

A strategic framework for analysing employability skills deficits in rural hospitality and tourism destinations

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ABSTRACT

Recently, businesses are shifting towards service economy which is the traditional operational base for the hospitality and tourism industry. Globally, the experience economy is growing but there are very few talents to provide the expected “wow” experience to guests. Therefore, the aims of this paper are from two dimensions: to identify the employability skills deficits in rural hospitality and tourism (RHT), and to develop a framework for employability skills in (RHT) destinations. A critical review of the extant literature on human resource management, employability skills, competencies in hospitality and tourism, meetings, incentive, convention and exhibition were conducted and content analysed. Findings indicate there are 14 employability skills deficits in RHT, and also identified the skills valued most by employers in the hospitality and tourism sector. Contributions to the existing knowledge include the development of a framework for RHT destinations. Implications for the managerial practice and host community are discussed further.

1. Introduction

In recent years, businesses are shifting towards service economy which is the traditional operational base for the hospitality and tourism industry. According to Pine II and Gilmore (1998, p. 97), “as goods and services become commoditized, the customer experiences that companies create will matter most”. Basically, the hospitality and tourism industry is an experience economy with ‘four realms of an experience – entertainment, educational, esthetic and escapist’ (Pine II & Gilmore, 1998, p. 102). A review of extant literature revealed that employability skills especially on hard skills and soft skills have been documented (Clark, 1993; Wellington, 2005), and soft skills competencies required by the hospitality practitioners considered indispensable by the academic researchers has been well investigated (Weber, Crawford, Lee, & Dennison, 2013).

The concern of most rural hospitality and tourism destinations is to increase the number of tourist arrivals, receipts and repeat visits by previous guests and tourists (Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore, 2013), and to develop a high yield tourist destination (Dwyer et al., 2006; Northcote & Macbeth, 2006). To achieve these goals, most rural hospitality and tourism destination management and marketing organisations (DMMOs) have developed different products, marketing and branding strategies (Tourism Malaysia, 2012). Today, the experience economy is witnessing global growth but there are very few talents to ‘identify the key drivers of the visitors’ experience’ (Ford, Sturman, & Heaton, 2012, p.477). In other words, the rural hospitality and tourism

operators must seek to provide both the basic or expected and “wow” experience to the guests (visitors and tourists) alike (Ford et al., 2012). In order to identify what the visitors want and satisfy their basic needs to create a “wow” visitors’ experience it is important to employ ‘the right people for the job’ (Ford et al., 2012). Surprisingly, the identification of employability skills needed in the rural hospitality and tourism (RHT) destinations have received minimal academic and practitioner attention. In this regard, the key element to meet the memorable experience sought by the guest or visitor in rural hospitality and tourism destinations is to identify these skills which are lacking in this segment of the hospitality and tourism sector. In particular, the aims of this paper are to: (i) identify and clarify the employability skills deficits in RHT and (ii) propose a framework for employability skills in rural hospitality and tourism destinations. In pursuit of the underlying purpose of this paper, a critical review of previous studies was conducted and asks one main question: What are the employability skills deficits (skills needs) in rural hospitality tourism destinations? The structure of this question is influenced by the fact that with the ‘growth of service economy, the type of employability skills required by the employers has also shifted.’ (Nickson, 2013, p.95).

2. Literature review

Generally speaking, research on human resource management, employees’ competencies, employees’ relations, compensation and employers’ skills requirements in different economic and business sectors

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have received academic researchers' and practitioners' attention over the years (Nickson, 2013). Specifically, these studies include tourism workforce (Baum, Kralj, Robinson, & Solnet, 2016); and exploring tourism labour (Ladkin, 2011). There are also extant literature on labour mobility into tourism (Szivas, Riley, & Airey, 2003); employability skills required by employers in Asia (Zaharim, Yusoff, Omar, Mohamed, & Muhamad, 2009); employability skills for Australian small and medium sized enterprises (McLeish, 2002); Malaysian graduates employability skills (Singh & Singh, 2008); soft skills versus hard business knowledge (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Researchers have also explored engineering employability skills needed by employers of labour in Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore (Singh & Singh, 2008). In view of the cut-throat global competition, graduates from the universities do not match the requirements of employers (Singh & Singh, 2008). Most graduates are lacking in both hard (technical knowledge) and soft (generic knowledge) skills that meet the business expectation (Khair, 2006). As a result, educational institutions in recent times have been facing pressure from the society especially the employers of labour to produce graduates with employability skills and not just the academic skills (Singh & Singh, 2008). These skills needed by the employers are termed as core, key, soft, transferable, employable and generic skills.

