

A Preliminary Study of the Needs for the Development of Competency Measurement Instrument for Malaysian Chefs

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ABSTRACT

Competency-based performance, as part of competency assessment and measurement at the workplace, has gained much attention in the field of technical and vocational training and education (TVET), and human resource management (HRM). There is an increasing concern over competencies that are needed for successful work performance, as well as methods involved in the assessment and measurement of these competencies in the workplace. In today's contemporary world of work, the practice of competency assessment and measurement is required as it is a guide in evaluating the performance of employees. Assessment of competencies is a lens through which the levels of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics needed to succeed in a job can be observed. Thus, an instrument measuring culinary competencies for superior performance at work that is reliable and valid needs to be established. From the literature reviewed, there have been few studies on the development of an instrument to measure vocational competencies, especially with regards to culinary competency among Malaysian chefs. Therefore, a preliminary study has been conducted to gain the perspectives of stakeholders in the Malaysian culinary industry regarding the need for this instrument. This paper presents the preliminary findings, which are the views of culinary educators and culinary professionals in the industry on the need for instruments to measure a chef's competency.

Keywords: Competency assessment, instrument, culinary professional

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INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian government has always dedicated its unwavering commitment in producing competent and expert human capital resources across the field of specialisation and for the different types

and levels of industry. Espousing the hasty demand for quality workforce in the industry, the government has put extensive effort to ensure that the supply of skilled workers is always adequate and tailored to meet the demand from all sectors in the industry (Ramlee & Rohana, 2013). In the recent 2015 Budget announced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, enhancement of the quality of workforce in the industry was emphasised, which was highlighted in the third strategy (empowering talent and entrepreneurship). To intensify upskilling and reskilling programmes, the Government introduced a new programme, the Globally Recognised Industry and Professional Certification (1MalaysiaGRIP) with an allocation of RM300 million in matching grant between the Government and the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) to train 30 thousand employees in the industry.

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the concept of competence and competencies in the areas of human resource management, training and professional development. Accordingly, competency modeling and assessments have been utilised and these are essentially found in the field of business, marketing and management. In the area of technical and vocational education and training, there is a need to extend this approach as competency is one of the critical aspects in the assessment of vocational performance. Competency is a person's ability to apply her skills, knowledge, and experience so as to perform their

job decorously. On the other hand, at workplace, competency assessment is used to ensure that the employees fulfil their duties as required by the job scope (Krajcovicova, Caganova, & Cambal, 2012). The process involved in competency assessment provides indications and degree of competency levels among workers while performing their respective tasks based on the identified standards (Yahya, 2005; Greenstein, 2012).

Since the early 1990s, competency-based education has been implemented in technical and vocational education and training. This has led to the practice of having competency assessment conducted on graduates in higher learning institutions. This practice reflects the prominence of the concept of training with defined standards of competency as the basis for training of skilled workers (Bowden & Masters, 1993). The Department of Education, Training and Employment, Queensland Government (2012) states that the concept of industry competency concerns the ability to perform particular tasks and duties to the standard of performance expected in the workplace. In an organisation, assessment is important as one of the methods to justify the standard of a worker's ability to perform his best at the workplace. By using the right methods and tools, organisations are able to ensure that they are hiring the right persons for the job. Only apprentices and trainees who possess the relevant skills and knowledge will be certified as competent (Jackson, 2009). Thus, this kind of assessment should be valid, reliable, flexible and fair.

Concerns over the importance of identifying competencies related to effective and efficient work performance has been highlighted as there is a lack of consensus on the approved methods for measurement and assessment. There is a vast literature in the assessment field, however, studies emphasising performance assessment and performance of professional work are still rare and limited (Gonczi, Hager, & Athanasou, 1993; Kak, Burkhalter, & Cooper, 2001; Marin-garcia, Pérez-peñalver, & Watts, 2013).

