

1 Increasing Tradeshow & Exhibition Industry Competitiveness  
2 through Competency-Based Hiring and Promotion: A Sales  
3 Executive Perspective

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6 *Received: 13 December 2014 Accepted: 3 January 2015 Published: 15 January 2015*

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8 **Abstract**

9 As a component of MICE industry, Exhibition and Tradeshow industry yields both economic  
10 and social benefits to Thailand in forms of direct foreign income, improved destination image,  
11 wealth distribution, and employment. Albeit its success in hosting endless list of world  
12 renowned tradeshows and exhibitions, the country is still considered less productive as  
13 compared to other leading MICE destinations in the region. Among other factors, human  
14 resource is one of the competitiveness components that need an urgent intervention not only  
15 to make the industry competitive vis-à-vis other rival destinations but also to keep pace with  
16 directionless and unpredictable changes. Competency based human resource management is  
17 now replacing its task-based counterparts for its adaptability and versatility to changes in  
18 industrial practices and market demands

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20 **Index terms**— exhibition, sales executive, competency-based hiring.

21 **1 Introduction**

22 Thailand's reliance on tourism and hospitality industry is significant in that 16.9 percent of its gross domestic  
23 products is yielded from tourism Author : College of Tourism and Hospitality, Rangsit University, Pathumthani,  
24 Thailand. e-mail: [jotikasthira@gmail.com](mailto:jotikasthira@gmail.com) economy representing 11.9 percent of total employment of the country  
25 (Blanke & Chiesa, 2013). The sector has witnessed a continual growth with the expected growth rate of 6.4  
26 percent from 2012 through 2022. Despite its 43<sup>rd</sup> rank in overall travel and tourism competitiveness, various  
27 sub-indicators have indicated its higher potential. Its government has prioritized this sector (ranked 27<sup>th</sup>) and  
28 succeeded in marketing campaigns to attract visitors to the country (ranked 11<sup>th</sup>). Thailand has good tourism  
29 and infrastructures as well (ranked 13<sup>th</sup> for airline seats per kilometers for international tourists and 31<sup>st</sup> for  
30 travel and tourism infrastructure) (Blanke & Chiesa, 2013). The aforementioned ranks showed that Thailand  
31 has greater potential than its overall ranks if it manages travel and tourism sector well.

32 Facing an ever intense competition and fluctuating, price sensitive, and seasonal demand of leisure market,  
33 Thailand and other established tourism destinations have diversified its marketing focus towards other lucrative  
34 markets including business travel, MICE, and other markets. Despite priority given by the government and high  
35 potential, Thailand's meeting and exhibition industry is still relatively less competitive as compared to other  
36 countries in the region. Table I reported the performance of Thailand vis-à-vis its major ASEAN neighboring  
37 countries. Table I reported the performance of Meeting and Exhibition sub-industries of Thailand and other  
38 ASEAN neighboring countries depicted and adapted from Barnes Report (2010) using sales per employee as  
39 the performance indicator. As the five available countries have different levels of cost of living making sales  
40 per employee incomparable, purchasing power parity has been adopted to convert the per employee sales of  
41 these countries more comparable (Barnes Report, 2010). Despite the fact that Thai meeting and exhibition  
42 sector is on par with those of Malaysia and superior to Indonesia and Philippines in regards to productivity, the

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43 country still lagged behind the performance of Singapore ??18.08 times less productive), the most prominent  
44 MICE destination in the region. Should Thailand aim to excel MICE market, it should strive on increasing its  
45 competitiveness in this regard.

46 The comparatively inferior productivity of Thai Meeting and Exhibition sectors as compared to Singapore and  
47 Malaysia can be attributed to several factors. One undeniable underlying factor is employees' competence and  
48 productivity. Heightening the performance standard and productivity of employees in the industry would surely  
49 increase the competitiveness of the country's MICE industry as a whole. This article explores the minimum  
50 standard performance and its associated competencies of sales executive in exhibition industry. The standard  
51 performance and competency set will be used as the basis for competency-based hiring in order to make sure  
52 that truly competent and productive to perform the tasks up to the expected level of stakeholders while being  
53 competitive to other MICE destinations.

54 In the near future where conditions of ASEAN Economic Community-AEC will fully be enacted, it is expected  
55 that there will be both threats and opportunities present to Thai MICE business operators both regarding to  
56 market opportunities, threats, potential hostile merger and acquisitions (Economic Ingelligence Center: Siam  
57 Commercial Bank, 2011). In such lights, productivity of firms partially derived from employee's performance is  
58 highly critical.

59 In the new environment where uncertainties become normalcy of business operation ??The ASEAN Secretariat:  
60 Public Outreach and Civil Society Division, 2012), organizational competitiveness and adaptability to changes  
61 need to be the core of business decision and planning. Recruiting and developing organizational talents to fit  
62 to the competitive landscape is highly important for modern organizations (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Huan, 2007).  
63 Organizational talents which are contributively and synergistically aggregated from individual employees need to  
64 be planned, managed, nurtured, and enhanced in order to assure its fit to the fast changing and volatile business  
65 environments, especially in tourism and hospitality labor markets (Baum, 2008). Hiring process to ensure that  
66 individuals with desired talents are hired is highly important.

