

Competency Requirements for Travel Industry Professionals: A Comparative Cross-National Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Tourism and travel, taken together, are a major economic activity in the modern world that mainly thrives on the services of competitive human resources. Since the competencies of employees have become one of the key elements for organizational success, it seems necessary that travel industry stakeholders keep an active role in examining the competencies of human resources for sustainable management and growth in the industry. This study was therefore intended to identify the generic competency requirements for the UK and US travel industries. Derived from numerous job postings using a comparative analysis, it was shown that employers looked for competencies of both soft and hard nature. However, much emphasis was laid on competencies related to the interpersonal, human, and behavioral qualities of the candidates. The study has also revealed a strong coherence between the two countries on numerous competency items. The findings of this study may overall contribute to the development of staff recruitment processes and training programs, employee performance appraisals, daily organizational operations, and hospitality and travel education.

Keywords: Competencies, Human Resources, UK Travel Industry, US Travel Industry, Organizational Development, Tourism and Travel Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Competent people are probably the single best resource that a company can get to remain competitive in an ever-changing business environment. This especially seems true of those in service industries where many of the operations rely on human labor. Many leading tourism and travel companies invest heavily in acquiring and retaining skilled people to maintain their business operations successfully. They spend hundreds of thousands of dollars each year recruiting key staff based on a carefully considered set of criteria, which are usually skills, experience, and ability-based (Lee-Ross & Pryce, 2010).

Recent decades have seen a shift in paradigms toward competency-based management, where the performance and effectiveness of an organization are predicated on the competencies of its employees. Boyatzis (1982), in his model of effective job performance, for instance, posits that effective job performance depends on some critical components, such as the individual's competencies, the job's demand, and the organizational environment. Effective action and thus performance are believed to be obtained when all three components are

consistent and correspond with each other. According to him, if any one or two of these components are inconsistent and don't correspond with each other, it is expected that ineffective behavior or inaction will result. He further points out that a person's set of competencies reflects his or her capability, which describes what he or she can do, not necessarily what he or she does, nor all the time, regardless of the situation and setting. One should know what capability the individual has brought to the situation, e.g., the job, to understand the individual's specific behavior that was effective; without knowing this about the person, it would be difficult to predict, describe, or interpret his or her specific actions and why they were effective (Boyatzis, 1982, p.23).

Lawler (1994), in a similar vein, suggests that competency-based organizing, as opposed to a job-based one, has some potential benefits and can create a competitive advantage as it leads an organization to perform better. By moving to a competency-based approach, although having a number of limitations and difficulties associated with it, organizations can form systems that support the development of particular types of competencies, develop individuals who are suited to particular management styles, which, in

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turn, may allow the organization to operate with a management style that can provide a hard-to-replicate competitive advantage, and help markedly in attracting new employees and retain existing ones (Lawler, 1994). In the wider context, the wealth of modern-day businesses and nations, according to McLagan (1997), is contingent on the competencies of their people. The common inclination to think of competencies as a key contributor to organizational success keeps feeding the publicity of a competency-centric mindset in modern-day management.

Competency-based human resources has grown as a common practice over the past few decades, and almost every large organization today utilizes some form of competency-based human resource management—HRM (Boyatzis, 2008). Tourism firms are no exception to considering some set of competencies in hiring, training, development, promotion, and such human resources activities. The commonality of interest in competency-based HRM has prodded many scholars into studying such a subject in the realm of tourism.

Little, however, has been written about the employers' expectations of candidates who seek a role in the travel industry. Although previous research, such as Burton & Burton (1995), Dhiman (2012), Geldenhuys (2000), Lather et al. (2008), Lazarinis & Kanellopoulos (2010), Major & Evans (2008), Navickiene & Buciuniene (2007), Povey et al. (2016), Samuels (1983), Subash (2012), Tsai (2017), and Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2009) provides some useful information on competency or skill requirements for those planning to engage in professions in this industry, more comprehensive studies, without a doubt, are necessary to reassess previous achievements, expand the literature, and gain further insights into one of the least understood subjects of the field. As well as that, one of the major gaps in the literature is the lack of systematic analyses of the employer's demands of candidates who seek to make a career in the travel industry (see also Dhiman, 2012; Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009). This, from a broader lens, may lead to various critical problems, including ineffective action plans among stakeholders, poor formal education, lack of competent staff, weak services, and thus impoverished organizational success that overall impede the sustainable growth of the industry. Recognizing that competency needs can change with time, the subject also requires frequent revisits to keep pace with progressive developments in the travel business. It should likewise be acknowledged that some competencies, as opposed to generic ones, can differ according to location, where they may be tailored to fit in with the local business environment.

This paper hence sets out to examine the competencies required by travel firms in the UK and the US, which are renowned for their significant economic and educational activities with respect to tourism and travel. Yet, there is a paucity of outstanding scholarly effort spent on understanding such a critical subject in-depth. The paper, therefore, provides a detailed comparative analysis of employers' expectations of candidates for different job positions in the two countries, which, to our knowledge, finds no previous examples.

At the outset, we provide the methodological approach to this research. Then we discuss initial details, such as job posting essentials and statistics, and identify the common competency needs for various job roles in the UK and US travel industries. In the final section, we draw implications for travel industry leaders and tourism and travel educators and give directions for future examinations.

METHOD

A good way of learning about the expectations of the industry from applicants is to have a look at employers' "real-world" job postings. To do so, we browsed for postings on a popular employment website, Indeed, with a work of two days in June 2023, and visited the main website for vacancies in the US and its division for those in the UK. Using "travel agent" as the keyword and "United Kingdom" and "United States" as location filters, we obtained a total of 798 postings for the UK and 479 for the US. The records were examined for their relevance with the industry and a total of 893 non-relevant items (615 for the UK and 278 for the US), such as those from other sectors (including air transportation, and accommodation), the field of specialization (e.g. engineering), postings published in another languages, and postings with incomplete specifications as well as a total of 43 (34 for the UK and 9 for the US) postings with similar titles (subtle differences) and identical contents issued by same employers (keeping one of them for analysis) were excluded from the study. We conducted a content analysis of the final data (149 for the UK and 192 for the US, which were 77.2% and 88.9% of the overall relevant items, respectively), which is a quite suitable method for this study. Noteworthy is that all computations were made with popular office software, and thus percentages are rounded figures that may not tally to a hundred using a basic calculator.

Moreover, Kendall's non-parametric correlation coefficient, similar to Spearman's correlation coefficient (a standardized measure of the strength of relationship

between two variables that does not rely on the assumptions of a parametric test and performed on data that have been converted into ranked scores), but preferred for a small data set with large number of tied, same ranks (Field, 2018), helped us identify the covariance between the two rank orders of the competency items. Below, we considered Kendall's tau as our datasets included a number of tied ranks, and it has some advantages over Spearman's rho (Field, 2018; Howell, 2010). We also employed Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests to examine the normality of the data.

