Job Competency Analyses of Entry-Level

Resort and Commercial Recreation Professionals

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Abstract

This study was initiated by the Resort and Commercial Recreation

Association (RCRA) in an attempt to determine the feasibility of a national

certification program for resort and commercial recreation employees. Current

national recreation related certification programs do not adequately address the

needs of current commercial recreation employers (Gladwell & Beeler, 1993). A

basic question of the job competency analysis were if a basic "core" of entry-level

job competencies existed, and if it did could be identified, across the wide

spectrum of resort and commercial recreation professional entry-level positions.

The objectives of this study were to identify entry-level job competencies

for professional members of RCRA; then, rank order the entry-level job

competencies, as determined by a Delphi group, according to their importance to

entry-level job performance. The Delphi group consisted of RCRA members that

represented entry-level, middle management and upper management.

Entry-level job competencies were developed through a two-phase

research design. First, entry-level job descriptions were collected from RCRA

organizations (N=89) and analyzed using Word Cruncher[TM], a computerized

content analysis program. Lists of 103 job qualifications were identified. Next,

the Delphi Technique was initiated to rank-order the job competencies identified in

the WordCruncher[TM] content analysis. The results from the Delphi study, after

three rounds, identified nine major competency domains with a total of 52 specific entry-level job competencies.

The General Accounting Office (1993a) predicts that skill standards and certification would "help employers identify qualified workers, save money on applicant screening, aid in recruitment and improve public perceptions of firms."

Keywords: Job competency analysis, job task analysis, commercial recreation, resort recreation

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Job Competency Analyses of Entry-Level Resort and Commercial Recreation

Professionals

This study was initiated by the Resort and Commercial Recreation Association (RCRA) in an attempt to determine the feasibility of a national certification program for resort and commercial recreation employees. Current national recreation related certification programs do not adequately address the needs of current commercial recreation employers (Gladwell & Beeler, 1993). A basic question of the job competency analysis were if a basic "core" of entry-level job competencies existed, and if it did could be identified, across the wide spectrum of resort and commercial recreation professional entry-level positions.

Due to the projected growth of 10% to 20% in the resort and commercial recreation field through the year 2005 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1996), a more thorough and systematic understanding of the services and entry-level job competencies required in this professional field would be beneficial. Employers, individuals currently working in the field; students wishing to enter the field; and professional associations representing individuals and businesses in resort and commercial recreation would benefit from this type of information. The trend toward increased reliance on competency recognition by consumers, business and government entities

creates a demand on professional associations to establish standards of

professional performance (Hamm & Early, 1994).

Even though many of the entry-level jobs in resort and commercial

recreation organizations are part-time and low paying. A potentially

significant benefit of a national certification program would be the

establishment of minimum employment performance standards. These

minimum standards would represent a higher level of performance than is

currently recognized by employing organizations. A higher standard would

also justify higher wages based on demonstrated performance and help

clarify potential career paths.

A survey of national trade and professional associations by Insight

Research Center Inc. (1995), indicated that over 77% of those organizations

surveyed were actively engaged in testing for some form of certification.

Over 62% of the organizations were planning to implement a new

certification program within the next two years. Bailey and Merritt (1995)

stated "Professional organizations are struggling with some of the same

problems that have confronted those developing systems for front-line

workers. The overall objective is to develop approaches to understanding

skills in reasonably broad clusters of jobs or occupations." (p.6). Within the

recreation and leisure services profession, many organizations have

conducted job task or job competency research including: American Society

of Association Executives; Convention Liaison Council; Club Managers

Association of America; Educational Institute of the American Hotel & Motel

Association; Institute of Certified Travel Agents; International Special Events

Society; Meeting Planners International; National Employee and Recreational

Services Association; National Intramural and Recreational Sports

Association; National Recreation and Park Association; National Therapeutic

Recreation Society; National Tour Association and US Water Fitness

Association. The number of organizations conducting job task analyses

research indicates the multiplicity of subgroups believing they require

specialized knowledge and training in the recreation and leisure services

industry. A fundamental question of this research consisted of attempting to

identify a "core" of competencies, which span the spectrum of resort and

commercial recreation businesses.