Therefore, it is necessary that educational institutions work closely with the employers to meet and equip their graduates with these skills for better job opportunity and business growth of their future employers. This view is consistent with Bailey and Mitchell (2006) that in an ever-changing and increasingly competitive business environment, employees with competencies (employability skills) which increase employers' return on investment will always be in high demand. In this regard and from the employers' view point "employability skills" seems to be "work readiness", in other words, possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and business understanding that will help the new employees to contribute to the organizational goals soon after being employed (Mason, Williams, & Crammer, 2006). This is also true in the hospitality and tourism industry.

2.1. Hospitality and tourism industry

Despite the level of technological development within the workplace, hospitality and tourism businesses are largely rely on the labour-intensive (Baum et al., 2016). Extant literature on human resources, workforce, employees' competencies and skills in relation to hospitality and tourism have predominantly focused on the hospitality (hotel) sector in urban, cities, resorts and iconic destinations. Baum et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review of workforce research in the hospitality and tourism literature of four top hospitality journals and four top tourism journals from (2005–2014) as measured by the Impact Factor in 2014. Further analyses revealed that these eight journals collectively published 6449 articles. Those articles related to workforce in hospitality and tourism research were reviewed as presented in Table 2 (Baum et al., 2016). Notably, none of these top journals is dedicated to studies that are specific to employability skills requirements in rural hospitality and tourism destinations.

Furthermore, a dedicated journal in this field, the *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism* had published series of articles on employment related issues and skills development as it affects hospitality (hotel) sector in general. These articles are featured within the soft skill competencies (Weber et al., 2013); skills needs of the tourism sector (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2006); employers' demand for personal transferable skills in graduates (Bennett, 2002); tourism and hospitality workforce planning (Bartlett, Johnson, & Schneider, 2016); employee perceptions of minimum wage in the hospitality industry (Joo-Ee, 2016); hospitality and tourism labour markets (Baum, 2008); hospitality employment issues in developing countries (Sobaih, 2015); the challenges of human resources in meeting, incentive, convention, and exhibition (MICE) industry (Sou & McCartney, 2015). Other studies include skills and training for the hospitality industry (Baum, 2002),

and human resources recruitment, selection and retention issues in the hospitality and tourism industry (Chan & Kuok, 2011). Surprisingly, this dedicated journal offers very limited studies especially on the employability skills requirements in the RHT destinations.

2.2. Skill and competency or competence

Skill and competency are synonymous terms. Based on literature it appears there is no general consensus on what could be regarded as the main difference between the two. However, for the purpose of this paper a brief description of these key terms are demonstrated. Skill is described as an ability coming from an individual acquired knowledge and practice to do a job well as demonstrated by action or behaviour due to training programmes or vocational instructions (Wickham, 2006). In other words, a skill is the ability to carry out a task successfully with pre-determined outcomes. Skills are needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the work place (Kantrowitz, 2005). According to Katz (1974), skills required by effective managers can be divided into human, technical, and conceptual skills. Lazear (2005) argues that in order to be successful in business, it is important that one must possess skills in a variety of areas.

On the other hand, 'competence or competency' has been described severally and often used interchangeably as skill, proficiency, prowess, expertise, capability, mastery, ability and knowledge. According to Le Deist and Winterton (2005, p. 27), opined "the concept of competence or competency - 'competence' generally refers to functional areas and 'competency' to behavioural areas but usage is inconsistent". Competency is the capacity to employ a set of related knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) needed to execute tasks or assignments. It should be noted that 'competence' is the ability of an employee to perform a task excellently as required. Sandwith (1993) posits that there are five dimensions of competency which can be adopted by organisations for management training. These competency domains include leadership, technical, administrative, conceptual/creative, and interpersonal. Over the years, previous studies show that entrepreneurial skills and competencies have been developed by scholars (Man, Lau, & Chan, 2002; Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2010; Phelan & Sharpley, 2012; Schallenkamp & Smith, 2008) as presented in Table 1. However, because of the aims of this study, the term employability skills will be adopted. This is presented in the next section.

