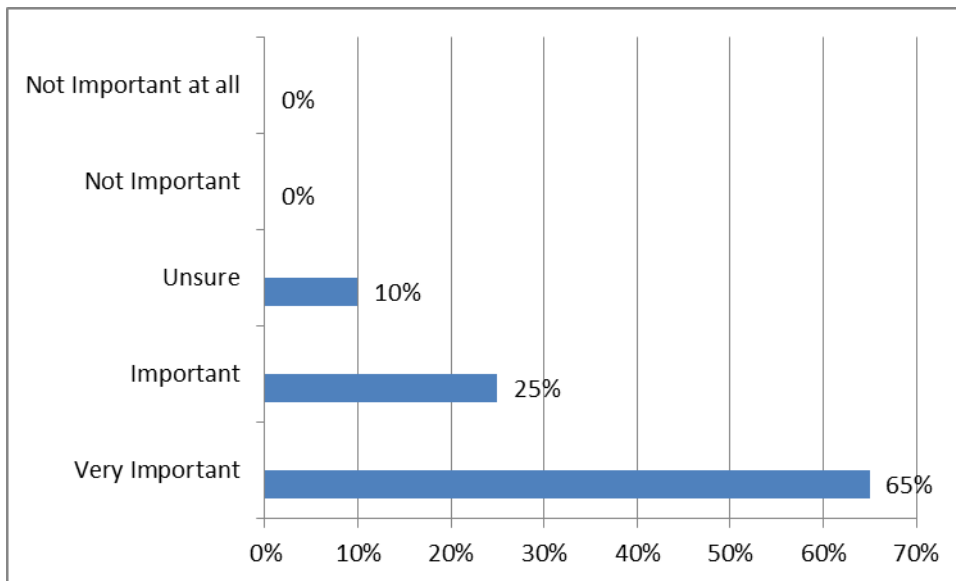
Similar to question 7 above, the results were similar. 13 of the 20 respondents said having sufficient teamwork skills and being able to be a team-player was very important for their organisation and when deciding who to recruit in their recruitment and selection practices. Given the different types of hospitality organisations, such as luxury hotels, restaurants, tourism and bars and being able to work with such a high demand at peak times being able to work as part of a team under pressure is fundamental. Depending on which department one works in in a hospitality organisation may require to work in a team or as an individual which may explain the divide in ‘Very Important’ and ‘Important’. For example, working as part of a team of chefs in a busy restaurant kitchen may be different than cleaners in a hotel.

Question 9: Problem-Solving*..How important, to your organisation, is a good problem-solver?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all Very Important

Figure 4-4



Out of the 20 respondents, 13 of 20, or 65% replied that being a good problem-solver was ‘Very Important’ when recruiting and selecting for new employees in their organisation. 5, or 25% of respondents answered it was ‘Important’ and interestingly to the researcher 2 respondents or 10% answered ‘Unsure’. This shows that being able to think quickly in dealing with organisational problems is hugely important within hospitality organisations in Ireland. 10% of respondents to this question answered ‘Unsure’. This suggests to the researcher that within organisations many decisions regarding any problems the company may encounter are in the hands of line managers and senior management. Armstrong (2012, p.493) argues that “problem-solving is a constant feature of life in organisations and elsewhere” and states it is a process which involves analysing and understanding a problem, diagnosing where it came from and

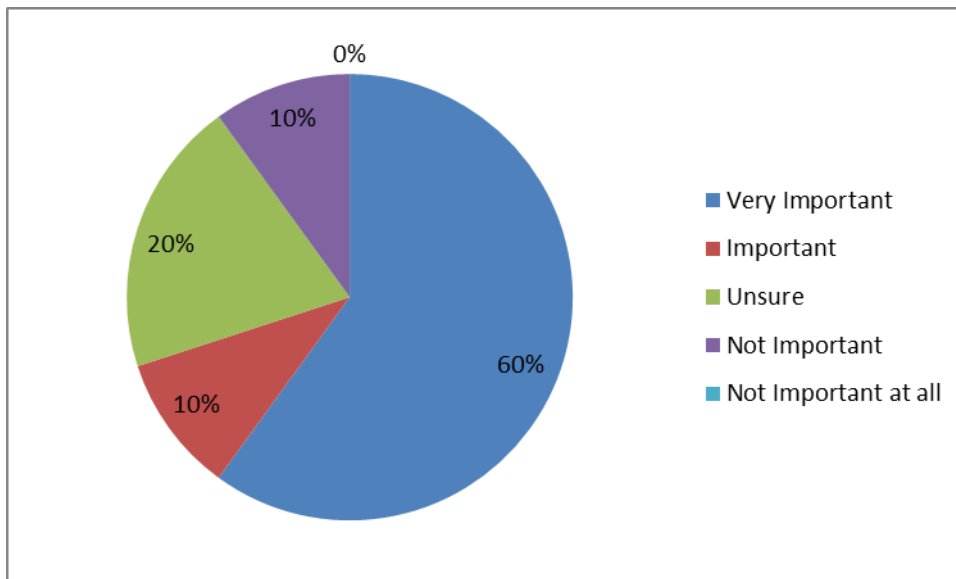
choosing a solution to solve the problem in the hope it will not occur again, and if it does, the organisation will be better prepared.

