

The Managerial Competency Development for Young tourism officials in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

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Abstract

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This paper aims to identify the component of managerial competencies of the young tourism official leaders and to develop managerial competency for young tourism leaders in Luang Prabang. Action research is designed for collecting primary data with training platform. In this action research was applied the concept of facilitation skill training as a tool for training model to develop an effective training workshop for improving managerial competency of the young tourism official leaders. The managerial competency was reviewed and interviewed with the selected ten participants from the young tourism officials, the managerial competencies are interested in developing are included: Service leadership, Innovative Management, Cooperate Governance, Financial Management and Human Resource Management.

However, due to our limited time of this research project, the Service Leadership Competency training was determined as a pilot training workshop to test and to develop learning approach to improve the managerial competency of selected ten representative tourism officials.

Keywords: *Young tourism official leader, Action research, and Facilitation Training approach.*

1. Introduction

Lao PDR is geographically surrounded by the industrialized neighboring countries those are high population density, demands high consumption and production, namely, China, Thailand, and Vietnam who demands natural resources for production and consumption can negatively impact to Lao PDR in terms of natural resources extraction, land use changes, international migration and other crisis. Currently, Lao PDR faces both internal and external constrains in improving socio-economy such as lack of internationalized skill of human capital, weak institutions, and high debt rate; and risky in health impacts, including un-exploded bombs and auto accidents and the external forces are global financial, inflation and economic crisis. Plus, the investment promotion of foreign direct investment-FDI could be a challenge for local entrepreneurs who lack of internationalized management skills to access the competitiveness market (MOPI, 2011).

The government of Lao PDR (GOL) account tourism into National Strategy for Socio-economic Development of Lao PDR since 1995

(Lyttleton & Allcock, 2002). Followed by the declaration of world heritage town of Luang Prabang, northern part of Lao PDR in 1995 and tourism was officially operated during the visit Lao year 1999-2000, through cultural events in promoting eco-tourism, culturally based tourism in the government's strategy development plan (Harrison and Schipani, 2009). Tourism has been used as a vehicle to sustain economically, ecologically and culturally. Tourism industry contributes more than 10 percent of total GDP for Lao PDR, creates more than 348 jobs in Lao PDR and generate more than US\$ 979, 4 million (WTTC, 2020).

Luang Prabang was declared as the first World Heritage Town [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2004)]. Tourism in Luang Prabang creates more 134,000 jobs and entrepreneurship.

The Local Government of Luang Prabang promotes tourism as the first priority to support and develop Luang Prabang Tourism Resources to improve social and economy of Luang Prabang and being a World Heritage City with

more than 23 historical and cultural attractions, ways of life of the locals, tradition and outstanding landscape, from the heritage tourism resources could contribute to local people to earn extra income from tourism business such as accommodation, food and beverage, transportation services, and souvenirs and also employed local people (Savannah et al., 2017).

However, the current employment market and entrepreneurs, most of the managerial employment, finance and marketing positions are foreigners, whereas most of the locals are employed in operational jobs, including housekeeping supervisors, frontline supervisors, cooks, maid, waiting staff (Wittayapak, 2010; Southiseng & Walsh, 2011). Therefore, the government of Lao PDR must invest in human capital in empowering local tourism leaders and entrepreneurs in hospitality business and tourism.

Recent study of Tourism and Hotel Courses in Lao PDR (Piyakasidet & Lamomsai, 2017). The study found that Problems of the tourism and hotel education in both vocational and higher institution in Lao PDR, found that the degree level focused on theoretical teaching and Research, lack of funds for the purchase of teaching and learning equipment. The period of internship for students is short and the business sector accepts students for internship with little experience. While the vocational education courses found that the curriculum using foreign documents but the students lack of reading skills. Foreign language textbooks and the duration of the internship experience are limited in developing human resources for tourism.

Luang Prabang was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Town in 1995 and currently is the most popular destination in Southeast Asia (UNESCO, 2004), with more than 27 indigenous ethnic groups. In addition, the infrastructure development and other necessary facilities are invested by both private and government to be ready for tourism industry such as Luang Prabang International Airport finished (2013), the 3rd New Mekong Bridge from Luang Prabang to Sayabouly and 4th new Mekong Bridge from Chiang Kong (Thailand) to Huay-Xai (Lao PDR), Lao-China Railway was operated in December 2021, telecommunications, and accommodation

[Ministry of Public Works and Transportation (MOPWT, 2021).