2.3. Employability skills

There are different terms used to describe employability skills across the continents as revealed in literature. For example, expressions such as core competencies, basic skill, work skills, hard skills, generic skills, enabling skills, transferable skills, essential skills, soft skills, key skills, and personal skills (Department of Education Science and Training [DEST], 2006; Hiroyuki, 2004; Knight & Yorke, 2002). Descriptions of the terms "employability skills" have been well documented by many scholars (Weber et al., 2013; Wellington, 2005). Robinson (2000) describes employability skills as those basic skills and attributes necessary for securing, keeping and performing well at the work place.

According to Robinson (2000), employability skills can be viewed from three different categories: (a) basic academic skills – reading writing, science listening, verbal communication and mathematics, (b) higher-order thinking skills – problem solving, creative thinking, learning, decision making and reasoning, and (c) personal qualities – social skills, self-control, self-confidence, honesty and integrity. Likewise, the Department of Education (2006) posits that employability are the key skills and attributes or traits individual employees require to be gainfully employed and to perform effectively in the work place. Employability skills are important in all industries from entry level to the top management echelon and not just job specific (Singh & Singh, 2008). For example, Singapore Workforce Development Agency [WDA] (2006) developed ten generic employability skills that are applicable to

Table 1
Skills and competencies components.

Skills	Competencies components	Indicators or functional
Managerial skills	Business Human relation and relationship Organizing Commitment Strategic	Strategic orientation
		Business plan preparation
		Leadership skills
		Team work
		Communication
		Planning and organisation
		Networking
		Persuasiveness
		Ability to motivate others
		Negotiation
		Idea generation
		Recognise opportunity
		Environmental scanning
Entrepreneurial skills	Entrepreneurship Opportunity	Innovation
		Vision and judgment
		Accountability
		Reflection and self awareness
		Emotional coping
Personal maturity skills	Conceptual	Creativity
		Conceptual thinking
		Industry specific skill
		Operational and production skill
Technical skills	Knowledge	Financial and budgeting skills
		Legal skills
		Sales and marketing skills

Source: Adapted from Man et al., 2002; Schallenkamp & Smith, 2008; Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2010; Phelan and Sharpley (2012).

all industries as illustrated in Table 3. In particular, employability skills can be more elaborated from two distinct perspectives namely hard skills (or hard business knowledge) and soft skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Weber et al., 2013).

2.4. Soft skills and hard skills

In a recent study of one thousand job advertisements in human resource, marketing, finance and general management, it was found that each occupation category required specific skills (Bennett, 2002). Likewise, the hospitality and tourism sector seeks to engage those with “soft skills” (social and organizational skills) for front or heart of the house services and “hard skills” for back of the house operations. Soft skills are based on the competency domains identified by Sandwith (1993). For example, soft skills encompass conceptual/creative (human), leadership, and interpersonal dimensions. Hard skills correspond with both administrative and technical domains.

Soft skills are ‘the interpersonal human, people, or the behavioural skills required to apply technical skills and academic or knowledge skills in the work place’ (Kantrowitz, 2005; Weber et al., 2013, p. 314). For example, soft skill is when a front or heart of the house staff assists a guest to decide on a suitable room. Boyatzis (1982), and Stevens and Campion (1994) developed four groups of soft skills: (a) leadership/people/relationship skills; communication skills; (c) management/organisation; and (d) cognitive skills and knowledge. Similarly, based on the literature synthesis, Andrews and Higson (2008) identified the following soft skills to improve graduate employability. These include creativity and self-confidence, professionalism, good written and verbal communication skills, ICT skills, self and time management skills, interaction and team work, reliability and willingness to learn.