A "job task" is defined as "a discrete, identifiable and meaningful unit

of work that is carried out by a job-holder for a specific purpose leading to a

specific outcome. The performance of a task requires the application of a

skill" (CHRIE, 1994, p.5).

A "competency" is defined as "the ability to perform activities within

an occupation to a set standard. It may incorporate the ability to apply the

relevant skills and knowledge to a new situation within the occupational area as well as generic skills" (ibid.). A comparison between the entry-level job tasks for the municipal recreation sector by the NRPA and the resort and commercial recreation field may identify common "core" competencies of an "ideal" entry-level recreation professional.

The most common job analysis techniques of DACUM and V-TECS reinforce narrowly defined skill components. The DACUM process involves seven procedural steps: 1) committee orientation to the DACUM process; 2) occupation/job review to arrive at a mutually agreeable working title(s) for jobs and specialization areas; 3) identification of duties or general functional areas or responsibility under which tasks will fit; 4) identification of specific tasks performed in each duty area; 5) review and refinement of task and duty statements; 6) identification of related requirements such as general knowledge and skills, tools and equipment, supplies and materials used, worker traits and attitudes, and future occupational trends/concern; and 7) task analysis to determine specific steps, performance standards and related requirements. Information from the task analysis is incorporated into modules, learning guides, and other instructional materials (Norton, 1993). V-TECS is a similar to DACUM in that they both focus on dissecting work-based activities into component parts, which reinforces a narrow conceptualization of workers roles within an organization (Norton, 1993).

The future high-performance workplace will require workers with more broadly, less well-defined job descriptions (Bailey & Merritt, 1995). This study attempts to avoid a narrow skills model with specific tasks being analyzed by incorporating a wide range of job descriptions into the analysis and creating a "core" of entry-level competencies. These core competencies would represent a professional cross-trained "generalist" worker with knowledge and skills a variety of resort and commercial recreation areas.

Industry-based skill standards or job competencies and certification have become a significant national issue, driven by concerns over educational quality and the need for a more competitive and highly skilled work force. This national concern is demonstrated by The Goals 2000: Educate America Act passed by the United States Congress in 1994. Included in this law is educational reform and a call for the creation of a private sector national skills standards board to endorse voluntary national skill standards in several broad occupational groups (Council on Hotel, Restaurant Institutional Education (CHRIE), 1995). A conviction by Bailey & Merritt (1995), that technology and market changes have resulted in significant alteration in the types of skills and behaviors needed by workers on the job has created a national skills standards movement. Industry-based skill standards are a crucial component of that movement. Gladwell & Beeler (1993) summed up the need for job task analyses in the resort and commercial recreation, when they

discussed the lack of meaning to commercial recreation employers of the National Recreation and Parks Association certification program.

In conducting a competency analysis of recreational sports personnel, Jamieson (1980) stated "a profession is recognized in part by the body of knowledge it relates and in part by the appropriate standards that evolve to support this knowledge base" (p. 1). Identifying entry-level job competencies would determine detailed information about what job tasks entry-level professional resort and commercial recreation personnel perform and what specific knowledge, skills and abilities are necessary to deliver competent professional services. Once identified, these competencies may provide a basis of core information for on-going professional activities, such as in-service training, certification and curriculum development. Stumbo (1986) acknowledged that "a concrete and systematic body of knowledge seems to be the primary building block of all professions" (p. 16).

One of many questions raised by William Niepoth (1993) is whether professionalism fosters fragmented, specialized service? The need for more research identifying what, if any, common job competencies exist between perceived "specialization" such as the Certified Leisure Professional, Therapeutic Recreation Specialist and the Certified Sports Specialist within the profession could clarify that question. Additional research into the exact knowledge, skills

and abilities of entry-level professionals within the resort and commercial recreation field may identify areas of possible "core competencies" which are common to all areas of recreation and leisure services or recognize this area as professionally "specialized."