FINDINGS

Job posting essentials and related statistics

UK travel industry

Table 1 exhibits the essential components and related statistics derived from a total of 149 job postings for the UK travel industry, which provide several important initial details for our competency analysis. These components include types of travel firms that posted jobs, types of vacancies posted, types of employment, educational levels required for the open positions, and specifications on candidates' professional experience, respectively. As shown in the table, a wide range of employer categories were identified, more than half of which consisted of travel companies (17.4%), travel management companies (10.7%), travel agencies (10.1%), tour operators (6%), luxury tour operators (5.4%), and undefined companies serving in the travel business (4.7%). Other firm titles are listed sequentially based on the number of observations. All titles were designated as they originally appeared on the postings, or they were derived from the employers' web pages and/or the Web.

Similarly, numerous job categories were obtained, which, with higher weights, were comprised of business travel consultant (8.7%), luxury travel consultant (4.7%), travel consultant (4.7%), travel reservations agent/reservations agent (2.7%), and travel sales consultant/sales travel consultant (2.7%). Almost 21 percent of the jobs were comprised of senior executive roles (considering titles, such as executive and senior), while 10 percent consisted of managerial roles (based on titles, such as manager, administrator, leader, and supervisor). It should be noted that job titles were arranged in their original forms to provide a detailed view of the sources of competencies as far as possible.

Surprising as it may seem, employers have chosen not to specify educational requirements for most job positions (91.9%). There were only twelve postings that required candidates to have a certain type of qualification. For instance, vacancies demanding a qualification include apprentice travel consultant (general standard of education/GSE, 100% of the given job), business travel consultant (BA2 level qualification to fares & ticketing, 100%), contact centre agent (general certificate of secondary education/GCSE, 100%), flight ticketing & administration consultant (tourism certification, 100%), marketing coordinator (online marketing/digital qualification, 100%), marketing executive (marketing qualification, 100%), senior travel executive (diploma in travel & tourism or similar certification, 100%), sales travel advisor/travel advisor-sales agent (commercial legal studies & hospitality knowledge, 50%), travel assistant manager (travel qualification, 100%), travel consultant (travel & tourism qualification, 14.3%; travel qualification, 14.3%), and travel counselor (high school diploma, 100%).

Strikingly, industry or activity-based professional experience was a particularly emphasized specification (87.9%). That said, employers did not view work experience as essential with respect to only 1.3 percent of the postings, which were related to the retail travel advisor and personal travel specialist positions, and about 8 percent of the postings made no reference to such a detail. These postings include titles, such as apprentice travel consultant (100% among the other experience categories regarding the given job), business performance and alignment manager (100%), Caribbean luxury travel consultant (100%), Europe/Mediterranean luxury travel consultant (50%), Middle East luxury travel consultant (100%), reservations and customer services associate (100%), senior advisor-sales support & systems (100%), Southeast Asia luxury travel consultant (100%), specialty product specialist (100%), systems administrator-finance team (100%), travel consultant (14.3%), and travel executive (100%). Besides, experience was marked as a preferred feature among 2.7 percent of the postings.

Moreover, job postings referred to many types of employment as shown in Table 1. For instance, almost 41 percent of the jobs were composed of permanent employment. Two other types with significant rates consisted of full-time, permanent (19.5%) and full-time (14.1%) employment. Additionally, about 8 percent of the jobs have not been specified in any category. Various other types are listed sequentially in their original titles.

Table 1. UK Job postings, essential components, and related statistics.