The Development of Tourism Logistics Connectivity of Luang Prabang and Indo-China would be really bringing the influx of tourism to Luang Prabang and also will help promoting and connecting economic growth and cultural sharing, tourism networking and tourism resources of each country will be also shared to each other (Fuggate, 2019).

This action research project is to develop the specific managerial competency for the young tourism officials in Luang Prabang. Thus, the study of competency development for young tourism official leaders will be essential for Lao PDR to gain the benefit from tourism growth beyond the regional and international integration of development projects. In addition, this study will allow the policy makers, tourism organizations, hospitality and tourism industry, and individuals to be able to re-framing their competency development strategy to cope with the changes and challenges.

The Concept of Competency will be conceptualized for the study. The concept of Competency introduced by David McClelland in 1970, the concept is to investigate why employees in the same position create different productivity, and from the testing. It results that is not only an intelligent to help workforce successfully, it is a competency, and the competency is defined as knowledge, skill, attribute. The competency is composed of 1) core competency, 2) professional competency and 3) specific technical competency (Akaravorn, 1998). The competency is also defined as a potential and intent to act of workforce that can learn, adapt to new environment, communicative effectively, and foster interpersonal relationship, and cultural intelligent is also very important in the global management environment (Buckler and Poutsma, 2009). Su (2013) analyzed that competencies needed by hospitality manager has first studied in 1980, and the all competencies are related to soft skills to develop good working relationships with customers and employees, communication skills, the ability to manage and motivate, information and technology.

Thon Than (2012) defines the business competency into three domains, including personal competency, management competency and functional competency: (1) Personal

Competency: Expertise, Creativity Thinking, Knowledge Management, and respect; (2) Management Competency: Leadership, Team Relationship, Human resource management, Corporate Governance, and change management; (3) Functional Competency: knowledge transfer, career development and change management. Managerial competency defines as necessary knowledge and skills for an executive to do his/her managerial works and to achieve a certain level of work performance (Fang et al., 2010). Chaicharoanthaweekit & Charinto (2015) defined managerial competency as interpersonal relationship, creativity, Human resources, financial management, and technique which includes knowledge, skills necessary for product and service development, personnel development. However, currently the digital power plays significant role in socio-economic development.

Objectives of the study: 1) To identify the Current Managerial Competencies of Young tourism officials in Luang Prabang Province, and 2) To Develop the Managerial Competencies of Young tourism officials in Luang Prabang Province.