Identifying entry-level resort recreation job competencies would ideally identify commonalties between other national certification programs, such as NRPA, yet distinguish certain competencies that are unique in the resort and commercial recreation field. It seems obvious that with the number of organizations and associations focusing on job competencies it will be necessary to find a common "core" from those in the recreation and leisure services field. This study addresses that process.

Once these "core" competencies can be identified, universal recreation and leisure service standards can be established. Universal standards would enhance professional recognition and offer broader appeal to employers.

Methods

Phase One

All of the 89 RCRA member properties were contacted by mail in February, 1995. The contact letter requested the Recreation Director, Human Resources Director or General Manager provide "entry-level" resort and

commercial recreation job descriptions used by their organization. We defined

entry-level positions as "full-time, permanent recreation staff positions."

Collection of entry-level professional job descriptions concluded in May, 1995.

Qualitative Data Analysis Procedure

All textual material related to job responsibilities, duties, and qualifications

were scanned into a word processor file prior to analysis using WordCruncher[TM]

(1992), a text indexing and retrieval software program (Patton, 1990; Tesch,

1990; Henderson, 1991; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne & Peskin, 1992). In

indexing the text file, WordCruncher[TM] generated an alphabetized printout of all

words in the text along with a frequency count for each. This was the first step in

identifying patterns in the narrative data. A 'stop list' of words was created to keep

the word inventory free of insignificant but highly frequent words (e.g. the, and,

for, of). How frequently certain words or phrases occur in a text and the patterns

that emerge from the meanings of those words can provide clues for designating

categories (Patton, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Tesch, 1990).

WordCruncher[TM] allows the user to search for all occurrences of related

words from the indexed list, including keywords in context (KWIC), permitting the

user to extract specific words together with text that precedes or follows the

specified word, or the word itself can be the center of the text. The KWIC method

facilitates determining the meaning and usage of the word within the context of the

original response. Preliminary categories emerge as a result of grouping words

and phrases, which appear to have similar meaning. Researchers (Tesch, 1990;

Henderson, 1991; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) suggest using the constant

comparative technique first described by Glaser & Strauss (1967) which calls for

constantly evaluating the internal consistency of each category as well as

constantly comparing across different categories in order to establish and maintain

"unmistakable" category boundaries. That is, the data, which belongs to certain

categories, should hold together in some meaningful way and there should be clear

differences between categories. When all of the data are justifiably categorized

and all of the categories have been saturated (e.g. no new categories are

discovered) the first stage of category identification is complete.

Data was then analyzed for content; that is, many words in the text can be

classified into fewer categories of similar content (Stainback & Stainback, 1988;

Strauss & Corbin, 1990) Tesch, 1990). Words and phrases were assigned to

categories on the basis of their frequency within the text and on their similar

contextual meanings. A thesaurus was used to help identify synonyms but it was

also necessary to review the words in context before assigning them to appropriate

categories.

Analysis and Evaluation

Because many of the job descriptions mentioned more than one job requirement or qualification, the unit of analysis was job task, not job description. The job task consisted of single words, phrases or even sentences; the key to identifying a job task was the meaning that emerged from the word or words. The total number of responses was used to obtain relative frequencies. While qualitative researchers warn that frequencies may not necessarily be a indication of importance and that what is important is the analysis of the meaning associated with the text (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Tesch, 1990; Weber, 1990) frequencies were used to establish rank ordered categories for convenience. A total of 103 entry-level job competencies were generated using the WordCruncher^{TM} program

Phase Two

In phase two, a Delphi Technique was established. A Delphi process was included in the research methodology to evaluate each job competency, prioritize the list generated in phase one, and identify the "core" job competencies representative of those used for an entry-level resort and commercial recreation position.

The Delphi Technique is a group process using written responses to aggregate the judgments of a number of individuals to improve the quality of decision making (Delbecq, et al., 1975). It is essentially an iterative series of questionnaires, with each subsequent questionnaire containing information

gathered from those preceding it. The process ends when consensus is reached or sufficient information has been exchanged (Dalkey, 1967).