Hard skills developed in literature are known as constructs of identifying features and capabilities required to be a successful manager. Therefore, the term hard skills refer to the technical competency

to execute an assigned job. Hard skills are also described as “technical skills” which are usually accredited by qualifications after the completion of a set of study or an apprenticeship (Nickson, 2013). These skills require the acquisition of knowledge relevant to a particular field or professional discipline (Weber et al., 2013). In other words, hard skills are acquired through the course of instructions for a given period of time in a particular field, discipline or occupation. There are different skills propounded in the literature which are sometimes called workplace skills framework but in this study, it is described as framework for employability skills.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

In the period from January to December 2017, a review of previous studies on human resource management, employability skills, and workforce research that featured 570 articles from the top eight journals in hospitality and tourism from 2000 to 2017 were conducted. The top four hospitality journals are *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, and *the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*. Similarly, for the tourism field, the top four journals include *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *Tourism Management and the Journal of Travel Research*. The selection of these journals was based on the Impact Factor measured in 2014 (Baum et al., 2016), and relevance in the field (Camprubi & Coromina, 2016). Two specialized journals on human resources in hospitality and tourism, and vocational education and training were reviewed. These journals include *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism from the first published article in 2001 to 2007*, and *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* from 2001 to 2017.

In this period, these two dedicated journals collectively published 405 articles. Details of each article on skills and competencies were reviewed. This process produced samples of 200 articles that were relevant to this study. The 10 journal articles were identified and accessed through EBSCOHost, Google Scholar and Science Direct. These represent three of the largest online data bases and search engines (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Additional literature search was conducted utilizing the Web of Science (previously known as Web of Knowledge) which is regarded as a major data base (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Notably, Proquest and Scopus data bases were also utilized and these have been used previously in tourism related research (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017).

The journal articles were selected in the following three steps. First, the keywords “human resource”, “human resource management”, “personnel”, “staff”, “workforce” were used to search for human resource management related articles published in these 10 journals in hospitality and tourism. Second, the keywords “employability”, “skills”, “employability skills”, “soft skills”, “hard skills”, “soft and hard skills”, “technical skills”, and “theoretical skills” were utilized to broaden the scope of hospitality and tourism of the articles. The next step is the inclusion of all keywords itemized in the first two steps were searched and combined with key terms such as “tourism destination”, “hospitality industry”, “rural tourism”, “rural place”, “rural destination”, “rural tourism destination” purposely to identify related extant literature in these journals. In fulfilling extant literature selection criteria for the purpose of analysis in this study, book reviews, book chapters, abstracts, editor prefaces, internet columns, conference papers and reports, commentaries, newspapers, industry reports, government reports and editorial notes were excluded from the study. This is because of their limited contributions to the study of this nature (Jang & Park, 2011). Overall, a total of 403 relevant articles from 2000 to 2017 were considered from the database search for analysis as presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of journals review.

Focus/year	Journals	Relevant articles
2001–2017		
Human resources	Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism	250
Training	Journal of Vocational Education and Training	50
2000–2017		
Hospitality	International Journal of Hospitality Management	20
	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	12
	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	10
	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	8
Tourism	Tourism Management	18
	Annals of Tourism Research	16
	Journals of Travel Research	13
	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	6
	Total	403

Source: Author.

3.2. Data analysis

These articles were content analysed. Content analysis is widely utilized in social science research (Berg, 2009; Krippendorff, 2003) and it has been used on human communication, documents, photographs, videotapes and audiotapes (Berg, 2009). Over the years, content analysis has been used in tourism studies (Camprubi & Coromina, 2016; Hall & Valentin, 2005). Content analysis was also used to identify key terms from the related articles to the existing classified patterns expanding the patterns, selection of specific and contributing pattern are then grouped into sub-themes (Stepchenkova, Kirilenko, & Morrison, 2009). Content analysis has been used in similar hospitality and tourism research (Bennett, 2002; Sambhanthan & Good, 2013; Stepchenkova et al., 2009; Xiano & Smith, 2006).

Content analysis is suitable for handling multifaceted and large amounts of textual data in an inductive or deductive manner (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). An inductive approach is used where there exists inadequate previous knowledge; however, a deductive approach is used when the structure of analysis is operationalized based on the existing knowledge (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). In this study, a deductive approach was employed due to the researchers consideration to adapt the existing concept of human resource management in a new context especially employability skills in rural hospitality and tourism destinations. The data were analysed through summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This is because this study begins with keywords which were clearly mentioned prior and during data analysis. In particular, these key words were conceptualised from review of literature and findings from data analysis can be linked back to the aims of the study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A total of 477 keywords were found and presented in Table 3. Keywords were categorized by related topics in order to facilitate interpretation of findings.