Question 10: Decision-Making*...How important, in your organisation, is good decision-making?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important Not Important at all

Figure 4-5



Out of all the questions in the survey, this saw a mixture of results in comparison to some of the other questions asked. 12 out of the 20, or 60% of respondents answered 'Very Important', 2 or 10% of respondents answered 'Important', 4 or 20% answered 'Unsure', and interestingly to the researcher, 2 or 10% of respondents answered 'Not Important'. As mentioned, these results are quite sporadic. Just over half of respondents think being a good decision-maker and being able to make decisions promptly is fundamental in working in hospitality organisations. Surprisingly, 30% of respondents answered 'Unsure' or 'Not Important'. This suggests that many

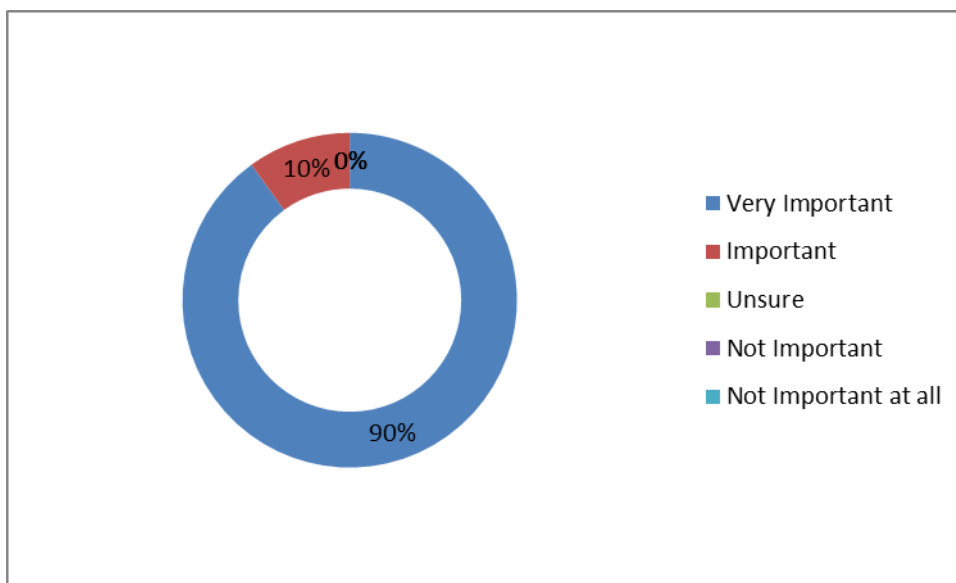
hospitality organisations may leave the decision-making power and authority in the hands of management. McDowell and Radin (2011, p.1) state “paying attention to how your organisation handles decision rights is the first step to making the effective and timely decisions needed to execute business strategies and realise goals”.

Question 11: Customer Focus*..How important, to your organisation, is the relationship from recruits to clients?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all Very Important

Figure 4-6



According to the responses of this question, 18 out of 20 respondents, or 90%, answered that having good customer focus was ‘Very Important’ when working in their organisation, while, 2 out of 20 respondents, or 10%, answered ‘Important’. This is not of surprise to the researcher given the large amount of interaction required

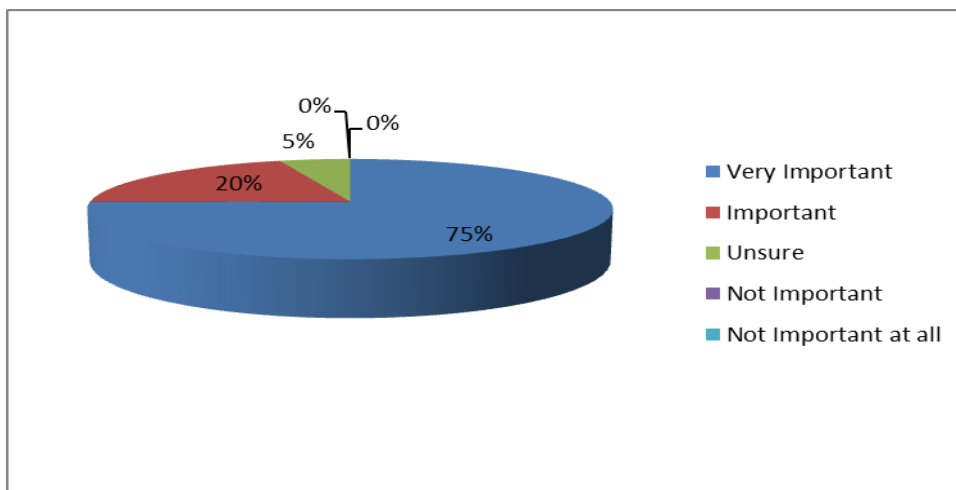
between hospitality employees and clients or customers. Findings of this research show that positions such as hotel receptions or waitors and waitresses spend the majority of their working day interacting with customers and potential clients.