The technique is valuable for obtaining judgments from experts who are geographically isolated (Delbecq, et al., 1975). To qualify for the Delphi group, individuals had to be currently working in a resort or commercial recreation setting, providing direct services to guests, and have held that position for at least five years; or, working in a resort or commercial recreation setting providing management services for at least the past five years; and the individual must have been able to make a one year commitment to the study. Diversity of experience and responsibilities were sought for the Delphi panelists in an attempt to gain a balanced response. A panel of all upper management may have a unique perspective not necessarily shared by entry-level or mid-management personnel. The optimum size for a Delphi group should not exceed thirty (Delbecq, et al., 1975). A random sample of RCRA members (n=21) that met the aforementioned criteria, were invited to serve on the Delphi panel.

<u>Survey Design</u>

The 103 entry-level job competencies generated from the initial phase of this study formed the basis for the first Delphi questionnaire. Panelists were also given the opportunity to add new competencies to the list; however, no new competencies were added. Subsequent questionnaires were based on the responses

to the preceding questionnaire. The key to the Delphi process is developing a clear understanding from the participants of exactly what information is desired. To this end the Delphi question was, "What are the most important job tasks or competencies performed by entry-level resort and commercial recreation professionals?" Two additional questionnaires were developed in order to reach a general consensus of the job competencies.

Results

A total of 74 usable job descriptions were received from 43 member properties (N=89), for an overall response rate of 58%. Subjects responded by sending one to three job descriptions for each property. Selected examples of job titles identified as entry-level were: Activities Leader; Assistant Marina Manager; Camp Supervisor; Assistant Recreation Coordinator; Special Events Coordinator; Stable Coordinator; Tennis Center Supervisor; Assistant Golf Manager; Assistant Recreation Director; Pool Manager; and Child's Program Supervisor.

The job descriptions were entered into WordCruncher™ for analysis. The total number of all responses to obtain relative frequencies divided the numbers of responses for each category. The results are reported by descriptive category labels in percentage of responses for each category (this data is available from the author upon request).

Using the keywords in context (KWIC) method, eleven preliminary job task domains or categories were identified in Table 1. Data from the WordCruncher™ program was used to determine the content of the first Delphi questionnaire. The 103 specific job task competencies identified in the WordCruncher™ program were initially placed in one of eleven domains or categories. These initial domains were pulled from the WordCruncher™ program analysis, with the expectation that they would be evaluated in the first Delphi group review for validity.

A Delphi group (Phase Two) was included in this research to attempt to reduce the 103 job competencies to a universal "core" of competencies, which would be representative of the broader resort and commercial recreation field. The Delphi panel was composed of RCRA "Professional" members currently working in the resort and commercial recreation field. The job titles of the members ranged from Recreation Assistant to Recreation Directors. The 21 professional members of the Delphi panel operated from August to November 1995.

Insert Table 1 about here

Each member of the Delphi panel were requested to; prioritize the domains; and assign and rank job task items by order of importance to a domain.

The data for the initial Delphi round consisted of the results from the WordCruncher^{TM} analyses of 11 domains or categories and 103 specific job task competencies. The first Delphi round reduced the initial categories from 11 to eight by eliminating Certifications, Education and Physical Competencies as major domains. The specific job tasks were reduced from the initial 103 to 59. The second Delphi round increased the categories from eight to nine by dividing the Programming/Leadership domain into separate categories. Specific job tasks were reduced from 59 to 52. After the third round a consensus was reached for each of the job task domains and the specific job competencies associated with each domain (Table 2).

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Insert Table 2 about here

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These entry-level job competencies represent the minimum knowledge, skills and abilities expected for professional standards in RCRA member properties. It is important to note the most important domain is communication and skills.

Discussion

The study identified and prioritized entry-level knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for professional practice in RCRA member resort and commercial recreation organizations. It may also provide beneficial information for pre-professional and professional development, certification and curricular design. The use of job descriptions to identify basic job competencies for entry-level resort and commercial recreation professionals and the Delphi panel which prioritized them, creates a strong content validation for the job competencies identified for entry-level positions in RCRA member properties.

The job competencies identified in the study range from the simplistic, ability to answer telephone to the more complex, knowledge of recreation programming. The diversity of the domains indicates an expectation of broad-based commercial recreation knowledge, skills and abilities for entry-level professionals. Interpersonal skills are emphasized in the majority of the domains with technical skills emerging in the promotion and publicity, maintenance, and retail operation domains.