In this study, 477 “keyword” counts were gathered and analysed. Similar keywords were classified and merged. The most frequently occurring keyword was “skills” (including employability skills, soft skills, hard skills, skills deficits, skills needs, technical and theoretical skills. This is followed by tourism (including rural tourism destination), human resource, training and development, hospitality and hotels, technical and vocational education (TVE) and ICT literacy, competency and competence. The keywords indicate that this study was basically on employability skills in rural hospitality and tourism destinations.

Table 3
Frequency of keywords in the journal papers.

Keywords	Frequency
Human resource, management, training and development	44
Skills	90
Employability skills	18
Soft skills	20
Hard skills	26
Theoretical and technical skills	17
Competency	14
Competence	6
Skills deficits	13
Skills needs	10
Tourism	
Hospitality and hotels	35
Rural tourism destination	25
Business knowledge and employees behaviour	29
Technical and vocational education, ICT literacy	30
Total	477

Source: Author.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Employability skills framework

Recruiting and selecting people to fill vacant positions in hospitality and tourism businesses irrespective of the size and location are an important element of human resource function (Baum, 2008). There are several employability skills and dimensions aptly described in the literature. Unfortunately, much hospitality and tourism work is often described as unskilled (Baum, 2002). This oversimplified has resulted in a large proportion of hiring unskilled staff who lack the required skills to provide memorable customer service experience. Findings indicate that employability skills framework would include personal attributes (or personal qualities and personal values) which employers regards as a characteristic of a good employee (Department of Education, 2006; McLeish, 2002; Robinson, 2000). Table 4 provides the employability skills framework.

4.2. Skills deficits (skills needs) in RHT

Findings show that different terms were used to describe skills deficits in the hospitality and tourism literature. For example, skills demand utilization, skills deficiencies (Thomas & Long, 2001); skills needs (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2006; Thomas & Long, 2001); skills gaps – employers perception of low skills among the existing staff to achieve business goals; and skills shortages- lack of skilled individuals in the labor market (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2006). Low incidence of basic skills was found to be a common barrier in the recruitment functions in the hospitality and tourism sector. This is due to the fact that jobs in this sector are often treated as a job that “anyone can do” and because “tourism is a low skill industry making use of cheap labour” (Thomas & Long, 2001, pp. 233, 238). Currently, most of the employees in this sector are not well trained and motivated to work which has resulted in skills deficits and mismatches in some instances. In Australia, “research undertaken by Deloitte Access Economics in 2010 found that, between 2012 and 2015, there will be demand for additional 56,676 tourism and hospitality employees”. Of this increase in employees required, it is estimated that there will be a shortfall of over 15,000 (Service Skills Australia, n.d., p.4).

Findings from recent studies indicate the importance of a skilled workforce to the success and development of hospitality and tourism destination competitiveness; however, soft skills are lacking among the job seekers (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2006). More importantly, findings also revealed that employers in hospitality and tourism organisations are seeking for people with soft skills to work in the front or heart-of-the-house operations, rather than the hard or technical skills (Nickson,

Table 4
Employability skills framework.