Question 12: People Management*...How important, to your organisation, to have effective people management skills?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important Not Important at all

Figure 4-7



People management plays an important role within most organisations, the hospitality sector included. Of the 20 responses on the survey, 15 or 75% of respondents answered having effective and good people skills was ‘Very Important’ when recruiting and selecting within their organisations. 4 of the 20, or 20% of respondents said it was ‘Important’ and 1 or 5% said they were ‘Unsure’ whether it was a vital factor in the recruitment and selection process. Many hospitality organisations in Ireland are large companies. Question 6 on Section 1 of the survey asked how many people are employed in their organisation, and responses included 130, 240, 215, 150,

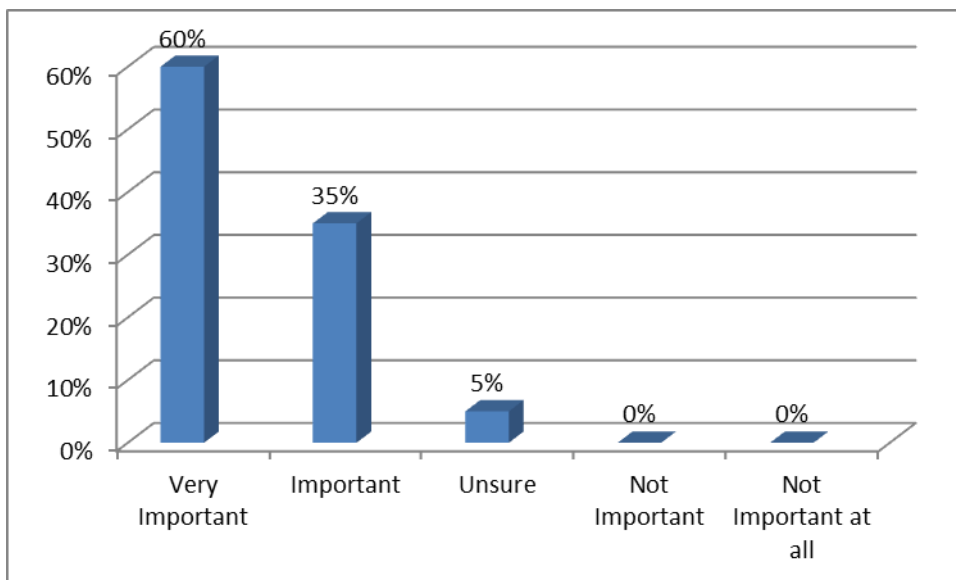
300 and 1,300. This shows a good people management or HR programme needs to be in place to manage employees efficiently and effectively.

Question 13: Results Orientation* _With new recruits, is the achieving of results essential to your organisation?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important Not Important at all

Figure 4-8



Question 13 of the survey, surrounds the competency of results orientation. Of the 20 respondents, 12 or 60% answered ‘Very Important’, 7 or 35% answered ‘Important’ and 1 or 5% answered ‘Unsure’. As seen in Figure 4-8, none of the respondents felt that being results driven when carrying out daily tasks and objectives within their organisation was ‘Not Important’ or ‘Not Important at all’. It appears to the researcher that the meeting and exceeding of individual goals and targets within this particular sector is crucial in the successful running of hospitality organisations. Similar to some

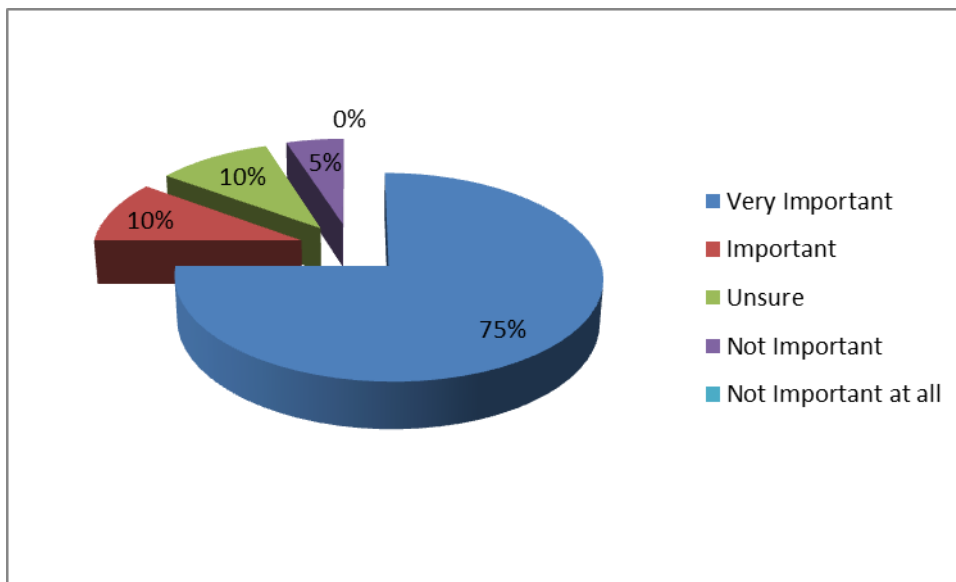
industries, findings of this research show the reaching of individual and organisational objectives are essential in the running of a successful enterprise.