67 In tourism and hospitality industry, it is hard to recruit, train and retain employees with right talents due to  
68 several factors including the lack of hiring standard, multiple points of entry to the industry, low skill specificity,  
69 variance of pay differential and flexible roles and responsibilities (Baum, 2008). Coupling with more volatile and  
70 less predictable business environments, these factors have commanded hospitality firms to revisit the task-based  
71 human hiring process to competency based hiring (Soderquist, Papalexandris, Ioannou, & Prastacos, 2010).  
72 There are a number of reasons justifying the need for human resource management paradigm shift. First, job  
73 specification of a position can easily be obsolete due to fast moving external environments and business practices.  
74 Second, employees need to be ready for position and functional mobility in order to keep pace with the fast moving  
75 competitive landscape. Competency-based hiring is undoubtedly a tool to increase a firm's competitiveness in  
76 the present environment. The question that still needs to answer is how an exhibition firm can adopt competency  
77 based hiring in such a manner that optimally strengthens its fit to the competitive landscape.

78 This paper aims, therefore, 1) to explore the competency sets necessary for sales executives in effectively, and  
79 2) to propose the a method for competency based hiring. Next part of this paper addresses exhibition business  
80 as well as the concepts of competency and competency based hiring.

## 81 2 II.

## 82 3 Related Works

83 To address research objectives mentioned in the previous part, conceptual frameworks related to the context of  
84 the study, exhibition business, as well as the parent disciplines, competency and competency-based hiring, is  
85 hereafter discussed.

## 86 4 III.

## 87 5 Exhibition and Tradeshow

88 Tradeshow and exhibition is another section of MICE industry. It is, in fact, a marketing communication tool  
89 available for both trade and consumer firms to communicate, sell, and negotiate with clients, buyers, and other  
90 trade partners through direct interaction without interruption (Blythe, 1999;Herbig, O'Hara, & Palumbo, 1998).  
91 As there is no clear measurement of the effectiveness of exhibition and tradeshow, companies might be reluctant  
92 to pour in their marketing budget in participating and decorating their exhibition booths (Blythe, 1999). Besides,  
93 the tendency for companies to invest in tradeshow participation is proved to be cyclical depending on the economic  
94 cycle of particular markets (Herbig, et al., 1998). It is the duty of exhibition and tradeshow sales executives  
95 to convince potential exhibitors of the benefit of tradeshow and exhibitions especially in the time of economic  
96 slowdowns.

97 Benefits of tradeshow and exhibition are varied. First, Tradeshow helps promote new products to prescreened  
98 audiences without interruption from other stimulus. Second, it allows firms to uncover new prospective customers  
99 who self-screen to attend the tradeshow and to discover potential trade partners, suppliers and buyers. Third,  
100 it yields several benefits to the host destinations in forms of local spending, distribution of wealth, attraction  
101 of foreign income, stimulation of local business, and destination image. Fourth, exhibition and tradeshow help

102 enhancing image of exhibitors in regards to their respective technological breakthroughs, good causes or other  
103 aspects of corporate image. Fifth, it helps manage and strengthen relationship between trade partners. Finally,  
104 it serves as additional selling opportunities for firms (Blythe, 1999;Firoiu, Dodu, & Patrichi, 2011;Herbig, et al.,  
105 1998). From the benefits as stated, tradeshow and exhibition are evidently important for hospitality industry,  
106 local economies, and host destinations alike.

107 Despite these benefits, certain firms still hesitate to participate in tradeshows and exhibitions due to their  
108 unrealistic and short term oriented expectations. The unmatched expectations of exhibitors and tradeshow  
109 attendees tend to be the most critical factors that make firms reluctant to participate in tradeshows. While  
110 attendees update themselves about players in the market, technological breakthrough, and information gathering  
111 forum for further purchase decisions, exhibitors tend to focus on sales and order taking (Blythe, 1999). Sales  
112 executives of exhibition companies who can realistically shape expectation of exhibitors should not only increase  
113 sales of the exhibition space but also assure satisfaction and repeated participation in the future.

114 Considering the semi custom-made nature of exhibition and tradeshow, exhibition firms can maximize the  
115 value of each client by selling largest exhibition space as well as other services to them including venue decoration  
116 and other supporting services. Sales executives' skills in selling and managing the project are crucial for a firm's  
117 success and competitiveness.

118 Critical success factors of a tradeshow highly depend on sales executives' performance especially in regards  
119 to expectation shaping and persuasive communication (Friedman, 2002). From the beginning of sales process,  
120 sales executives must shape the most realistic expectation to exhibitors and inform them of what to be expected  
121 and what is not. Consultative dialogue about how to increase exhibition effectiveness in regards to relationship  
122 management and marketing communication also helps increase per transaction sales of exhibition as well as  
123 strengthening long-term relationship (Friedman, 2002). It is clear that sales executives play an important role  
124 in making a tradeshow successful. Hiring sales executives with competencies that allow high performance is,  
125 therefore, highly critical for its competitiveness.

126 IV.

## 127 **6 Competency**

128 For decades, the concept of competency has gained recognition from both human resource practitioners and  
129 academics due to its role as underlying enabling factors of expected performance (Melaia, Abratt, & Bick,  
130 2008). Using competency as the core of human resource decision also allows firms to better embrace changes and  
131 adapt themselves successfully (Baum, 2008). Competency can be defined as allied inherent and developed skills,  
132 knowledge, and other attributes that allow a job incumbent to perform his/her tasks adequately or superiorly  
133 within a working context (Baum, 2008;Bhatawdekar & Bhatawdekar, 2012;Soderquist, et al., 2010). It can be  
134 seen from the definition given that competency must be set against certain set of standard either for job adequacy  
135 or task superiority. Besides, competency sets should be adjusted according to each firm's working environment.  
136 One can assume, therefore, that there is no universal set of competency standard that fit in all organizations in  
137 an industry.