Content validation is a critical element of norm-referencing methodology, which links the identified knowledge base to actual professional practice. "The norm-referencing approach is traditionally selected for determining the professional knowledge base as used in pre-service educational and professional certification programs" (Stumbo, 1986, p. 17). Content validation may be used to construct

tests and measurements which derive specifics from an overall domain or universe (Stumbo, 1986). This study provides information that may be useful in the development of an entry-level certification examination for the resort and commercial recreation profession.

William Niepoth (1993) raises the question "Does professionalism foster fragmented, specialized service?" This study responds to Neipoth's question by identifying common job competencies that exist between the various recreation specialization's. The nine content domains from this study have similarities to the National Recreation and Parks Association Certified Leisure Professional (CLP) certification program (Table 3). The similarities in the major domains or categories of job competencies supports a "universal core" of entry level knowledge irregardless of specialization's. The identifiable "universal core" competencies between NRPA and RCRA include Management, Programming and Facility Maintenance.

Insert Table 3 about here

The notable similarities and differences between the NRPA and RCRA competencies indicate an emphasis in a particular competency area over another. Differences include the absence from the NRPA competencies of the RCRA Communication, Guest Services, Leadership, Regulations, Rules and Standards and Retail Operation categories. Guest Services emphasizes the importance of increasing fiscal pressures and accountability for benefits- based management in municipal park and recreation agencies. Guest Service training may offer opportunities for new income sources and increased participant satisfaction. One of these revenue sources is likely to be a retail operation. If not operated by a park and recreation agency, it would improve their employees' working knowledge of concessionaire operations. Another example is the inclusion of Public Relations and Marketing in the Leisure Services Management NRPA domain. This study indicates a greater emphasis placed by RCRA members on these competencies and establishes it as a separate category called Promotion and Publicity. Another difference is the emphasis placed on Communication and Leadership by RCRA, which is identified as a separate category and is not as discrete in the NRPA competencies.

In contrast, the inclusion of the NRPA Therapeutic Recreation domain indicates the importance of these competencies to the Association and its members. The NRPA Therapeutic Recreation domain includes the ability to assess

individuals with special needs and adapt programs equipment and facilities for their use. This would be an important competency area for RCRA members. The omission of this domain or category, in any form, of the RCRA job competency list raises strong concern about the interest or ability of the RCRA members to respond to individuals with special needs.

Ultimately, by expanding the knowledge of professional job tasks and competencies, the resort and commercial recreation profession and consumers will benefit. Job competencies will strengthen the educational system and become a critical element of reform efforts in the workplace.

Implications for Practice

The recognition of job competencies for an occupational field generally leads to certification programs. The development of professional certifications would define curricula development for students and focus on the specific skills needed in the modern workplace. The U.S. educational system has traditionally been based on the dichotomy of theoretical from practical and academic from vocational. The inclusion of job competencies or certification requirements in educational reform would challenge that duality. Professional personnel are expected to perform broader, more open-ended activities identified through job competencies. Certification cannot usually be separated from the nature of the

professional training. Professionals are uniquely poised to set standards since they have the knowledge necessary to do so. Professionals working in the field have demonstrated the necessary personal and professional competencies when recognized by their peers (Hammersley & Rivers, 1992; Hammersley & Kastrinos, 1993). The recognition of job competencies or skills brings the professional and the educator into a mutually beneficial partnership, which creates a stronger professional recognition and higher consumer confidence.

Suggestions for Further Research

Additional research would be beneficial comparing other recreation and leisure services' organization's certification programs. The "universal core competencies" concept could be evaluated further. Would a "universal core" allow the integration of the divergent certification programs into a single national professional certification? This integration of certification programs seems by nature to be more broad based to prepare students and professionals for the challenging work of the 21st century.

The final evaluation of a certification program is often whether it is linked to employment requirements. A comparison between certified and non-certified individuals in employment opportunities, salary and promotion may yield

invaluable insights into the professed certification value and the reality of the

existing professional field.