Question 14: Planning and Organisation* _How important, in your organisation is having the ability to plan and organise well in new recruits?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all Very Important

Figure 4-9



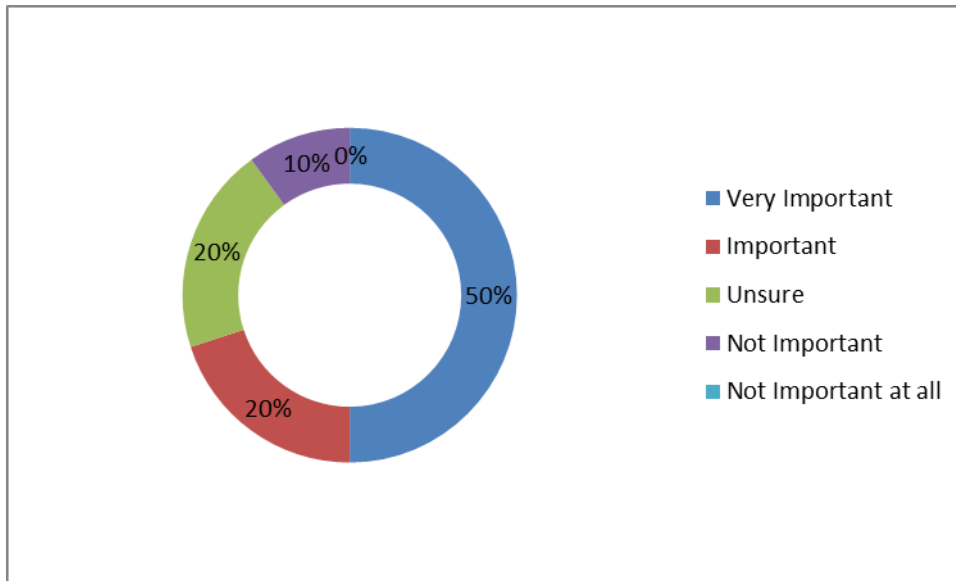
Of the 20 respondents, 15 or 75% of respondents answered Planning and Organising as ‘Very Important’, 2 or 10% answered ‘Important’, a further 2 or 10% answered ‘Unsure’ and 1 or 5% of respondents answered this competency as ‘Not Important’ in their recruitment and selection practices. $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents find having the competence to plan and organise well very important in their organisation. The data received shows being able to plan and organise well is a contributing factor to successful performance and reaching targets.

Question 15: Leadership *_How important, is it for new recruits, to be effective and influential leaders?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important Not Important at all

Figure 4-10



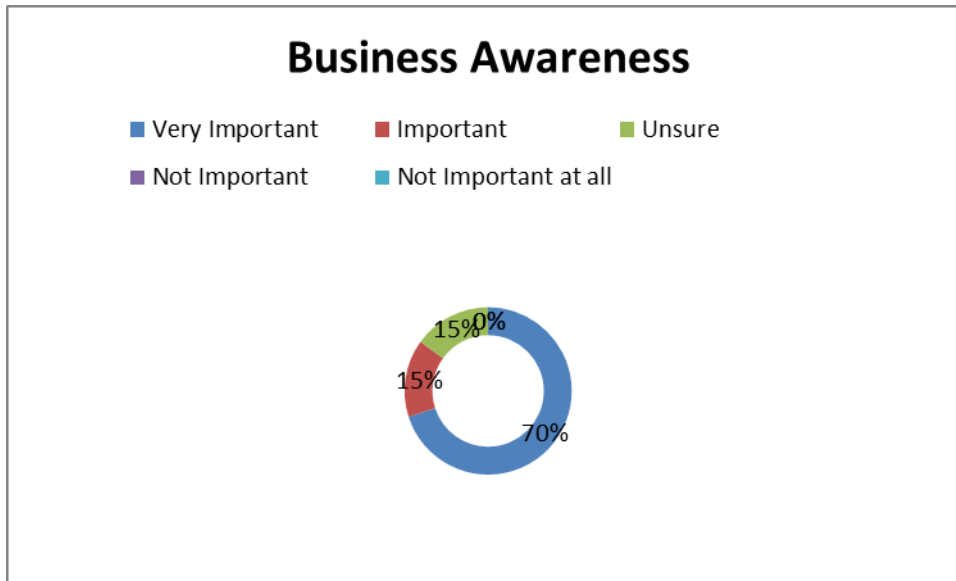
Question 15 of the survey related to the competency of Leadership. Of the 20 respondents, 10 or 50% responded that possessing good leadership skills and being a good leader was ‘Very Important’ to their organisation. 4 or 20% of respondents answered ‘Important’, a further 4 or 20% replied with ‘Unsure’ and 2 or 10% ticked the ‘Not Important’ option. This question on the survey got the biggest difference in results, varying across the different options in the Likert Scale. The varying results suggest to the researcher that daily organisational tasks are delegated to employees by line managers or those in more senior positions.