138 Competency can be approached from different angles. Certain scholars divide competency into categories  
139 namely hard and soft skill competencies (Weber, Finley, Crawford, & Rivera Jr., 2009). While hard skills are  
140 important for technical aspect of task performance, soft skills are precursors high performance of individual  
141 employees (Testa & Sipe, 2012;Weber, et al., 2009). Despite its indirect relevance to task completion, soft skill  
142 competency which covers four aspects namely relationship skills, management and organization, communication  
143 and cognition skills, are indispensable for a firm's competitiveness and productivity (Weber, et al., 2009). From  
144 this approach, it can be argued that individuals need to possess soft skill competencies to master well the hard  
145 skills.

146 Competency can also be approached from a more function oriented perspective. Testa and Sipe (2012)  
147 categorized competency into three groups namely business savvy competencies, people savvy competencies,  
148 and self-savvy competencies. Business savvy competencies concern mainly skills and thinking process that  
149 allow employees to make astute business decisions such as number wise, planning, strategic decision, system  
150 thinking (Testa & Sipe, 2012). People savvy competencies mainly deal with interpersonal skills that allow  
151 individuals to create positive and constructive rapports with others (Testa & Sipe, 2012). This competency is  
152 highly important for hospitality industries due to high contact nature of the industry (Kay & Rusette, 2000;  
153 Lovelock, Patterson, & Walker, 2001). Self-savvy competencies deal with ethics, disciplines, self-locus of control,  
154 accountability, professionalism, time and change management (Testa & Sipe, 2012). It can be seen, here, that self-  
155 savvy competencies make an employee an organic member of the organization. Other two types of competency  
156 help ensure high performance and organizational competitiveness.

157 Cappallen, and Jassens (2008) group competencies into three categories namely know-why competencies, know-  
158 how competencies, and knowwhom competencies. Know-why competencies concern mainly personal identification  
159 to the profession, motivation to work, and the match between the organizational and personal goals of employees  
160 (Cappallen & Janssens, 2008;Defillipi & Arthur, 1994). Know-why competencies determine how devoted an  
161 employee is. Without this quality, an organization cannot be assured that employees put their maximum efforts  
162 to the work assigned. Apart from the job identification, know-why competencies also include other transferable

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163 skills that allow a person to be better motivated and identify him/herself to the profession while making more  
164 astute decisions.

165 Know-whom competencies reflect career relevant networks inside and outside a firm (Defillipi & Arthur, 1994).  
166 This type of competency is highly important for sales and marketing functions due to the high contact nature of  
167 the functional area (Meliaia, et al., 2008). It is also related to certain inherent qualities such as personal traits and  
168 social skills as well as work experience (Asree, Zain, & Razalli, 2010). Consequently, know whom competencies in  
169 this particular study also embrace knowledge, skills, and other attributes that allow better network enhancement  
170 and development. Therefore, a sales executive in exhibition business needs to possess know-whom competencies  
171 in order to close sales and make things possible for the project.

172 Know-how competencies concern task completions according to what specified in the job description (Cappellen  
173 & Janssens, 2008). This type of competency is highly technical by nature. However, employees need to possess  
174 other transferable skills ensure high performance of this competency (Koenigsfeld, Perdue, Youn, & Woods, 2011).  
175 This particular study will use know-why, know-whom, and know-how competencies to group the competency.

176 V.

## 177 7 Competency Model

178 To identify competencies required in a job position, competency model must be developed. Competency  
179 models conventionally used now in most industries are models and matrices that overstress technical skills while  
180 downplaying the importance of know-why and know-whom competencies (Langdon & Marrelli, 2002; Testa & Sipe,  
181 2012). While certain models identify competency for expected performance, others identify competencies in forms  
182 of knowledge, skills, and attributes that underlie superior performance (Dua, Ismail, & Omar, 2010; Purdue,  
183 Ninemeier, & Woods, 2002). Good competency models must, hence, include both soft and hard skills while giving  
184 more weight to soft competencies (Chapman & Lovell, 2006).

185 To identify a competency model, job descriptions must be first studied and analyzed. Unfortunately, most job  
186 descriptions are vaguely written with debatable loopholes and do not specify the task standard. Like competency  
187 models, job descriptions tend to over-stress the importance of technical part of job fulfillment. Therefore, they  
188 cannot serve as a salient basis for recruiting, appraising, and developing the job incumbents (Soderquist, et al.,  
189 2010). Despite such flaws, job description is a starting point of a competency model development as it specifies  
190 that is expected from an employee assuming a job position given an organizational context (Soderquist, et al.,  
191 2010).

192 Another problem with conventional competency models is that they are developed from data collected from  
193 only one group of job stakeholders which might not cover all angles of the job. A good competency should,  
194 therefore, be developed from data collected from various stakeholders to the job position both inside and  
195 outside an organization (Langdon & Marrelli, 2002). Given the fact that changes are fast and unpredictable, a  
196 good competency model must also embrace competencies that allow job incumbents to be adaptive to change  
197 (Rowe, 1995). Ideally, competency models developed for several positions in an organization should be based  
198 on organizational strategies and their required competency to ensure that they have developed and recruited  
199 employees with needed competencies for competitiveness (Hamimi Abdul Razak, Kamaruddin, & Abdul Azid,  
200 2012).

201 As for this particular study, the competency model to be used is adapted from "Language of Work-LOW"  
202 model developed by Langdon and Marrelli (2002) due to the context of the study which aims to set competency-  
203 based hiring criteria for sales executive position for the whole Thai exhibition and tradeshow industry. It,  
204 consequently, excludes organizational factors out of the consideration. After grouping and sorting tasks, data  
205 from informant groups including persons assuming sales executive position in the tradeshow and exhibition  
206 themselves, job supervisors, colleagues, suppliers, and customers, were collected about their expected performance  
207 of tasks included in the job description. Associated to the performance standard, they were also asked to report  
208 their believed underlying competencies in the forms of knowledge, skills, and other attributes. Competencies  
209 reported were further sorted into three groups namely know-why, know-whom, and know-how. The competency  
210 set acquired from this model will be used as the basis for competency-based hiring for this particular position.