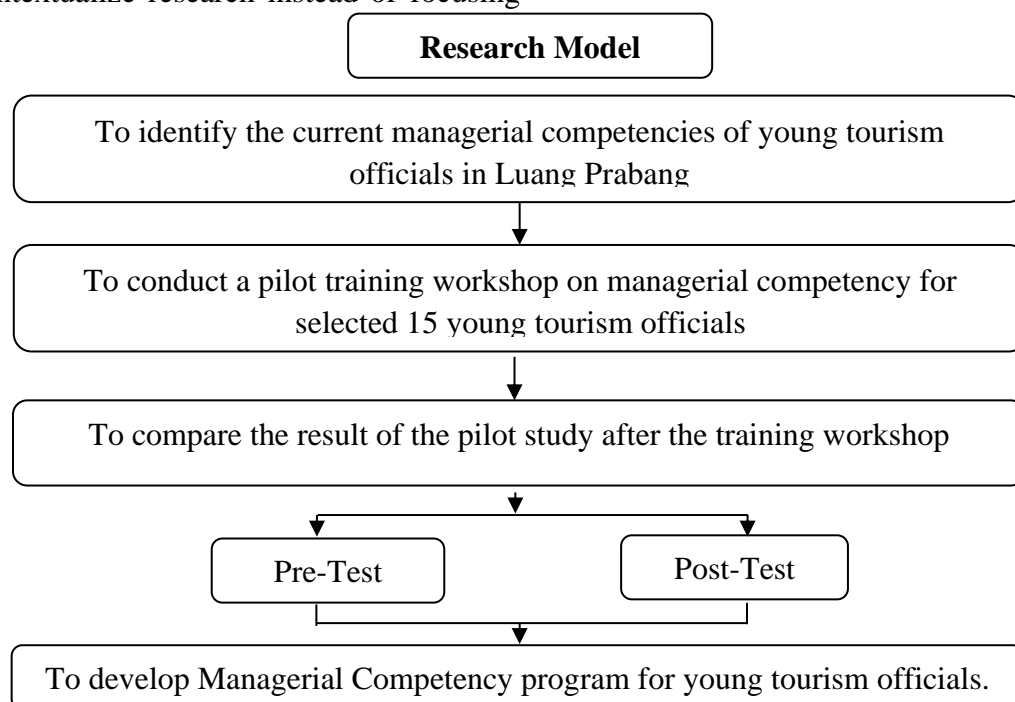
2. Materials and Methods

Action Research (AR) was first developed by Lewin (1948) and then this action research theoretically developed and defined as a practical approach to professional and social development. AR was originally used in Europe and the USA to decontextualize research instead of focusing

on survey and statical methods (Morales, 2016). In this study, we will depend on the identification analysis from tourism experts, tourism entrepreneurs and sampling group of young tourism officials in Luang Prabang.

In this action research is applied the concept of facilitation skill training as a tool for training model. The concept of facilitation appears to have emerged from the fields of counselling and student center-learning and also in some approaches of practice-learning such as facilitative learning approaches, student-center, problem-based and experimental learning. The origin and meaning of facilitation have been applied in different areas and disciplines, including education, counselling, management, and practices development and action research. Facilitation defines as a technique by which one person makes things easier for others and facilitation is achieved by an individual carrying out a specific role, called a facilitator, which aims to supports others and the facilitators are individuals with appropriate roles, skills and knowledge to contribute and helps individuals, teams, and organizations apply evidence into practices (Harvey, 2002). This kind of approach requires of a trainer/ facilitator skills and competencies that enable them engage effectively during training. Therefore 15 young tourism officials from tourism sectors will be participated in this action research.

<Table2> Research Model



The model was developed based on the perspectives of the selected tourism officials

3. Results

3.1 The current managerial competency of young tourism officials in Luang Prabang

The participatory action research questions were designed to understand the current managerial competency of the ten representative of young tourism officials in Luang Prabang. The Managerial competencies are currently identified as the most important to develop for young tourism officials are:

- (1) Service Leadership
- (2) Innovative Management
- (3) Governance
- (4) Financial Management,
- (5) Human Resource Management and Team Relationship.

The Participatory Managerial Competency Assessment (PMCA) was conducted with ten representative of young tourism officials. The participants scored their managerial competency and prioritize the competency they need to develop with the method of participatory action research. The finding of the study results that the low score of managerial competencies are the competency domain of Service leadership, Innovative Management, and Cooperate Governance within 3 score after PMCA and the result of the study also shows that the competency of human resource management and financial management are high with 4 score, they need to improve and develop as the second priority.

Therefore, the competency development for young tourism official leaders was designed to applied facilitation training method for training the service leadership as a pilot study of managerial competency development for young tourism officials. In addition, this study is also asked the participants the generic managerial training requests are Information Communication Technology-ICT Skills, Advance Foreign Languages for Communication, Events Management, Heritage and Tourism Law, and Digital Marketing.

The lowest score of the managerial competency in the domain of Service Leadership is professional and Technology competency of tourism and hospitality management, followed by the lowest score of the domain of Governance Competency is Philosophy of Marxism and

legislation related to cultural heritage and tourism administration.

The requirement of higher management official leaders of Lao PDR has to complete at least 45 Day-Course of Governance, including an Introduction to Administration, Public Administration, Political Economy, Philosophy of Marxism and Development History of Lao PDR (Luang Prabang Governance School, 2022).

Bases on the interview the Leadership Competency Development at the moment is a form of Governance Study or it is known as Political and Governance study, it is compulsory for the officials leaders to be trained and requirement of the Governance Training has to be screen by the head of Personal Organization and approved by the higher management committees of each department to ensure he/she could be the future leader of the organizations. This political and Governance Course is only school of Political and Public Administrative Study could operate this certain training.

The integrating of Service Leadership and Public Administration Study could be recommended to offer an opportunity for the young officials to understand the political system and related policies and law to ensure they understand the policy for their work implication.