Component
<i>Employer Profile (Frequency, Percentage)</i>
Travel company (26, 17.4); Travel management company (16, 10.7); Travel agency (15, 10.1); Tour operator (9, 6.0); Luxury tour operator (8, 5.4); Undefined/Travel business (7, 4.7); Specialist travel company (6, 4.0); Worldwide travel agency (6, 4.0); Family-run travel company (4, 2.7); Luxury travel company (4, 2.7); Worldwide/Global travel company (4, 2.7); Inbound tour operator (3, 2.0); Large travel company (3, 2.0); Specialist tour operator (3, 2.0); Tour company (3, 2.0); Travel and leisure company (3, 2.0); Corporate travel company (2, 1.3); Independent travel agency (2, 1.3); Independent travel company (2, 1.3); International tour operator (2, 1.3); Travel technology company (2, 1.3); Adventure travel company (1, 0.7); Business to Business/B2B software as a service/SaaS business in travel (1, 0.7); Business travel agency (1, 0.7); Cycling tour agency (1, 0.7); Global travel management company (1, 0.7); Independent retail travel agency (1, 0.7); Independent tour operator (1, 0.7); Independent travel retailer (1, 0.7); International travel company (1, 0.7); Online tour operator (1, 0.7); Online travel agency (1, 0.7); Provider of travel management solutions (1, 0.7); Specialist travel management company (1, 0.7); Specialist winter-sports tour operator (1, 0.7); Strategic travel management and services company (1, 0.7); Tailor-made travel company (1, 0.7); Transatlantic tour operator (1, 0.7); Travel and tourism operator (1, 0.7); Volunteer travel company (1, 0.7); Total (149, 100)
<i>Job Title</i>
Business travel consultant (13, 8.7); Luxury travel consultant (7, 4.7); Travel consultant (7, 4.7); Travel reservations agent/Reservations agent (4, 2.7); Travel sales consultant/Sales travel consultant (4, 2.7); Retail travel consultant (3, 2.0); Sales executive/Sales executive-Travel consultant (3, 2.0); Travel advisor (3, 2.0); Travel manager (3, 2.0); Call center agent (2, 1.3); Customer service agent (2, 1.3); Europe/Mediterranean luxury travel consultant (2, 1.3); Sales travel advisor/Travel advisor-Sales agent (2, 1.3); Senior business travel consultant (2, 1.3); Specialist travel consultant (2, 1.3); Travel itinerary coordinator (2, 1.3); Travel operations coordinator (2, 1.3); Travel operations executive (2, 1.3); Africa travel sales agent (1, 0.7); After sales consultant (1, 0.7); Agency partnership executive (1, 0.7); Apprentice travel consultant (1, 0.7); Asia-team travel consultant (1, 0.7); Business performance and alignment manager (1, 0.7); Business travel operations manager (1, 0.7); Business travel team leader (1, 0.7); Caribbean luxury travel consultant (1, 0.7); Commercial partner manager-Ancillaries (1, 0.7); Contact centre agent (1, 0.7); Corporate travel consultant (1, 0.7); Cruise travel consultant (1, 0.7); Dedicated support analyst (1, 0.7); Digital marketing executive-Projects (1, 0.7); Fares & ticketing executive (1, 0.7); Finance assistant (1, 0.7); Flight ticketing & administration consultant (1, 0.7); Flights coordinator (1, 0.7); Foreign exchange agent (1, 0.7); Global travel advisor (1, 0.7); Group travel consultant (1, 0.7); Holiday planner (1, 0.7); In resort manager (1, 0.7); International business travel consultant (1, 0.7); Land operations executive (1, 0.7); Marketing coordinator (1, 0.7); Marketing executive (1, 0.7); Meeting air coordinator (1, 0.7); Middle East luxury travel consultant (1, 0.7); Oceans & islands travel consultant (1, 0.7); Operations executive (1, 0.7); Operations support executive (1, 0.7); Operations support executive-Servicing (1, 0.7); Outbound sales agent (1, 0.7); Partnership development manager (1, 0.7); Personal travel expert (1, 0.7); Personal travel manager (1, 0.7); Personal travel specialist (1, 0.7); Personal travel supervisor (1, 0.7); Public relations executive (1, 0.7); Public relations senior specialist (1, 0.7); Reservations and customer services associate (1, 0.7); Reservations and ticketing executive (1, 0.7); Retail travel advisor (1, 0.7); Retail travel manager (1, 0.7); Retail travel sales consultant (1, 0.7); Sales & operations agent-B2B (1, 0.7); Sales & operations agent-Foreign independent tour/FIT (1, 0.7); Sales consultant-B2B (1, 0.7); Senior advisor-sales support & systems (1, 0.7); Senior business travel advisor (1, 0.7); Senior business travel agent (1, 0.7); Senior business travel consultant-VIPs client (1, 0.7); Senior corporate travel advisor (1, 0.7); Senior corporate travel consultant (1, 0.7); Senior retail travel sales consultant (1, 0.7); Senior tailor-made travel consultant (1, 0.7); Senior travel consultant-Assistant manager (1, 0.7); Senior travel executive (1, 0.7); Ski travel consultant (1, 0.7); Southeast Asia luxury travel consultant (1, 0.7); Specialty product specialist (1, 0.7); Systems administrator-Finance team (1, 0.7); Tailor-made luxury travel consultant (1, 0.7); Tailor-made travel consultant (1, 0.7); Ticketer (1, 0.7); Trade communications executive (1, 0.7); Travel advisor-Customer booking support (1, 0.7); Travel advisor-Supply operations (1, 0.7); Travel agent (1, 0.7); Travel assistant manager (1, 0.7); Travel branch manager (1, 0.7); Travel consultant-European destinations (1, 0.7); Travel consultant-Long haul (1, 0.7); Travel counselor (1, 0.7); Travel customer service executive (1, 0.7); Travel executive (1, 0.7); Travel reservations agent-Inbound (1, 0.7); Travel sales specialist (1, 0.7); Travel specialist (1, 0.7); Very important person/VIP travel consultant (1, 0.7); Worldwide travel consultant (1, 0.7); Worldwide travel sales consultant (1, 0.7); Total (149, 100)
<i>Employment Type</i>
Permanent (61, 40.9); Full-time, permanent (29, 19.5); Full-time (21, 14.1); Undefined (12, 8.1); Freelance (3, 2.0); Full-time, part-time (3, 2.0); Hybrid remote (3, 2.0); Temporary (3, 2.0); Full-time, fixed term contract (2, 1.3); Full-time, freelance (2, 1.3); Full-time, permanent, remote (2, 1.3); Remote (2, 1.3); Apprenticeship (1, 0.7); Fixed term contract (1, 0.7); Full-time, fixed term contract, hybrid remote (1, 0.7); Full-time, hybrid remote (1, 0.7); Part-time, permanent (1, 0.7); Permanent, hybrid remote (1, 0.7); Total (149, 100)
<i>Educational Level</i>
Undefined (137, 91.9); Travel qualification (2, 1.3); Commercial legal studies & hospitality knowledge (1, 0.7); Diploma in travel & tourism or similar certification (1, 0.7); GCSE or equivalent (1, 0.7); GSE (1, 0.7); High school diploma (1, 0.7); Marketing qualification (1, 0.7); Online marketing/digital qualification (1, 0.7); Tourism certification (1, 0.7); Travel & tourism qualification (1, 0.7); VAll (formally BA2) level qualification to fares & ticketing (1, 0.7); Total (149, 100)
<i>Experience</i>
Required (131, 87.9); Not specified (12, 8.1); Preferred (4, 2.7); Not essential (2, 1.3); Total (149, 100)

US travel industry

Findings from the initial analysis of a total of 192 US job postings are shown in Table 2. As can be seen from the table, travel firms that posted jobs in the US consist of many types. Approximately 16 percent of these firms are comprised of travel agencies. Other outstanding types include the federation of affiliated automobile clubs (8.3%), corporate travel management company (7.3%), travel management company (6.3%), full-service travel agency (6.3%), and travel company (6.3%). Along with that, 6.8 percent of firms whose categories could not be identified operate in the travel industry.

Also, a good many job titles have been identified, of which 5.2 percent comprise senior roles and 2.6 percent managerial positions (considering titles such as manager and director). Significant job titles include travel advisor (15.1%), travel consultant (9.9%), and travel agent (9.4%). Many other titles remain just less than 5 percent, constituting the majority of all job titles.

Most US job postings (66.1%), just as in the UK, did not point to any requirement for education. However, employers either required or preferred a number of educational qualifications for a significant portion of the jobs as opposed to their UK counterparts. As shown in the table, they, for instance, demanded at least a high school education or general educational development (GED), while others sought higher education, such as associate or bachelor's degrees, for many positions. It is noteworthy that 7.3 percent of the postings referred to travel, tourism, and/or hospitality-related education. Positions that demanded educational qualifications include corporate travel agent (33.3% of the given job), corporate VIP travel agent (100%), corporate/government travel agent (100%), destination events and luxury travel manager (100%), destination travel specialist (100%), entertainment travel agent (100%), entertainment travel agent, tour specialist (100%), group air coordinator (100%), international corporate travel advisor (100%), international travel consultant (33.3%), leisure travel agent (66.7%), luxury travel specialist (100%), office assistant/junior travel consultant (100%), reservation specialist (100%), reservation specialist & retail sales/service (100%), senior global travel manager (100%), specialized travel consultant (100%), teen travel counselor (100%), travel advisor (50%), travel advisor assistant (100%), travel advisor/travel agent (100%), travel

agent (61.1%), travel consultant (31.6%), travel consultant/customer service specialist (100%), travel consultant/web assist agent (100%), travel coordinator (50%), travel manager (100%), travel reservations agent (50%), travel sales agent (66.7%), travel specialist (50%), vacation counselor (100%), vacation travel consultant (100%), and VIP corporate travel consultant (100%). Along with that, only one employer considered education as unessential, which relates to the travel advisor position (3.3% of the given title).