Sources	Employability skills	Essential elements or indicators
Robinson (2000) McLeish (2002)Department of Education (2006) WDA (2006) BOS-NSW (2013)	Communication - soft skill Team work - soft skill	Speaking, listening, writing, reading and negotiating effectively Works well with colleagues and customers, understands cultural sensitivity, Transfers well between personal work and team work
	Problem Solving –soft and hard skills Planning and organizing - soft skill	Evolves creative solutions, practical oriented Initiative in identifying problems and solving them Resourceful, makes decision, allocates people and other resources, manages self, time and work
	Learning, life long learning - soft and hard skills Self awareness, initiative and enterprise - soft skill	Open to new ideas and techniques, Invest time and effort in learning new skills Personal vision and goals Evaluates and monitors self performance Initiate a strategic vision and adapt to new situation
WDA (2006)	Technology - hard skill Global mindset, health and work place safety, workplace literacy and numeracy, initiative and enterprise Workplace-related life skills - soft and hard skills Emotional and aesthetic - soft skill	Basic computer operations, uses technology to seek, process and present information Globalization, safety and security consciousness, adaptation to in-house training, job rotation, business mindedness, multi-skills Self- confident, smart appearance, well presented, good attitude, neat and stylish, very friendly
Baum (2002) Nickson, Warhurst, and Dutton (2005) Nickson (2013, p.81–97) Baum (2002) Andrews & Higson (2008, p.414) Nickson (2013) Andrews & Higson (2008, p.413)	Technical and Hard- business knowledge Interpersonal soft business-related skills – soft skill	Course of study, accredited qualifications, apprenticeship, in-house and on the job training, business and technical knowledge Professionalism, reliability, good written and verbal communication, plan and think strategically, creativity and self-confidence, ICT skills, self-management and time management, willingness to learn and accept responsibility, team work
Robinson (2000) McLeish (2002) Department of Education (2006) BOS-NSW (2013)	Personal values, attributes and qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Loyalty ● Commitment ● Honesty and integrity ● Motivation and enthusiasm ● Positive presentation ● Adaptability ● Sense of humour ● Balance attitude to work and family life ● Responsible ● Punctuality and efficiency ● Self-directed and self-management ● Ability to handle tourists professionally ● Solving problems proactively
Zwane, Du Plessis, and Slabbert (2014)	Competence	

Source: Author - Developed for this study.

Table 5
Skills deficits (skills needs) in RHT destinations.

Skills deficits (skills needs in RHT)	Elements or indicators	Skills benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social and interpersonal ● Executing instructions ● Initiative and understanding visitor/guest needs ● Communication and language, history and story telling ● Motivation, teamwork, coaching and mentoring ● Technology, digital literacy, innovative and management of change ● Entrepreneurship and knowledge of community resources ● Planning, organizing and analytical 	Confidence, personal presentation, guest interaction Understanding policies and guidelines Proactive, dynamics and customer satisfaction Verbal communication and storytelling, understanding culture and norms, proficient in foreign language e.g. ability to English Working relationships and role model Technological changes, new work practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Repeat visitors ● Increase tourist arrivals ● Increase tourist receipts ● Visitors' memorable experience ● High yield tourist destination ● Succession planning ● Training and development ● Seeing H & T as a career ● Increase employment opportunity ● Quality service ● Good remuneration ● Motivation issue ● Sustainability ● Sense of community ● Satisfying visitors' needs ● Improve customers' loyalty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Management of crisis and problem-solving ● Time and self- management ● Learning and industry specific professional training and development ● Professional knowledge, occupation and technical skills ● Relationship management ● Emotional and aesthetic ● Competence 	Business oriented view point, delays in introducing new products or services Good organisation, strategic planning and ability to analyse events and industry trends Safety and security concern, service failure and recovery Timeliness and punctuality Training adaptation and application to job Customer staff service, chefs and cooks, house keepers, tour guides, guest house, lodge, homestay and longhouse manager, tour driver Hospitable and friendship with visitors Self presentation, the ability to either look good or sound right Handling customers professionally Proactive in solving problems	

Source: Author - Developed for this study.