In the recent years, several studies have shown the need to assess competency of professional workers and study the significance of competency towards career success (Miller, Mao, & Moreo, 2008; Bisset, Cheng, & Brannan, 2010). Furthermore, recent studies provide little evidence on the existence of such instrument of measurement at workplace, especially an assessment tool for employees who are already in the industry. Symons (2004) highlights that the Cooks and the Chefs exist behind every occasion and foods served are always the true evidence of their hard work. Much literature focuses on *what* has been their creation such as the meals, foods and recipes; *how* they cook such as the methods of preparing meals, however, too little emphasis on *who* are these Cooks and Chefs. These people will remain in the background despite their contributions to the society's civilisation. It is indeed mentioned by Wood (2012, p. 132) that:

the whole of 'foodie' culture revolves, of course, around Chefs and yet remarkably little is known about Chefs as an occupation, nor the aesthetic values that drive the Chefs.

Congruent with the statement of Wood (2012), this gap also has been addressed by Zopiatis (2010) where the author highlights the needs to explore knowledge, skills and abilities of a specific job classification such as Chefs. Recent studies in measuring the level of competencies among culinary professional have been done in Cyprus, Taiwan and the United States (Ko, 2010; Riggs & Hughey, 2011; Cheng, 2012; Aguirre, Andrade, Latina, Heredia, & Rica, 2013). There is a need for people in Malaysian culinary industry to be aware of the new global competency requirements for the profession (Mohd Amin, Sahul Hamed, & Mohd Ali, 2010). Thus, measuring culinary competencies is significant in Malaysia in order to obtain an empirical data regarding the level of competencies of culinary professionals in the Malaysian context.

Therefore, in this study, a need analysis with the aims of investigating a feasibility study and supporting the need for the study was conducted. Titcomb (2000) states that a need analysis is the process of identification and evaluation of needs, confirmation of any gaps (if assumed to be exist) and description of the problems encountered by the community or defined population. By using this means, the problems of the study are examined, reviewed and possible solutions are proposed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main purposes of conducting this preliminary study are to understand and discover the perceptions of culinary professionals on the need for an instrument to measure culinary competency among culinary professionals in Malaysian culinary sector. A study by Nor Fadila (2013) showed that conducting a need analysis study prior to instrument development provides multiple views regarding the research. Thus, the aim of this research is to answer the following:

- i. Are there instruments for measuring chefs' culinary competencies for superior performance at work?
- ii. How are competencies at the workplace assessed?
- iii. Why is competency measurement among chefs important?

The preliminary study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative part of the study was conducted using semi-structured, virtual and face-to-face interviews with seven participants who are culinary educators, human resource representatives of hotels, culinary training officers and chefs in the industry. Purposive sampling was employed to select the interview participants based on a criteria of selections set by the researcher.

In addition to the qualitative approach, a descriptive survey as the quantitative approach was employed. Using an online survey technique, the questionnaire was distributed randomly to chefs using a social media networking account. Specifically, the respondents involved in the study were chefs who joined the Chefs Associations of Malaysia Facebook group. They are the chefs

who work in various culinary establishments of the industry, as well as those who work in the culinary education and training segments. The chefs were contacted and asked to participate in the survey. In the questionnaire, there are seven items measuring the need for an instrument measuring chefs' competencies. These items were adapted from a study by Abdul Hamid, Raja Mohamed Fauzi, and Juhary (2011) which focused on the competency model development of human resource practitioners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Both qualitative and quantitative findings are discussed in this section.

Interview Findings

There are seven participants involved in the qualitative phase. Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis and code development as suggested by Boyatzis (1998) and Saldana (2014) until the point of saturation was reached. Findings from the study showed that majority of the interviewees shared their views which highlighted the need to develop an instrument to measure the competencies of chefs in the Malaysian culinary industry. The findings are divided into three sections, namely, absence of competency measurement approaches, need for a comprehensive competency measurement instrument and importance of competency assessment and measurement. Table 1 shows a summary of the interview data analysis using the framework method analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013).