Question 16: Business Awareness*...How important, to new recruits in your organisation, is organisational knowledge and business awareness?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important Not Important at all

Figure 4-11



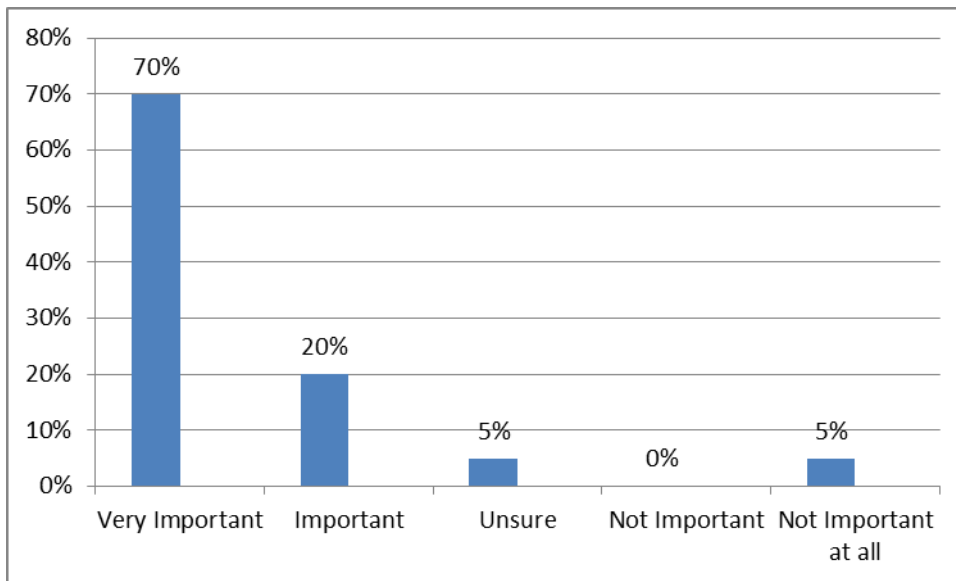
Of the 20 respondents for Question 16 in relation to Business Awareness, 14 or 70% responded that having good business awareness and organisational knowledge was 'Very Important' for their organisation and in their recruitment and selection practices, 3 or 15% of respondents answered 'Important' and a further 3 or 15% replied 'Unsure'. None of the respondents ticked the 'Not Important' / 'Not Important at all' option. This shows the researcher that when potential employees have a basic knowledge or understanding of the company they are applying for will work in their favour in the recruitment and selection process. This includes have a general knowledge of the background, the history of the company, its mission and values and personnel.

Question 17: Attitude* How important, to your organisation is the attitude of new recruits?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all Very Important

Figure 4-12



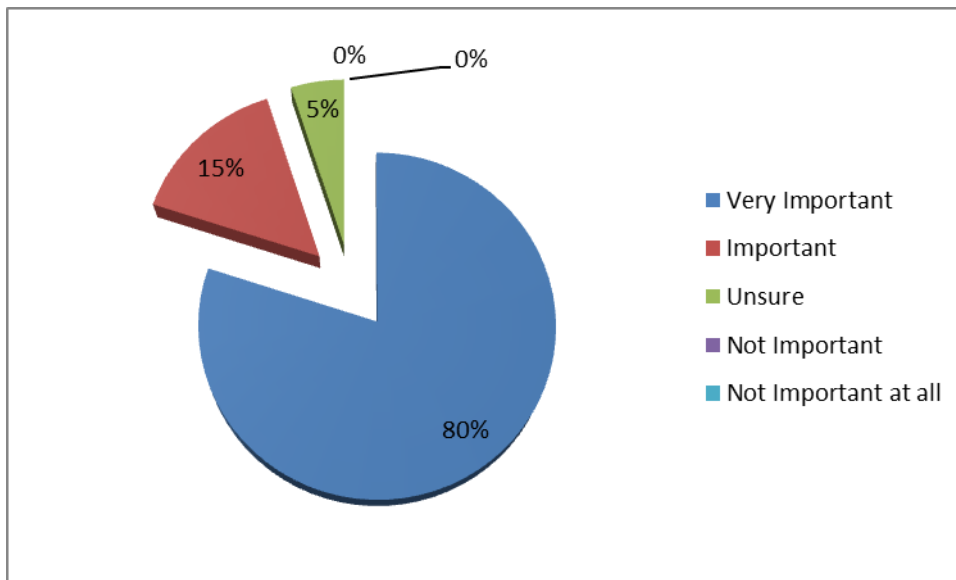
The penultimate question on the second part of the survey related to a competency added in by the researcher in the hope of receiving more data, which was Attitude. Of the 20 respondents, 14 or 70% answered ‘Very Important’, 4 or 20% replied it was ‘Important’, 1 or 5% of respondents ticked the ‘Unsure’ answer, and a further 1 respondent answered ‘Not Important at all’. None of the respondents replied with the ‘Not Important’ option. These findings show the researcher that when applying for any position within a hospitality organisation in Ireland, showing a good and positive attitude is important and may be one deciding factor in the selection and screening process.