## 211 8 VI.

## 212 9 Competency-based Hiring

213 Due to volatility of the work environment as well as fast borderless and directionless external environment,  
214 mobility of career path and change adaptation becomes the core of the human resource decision (Asree, et  
215 al., 2010; Baum, 2008). Consequently, the conventional task-based human resource management is now being  
216 replaced by its competency-based counterpart ??Soderquist, et As human resource is now an integral part  
217 of an organization's strategy (Jain & Haley, 2009), all firms should identify the gap between their current  
218 organizational competencies and the needed competencies given the strategies stated (Soderquist, et al., 2010).  
219 The gap identified can actually assure the alignment of firms' strategies and their human capital (Priyadarshini  
220 & Dave, 2012). As this present study does not study one particular exhibition firm, the proposed competency  
221 set should be adapted to each organization's working environment and strategies.

222 As certain competencies tend to precursor the mastery of others, recruitment, interview, hiring, compensation, 223 and development policies and practices should be based on competencies not the performance of tasks included 224 in a job description (Chapman & Lovell, 2006; Testa & Sipe, 2012). However, employers should place more 225 importance on less observable and inherent skills than technical ones (Chapman & Lovell, 2006). Besides, as 226 certain competencies are inherent to individuals while others can be developed, hiring practices and policies 227 should focus on the former while HRD policies should focus on the latter (Bhatawdekar & Bhatawdekar, 2012; 228 Chapman & Lovell, 2006). Consequently, the hiring policies of exhibition sales executives should focus on know 229 why and know whom competencies than know how competencies.

230 Candidate screening process based on competencies that underlie the expected performance became a challenge 231 to employers given the conventional recruitment practice where candidates are selected from their curriculum 232 vitae and job interview which are short and parsimonious in nature (Cappellen & Janssens, 2008; Jauhari, 2006). 233 These practices do not allow employers to observe qualities that are inherent to the candidates such as observance, 234 ethics, attitudes, and work disciplines. Besides, candidates can fake their qualities to appear more desirable for 235 job interviewers as well. Alternative forms of job interview should be used such as case studies that simulate real 236 working situation of a position should be used in order to observe and evaluate how effective a candidate performs 237 in such a situation (Bleedorn, 1993). Apart from case study base screening, it is advised for employers to assign 238 as much work to newly recruited employees during probationary period as well in order to assess the inherent 239 qualities that are important for the positions.

240 Fortunately, there are a myriad of aptitude and evaluation scales commercially available for a number of skills 241 including thinking, social, communication, interaction, and cross-cultural skills ?? Of course, all these measures 242 make recruitment harder and time-consuming. However, it better ensures the success of recruitment and hiring 243 of employees who would finally contribute their respective talents to the organizational effectiveness.

244 Compensation policies of most firms tend to be based on the job experience the candidate has in the industry 245 and other qualifications such as education, proficiency of English etc. Taking a long-term perspective to human 246 resource management where an employee hired must progress along the managerial path and move across 247 functional areas, compensation must also be based on the competencies or potential of a person in the future as 248 well (Bhatawdekar & Bhatawdekar, 2012).

## 249 10 VII.

## 250 11 Methods

251 To come upsets of competency necessary for hiring a sales executive in exhibition and tradeshow business in 252 Thailand, a qualitative research design is adopted for two reasons. First, there are a very limited number of 253 studies conducted in the area of competency in exhibition business. Inductive approach to fact finding is, thus, 254 warranted (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011; Neuman, 2011). Second, the researcher aimed to capture richness of 255 information (Hennink, et al., 2011). This empirical study follows the model stated in Figure I. To start, interview 256 question is developed from job descriptions of selected exhibition firms that were member of Thai Exhibition 257 Association-TEA. Data collection was discussed followed by data analysis.

## 258 12 a) Development of Interview Frame

259 As discussed in the previous section, this study followed the competency model stated in Prepare and coordinate 260 all job relevant documents. Rank and files Figure II reported tasks included job descriptions of sales executive 261 from three Thai PEOs selected by Thai Exhibition Association based on business standard and reputation in the 262 industry. To facilitate the data collection process, tasks were combined into mutually exclusive items, deleted 263 in case of redundancy, and finally sorted into functions. The job description was the basis for the in-depth 264 interview which is the major data collection method of this study. During the interview session, informants were 265 asked to report their expectation of the performance of a sales executive for particular task at the threshold 266 level. Following the report of performance, they were also asked to report the competencies that underlie such a 267 performance in terms of knowledge, skills, and attributes. The researcher moved to differing performances and 268 the underlying competencies. Differing performances referred to the differential performance of high performers 269 from average performers. Finally, informants were asked to report their believed ideal performances for particular 270 tasks and the associated competencies.

## 271 13 b) Research Design i. Recruitment of Participants

272 According to the model stated in Figure ??, data in regards to the performances of tasks included in the 273 job description of sales executives in Thai exhibition and tradeshow businesses as well as their underlying 274 competencies were to be collected from five groups of feedback providers. To ensure the comprehensiveness 275 of the competency model to be developed, five groups of feedback providers were included in this study. The 276 feedback provider groups were job incumbents, their supervisors, colleagues, suppliers, and customers.