Although its percentage was less than the UK instance, experience was likewise a highly sought feature among US travel industry professionals. For instance, 62 percent of the jobs required candidates to have some generic or specific work experience. In addition, many employers preferred candidates to have experience, which was expressed in a significant number of jobs (24%). However, experience was not seen as essential for around 5 percent of the jobs. Such jobs include travel advisor (10% among the other experience categories regarding the given job), travel advisor assistant (100%), travel consultant (10.5%), independent travel consultant (100%), international travel consultant (33.3%), cruise travel coordinator (100%), and vacation planner (100%). Apart from that, 8.9 percent of the postings did not refer to any specification regarding experience.

Lastly, job postings also refer to various distinct sets of employment. 46.4 percent of the jobs depended on full-time employment, while about 20 percent hinged on full-time, remote employment. Almost 9 percent of the postings did not point to any type of employment, though. Several other employment sets with fewer shares are exhibited in the table.

Competency requirements for travel industry professionals

A comparative list of competencies, as shown in table 3, provides some interesting findings on UK and US employers' expectations of candidates for open job positions. These competencies were divided into two main groups: the first one being knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and other characteristics, and the second one being skills. Such a categorization, with some closely corresponding items, was a product of the concept competency itself, which usually tends to be parsed into such subgroups throughout the literature, and particularly "skill" standing as an outstanding key term throughout the examined material. Every item comprising at least 2 percent of both UK and US job

Table 2. US Job postings, essential components, and related statistics.

Component
Employer Profile (Frequency, Percentage)
Travel agency (30, 15.6); Federation of affiliated automobile clubs (16, 8.3); Corporate travel management company (14, 7.3); Travel management company (12, 6.3); Undefined/Travel business (13, 6.8); Full-service travel agency (12, 6.3); Travel company (12, 6.3); Luxury travel agency (6, 3.1); Corporate travel management services (5, 2.6); Tour operator (5, 2.6); Full-service travel company (4, 2.1); Leisure travel agency/Leisure vacation travel agency (3, 1.6); Boat tour company (2, 1.0); Business travel & meetings management company (2, 1.0); Entertainment travel and event management company (2, 1.0); Full-service family owned and operated travel agency (2, 1.0); Full-service travel management company (2, 1.0); Incentive travel company (2, 1.0); Membership-based luxury travel club and community (2, 1.0); Travel wholesaler (2, 1.0); Travel, hospitality and leisure management group (2, 1.0); Adventure travel company (1, 0.5); Boutique travel agency (1, 0.5); Boutique-style corporate event and incentive program company (1, 0.5); Business travel management company (1, 0.5); Catholic pilgrimage company (1, 0.5); City tour company (1, 0.5); Corporate and academic travel management company (1, 0.5); Cruise travel company (1, 0.5); Educational travel agency (1, 0.5); Ethnic travel agency (1, 0.5); Events management company (1, 0.5); Family owned and operated educational travel company (1, 0.5); Family owned and operated travel agency (1, 0.5); Family-run helicopter tour company (1, 0.5); Female owned and operated agency (1, 0.5); Female owned travel management firm (1, 0.5); Full-service corporate travel management agency (1, 0.5); Global corporate travel and event management company (1, 0.5); Global travel management company (1, 0.5); Golf travel company (1, 0.5); Leisure travel company (1, 0.5); Local travel agency (1, 0.5); Luxury online travel agency (1, 0.5); Luxury travel company (1, 0.5); Luxury travel concierge (1, 0.5); Luxury travel consultancy (1, 0.5); Luxury travel specialists (1, 0.5); Meetings and incentives company (1, 0.5); Native American travel office (1, 0.5); Polaris outfitter & adventure tours company (1, 0.5); Provider of university & sports travel management services (1, 0.5); Retail travel agency (1, 0.5); Signature travel network agency (1, 0.5); Small group travel company (1, 0.5); Specialist sports travel business (1, 0.5); Specialized travel company (1, 0.5); Travel advisory company (1, 0.5); Travel and event management company (1, 0.5); Travel and tourism company (1, 0.5); Travel and tourism operator (1, 0.5); Travel corporation (1, 0.5); Worldwide tour operator (1, 0.5); Total (192, 100)
Job Title
Travel advisor (29, 15.1); Travel consultant (19, 9.9); Travel agent (18, 9.4); Leisure travel advisor (8, 4.2); Corporate travel consultant (7, 3.6); Travel coordinator (4, 2.1); Corporate travel agent (3, 1.6); International travel consultant (3, 1.6); Leisure travel agent (3, 1.6); Senior corporate travel consultant (3, 1.6); Travel sales agent (3, 1.6); Independent travel advisor (2, 1.0); Luxury travel advisor (2, 1.0); Senior travel agent (2, 1.0); Specialized travel counselor (2, 1.0); Travel reservations agent (2, 1.0); Travel specialist (2, 1.0); VIP travel consultant (2, 1.0); Administrative assistant/Travel coordinator (1, 0.5); Africa specialist luxury travel advisor (1, 0.5); After hours travel consultant/After-hours travel counselor (1, 0.5); After hours travel specialist (1, 0.5); Air travel advisor (1, 0.5); Air travel agent (1, 0.5); Corporate travel advisor (1, 0.5); Corporate travel coordinator (1, 0.5); Corporate travel counselor (1, 0.5); Corporate travel specialist (1, 0.5); Corporate VIP travel agent (1, 0.5); Corporate/Government travel agent (1, 0.5); Cruise travel coordinator (1, 0.5); Customer service/Reservation sales specialist (1, 0.5); Defense & government travel consultant (1, 0.5); Defense & government travel consultant/Travel counselor (1, 0.5); Destination events and luxury travel manager (1, 0.5); Destination travel specialist (1, 0.5); Entertainment travel agent (1, 0.5); Entertainment travel agent/Tour specialist (1, 0.5); Fulfillment agent & backup corporate travel advisor (1, 0.5); Golf travel specialist (1, 0.5); Group air advisor (1, 0.5); Group air coordinator (1, 0.5); Group air director (1, 0.5); Group air planner (1, 0.5); Group air/travel for meetings planner (1, 0.5); Group finalization coordinator (1, 0.5); Group reservations specialist (1, 0.5); Group travel advisor (1, 0.5); Group travel consultant (1, 0.5); Group travel coordinator (1, 0.5); Guest service travel advisor/Travel experience designer (1, 0.5); Independent travel consultant (1, 0.5); International corporate travel advisor (1, 0.5); Luxury travel advisor B2B (1, 0.5); Luxury travel expert (1, 0.5); Luxury travel sales agent (1, 0.5); Luxury travel specialist (1, 0.5); Marketing coordinator (1, 0.5); Meeting coordinator (1, 0.5); Member experience associate travel advisor-Call center (1, 0.5); Office assistant/Junior travel consultant (1, 0.5); Onsite travel consultant (1, 0.5); Personal assistant for travel advisor (1, 0.5); Post travel specialist (1, 0.5); Reservation specialist (1, 0.5); Reservation specialist & retail sales/service (1, 0.5); Reservation specialist/Dispatcher (1, 0.5); Senior corporate travel counselor (1, 0.5); Senior global travel manager (1, 0.5); Senior luxury travel advisor (1, 0.5); Senior travel advisor (1, 0.5); Senior VIP travel consultant (1, 0.5); Specialized travel consultant (1, 0.5); Team travel manager (1, 0.5); Teen travel counselor (1, 0.5); Travel advisor assistant (1, 0.5); Travel advisor/Customer service (1, 0.5); Travel advisor/Travel agent (1, 0.5); Travel advisor-Independent contractor (1, 0.5); Travel agent & travel coordinator (1, 0.5); Travel agent/Travel consultant (1, 0.5); Travel consultant-Global 24 hour emergency desk (1, 0.5); Travel consultant/Customer service specialist (1, 0.5); Travel consultant/Web assist agent (1, 0.5); Travel coordinator-International tours (1, 0.5); Travel counselor (1, 0.5); Travel destination agent (1, 0.5); Travel experience agent (1, 0.5); Travel manager (1, 0.5); Vacation counselor (1, 0.5); Vacation group air consultant (1, 0.5); Vacation planner (1, 0.5); Vacation travel advisor (1, 0.5); Vacation travel consultant (1, 0.5); VIP corporate travel consultant (1, 0.5); VIP international travel consultant (1, 0.5); Total (192, 100)
Employment Type
Full-time (89, 46.4); Full-time, remote (38, 19.8); Undefined (17, 8.9); Full-time, part-time (13, 6.8); Full-time, hybrid remote (8, 4.2); Part-time (6, 3.1); Remote (5, 2.6); Contract (4, 2.1); Full-time, contract (2, 1.0); Full-time, part-time, contract (2, 1.0); Full-time, part-time, hybrid remote (2, 1.0); Full-time, part-time, remote (2, 1.0); Contract, remote (1, 0.5); Full-time, part-time, internship (1, 0.5); Full-time, temporary (1, 0.5); Temporary (1, 0.5); Total (192, 100)
Educational Level
Undefined (127, 66.1); High school diploma or equivalent (16, 8.3); Bachelor's degree (7, 3.6); High school diploma or GED (6, 3.1); High school diploma or two/four year college degree (5, 2.6); Bachelor of science or Bachelor of arts degree (4, 2.1); Associate degree (3, 1.6); Diploma or degree in hospitality, travel, tourism, business or relevant field (3, 1.6); High school diploma or equivalent, a graduate of an accredited travel school (2, 1.0); High school diploma or equivalent, bachelor's degree (2, 1.0); Travel school (2, 1.0); Associate degree or equivalent (1, 0.5); Associate degree or equivalent from two-year college or technical school (1, 0.5); Associate or bachelor's degree (1, 0.5); Associate or better in hospitality and resort management (1, 0.5); Bachelor or degree in business administration, tourism administration or related areas (1, 0.5); Bachelor's degree and/or equivalent certification (1, 0.5); Bachelor's degree in sales, marketing, business administration, or a related field (1, 0.5); Bachelor's degree, hospitality or event management related degree (1, 0.5); High school diploma or equivalent, a graduate of an accredited travel school program and some college (1, 0.5); High school diploma or equivalent, Post-secondary education in travel and tourism (1, 0.5); High school diploma, associate degree (1, 0.5); High school education or equivalent or college (1, 0.5); Hospitality or sales education (1, 0.5); Not essential (1, 0.5); Travel & tourism or agent related certification (1, 0.5); Total (192, 100)
Experience
Required (119, 62.0); Preferred (46, 24.0); Not specified (17, 8.9); Not essential (10, 5.2); Total (192, 100)