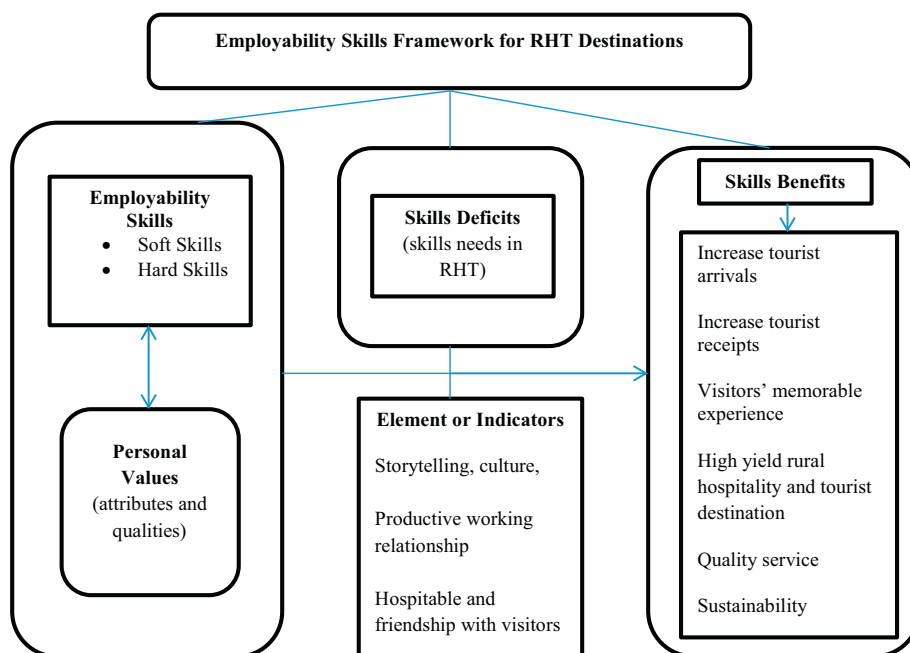


Fig. 1. Employability skills framework for Rural Hospitality and Tourism (RHT) destinations.

2013, p. 96), and those with hard skills (technical skills and business knowledge skills) are recruited to perform the back-of-the house operations. Table 5 presents skills deficits (or skills needs) in rural hospitality and tourism sector.

5. Implications, conclusion and future research

5.1. Implications

Notably, findings from the employability skills framework in Table 4 and skills deficits in Table 5 are conceptualised to construct a framework for employability skills in rural hospitality and tourism destinations as presented in Fig. 1. Findings from this paper have implications for the existing knowledge, managerial practice and respective rural hospitality and tourism destinations.

There are three main contributions to the theory from this study. First it has produced 14 employability skills deficits. Second it has identified the skills valued most by the employers in hospitality and tourism destinations (Chan & Kuok, 2011; Haven-Tang & Jones, 2006; Mayo & Thomas-Haysbert, 2005; Nickson, 2013). These skills are (a) communication skills (good verbal and listening skills); (b) relationship management skills (social, interpersonal and good human relations skills); (c) aesthetic skills (self-presentation, the ability to either look good or sound right), and (d) motivation skills (ability to manage and motivate subordinates). The third theoretical implication is the construction of a framework for employability skills in RHT destinations.

From the managerial implications view point, rural hospitality and tourism businesses should ensure that training is given a priority so that RHT employees' skills can be developed. Findings revealed that there exists undervaluing of employees' skills and lack of information of the benefits of training (Thomas & Long, 2001); it is also well documented that the reputation of hospitality and tourism industry in terms of training and career advancement is reputedly poor (Lashley, 2009); and in particular, most hospitality employers do not invest in the skills and training development of their staff (Sobaih, 2015). This is because most of the hospitality and tourism businesses (including rural destinations) are owned and managed by micro and small-sized enterprises (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2006; McLeish, 2002; Thomas & Long, 2001). This paper suggests that RHT business organisations and policy makers should

identify the training and skills needs of the hospitality and tourism employees in rural destinations and invest in them so that they can perform very well. These views are corroborated by Haven-Tang and Jones (2006) that tourism employers should be encouraged that investment in training and development will provide a competitive advantage and that employees' skill development will improve the quality of tourism product and service offered to the visitors in the long run.

For the host community, the implication is that local residents should be encouraged to take up appointments in the RHT businesses. This will help in reducing the skills deficits when members of the community are gainfully employed because their employability skills will be improved, which eventually benefits the industry.

5.2. Conclusions and future research

This paper suggests that the future research should involve empirical data collection from the relevant stakeholders in different rural destinations, compare with the issues raised and validate the findings from this paper. This is important because to the best of the author's knowledge empirical studies on the employability deficits in RHT destinations is lacking in the literature. In conclusion, this study has contributed to the existing knowledge on human resources management and employability skills requirements in hospitality and tourism industry as one of the highly competitive economic sectors. The key success factors show that employees must possess both soft skills and hard skills in order to provide visitors with satisfying and memorable experiences. To sum up, provision of an excellent service might result in repeat visits (Chan & Kuok, 2011), positive word of mouth to friends and relatives, extending length of stay, high yield rural destination (Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore, 2013), and increase in tourist arrivals and tourist receipts.

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