277 Purposive recruitment of informants was adopted to ensure the eligibility of the informants in providing data 278 (Hennink, et al., 2011). As there are five groups of feedback providers or participants, TEA, the most recognizable 279 exhibition and tradeshow professional association in Thailand agreed to be the gatekeeper for this present study.

## 17 RESULTS

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280 It helps pick five of its members who are leading exhibition firms. With the assistance from gatekeeper, the  
281 researcher reached job incumbents and job supervisors. Additional participants were recruited using snowball  
282 recruitment method via the network of job incumbents and job supervisors (Hennink, et al., 2011).

283 ii. In-depth Interview as Major Data Collection Method Due to the exploratory nature of this study, indepth  
284 interview which allows the participants to freely report their respective perception of threshold, differing and  
285 ideal performances as well as the associated competencies, standardized open-ended interview was selected as the  
286 major data collection method (Patton, 2002). The interview sessions were conducted according to the principles  
287 of Payne (1951); being single, being clear, being truly open-ended, and being neutral.

288 Participants were contacted by gatekeepers to request their permission for the interview appointment.  
289 The interview appointments were reconfirmed by the researcher before sending the interview frame to them  
290 beforehand. The objectives, nature of questions, length of time, natures of questions, statement of confidentiality,  
291 the freedom to withdraw, and voluntary participations were informed to the informants (Bouma, 2000).

### 292 14 iii. Validation of Finding Using Group Interview

293 The initial finding from in-depth interview was validated by triangulations of measures and observers (Neuman,  
294 2011). The former refers to the collection of data from the same group of participants but using different methods  
295 of data collection. The latter refers to the collection of data from different groups of participant. The competencies  
296 reported by participants from in-depth interview sessions were further discussed in the group interview session.

297 Focus group interview is a qualitative method with primary goal of making attitudes, beliefs, behavior, attitude  
298 about particular issues in an informants explicit knowledge and is normally used in exploratory research to test  
299 ideas, solving specific problem and evaluation (Ezzy, 1999). Panelists who are board members of TEA were  
300 recruited for group interview. TEA Board Members were entrepreneurs and high rank executives in tradeshow  
301 and exhibition businesses in Thailand. Therefore, the eligibility of finding acquired from group interview can be  
302 assured.

303 In the group interview, panelists were given with the performance standard for three levels of performance and  
304 their respective underlying competencies. The researcher who acted as group moderator asked them to discuss  
305 that appropriateness, and the completeness of the task performances as well as the competencies. After the group  
306 interview, the competency set was adjusted accordingly. The finding from group interview will be analyzed using  
307 the priori theories.

### 308 15 iv. Data Analysis

309 The competencies reported and adjusted from in-depth, and group interviews were sorted into knowwhy  
310 competencies, know-whom competencies, and know why competencies as follows:

311 1. Competencies that lead to self-identification with the profession and motivation, transferable skills, and  
312 ethical considerations were coded into know-why competency.

313 2. Competencies that underlie the relationship management, enhancement and retention of professional  
314 network, and interpersonal interactions were grouped into know-whom competency 3. Competencies that are  
315 directly related to technical aspect of task completion were coded into knowhow competencies

316 The aim of this study is to develop a competencybased hiring guideline for the sales executive position in  
317 Thai exhibition and tradeshow business. Only competencies that are antecedents of threshold performance were  
318 included into the hiring set. Developable competencies were also excluded from the competency-based hiring  
319 criteria set as they can be trained and developed in a short period of time.

## 320 16 VIII.

## 321 17 Results

322 In-depth interview sessions were conducted with 21 participants who recruited from purposive recruitment and  
323 snowball recruitment methods. Among the 19 participants, 5 were job incumbents and another 5 were job  
324 supervisors. Four of them were colleagues to sales executives who work in other department yet had regular  
325 contact with them. Three of them were suppliers or representatives from third party service providers for  
326 exhibitions and tradeshows. Only two customers were recruited in the sample. They reported three levels of  
327 performance as well as their respective competencies. Due to the tightly scheduled obligations of participants,  
328 the in-depth interview sessions were conducted from March to October 2013.

329 After the in-depth interview sessions were completed, panels were recruited. Eight panelists who sat in the  
330 board of Thai Exhibition Association-TEA were recruited. Three of them were owners of major Professional  
331 Exhibition Organizer firms while other 5 were high ranked executives in large exhibition firms. During the  
332 group interview, panelists requested the researcher to move the level of performances. Most items were moved  
333 downward from differing performance to threshold performance. The same was done for competency as well.  
334 From the above table, it can be seen that for a sales executive in exhibition and tradeshow to perform the tasks  
335 included in the job description. They, hence, rely on knowledge about exhibition and tradeshow businesses as  
336 well as market intelligence and customer knowledge. Product knowledge and knowledge about other tradeshow  
337 components as well as their logistical and safety requirements are indispensable for effective sales performance

338 as well. These competencies were categorized as "Know-how" competencies that are directly related to technical  
339 part of the task completion.

340 For exhibition firms to optimally utilize the knowhow competency, its sales executives rely on "know-why  
341 competencies" and "know-whom competencies" to master the job completion and know-how competencies.

342 Know-why competencies are selfidentification to the profession, motivation and other factors that other  
343 transferable skills that allow better astute decision making (Defillipi & Arthur, 1994).