Question 18: Technical competence *..How important, to your organisation, is the knowledge and expertise of new recruits?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important Not Important at all

Figure 4-13



The final question on the second part of the survey was also added in by the researcher and related to Technical Competence. Of the 20 respondents, 16 or 80% replied that it was ‘Very Important’ in the recruitment and selection process of their hospitality organisation. Of the remaining responses, 3 or 15% answered ‘Important’ and a further one respondent ticked the ‘Unsure’ option. No respondents replied with ‘Not Important’ / ‘Not Important at all’ option. The aim of this question was to investigate the importance of having industry experience from other hospitality organisations and the findings show having a general understanding or expertise in how hotels or restaurants are ran is important.

The third and final section of the survey consisted of four further questions – three open-ended questions and one closed questions. The researcher felt this was a good way of gathering more data as each respondent may be likely to answer with a different response depending on their organisational requirements.

Question 20 was a simple (Yes / No) question with regard to if the respondent feels there are big differences in relation to competencies depending on the job role or position that is being filled. This was included to make statistical comparisons between different hospitality organisations which was sub-objective number 2, and to seek the commonalities and differences between the required competencies of kitchen staff at restaraunts and receptionists at hotels etc. The results show

Question 20: Do you feel there are big differences in relation to competencies depending on the job role?*

- Yes
- No

Within the third and final section of the survey, the three open-ended questions were included to gather as much data from the respondents as possible. Even though the researcher used a well-known framework by Armstrong in the making of the survey, he felt some competencies may not be included which are industry relevant to the hospitality sector. Question 19 was if the respondent feels there are other competencies they feel are important in the recruitment of new employees which were not included in the survey.

Are there any other competencies you feel are important in the recruitment of new employees, which are not mentioned above? If so, which? Please provide a list.* ...

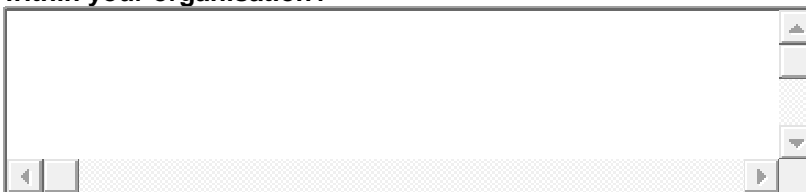
A large, empty rectangular text input field with a light gray border. On the right side, there are three small square buttons stacked vertically, and on the bottom side, there are two small square buttons. The field is currently blank.

Question 21 was answering the fourth sub-objective of the research in relation to the perceived benefits of using a competency-based framework or approach in their organisation's recruitment and selection practices. The purpose of including this question was to receive data from a recruiters viewpoint. The final question, Question 23, was the only optional question on the survey, leaving the respondent space for any further comments regarding the use of competencies within recruitment and selection which may not have been possible to include in the other questions of the survey.

List any perceived benefits to your organisation of using a competency-based approach to recruitment and selection.* ...

A large, empty rectangular text input field with a light gray border. On the right side, there are three small square buttons stacked vertically, and on the bottom side, there are two small square buttons. The field is currently blank.

To conclude, are there any further comments in relation to the use of competencies within your organisation?

A large, empty rectangular text input field with a light gray border. On the right side, there are three small square buttons stacked vertically, and on the bottom side, there are two small square buttons. The field is currently blank.

4.3 Other Data Received

In the third and final section of the distributed survey, there were three further open-ended questions, which highlighted other competencies which respondents felt were important and used in their recruitment and selection practices. One emerging common response from respondents in Question 19 was the having the competence and ability to *work under pressure*. This makes sense to the researcher in roles and positions such as kitchen staff in busy restaurants, hotel staff in preparing and cleaning rooms for the next guests in a short period of time and event management employees working at very busy events. One respondent to Question 19, stated ‘although organisational skills and planning are vital in this industry, the ability to be *flexible*, to *think outside the box* at a moments notice are also very important. To be open to split second changes and demands, even when it puts the whole work time management off kilter’.

Other respondents to Question 19 included having specific job related competencies, such as a waiter or waitress in a restaurant or hotel bar showing the capability to carry a tray full of drinks and/or carrying a large number of plates at once. Also, other competencies which emerged from this question show innovation, general knowledge and competence, efficiency and being presentable are important. The findings from Question 20, in relation to if the respondents felt there was differences regarding competencies depending on the job role, show 16 of the 20 respondents, or 80% replied ‘Yes’, while 4 or 20% of respondents responded with ‘No’. This is of interest to the researcher as it shows hospitality organisations such as hotels or tourism are more likely to use competency-based frameworks than pubs or bars.