TABLE 1
Summary of the interview findings based on the framework method analysis

Research Questions	Are there instruments for measuring chefs' culinary competencies for superior performance at work?	How are competencies at the workplace assessed?	Why is competency measurement among chefs important?
Themes	Absence of competency measurement approaches for the chefs profession in Malaysia	Need for a comprehensive competency measurement instrument	Importance of competency assessment and measurement
ID01	To date, <u>I don't think there is a tool for competency assessment. There have been no specific assessment and measurement tool,</u>	<u>even if such tool ever exists, it haven't made available for every member in the industry</u>	To have an instrument for me, it's good because it will help a lot of ways to improve in the <u>sense of the educational and industrial point of view</u>
ID02	For me, <u>for now, no such instrument. Do you have any?</u> I also would like to know	All these while, for the purpose of performance appraisal, we are using the same staff evaluation forms that are used for every staff in hotels. For a chef's role and function, <u>we need to adjust our feedback in the existing evaluation forms so that we could measure our chefs using the respective forms.</u> Well... it is good if we have one instrument that could be used precisely for chefs job position	The most difficult situation is when a person wishes to apply for a higher position... sometimes it is not fair for those degree/master holders to start from the bottom... unless their skills are zero... Therefore, it might be beneficial if there is a system <u>to identify possessed skill by individual...</u> Because once they are already in the vocation, it is not that difficult as there will be someone who can guide them...
ID03	There is <u>no instrumentation developed to assess the a chef's capability in the industry.</u> The only method of assessment is based on loyalty, seniority and also other personal influential factors.	The assessment form for performance appraisal is too broad and general... <u>It does not address the area of competency in detail.</u>	In overseas, if we learn from the history of City & Guilds, the system is derived from the 18th century. During that time, the instrumentation of measurement is based on the <u>success of the apprentice to be able to develop their branding and products.</u>
ID04	After all, <u>such instrument is not available in the industry...</u>	We do not really have a <u>detailed, specific measure for our workers' competency.</u>	It's good to have a proper competency instrumentation. <u>so that we could use it in measuring competencies held by our students before them graduating</u>
ID05	I don't think there is <u>any and I am not sure how to do that kind of assessment</u>	If we want to assess people, <u>that competency must be categorised into a specific area... knowledge? Skills? Attitude?</u>	It's important to have some forms or tools to measure our knowledge and skills... <u>then we know, how good am I?</u>

Absence of competency measurement approaches for the chefs profession in Malaysia

From the qualitative data, the interview findings show that there is currently no available standard approach used as a measurement of chefs' competencies in the culinary industry, especially in the hotel settings. The inavailability of such instrument is supported by the interview responses, as shown in Table 1. Based on the comments given by the interviewees, these findings are similar to those from some previous studies which highlight several factors limiting competency assessment in the workplace. Previous study highlights that these challenging factors revolve around reformulation of the curriculum, reformatting standards, development of delivery strategies and designing assessment schemes, which incorporate psychometric values such as validity, reliability and fairness (Bissett, Cheng, & Brannan, 2010; Riggs & Hughey, 2011; Greenstein, 2012).

Need for a comprehensive competency measurement instrument

Another finding from the interview is the suggestion that there is a need for the existing assessment process and instrument to be improved. Most of the interviewed participants agreed that the existing methods used for a worker's assessment at the workplace is very general. The nature of the work in a foodservice establishment such as hotels,

restaurant and catering is very dynamic. However, most of the organisations inclusive of the hotel industry have been using the same type of evaluation forms. Thus, suggesting that there should be an instrument to measure competencies of the foodservice establishment of the house personnel, namely, the culinary professionals. Thus, this practice has yielded an ineffective value of the results for human capital management and development.