344 For threshold performance of exhibition sales executives, sales executives depend on their respective thinking  
345 skills in the most logical, systematic, analytic, and critical manner to capture the situation. They also need to  
346 be able to pose questions strategically to get the information needed. To make a sales dialogue and to develop a  
347 sales proposal that intrigue clients' decision, they rely very much on problem solving, systematic planning skills,  
348 communication skills and acumen. To ensure the profitability of the project, sales executive also needs to have cost  
349 management skills. However, sales executives will only exert their maximum level of effort to work according to  
350 the job description, sales executives need right attitudes and approach to work. Goal oriented attitudes, honesty,  
351 adaptation to change, fairness, sacrificing, patience, and persistence all contributively make sales executive an  
352 organic member of the organization who tend to ethically work extra miles for the organizational success.

353 Know-whom competencies are not less in importance in making a sales executive successful in their task  
354 completion at the threshold or expected level from the stakeholders. Apart from communication skills at the  
355 verbal level, sales executives must be sensitive to all the non-verbal communications from both clients and  
356 colleagues. Interpersonal skills that are highly associated to their respective personalities (agreeableness and  
357 emotional stability), looks, manner, and business etiquette are also an indispensable part of sales executives to  
358 maintain, create, and enhance relationship with clients, colleagues, and suppliers. It can be seen that without  
359 Know-whom competencies and Know-why competencies, sales executives cannot perform their tasks according  
360 to what specified in the job description (Table II).

361 Considering that most "Know-how" competencies for the threshold level of performance are knowledge about  
362 exhibition and tradeshow as well as other related knowledge which can be acquired once sales executive are already  
363 in the industry, the screening process of candidates for the position should focus on qualities that are inherent  
364 to them or take time to develop (Bhatawdekar & Bhatawdekar, 2012;Chapman & Lovell, 2006). Hiring policies  
365 for sales executives in Thai exhibition and tradeshow industry should focus on inherent qualities of candidates  
366 such as thinking, communication and interpersonal skills as well as other qualities such as acumen, personality,  
367 professional network, look and manner, observance, and other ethical qualities. Table IV IV, it can be seen  
368 that candidate screening process should not limit itself to job-interview which normally lasts 30 minutes to 2  
369 hours (Cappellen & Janssens, 2008;Jauhari, 2006). Several skills and qualities can be observed, despite the fact  
370 that they can also be pretended, during the interview sessions including communication skills, acumen, thinking  
371 skills, and other attitudes. Others such as attitudes, problem solving, cost management, honesty, interpersonal  
372 skills, sensitivity, work disciplines, and network in the industry tend to be hard to assess and verify during a short  
373 interview session. Case studies that simulate the real life situation of sales executives in exhibition and tradeshow  
374 industry should be developed to assess all aspects of inherent qualities required (Bleedorn, 1993). Along with case  
375 studies, employers in exhibition and tradeshow industry should invest in aptitude tests commercially available to  
376 test crucial transferable skills namely communication, thinking, social, and intercultural skills (Bhatawdekar &  
377 Bhatawdekar, 2012;Bleedorn, 1993;Jauhari, 2006).

378 The above table also showed that all inherent qualities desired in an exhibition and tradeshow sales executive  
379 in Thailand are "Know why" and "Know-whom" competencies. Therefore, it can be assumed that know-how  
380 competency mastery depends on the possession of know-whom and know-why competencies.

381 Considering that know-how competencies which are usually knowledge that can be taught or trained in schools  
382 and on-the job, they can be developed after hiring. On the contrary, know-whom and know-why competencies  
383 which are mostly skills and other attributes which are precursors of high performance tend to be inherent or  
384 hard to develop. Therefore, human resource management decisions should focus on know-why competencies, and  
385 knowwhom competencies.

386 Considering the critical success factors of tradeshow and exhibitions, the threshold competencies seem not  
387 to lead to such factors. Communication skills at this level, for example, would not lead to a sales dialogue  
388 with prospective customers that shape a realistic expectation or maximize sales value through cross-selling and  
389 up-selling. Competencies that support superior performance (differing performance) tend to be more valid in  
390 such as case. From Table V, it can be assumed that only high performers can contribute to an organization's  
391 competitiveness through the achievement of key success factors in the industry. Charismatic communication  
392 and high level of negotiation skills, for example, can shape realistic expectation of prospective exhibitors and  
393 cross-sell the products. Know-why, and know-how competencies reported in the above table should also be used  
394 in screening candidates to ensure high level of performance. However, it might be hard to find candidates that  
395 meet all these competencies in the labor market. Therefore, the differing competencies should be used together  
396 with threshold competencies in an additive fashion. All candidates should meet all the inherent competencies for  
397 threshold performance (minimum acceptable performance as reported by participants-Table IV)to be included in  
398 a short list of candidates. Final decision should be based on the "know why" and "know-whom" competencies  
399 for differing performance. Recruitment and hiring for the position of sales executive in exhibition and tradeshow

400 industry becomes more difficult, complex and time consuming. However, the result should be beneficial for the  
401 whole organization in the long run.

### 402 18 c) Competency-based Hiring Methods for Sales Executive in 403 Thai Exhibition and Tradeshow Industry

404 Both in-depth interview and group interview have revealed competency set necessary for hiring a sales executive in  
405 Thai exhibition and tradeshow businesses. From the discussion in the previous section, transferable skills related  
406 to decision making, communication, relationship management, and especially thinking as well as work and life  
407 values determine how a sales executive in tradeshow and exhibition industry in Thailand use their knowledge  
408 to perform their tasks effectively. Sales executives on "know-why" and "knowwhom" competencies to perform  
409 the tasks according to the expected level from stakeholders' perspectives. However, empirical data showed that  
410 competencies for threshold performance do not support the critical success factor of exhibition and tradeshow  
411 business. Differing competencies should, therefore, be brought into hiring consideration for this position. Hiring  
412 methods for the sales executive position can be proposed as follows;