postings was included in this collection of competencies. Original expressions with close meanings were adjusted and encapsulated to form a single competency item.

A very straightforward implication reveals that both UK and US employers look for competencies of “soft” as well as “hard” nature. Many of the identified competencies refer to the initial category, which, according to Weber et al. (2009), relates to interpersonal, human, and behavioral aspects that are needed to apply the latter, mainly pointing to technical sides. For instance, the most important competence that potential employees were mutually expected to demonstrate was strong attention to detail and accuracy. In addition, the ability to work within a team, a customer-centric mindset, and interest and passion for travel and the travel industry were some other substantial competencies required by industry professionals. In a similar vein, written and verbal communication, customer service, organizational, relationship-building, interpersonal, and time management skills were pronounced qualities for both countries, taking place in the second subcategory along with their counterparts in the upper subcategory. Likewise, many other identified competency items point to the interpersonal, human, and behavioral capabilities of candidates who are seeking career opportunities in the travel industry. Recognizing that travel is a service industry, this, without doubt, seems quite reasonable.

A good number of the competencies, on the other hand, are linked to the technical aspects of the industry. Knowledge, abilities, and skills related to computer technology were considered among the principal competencies for being assigned to one of the job positions. Being competent in essential computer programs and global distribution systems, as given in the table, was ranked as one of the top priorities by both countries’ employers. Along with that, good geographical knowledge and being knowledgeable of the travel industry were commonly of significant importance.

As indicated in the table, a number of competency domains were identified using Hogan & Warrenfeltz’s (2003) model of managerial education, by also considering the works of National Research Council (2011), National Research Council (2012), Sandwith (1993), and Weber et al. (2009). These included intrapersonal, interpersonal, leadership, business, and cognitive skills. The competency items belonging to the intrapersonal domain outstandingly prevailed over the others in number throughout the two main categories, and what followed this domain were the interpersonal competencies. It should be noted that some aspects of the specified competency categories may overlap with one another, making it naturally quite possible for some items to be considered in more than a single category.

Table 3. Competencies for UK and US travel industry professionals.

Competencies	Domain	UK			US			Difference in Rank
		Frequency	Percentage	Rank	Frequency	Percentage	Rank	
<i>Knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and other characteristics</i>								
Demonstrating a strong attention to detail—being detail-oriented and accurate	Intrapersonal	43	28.9	1	76	39.6	1	
Proficiency in using computers effectively, including IT and digital literacy, e.g., Microsoft Office Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Teams, spreadsheets, Google applications, databases, Internet navigation, messenger tools, and email, social media platforms, Zoom	Business	43	28.9	1	74	38.5	2	-1
Ability to work collaboratively within a team, teamwork—excellent team player, sharing knowledge and supporting colleagues, when necessary, also switching responsibilities	Interpersonal	34	22.8	2	46	24.0	6	-4
Being competent in using global distribution systems, and other computer, travel agent, or tour operator reservation systems—including online booking, e.g., Amadeus, Sabre, Travelport, Worldspan, or Galileo, Apollo-Focalpoint, Concur OBT	Business	33	22.1	3	56	29.2	3	