A common theme from Question 21, in relation to the perceived benefits of using a competency-based approach to recruitment and selection from the respondents was it ensures they have the right people in the correct roles who have the ability and attitude to complete the role and its duties. To quote one respondent, 'it suits, as people have different strengths and as there are so many departments within this sector, it matches the right person with the right role, with the company then supporting the new recruit with training and development to equip them with new skills and development as it feels necessary'. Other data received from this question includes: it gains an understanding of the skills potential employees possess and using a competency-based approach analyses the most suitable for the job required.

It was fundamental for the purposes of research that the findings tied in with the objectives of the research. The first objective of this research was; do employers look for certain competencies when recruiting all new employees and such as technical and knowledge based competence. From the findings, it is evident that the use of competency-based frameworks and a competency-based approach is still very common in the recruitment and selection practices of Irish hospitality organisations. The use of technical competencies, knowledge based competencies and behavioural competencies are very important in the decision process of selecting people to work in their organisation. The second objective of the research was to identify which are the most common or important competencies. The findings show the three most used competencies within this sector are: communication (75% of respondents), customer focus (90% of respondents), and technical competence (80% of respondents). The third objective was to explore any commonalities or differences across the sector as a whole. This showed that generic competencies such as communication, team-working, problem-solving and decision-making were identifiable across the sector but

organisational specific competencies were identified such as working under pressure for kitchen staff, polite telephone manner for hotel receptionists. The fourth and final objective of this research was to investigate the benefits of using a competency-based approach in recruitment and selection. The findings showed a number of benefits – such as it ensures the correct person is chosen for positions that have the ability and attitude to complete the role and its duties. Also, other benefits from respondents include: identification for training and development and promotional opportunities and for succession planning.

Other findings include that some hospitality organisations use psychometric testing and personality profiles in conjunction with a competency-based approach to generate an understanding of the attitude and competence of candidate. One respondent replied ‘the competencies which employees are hired upon are the competencies which said employee are graded against during their employment in performance appraisals and reviews’. Many hospitality organisations use different interview template with a corresponding competency framework depending on the position they are interviewing for and hoping to fill. One respondent responded saying they have 3 interview and competency templates – staff / employee level, supervisor level and management level. To summarise, the researcher used a competency-based framework by Armstrong (2012, p.91) for this research and the findings show his framework is a comprehensive list of competencies which correspond and are applicable to new recruits and employees in Irish hospitality organisations. The data received from the distributed surveys for the purpose of this research, it is evident from the respondents that the use of competency approaches and frameworks are still very much evident within the recruitment and selection practices within hospitality organisations in Ireland today.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Research

The overall objective of this dissertation was to investigate the use of competencies, a competency-based approach and competency-based frameworks from a recruitment and selection viewpoint within the hospitality sector in Ireland. The overall research question was divided into four sub-objectives which were

- Do employers and HR managers look for certain competencies, such as technical or knowledge-based competencies when recruiting all new employees?
- Which are the most common competencies which employers look for in potential new recruits?
- Is there any commonality or differences in required competencies between different companies (such as hotels, restaurants, event management etc.) within the Irish hospitality sector?
- Finally, what are the perceived benefits of using competencies and a competency-based approach when recruiting new employees?

In undertaking this research, the researcher designed a set survey on Google Docs which was distributed both online and in person to HR managers within Irish hospitality organisations. The survey was designed using a competency framework designed by Armstrong (2012, p.91) and some further competencies were added on at the end of the survey in the hope of receiving more data. The overall aim was to

examine whether competencies or competency-based frameworks were used within recruitment and selection practices of Irish hospitality organisations.

A review of the existing literature was carried out and gathered information from academics and scholars in this field in relation to what competencies are, the history and origins of competencies and their importance within recruitment and selection. Also types of competencies and competency-based frameworks, behavioural and technical competence, and the importance and link between human capital and competence were discussed in Chapter Two. An emerging theme which is found from the literature is how competence is linked with improving performance. Competencies relate to a characteristic or trait of a person or employee which results in effective or superior performance (Armstrong, 2012, p.97).

When the data was received, the researcher used Microsoft Excel to analyse the surveys which were returned, to generate different forms of illustrated graphs. The findings of the research shows the use of competencies, competency-based frameworks and a competency-based approach in recruitment and selection are still very evident in hospitality organisations in Ireland today. The research showed the majority of hotels and tourism use a standard competency-based framework in their recruitment and selection practices when hiring new employees for their organisation.

The research showed that the competencies which were most common across the industry as a whole were: communication, customer focus, people management, planning and organising and technical competence. The two competencies which saw most variation from respondents was decision-making and attitude.

5 2 Limitations of research / Areas for future research

The researcher is aware of numerous limitations from this research and has a number of suggestions for future research in this area. The use of a Likert scale brings limitations itself as respondents only tick a box which they feel is most suitable with their circumstances depending on the question. This may prevent limitations on data received, as there may not be a suitable answer for their organisation.