Importance of competency assessment and measurement

Another key finding from the needs analysis study is that it will be beneficial if there is an instrument or assessment system that can measure competencies of chefs. One of the reasons is that the use of the instrument will result in a profile of Malaysian culinary professionals and their competency assessment could be included in the individual portfolios. The need for such an instrument is reflected in the interview responses. In a wider context, a comprehensive competency assessment and measurement tool is useful for training and education institutions as it will be used as a reference in the evaluation of mastery and learning outcomes of specific knowledge and skills. Therefore, the research is important as there is a need to develop a reliable and valid instrument measuring culinary competencies for superior performance at work. This instrument can then be utilised to

measure the level of culinary competencies for superior work performance among chefs of Malaysian hotels. However, there are a few considerations and limitations of using such instruments and these have been highlighted by an interviewee who said:

“Assessment at workplace is actually hard to be done... need the cooperations from the human resource management and our superiors such as the General Manager...” (ID03)

“My sense is this would be beneficial to the chefs, provided that the assessment instrument does not create added costs or liabilities of the company and second, there is an applicable outcome - does passing this test results in a raise or promotion for said chef, and does failing the test reflect on training policies of the company or the failings of the individual, hence setting them up for potential firing. Protecting employee rights do come into play...” (ID 05)

“Having an instrument to measure competencies will benefit us, however we need to think of the most appropriate methods in conducting the assessment...” (ID 02)

Thus, based on the the analysis of the interview responses, further study to develop an instrument for measuring culinary competencies among chefs needs to be conducted. By using a prescribed

instrument or tool of measurement, important information related to worker competencies can be gathered and utilised for further analysis. This will also benefit the human resource management practices in organisations, especially in the selection and hiring, as well as training and development of skills for workers. By having a competency profile, the human resource management of an organisation could focus on the training needs and emphasise on the development of skills for their workforce. According to Mahazani and Noraini (2010), a customised design of competency profile can be used in targeting specific interventions for specific competencies.

Survey Findings

The questionnaire consists of seven items measuring the needs and importance of a competency measurement instrument with a reliability value of Cronbach's alpha of 0.86. In this preliminary study, 42 completed questionnaires were used. The first section contains the description of respondents' characteristics. A summary of the respondents' demographic information according to age, educational culinary background, culinary work experience, current job position and current workplace is shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
A Summary of the Respondents' Demographic Information

Demographic	Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	37	88.1
	Female	5	11.9
Age	21-30 years old	14	33.3
	31-40 years old	18	42.9
	41-50 years old	8	19.0
	Over 50 years old years old	2	4.8
Experience	Less than 5 years	6	14.3
	5-10 years	9	21.4
	11-15 years	14	33.3
	Over 15 years	13	31.0
Job Position	Executive Chef	11	26.3
	Head Chef	3	7.1
	Sous Chef	5	11.9
	Chef de Partie	4	9.6
	Commis	3	7.1
	Trainer/ Educator	10	23.8
	Trainee/ Students	3	7.1
	Others	3	7.1
Institution	Hotel	10	23.8
	Restaurant	10	23.8
	Training/Education	15	35.7
	Consultant	1	2.4
	Freelance	2	4.8
	Catering	1	2.4
	Others	3	7.1

Note: n = 42

With reference to the data on job position and institutions, the respondents are classified further as either in the industry or education sector. The following Table 3

and Table 4 show the classification of the respondents representing the population of culinary professionals in Malaysia.

TABLE 3
Classification of the Respondents according to their Job Position

Sectors	Criteria	f	%	Total %
1. Industry	Executive Chef	11	26.3	69.1
	Head Chef	3	7.1	
	Sous Chef	5	11.9	
	Chef de Partie	4	9.6	
	Commis	3	7.1	
	Others (retiree, engineers)	3	7.1	
2. Education	Trainer/ Educator	10	23.8	30.9
	Trainee/ Students	3	7.1	

TABLE 4
Classification of the Respondents according to Institutions

Sectors	Criteria	f	%	Total %
1. Industry	Hotel	10	23.8	64.3
	Restaurant	10	23.8	
	Consultant	1	2.4	
	Freelance	2	4.8	
	Catering	1	2.4	
	Others (self-business)	3	7.1	
2. Education	Training/Education	15	35.7	35.7

Perceptions towards use of an instrument for competency measurement

As shown in Table 5, the findings of the survey demonstrate that most of the

respondents have positive perceptions towards the need to develop a competency measurement instrument.