Having a customer-centric mindset with a desire to provide exceptional service and exceed customer expectations—being service-oriented, excellent customer service, quality-of-service orientation (both internal and external)	Interpersonal	31	20.8	4	53	27.6	4	
Demonstrating an interest and passion for travel and (also enjoying working in) the travel industry, in providing memorable experiences to customers	Other	27	18.1	5	30	15.6	9	-4
Flexibility to adapt to changing work demands, handling other tasks as assigned, and occasional overtime as required—flexible hours, shifts	Intrapersonal	24	16.1	6	34	17.7	7	-1
Ability and desire to work under pressure, also thrive and strive, in a fast-paced environment	Intrapersonal	21	14.1	7	20	10.4	15	-8
Having good geographical knowledge	Business	21	14.1	7	21	10.9	14	-7
Having knowledge, understanding, and awareness of the travel industry, policies, procedures, processes, codes, practices, and systems—including trends and products in the market, low-cost carriers, worldwide airlines, different aircraft types and cabins, retail, tours, travel agency and tour operations, transportation, accommodations, cruising, FITs, documentation, insurance, travel suppliers, travel-related sales, and reservations	Business	21	14.1	7	32	16.7	8	-1
Holding a good and clear English spoken (also warm, personable, enthusiastic, polite, confident, and professional) phone manner	Interpersonal	21	14.1	7	4	2.1	30	-23
Ability to work independently—exercising discretion and judgment	Intrapersonal	20	13.4	8	47	24.5	5	3
Ability to multitask in a fast-paced environment—a multitasker, managing multiple tasks, requests, and projects simultaneously, including dealing with multiple clients, and handling multiple demands at once	Intrapersonal	15	10.1	9	53	27.6	4	5
Being positive, energetic, and motivating—a positive and cheerful attitude	Intrapersonal	14	9.4	10	19	9.9	16	-6
Having excellent knowledge of destinations and their tourism products, e.g., European/Mediterranean holiday destinations, Japan, Scotland, USA	Business	14	9.4	10	7	3.6	27	-17
Fluency in a foreign language, both oral and written, a bilingual, multilingual speaker, e.g., Cantonese, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hindi/Punjabi/Gujarati, or any other Indian language, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Norwegian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Tagalog, Vietnamese	Interpersonal	13	8.7	11	23	12.0	12	-1
Ability to communicate effectively both written and verbally with customers and staff (including travel counselors) in all areas and levels of the company—an excellent communicator	Interpersonal	12	8.1	12	26	13.5	11	1

Competency Requirements for Travel Industry Professionals: A Comparative Cross-National Perspective

Fluency in English, both oral and written, good, appropriate use of grammar—a clear voice, fluent, idiomatic English speaker	Interpersonal	12	8.1	12	14	7.3	20	-8
Having strong problem-solving abilities to resolve issues effectively (by taking the initiative)—an active problem solver	Cognitive	12	8.1	12	18	9.4	17	-5
Ability to prioritize, plan, organize, and manage workload, and projects—whilst remaining reactive to the needs of the business, as well as following up with clients and providing a premium level of service	Intrapersonal	10	6.7	13	27	14.1	10	3
Being (well) organized, also precise	Intrapersonal	10	6.7	13	20	10.4	15	-2
Having (a passion for and) knowledge of worldwide, long-haul travel, (popular) tourist destinations, and products, e.g., Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Far East, Latin America, Middle East, Southeast Asia	Business	10	6.7	13	4	2.1	30	-17
Being confident	Intrapersonal	9	6.0	14				
Being self-directed—self-motivated, autonomous	Intrapersonal	9	6.0	14	16	8.3	19	-5
Having a tenacious approach—tenacity	Intrapersonal	9	6.0	14				
Having an excellent understanding of ticketing, rules, and regulations, ticket exchanges, reissue, void, refund transactions, and documentation—including an understanding of a passenger name record/PNR lifecycle and building PNRs and profiles, also group ticketing	Business	9	6.0	14	18	9.4	17	-3
Ability to meet deadlines	Intrapersonal	8	5.4	15	11	5.7	23	-8
Ability to prioritize	Intrapersonal	8	5.4	15	4	2.1	30	-15
Ability to think out of the box with new ideas, suggestions, and different perspectives, try new things—outside-the-box thinking, a start-up mentality	Intrapersonal/ Conceptual-Creative	8	5.4	15	7	3.6	27	-12
Being sales-driven with a keen eye for numbers, a strong work ethic, and a focus on achieving and exceeding sales targets	Intrapersonal	8	5.4	15	9	4.7	25	-10
Excellent understanding of (domestic and international) fares, airfares, and contracted fares	Business	8	5.4	15	11	5.7	23	-8
Ability to plan	Intrapersonal/ Conceptual-Creative	7	4.7	16				
Being proactive, working proactively, including looking for ways to improve internal processes	Intrapersonal	7	4.7	16	10	5.2	24	-8
Flexibility to adapt and customize an approach to changing customer demands, travel trends, industry developments, changeable or reactive situations, and frequent interruptions, while ensuring the quality of work remains high and objectives are set	Intrapersonal	7	4.7	16	8	4.2	26	-10
Ability to engage, interact, and negotiate with customers and individuals in a professional, helpful, friendly, empathic, respectful, and clear manner	Interpersonal	6	4.0	17	13	6.8	21	-4

Ability to maintain a high level of professionalism while working with both internal and external customers—mature and professional attitude and appearance	Intrapersonal	6	4.0	17	22	11.5	13	4
Ability to organize	Intrapersonal	6	4.0	17				
Being calm and approachable even when under pressure—resilient attitude, resilience	Intrapersonal	6	4.0	17	10	5.2	24	-7
Being motivated and focused to achieve individual, team, and company goals and objectives—including strategic attitude, strategic thinking	Intrapersonal	6	4.0	17	5	2.6	29	-12
Being target-driven, goal-oriented/ goal-driven—with a focus on revenue and productivity	Intrapersonal	6	4.0	17	5	2.6	29	-12
Being willing to continually learn, grow, and adapt—a passion for learning	Intrapersonal	6	4.0	17	23	12.0	12	5
Demonstrating a can-do attitude	Intrapersonal	6	4.0	17	4	2.1	30	-13
Ability to take initiative, initiative-taker—also a self-starter	Intrapersonal	5	3.4	18	23	12.0	12	6
Being driven, passionate, enthusiastic	Intrapersonal	5	3.4	18	5	2.6	29	-11
Being friendly—friendliness	Intrapersonal	5	3.4	18	7	3.6	27	-9
Confidence in dealing with people/ clients at all levels of the business	Interpersonal	5	3.4	18				
Having a desire to succeed—with confidence and determination	Intrapersonal	5	3.4	18				
Ability to resolve customer issues in a professional, empathetic, courteous, and timely manner	Interpersonal	4	2.7	19				
Being keen on exploring and solving problems	Intrapersonal	4	2.7	19				
Being motivated	Intrapersonal	4	2.7	19	4	2.1	30	-11
Being well-traveled	Other	4	2.7	19				
Having a proven track record in reaching and exceeding targets	Other	4	2.7	19				
Having a proven track record of working towards and achieving sales targets	Other	4	2.7	19				
Having an outgoing personality	Intrapersonal	4	2.7	19	5	2.6	29	-10
Ability to take ownership of responsibilities, having a sense of responsibility—accountability	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20	6	3.1	28	-8
Ability to use marketing campaign management tools—including pay-per-click/PPC, search engine optimization/SEO, and e-mail marketing	Business	3	2.0	20				
Ability to work across different contact channels at the same time, e.g., e-mail, telephone, live chat, and social media	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20				
Ability to work at a pace	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20				
Being a good listener—also the ability to actively listen	Interpersonal	3	2.0	20				
Being able to work with minimal supervision, e.g., when resolving customer queries	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20				
Being creative—thinking creatively, creativity	Cognitive/ Conceptual/ Creative	3	2.0	20	7	3.6	27	-20
Being determined	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20				