With regard to recommendations for future research in this area, the researcher has a few suggestions:

(1) the use of interviews and / or focus groups – even though for the purposes of this research a set survey was distributed to the sample, the researcher is aware of dishonesty and the assumption that many management staff in hospitality organisations have extremely busy schedules and answering surveys is not high on their list of priorities due to time and other constraints. The researcher feels that perhaps the use of a face-to-face interview or a small focus group may gather more sufficient data in this area and avoiding the ‘tick the box’ survey which may limit the data provided. A focus group of different hospitality management staff brings an advantage in itself and would be very beneficial for future researcher if one wanted to use more of a comparative approach of the industry.

(2) use a mixed method approach through using quantitative and qualitative research – this research used a quantitative approach solely but future research in this area may wish to use a combined approach of using both a survey or questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The use of a mixed approach will enhance the data and have a more well-rounded representation of the hospitality sector.

(3) compare the use of competencies across varying sectors – this research question focused on the Irish hospitality sector solely. Future research may wish to explore the use of competencies and competency-based frameworks across a number of sectors. Also, this research focused on their use within recruitment and selection; future research may wish to focus in on competence within training and development, career progression and promotion or reward.

Appendix A: Cover Letter provided with distributed survey

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Cian Farrell and I am a full-time postgraduate student at the National College of Ireland studying the Master of Arts in Human Resource Management. As part of a Masters programme, it is required for students to undertake a dissertation. My research topic is on the use of competencies in recruitment and selection within the Irish hospitality sector. I have designed a survey which can be found in the following pages designed to identify issues and receive data on this subject matter.

The survey is designed on a rating scale basis and your honesty would be much obliged. The survey itself should only take a matter of minutes to complete. Your time in completing this would be of huge benefit in answering my research question and is greatly appreciated. All answers you give are strictly confidential and for the purposes of this dissertation only. All answers you give will be kept between myself and my supervisor.

Many thanks for your co-operation and taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix B: The Survey

Competencies are the skills and abilities of an individual to do a job properly. A competency-based framework is a structure that sets out and defines each individual competency required by individuals working in an organisation or part of an organisation.

Guidelines

Dear Sir/Madam, My name is Cian Farrell and I am a full-time postgraduate student at the National College of Ireland studying the Master of Arts in Human Resource Management. As part of a Masters programme, it is required for students to undertake a dissertation. My research topic is on the use of competencies in recruitment and selection within the Irish hospitality sector. I have designed a survey which can be found in the following pages designed to identify issues and receive data on this subject matter. The survey is designed on a rating scale basis and your honesty would be much obliged. The survey itself should only take a matter of minutes to complete. Your time in completing this would be of huge benefit in answering my research question and is greatly appreciated. All answers you give are strictly confidential and for the purposes of this dissertation only. All answers you give will be kept between myself and my supervisor. Please be aware the rating scales are varied throughout (i.e. 1 may not always be Very Important etc). Many thanks for your co-operation and taking the time to complete this survey.

1. Does your organisation use a competency-based framework?*

Required

Yes
No

2. What is your job title? *

Required

3. What is the name of your organisation? *

Required

4. Are you male or female?*

Required

Male
Female

5. How long have you worked in your organisation?*

Required

Less than 1 year
1 - 4 years
5-9 years
10 - 19 years
Over 20 years

6. How many people work in your organisation? *

Required

7. Communication *

Required

How important, to your organisation, is having good and effective communication skills in new recruits?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important	Not Important at all
----------------	----------------------

8. Teamwork*

Required

How important, to your organisation, is being a good team-player?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all	Very Important
----------------------	----------------

9. Problem-Solving*

Required

How important, to your organisation, is a good problem-solver?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all	Very Important
----------------------	----------------

10. Decision-Making*

Required

How important, in your organisation, is good decision-making?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important	Not Important at all
----------------	----------------------

11. Customer Focus*

Required

How important, to your organisation, is the relationship from recruits to clients?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all	Very Important
----------------------	----------------

12. People Management*

Required

How important, to your organisation, to have effective people management skills?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important	Not Important at all
----------------	----------------------

13. Results Orientation*

Required

With new recruits, is the achieving of results essential to your organisation?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important	Not Important at all
----------------	----------------------

14. Planning and Organising*

Required

How important, in your organisation is having the ability to plan and organise well in new recruits?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all	Very Important
----------------------	----------------

15. Leadership *

Required

How important, is it for new recruits, to be effective and influential leaders?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important	Not Important at all
----------------	----------------------

16. Business Awareness*

Required

How important, to new recruits in your organisation, is organisational knowledge and business awareness?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important	Not Important at all
----------------	----------------------

17. Attitude*

Required

How important, to your organisation is the attitude of new recruits?

1 2 3 4 5

Not Important at all	Very Important
----------------------	----------------

18. Technical competence *

Required

How important, to your organisation, is the knowledge and expertise of new recruits?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important	Not Important at all
----------------	----------------------

19. Are there any other competencies you feel are important in the recruitment of new employees, which are not mentioned above? If so, which? Please provide a list.*

Required

20. Do you feel there are big differences in relation to competencies depending on the job role?*

Required

Yes

No

21. List any perceived benefits to your organisation of using a competency based approach to recruitment and selection.*

Required

22. To conclude, are there any further comments in relation to the use of competencies within your organisation?

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