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Table 1

Initial Job Task Categories Provided to the Delphi Group

Competency Categories (not prioritized):

Certifications

Communication Skills

Education

Guest Services

Leadership

Maintenance

Physical Competencies

Promotion and Publicity

Regulations, Rules and Standards

Retail Operation

Table 2

Final Results from the Delphi Technique

Resort and Commercial Recreation Professional Entry-Level Job Competencies

Competency Categories (prioritized by importance):

Communication Skills

Leadership

Guest Services

Programming

Supervision

Regulations, Rules and Standards

Promotion and Publicity

Maintenance

Retail Operation

Communication: Competencies:

Ability to be courteous, friendly, and socially appropriate at all times.

Ability to speak effectively before groups of customers or employees.

Ability to read and interpret a variety of instructions furnished in written, oral, diagram or

　　　schedule form.

Ability to answer telephone.

Write routine reports and correspondence.

Leadership: Competencies:

Implement programs and activities.

Lead games/activities for groups ranging in size from 10 to 200.

Caring for and insuring the safety of children.

Ability to follow through on instructions from supervisor.

Ability to deal calmly with emergency situations.

Ability to teach/instruct basic skills/classes/activities.

Good knowledge of rules and regulations for games and sports.

Leadership: Competencies (continued)

Maintain accurate inventory of supplies and equipment.

Order/Purchase supplies and equipment.

Complete daily/weekly/monthly reports.

Guest Services: Competencies:

Positive guest service skills, a polite, positive and attentive attitude.

Ability to solve and resolve practical problems.

Insures all complaints and problems are handled in a proper and timely manner.

Make activity, court, facility or program reservations.

Programming: Competencies:

Must have knowledge of age appropriate activities for all ages.

Basic knowledge of recreation programming.

Planning for games, crafts, and activities.

Plan and schedule activities.

Develop new events, programs and activities.

Evaluate programs.

Coordinate scheduling of facility use.

Supervision: Competencies:

Supervise recreation assistants, attendants, aids and volunteers.

Ability to evaluate guest needs.

Analyze staffing requirements.

Train staff.

Supervise youth, teen, adult, family, conference and social programs.

Interviewing/Hiring staff.

Schedule Staff.

Staff performance appraisal.

Use rewards and disciplinary action for employees.

Prepare and manage budget effectively.

Perform general accounting duties (ex: daily revenues, calculations and petty cash).

Regulations, Rules and Standards: Competencies:

Standards of professionalism.

Comprehend agency policies and procedures (personnel, safety, etc.).

Knowledge of safety rules and policies.

Comply with and enforce safety regulations.

Promotion and Publicity: Competencies

Marketing a variety of recreational programs/activities.

Develop fliers, brochures, posters and press releases for activities and programs.

Plan promotional activities.

Maintenance: Competencies

Participate in cleaning and maintaining facilities, supplies and equipment.

Maintain and monitor accurate pool records.

Provide cleanliness and sanitation regarding Health Department inspections.

Perform daily pool maintenance (filters, chemicals, surrounding area).

Responsible for safe operating procedures and practices in use of hazardous materials used

in   pool operation.

Retail Operation: Competencies:

Correct cash drawer/register operation.

Sell merchandise or activities for individuals, groups and conventions.

Maintain accurate inventory of merchandise, supplies and equipment.

Maintain and monitor current and accurate shop records.

Table 3

Comparison of NRPA and RCRA Major Job Content Domains

RCRA (Prioritized by Importance)	NRPA
Communication Skills	Leisure Services Management
Leadership	a. Budget and Finance
Guest Services	b. Staff Development and Supervision
Programming	c. Policy Formulation and Interpretation
Supervision	d. Public Relations
Regulations, Rules and Standards	e. Marketing
Promotion and Publicity	Leisure/Recreation Program Delivery
Maintenance	a. Assessment
Retail Operation	b. Planning
	c. Implementation
	d. Evaluation
	Natural Resource and Facilities Management
	a. Planning, Development and Management
	b. Maintenance
	c. Therapeutic Recreation