Competency Requirements for Travel Industry Professionals: A Comparative Cross-National Perspective

Being punctual	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20					
Having a dynamic personality	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20					
Having knowledge of luxury holiday markets, e.g., European, Middle East, Southeast Asia	Business	3	2.0	20					
Having leadership abilities—a leader by nature	Leadership	3	2.0	20					
Having the ability to pick up and learn new systems/booking systems, call-center telephone systems, and ever-changing technology quickly	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20	11	5.7	23	-12	
Proficiency in using computers effectively, e.g., website content management, Tigerbay CMS, Hyper-Text Markup Language/HTML, video editing, Adobe Creative Suite	Business	3	2.0	20					
Strong commitment to achieving targets and overcoming challenges	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20					
Supportive of and accepting business changes and improvements for the long-term success of the business	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	20					
Ability and willingness to undertake domestic and international travel, as well as travel to destination locations, when required	Intrapersonal	2	1.3	21	4	2.1	30	-9	
Being flexible—flexibility	Intrapersonal	2	1.3	21	7	3.6	27	-6	
Being reliable, dependable, and trustworthy, reliability	Intrapersonal	2	1.3	21	9	4.7	25	-4	
Proficiency in using customer relationship management/CRM systems, travel customer service platforms, and other sales tools, e.g., ClientBase, Soft-rip, Zendesk, Salesforce, TravelXen	Business	2	1.3	21	10	5.2	24	-3	
Having strong commercial abilities, awareness	Business	2	1.3	21	5	2.6	29	-8	
Having a working knowledge of luxury travel products and destinations, e.g., Europe, and Mediterranean luxury holiday destinations—versed in working with luxury hotels, first and business-class air, DMCs, villa suppliers, sourcing guides, etc.	Business	2	1.3	21	6	3.1	28	-7	
Ability to make decisions confidently—decisiveness	Cognitive	1	0.7	22	4	2.1	30	-8	
Ability to type fast and accurately on the computer keyboard	Business	1	0.7	22	6	3.1	28	-6	
Enjoying dealing with the public and working with people, interacting with customers, including while on the phone	Interpersonal	1	0.7	22	4	2.1	30	-8	
Having a strong sense of urgency	Intrapersonal	1	0.7	22	4	2.1	30	-8	
Having discretion and the utmost respect for client confidentiality	Interpersonal	1	0.7	22	6	3.1	28	-6	
Ability to build and maintain relationships effectively—with company employees, clients, and travel suppliers	Interpersonal				17	8.9	18		
Ability to arrange domestic and international vacation travel, also book travel—including air, rail, car rental, hotel, other ground transportation, transfers, restaurant reservations, etc.	Business				12	6.3	22		
Demonstrating a strong commitment to ethics and work ethics	Intrapersonal				12	6.3	22		

Ability to manage time effectively—time management ability	Intrapersonal					10	5.2	24
Ability to effectively navigate between multiple computer systems and web browsers	Business					9	4.7	25
Being honest—demonstrating personal and organizational, professional integrity	Intrapersonal					9	4.7	25
Demonstrating adaptability—being adaptable, versatile	Intrapersonal					7	3.6	27
Having an entrepreneurial spirit	Intrapersonal					4	2.1	30
Having strong organizational abilities	Intrapersonal					7	3.6	27
Ability to learn quickly—a quick learner	Cognitive					4	2.1	30
Ability to work within the posted hours, specified times, and schedules, e.g., 8 am-6 pm ET, Monday-Friday 9-5 pm PST, 35-45 hours/week	Intrapersonal					6	3.1	28
Having a strong and very comfortable relationship with paperwork	Business					6	3.1	28
Having a strong sales acumen, being strong in sales—the ability to close sales, including comfort with consultative sales	Interpersonal					6	3.1	28
Having strong critical thinking abilities	Cognitive					4	2.1	30
Demonstrated ability and innate talent to create and deliver great, exceptional client (travel) experiences—with ease and grace	Interpersonal					5	2.6	29
Demonstrating regular and reliable attendance	Intrapersonal					4	2.1	30
Being competent in using travel product management systems, including electronic sales reporting systems for travel companies, e.g., Softrip, ARC/IAR, Axis	Business					4	2.1	30
Correlation coefficient between the two rank orders = .574, n =57								
<i>Skills</i>								
Having excellent verbal and written communication skills—competency in English	Interpersonal	66	44.3	1	110	57.3	1	
Having excellent customer service skills	Interpersonal	27	18.1	2	40	20.8	3	-1
Having strong organizational skills—to ensure all customer requests and internal processes are handled efficiently to achieve high levels of performance	Intrapersonal	17	11.4	3	46	24.0	2	1
Having excellent relationship-building skills to liaise with clients, external suppliers, and internal stakeholders effectively	Interpersonal	16	10.7	4				
Having strong interpersonal (people) skills	Interpersonal	11	7.4	5	35	18.2	4	1
Having strong time management skills—to be able to work effectively to deadlines	Intrapersonal	8	5.4	6	20	10.4	7	-1
Having good IT and computer skills, especially working with spreadsheets, e.g., Microsoft Office Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Gmail, Google Docs, e-mail, and Internet research	Business	7	4.7	7	32	16.7	5	2

Competency Requirements for Travel Industry Professionals: A Comparative Cross-National Perspective

Having advanced skills (skilled) in global distribution systems, e.g., Sabre	Business	5	3.4	8	9	4.7	10	-2
Having excellent (relationship-based) sales, selling skills	Interpersonal	4	2.7	9	18	9.4	8	1
Having strong (creative, proactive) problem-solving and resolution skills	Cognitive	4	2.7	9	26	13.5	6	3
Having excellent (including commercial) English language skills	Interpersonal	3	2.0	10				
Having excellent numerical/mathematical skills	Cognitive	3	2.0	10				
Having multiple language skills, e.g., Czech, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Bahasa, and Vietnamese	Interpersonal	3	2.0	10				
Having strong negotiation skills, which can be demonstrated through high-value commercial agreements	Interpersonal	3	2.0	10				
Having strong prioritization skills	Intrapersonal	3	2.0	10				
Having strong listening skills—with the ability to determine root cause quickly, check for shared understanding, and address misunderstandings promptly	Interpersonal				14	7.3	9	
Having strong analytical skills, e.g., identifying significant problems and opportunities	Cognitive				7	3.6	11	
Having strong planning skills	Intrapersonal/ Conceptual-Creative				5	2.6	12	
Having excellent phone skills	Interpersonal				5	2.6	12	
Having strong presentation skills, including oral presentation	Interpersonal				4	2.1	13	
Having strong phone sales skills	Interpersonal				4	2.1	13	
Correlation coefficient between the two rank orders = .704, $n = 9$								

Additionally, competency items that did not fit well in a certain category were marked as others.