The lowest score of the competency testing of the components of the Governance is the Philosophy of Marxism with average of 2.00. The Marxism ideology is the roadmap of socio-economic development strategy for all organizations, in which all economic activities have to be ensure for sustainable development to minimize the gap of gender inequality, rich and poor, urban and rural villages, educated and uneducated and environmental responsibility of the people in the country.

Followed by the level of the Law competency of the selected representative young officials in Luang Prabang. The score of tourism law and legislation is high since they are familiar with them and implement for their daily work.

However, Heritage Convention and regulation is requested to train and they are not clear when implanting construction hospitality facilities and building in the World Heritage site and also it is very important to design the advertisement and signs in a correct manners

bases on the heritage regulation for all activities when implementing works in a heritage zone.

The highest core in the component of the Governance is the Lao History with 4.5 score. The key informants confirm that Lao History is very important competency for tourism officials to develop tourism products and activities as well as to develop the tourism resources in professionally. The score is quite high in comparing other components of Governance, since the tourism officials have to learn and develop their competency of Lao History. It is also would be good to organize workshop to interpret the history for tourism in an innovative strategy for tourist satisfaction and help publication Lao History correctly. The components of the Governance Competency base on the reviewed as follows:

No Governance Competency

- 1 Lao History
- 2 Philosophy of Marxism competency
- 3 Tourism Law competency
- 4 Public Administration competency
- 5 Heritage Law and Regulation

3.2 The result of the pilot study of training workshop on Service Leadership

Based on the objective 1 of identification of the managerial competency assessment and the needs of the young tourism officials of Luang Prabang. The Service leadership was selected as a priority topic for training in order to test the participatory action research of competency development with training method of facilitation training in which the trainers play their role as facilitators in preparing activities, materials games and Medias; and the participants play their roles actively. The Service Leadership course is prioritized by the participants when the first interview for training contents identification, then it was developed in this pilot study.

This Service Leadership concept was originally introduced by Mark Testa and Lori Spe (2012), the components of Service Leadership should be considered Business Planning, people Management, and Self-Development and in the three components of the Service Leadership are included: responsibility or ownership, professional, inspire others, self-Development and adaptation, communication effectively, time management, positive person, creating organizational value, focuses on result orientation, skills of coaching and training,

changing management, and having world wide networks. After the pilot training workshop of Service Leadership presented that innovative management and Governance Competency is also needed for Leadership Competency Development as followed the Table 2.1

The positive change in this pilot study represents the knowledge of managerial competency of the participants from self-assessment. The highest positive change of the facilitation training of the service leadership is highlighted that is responsibility and executes of the works with + 2.1 and creating cultural values of the organization with positive change of +2. It would be better to apply coaching method after training and interview their co-workers, supervisors and their pupils to assess the improvement of the managerial competency of the participants after training.

3.3 A guideline of the Managerial competency program for young tourism officials

Managerial Competency Development is very important in Human Resource Development Department in both public and private organizations. One of the role of the Department of Information, Culture and Tourism (DOICT) of Luang Prabang is to develop Capacity of human resources in tourism sector to be able to handle hospitality and tourism growth (DOICT, 2020).

Therefore, related Departments in Lao PDR has to consider in integrating and creating ecosystem of competency development in the workplace for promoting learning organizations. In the new Business environment change and working environment of tourism administration in Lao PDR is also changed, therefore, competency development of government officials, and Business sectors also need to train and retrain their staff in Lao PDR (Mateo and Sanusi, 2021).

Leadership Competency is the most important managerial competency for the official leaders for both public and private organizations. The participants request to include Governance Competency and Innovative Management into the components of Service Leadership training. The Governance Competency components include (1) Lao History, (2) Philosophy of Marxism, (3) Administrative Law, (4) Public Administration; (5) and related legislations and Laws, including Business Law, Tourism Law

and World Heritage Law. From the Interview of competency needs for training resulted that Innovative Management is also very important for the modern organization since Luang Prabang was the first city that Lao PDR promoted to conduct a pilot project of Smart Tourism (Xaydung, 2021), the smart city components should develop the system into Smart ticketing, Smart-security services, Improved transport services, Virtual reality and Linguistic services. Therefore, the components of Innovative Management Competency is included Innovative Services, Innovative Technology and Network Competency.