413 1. Before job interview, employers should assess candidates for transferable skills namely communication,  
414 social, thinking, and intercultural skills using commercially available aptitude tests 2. Candidates should be  
415 evaluated using simulated case studies with situation complexities. Candidates must be observed through  
416 critical observation and interviewed for their decision justification 3. Job interviewers must ask questions that  
417 require candidates to use their acumen and skills to answer. Non-verbal communication should also be critically  
418 observed. 4. The decision process should be two folds. First, candidate shortlist should be developed by  
419 screening candidates with threshold "know-why" and "know-whom" competencies. Second, the final decision  
420 should be based on differing "who-why" and "know-whom" competencies. 5. Newly hired sales executives must  
421 be critically observed for their competencies during the probationary period by focusing on their "knowwhy" and  
422 "know-whom" competencies 6. Human resource development programs for newly hired sales executives should  
423 aim to develop "know-how" competencies or competencies that allow the mastery of technical part of the job 7.  
424 Compensation decision should be based on "knowwhy" and "know-whom" competencies IX.

### 425 19 Conclusion and Future Work

426 Exhibition and tradeshow industry is undoubtedly important for Thai tourism and hospitality sector and Thai  
427 economy overall, the sector still needs tremendous improvement to increase its productivity. Sales executives  
428 play crucial roles in the success of an exhibition and tradeshow firm in several regards including shaping realistic  
429 expectation, maximizing per transaction sales, and profitability. Hiring right sales executives can contribute  
430 greatly to a firm's competitiveness. Amid unpredictable changes and formless competition, competency-based  
431 hiring must be adopted. Competencies are underlying factors performances. They comprises three components  
432 namely knowledge, skills, and attributes. Some competencies are inherent to individuals or take long time  
433 to develop; others can be developed through human resource development and on the job training. Hiring  
434 decision should focus on inherent competencies of candidates while training decision should focus on developable  
435 competencies.

436 A qualitative study through in-depth interview with 19 participants who are stakeholders to the "sales  
437 executive" position in Thai exhibition and tradeshow industry was conducted with the assistance from exhibition  
438 professional association-Thai Exhibition Association, who acted as the gatekeeper to explore the competencies  
439 for three levels of performancethreshold, differing, and ideal performances. Focusgroup interviews with panels  
440 comprising TEA board members were conducted to triangulate the finding. The finding showed that "know-  
441 why" and "know-how" competencies were more in number and underlie the mastery of "know-how" competencies  
442 which covers the technical part of the job description. Hiring sales executives for Exhibition and Tradeshow  
443 industry should, therefore, be based on "know-why" and "know-whom" competencies. However, when matching  
444 the competencies that support the threshold performance with key success factors of the industry, it was found  
445 that they did not support one another. Employers should use threshold competencies to create short list while  
446 making a final decision using differing competencies. Hiring practices were proposed in this study as well.

447 Scholars and practitioners in the field interested in this topic should complete the study by developing  
448 evaluation tools for "know-why" and "know-whom" competencies that are practical for employers with limited  
449 access to aptitude tests that might be costly. Case studies should also be developed to support a hiring decision  
450 as well. Longitudinal studies that track the actual performance of sales executives recruited by competency-based  
451 method should be undertaken to validate the merit of competency-based hiring approach.

452 X. 1 2 3

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<sup>2</sup>© 2015 Global Journals Inc. (US) Increasing Tradeshow & Exhibition Industry Competitiveness through  
Competency-Based Hiring and Promotion: A Sales Executive Perspective

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Figure 1:

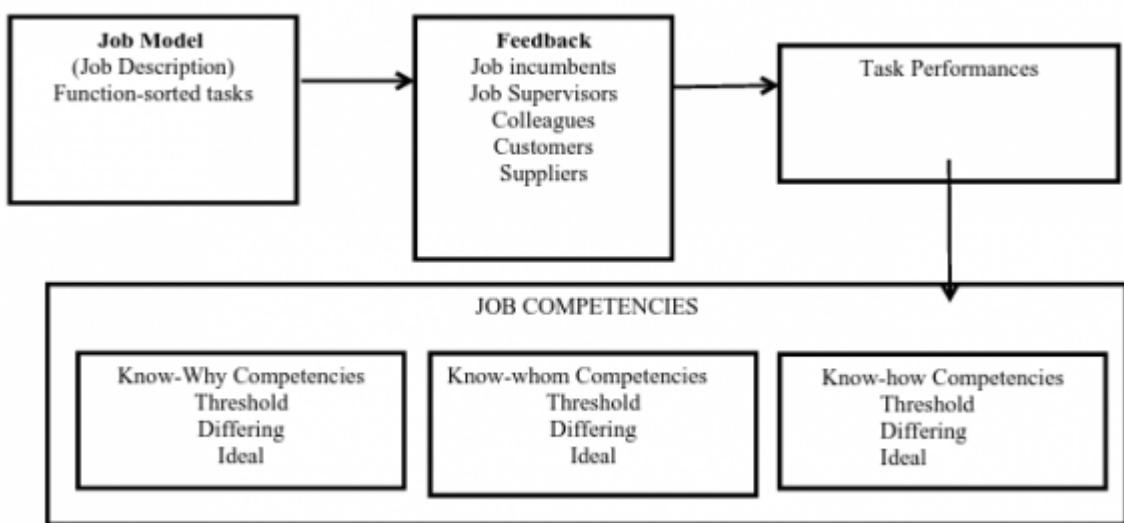


Figure 2: Figure

I

Country	Sales/ Employee	PPP Ratio	PPP Sales/ Employee	Efficiency Ratio
Singapore	340,631	1.377	469,048.89	18.08
Malaysia	15,191	1.966	29,865.51	1.15
Thailand	12,551	2.067	25,942.92	1.00
Indonesia	8,084	1.769	14,300.60	0.55
Philippines	4,601	2.006	9,229.61	0.36