Obviously, no association is seen between the UK and US ranks of many competency items, as they were ranked only by one of the two countries, particularly between the lower-rated ones. To examine the relationship between the remaining items (i.e., items concerning both countries), we conducted a Kendall's rank correlation test as the data involved ordinal variables. K-S test also suggested that datasets were not distributed normally ($p < .05$, $n = 57$). Kendall's tau_b correlation showed that there was a significant positive correlation between the two rank orders in the first group of competencies ($\tau = .574$, $p < .01$, $n = 57$), which suggests that the two countries attributed the same levels of importance to the specified competencies. Substantial divergences, however, can be seen in some competencies considered individually, looking at the column of difference in ranks, e.g., the most striking one being "holding a

good and clear English spoken phone manner", with a difference of rank of 23. In the similar vein, taken individually, competency domains that referred to both countries and could be examined statistically, pointed to strong positive correlations as follows— intrapersonal ($\tau = .512$, $p < .01$, S-W test for datasets, $p < .05$, $n = 32$), interpersonal ($\tau = .551$, $p < .05$, S-W test for datasets, $p > .05$, $n = 9$), business ($\tau = .646$, $p < .01$, S-W test for datasets, $p_{UK} > .05$, $p_{US} < .05$, $n = 12$). Other domains did not qualify for statistical analysis due to insufficient numbers of entries.

No relation was also observed between the two countries concerning more than half of the competencies in the second group of items under the title of skills, as they pertained to either the UK or the US. There was, however, a strong correlation between the rest of the items ($\tau = .704$, $p < .01$, S-W test for datasets, $p > .05$, $n = 9$), which indicated a strong cohesion between the two groups of employers. Overall, one can observe a close mutual harmony in

the upper rows of skill items with no (e.g., the first, fourth, and fifth items) or subtle differences. Domain-based statistical analysis did not apply to this group of competencies.

CONCLUSION

The main contribution of this study is that it provides an elaborate and expansive set of generic competencies drawn from a wide range of job positions of two leading travel industries, with a comparative cross-national perspective. These competencies represent the expectations of both UK and US professionals of candidates looking for a career in the travel industry. The study has, distinctively, sought to analyze the competency requirements of travel industry jobs, relying on data derived from real-world job postings of many travel firms, including the leading ones in the two countries, and therefore, expands scientific discussion on the subject by providing critical empirical evidence with an international approach.

The greater gravitation of the identified competencies was toward interpersonal, human, and behavioral aspects, which can be ascribed to a well-known phenomenon that travel is a service-intensive industry. Much emphasis, however, can also be placed on the technical side, as several items pointed to such a facet of the industry, particularly on the use of computer systems effectively. From a domain-based approach, the competencies mainly pertained to intrapersonal, interpersonal, leadership, business, and cognitive features of candidates. People, therefore, looking to make a travel industry-related career in the two countries should especially consider being equipped with these as part of their personal capabilities. This study has further shown that there was a strong association between the two countries on 58.2 percent of the competency items related to knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and other characteristics, and on 42.9 percent of the items concerning skills. Such a connection is especially manifest in some highly rated competencies and points to their cross-cultural importance.

Although this study has a markedly distinct design, its results support some of the merits of previous research. Several items, regardless of ranking, for instance, advocate multiple items of the skills checklist for travel operations professionals, determined by Povey et al. (2016). Major & Evans (2008) have earlier identified some specific skill sets in the UK travel industry, such as computer literacy, good customer contact, selling ability, and good product knowledge, as all of these have taken place among various items identified above. In a similar

vein, Samuels (1983) recommended a list of suggested areas of knowledge and skills useful in the travel agency and tour business with a reference to the US travel industry, multiple of them finding their specific examples uncovered in this elaboration. This study further confirms various skills proposed by Reiff (1990) that concentrated on corporate travel. A number of competency items, similarly, corresponded with the guidelines of Horner (1996) for travel agents to deal with their clients effectively. Moreover, effective use of computer technology was a leading competency requirement in the current study, as previously discussed by Lazarinis & Kanellopoulos (2010) in the realm of the Greek travel industry. The present findings also support various competency or skill items suggested by Buciuniene (2007), Geldenhuys (2000), Lather et al. (2008), Navickiene & Tsai (201), Reilly (1991), Subash (2012), and Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2009), which overall point to the common requirements of the international travel industry.

Although significant importance was attached to work experience by both UK (also stressed by Major & Evans, 2008) and US employers, and not much priority was given to educational qualifications, especially by the UK, the core curricula of formal hospitality and travel education should be adjusted to fit the recent expectations of the industry. This especially seems important for achieving sophisticated educational designs by feeding theory-based approaches with empirical evidence. It should also be focused on developing effective training and assessment methods to involve students' competencies (e.g., see National Research Council, 2012, p. 148) by also considering the industry requirements for creating more integrative programs.

This pool of competencies can serve as a useful guide for industry employers as well, both for corporations and startups that look for people in similar positions to those identified in this study or apply human resources training programs. Human Resources professionals may well benefit from the recent findings in managing some critical processes, e.g., recruitment and selection, performance management, and training and development. There may also be advantages to trade associations, e.g., ABTA, ASTA, IATAN, USTOA, and US Travel, that play a major role in the travel industry and have incentives, education partners, and diploma courses aimed at equipping staff and students with desired industry knowledge and skills. Such organizations should consider the current competencies in revising and reinvigorating their training and development programs and curricula.

Limitations and future research

The findings of this study can certainly be a benchmark for more research, as here has been provided a collection of competencies which can be used to form constructed measures, such as questionnaires and surveys, and be the subject of new examinations. However, this study has some limitations since it was conducted on a limited number of job postings in a specified time span. More examinations should be carried out to gain further insight into the realm of competencies for more competitive human resources in the travel industry. Future research can be devoted to uncovering competencies of core nature and can focus on competencies for specific job positions.

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