4. Discussion

The finding of the first objective is to identify the components of the Managerial Competency of the young tourism officials. The most important components of the managerial competency identified by the representative of the young tourism officials are Service Leadership, Innovative Management, Governance and other related tourism management, including Human Resource Management, Financial Management, and IT Skills to adapt to the current development of tourism. The finding shows that it is very important to build innovative managerial competency for young tourism officials. The strong commitment and social characteristics in working operation plays a significant for successful in the new century. Phungphol et al. (2019) defined that we need some kinds of intellectual competency such as innovative competency; competence of potential change leader, team building and creative thinking; effective network construction with negotiation skills; creative risk management and ethical proactive business and creative marketing.

Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Laos' top tourist destination, faces exciting challenges in sustaining its tourism development while preserving its cultural heritage. To meet these challenges, investing in the managerial competency of young tourism officials is crucial. This discussion explores the key areas of competency development necessary for young tourism officials in Luang Prabang, drawing upon relevant research and best practices. Young officials need the ability to analyze tourism trends, formulate effective development strategies, and adapt to changing

market demands. Understanding Luang Prabang's unique tourism niche and developing strategies that promote responsible and sustainable tourism practices are essential (Jamal & Budruk, 2017; Weaver, 2011). Effective leadership skills are crucial for motivating and managing tourism teams, collaborating with stakeholders, and fostering community engagement. Strong communication skills are necessary for interacting with diverse audiences, building trust, and promoting Luang Prabang's tourism offerings (Pearce & Moscardo, 2019; Getz & Carruthers, 2011). Young officials need to understand tourism marketing principles, leverage digital platforms, and develop promotional campaigns that attract responsible tourists while protecting the local culture and environment. Knowledge of destination management principles is essential for managing visitor flows, ensuring infrastructure development aligns with sustainability goals, and protecting sensitive cultural sites. References: Kotler et al. (2020), Fennell (2014). Understanding tourism economics, budgeting effectively, and exploring innovative financing mechanisms are crucial for young officials. This includes attracting responsible investments, managing tourism revenues sustainably, and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits within the community. References: Dwyer et al. (2017), Lepp & Hall (2014). Young officials must possess a deep understanding of Luang Prabang's rich cultural heritage and traditions. This involves respecting local customs, promoting cultural sensitivity among tourists, and developing strategies for sustainable heritage management. References: Smith & Watson (2017), Timothy & Boyd (2003).

5. Conclusion

The Pilot study of Service Leadership Training was conducted to implicate the Managerial Competency Development Model for young tourism officials after identifying the components. The Service Leadership is the most significant program to develop and improve the managerial competency of the young tourism officials. However, the Change Management or Innovative Management Competency and Governance Competency are requested to include into Service Leadership when operating training. In addition, experienced trainers, training methods and training facilities are

matters for the effective competency development. Therefore, in this action research is applied the concept of facilitation skill training as a tool for training model, the facilitation technique has been applied in different areas and disciplines, including education, counselling, management, and practices development and action research, in which makes things easier for others by carrying out a specific role, called a facilitator, which aims to supports others and the facilitators are individuals with appropriate roles, skills and knowledge to contribute and helps individuals, teams, and organizations apply evidence into practices.

6. Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial organization regarding the material discussed in the manuscript.

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Table 2.1 The Component of Managerial Competency of Service Leadership

The Component of Managerial Competency		Pre-test Score	Post-Test Score	Change Score
1. Service Leadership Competencies				
No.	Indicator			
1	Accountability: takes ownership, executes and follows through on promises and responsibilities	2.6	4.7	+2.1
2	Professionalism: Role models behaviors and demeanor consistent with company values)	2.9	4.1	+1.2
3	Inspiration: Inspires others to do the best work	2	3.4	+1.4
4	Self-development: Having learn skills, adapt and improve oneself	2.8	3.8	+1
5	Communication: listens and communicates openly and effectively	2.3	3.6	+1.3
6	Time management	2	3.4	+1.4
7	Positive person: passionate, and optimistic approach	3.3	4.2	+0.9

8	Creating organizational values	2.3	4.3	+2
9	Focuses on achieving high expectations and getting things done	2.8	4.2	+1.4
10	Coaching and supporting continuous learning)	2.6	4.1	+1.5
11	Change management: Adapts easily and apply technology to innovate service leadership	2.5	4.3	+1.8
12	Networked: Foster relationships inside and outside the organization)	2.2	3.7	+1.5
13	Governance and Policy: History, Politics and Law	2.1	3.8	+1.4

+ Means the positive changes from the competency development