Depicted from: (Barnes Report, 2010)

Figure 3: Table I :

Figure 4:

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## II

Function	Tasks
Areas	
Sales	Help plan, acquire insights, provide and
Marketing	Put and help team members in planning and implementing tasks Make sales call with current and new clients Follow up with unclosed sales and negotiate the best deal Cross-sell/ up-sell where possible and appropriate Prepare bidding proposal Coordinate and follow-up the bidding procedures After confirmation from clients, conduct service level agreement with all concerned Assist the site inspection and report to sales Search, acquire information and specification about services needed by customers from 3 rd party suppliers
Operations	Coordinate with relevant departments internally and external partners Co-develop the action plan and timeline of the function throughout the process Be the center of coordination throughout the project implementation Verify the project readiness before show days
Finance	Verify bills and approve payment and
budget	Follow up payment from clients according to the contracts and policies
Administrative	

Figure 5: Table II :

Figure 6:

### III

Competency	Sources of Competency	
revenue		
Competency Social Skills appropriate for people from broad backgrounds Knowledge about characteristics, natures, and operation Stay neutral in conflict situations and reserve negative opinions parts of different types of exhibition and tradeshows Knowledge about customary procedures and practices Social acumen	Sources Competency of Inherent Developable Inherent Developable	
in the country Knowledge about customary procedure and practices in Systematic planning skills Planning Skills (Anticipate potential problems) international markets Customer knowledge about their business, goals, needs Planning Skills (With contingency plans) Correspondence preparation appropriate for document about tradeshows and exhibition, their critical success recipients factors and past events Knowledge about logistical limitation and safety Interpersonal skills Work experience in tradeshow and exhibition business requirements of the venues and exhibits Product (components) knowledge with regards to Work experience in both tradeshow and exhibition as well as other related businesses capacity, quality, cost, and availability Comparative product (components) knowledge (with Acumen Agreeable personality competitors) Knowledge about local current affairs Compromising Knowledge about international socio-economic current Charisma	Developable Developable Developable Developable Developable Developable Developable Developable Inherent Inherent Developable Inherent Developable Inherent Developable Inherent Developable Inherent Developable Inherent Developable Inherent	
affairs Goal oriented attitude	Inherent	
Market intelligence about customers and competitors	Developable	
International market intelligence Optimism towards problems and obstacles	Developable Inherent	
Accounting, costing, and pricing skills Persistence	<sup>12</sup> Developable Inherent	

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Figure 8:

## IV

From Table	Competency	Types of competency
	Thinking skills (Logical, Systematic, Analytical, Critical, Conceptualization)	KNOW-WHY
	Comprehensive understanding of the project and ability to anticipate problems	KNOW-HOW
	Strategic questioning skills	KNOW-WHY
	Social Skills appropriate for people from broad backgrounds	KNOW-WHOM
	Interpersonal skills	KNOW-WHOM
	Work experience in tradeshow and exhibition business	KNOW-HOW
	Acumen	KNOW-WHY
	Agreeable personality	KNOW-WHOM
	Goal oriented attitude	KNOW-WHY
	Personal network and professional network in exhibition and tradeshow business	KNOW-WHOM
	Emotional stability	KNOW-WHOM
	Look and manner that command trust	KNOW-WHOM
	Observance and detail oriented	KNOW-WHY
	Service minded	KNOW-WHOM
	Work disciplines	KNOW-WHY
	Well-preparedness	KNOW-WHY
	Patience and ability to work under pressure	KNOW-WHY
	Fairness	KNOW-WHY
	Adaptive to change	KNOW-WHY
	Honesty	KNOW-WHY
	Sacrificing	KNOW-WHY

Figure 9: Table IV :

Figure 10:

V

Competency	Types of competency
Knowledge about customary procedure and practices in international markets	KNOW-HOW
Comparative product (components) knowledge (with competitors)	KNOW-HOW
Knowledge about working process of other departments in the organization	KNOW-HOW
Work experience in both tradeshow and exhibition as well as other related businesses	KNOW-HOW
Knowledge about international socio-economic current affairs	KNOW-WHY
International market intelligence	KNOW-WHY
Relationship management skills with quality suppliers and trade partners	KNOW-WHY
High level of English proficiency	KNOW-WHY
Problem solving skills on an unplanned basis	KNOW-WHY
Planning Skills (Anticipate potential problems)	KNOW-WHY
Stay neutral in conflict situations and reserve negative opinions	KNOW-WHY
Optimism towards problems and obstacles	KNOW-WHY
Self-esteem and confidence	KNOW-WHY
Good memory	KNOW-WHY
Meticulous and neat working style	KNOW-WHY
Thinking skills (Creative, Synthetic, Comprehensive)	KNOW-WHY
Comprehensive negotiation skills that balance between long-term relationship	KNOW-WHOM
Compromising	KNOW-WHOM
Personal network and professional network in related industries	KNOW-WHOM
Emotional locus of control	KNOW-WHOM
Enthusiasm when encountering with others	KNOW-WHOM

Figure 11: Table V :

### 453 .1 Acknowledgement

454 This study is a part of a research series commissioned by Thailand Incentive and Convention Association, Thai  
455 Exhibition Association, and Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau with the aim to lift the operational  
456 standard of sales executives and operation planners in the whole MICE industry in Thailand. They also help  
457 be the gatekeepers to reach the participants. I would like to express my appreciation towards their support and  
458 assistance.

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## 19 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

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