TABLE 5
Perceptions towards Instrument for Competency Measurement

Statement	SD	D	SMA	A	SA	M	Sd
1 Currently, there is no instrument for measuring chefs' competencies in Malaysia	0 0	4 9.5	9 21.4	17 40.5	12 28.6	3.88	.942
2 Instrument for measuring chefs' competencies is important for a chef's self-evaluation	0 0	1 2.4	2 4.8	25 59.5	14 33.3	4.24	.656
3 Having an instrument for measuring chefs' competencies will help chefs know their current level of competency	0 0	1 2.4	2 4.8	26 61.9	13 31.0	4.21	.645
4 Having an instrument for measuring chefs' competencies will help chefs identify competencies that they have mastered.	0 0	1 2.4	3 7.1	28 66.7	10 23.8	4.12	.633
5 Having an instrument for measuring chefs' competencies will help chefs identify competencies of as a good Chef	0 0	1 2.4	3 7.1	26 61.9	12 28.6	4.17	.660
6 Having an instrument for measuring chefs' competencies will help chefs identify competencies that need improvement.	0 0	0 0	1 2.4	26 61.9	15 35.7	4.33	.526
7 Having an instrument for measuring chefs' competencies will guide chefs towards superior work performance in the culinary profession	0 0	0 0	2 4.8	24 57.1	16 38.1	4.33	.570
						4.17	0.662

SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, SMA=Somewhat Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree
M=Mean, Sd=Standard Deviation
Note: n = 42

Table 5 provides distribution of the importance level based on the survey responses. Majority of the respondents (90.5%) participating in the survey agreed that there are currently no instruments for measuring chefs' competencies in Malaysia. The respondents were also asked to rate their perceptions of the benefits of having such instruments as self-evaluation, identifying current level of existing competencies, identifying competencies that the chefs are well-mastered, identifying competencies of good chefs, identifying competencies that need improvement, as well as a guidance for chef's profession. Nearly 80% agreed that having an instrument for measuring

chefs' competencies is important for chefs' self-evaluation. Most of the respondents agreed that having a competency instrument would inform the chefs of their present level of competency, identify competencies that they have mastered and determine competencies of a good chef, as well as review competencies that need to be improved. Based on the information in Table 6, all respondents agreed that an instrument for competency measurement would guide chefs to attain superior work performance in the culinary profession. It can be seen that the respondents' perceived level of importance of having competency assessment is high (92.9%).

TABLE 6
Distribution of the Importance Level

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage
Importance	Low (1.00-2.33)	0	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.66)	3	7.1
	High (3.67-5.00)	39	92.9
	Total	42	100.0

CONCLUSION

The current world of vocation requires skilled workers to be able to orchestrate themselves in accordance with the contemporary and dramatic changes of the industry. The attainment of competencies has become the most fundamental component of individual, organisational and governmental aspirations (Potgieter & Merwe, 2002). Future study in this area is of importance because competencies development and assessment are important factors that would ensure all parts of an

organisation work in harmony. This is a challenge faced by the human resource management as it plays an important role in managing organisations' human capital which should be parallel with the government's aspirations to enhance competencies of the existing workforce in the Malaysian industry. The Malaysian government is targeting that 33% of the workforce to in the high-skilled jobs category in 2015, and an increase to 50% by 2020. This target will definitely require greater involvement from every stakeholder

in the industry. Although various initiatives have been taken to assist future skilled workers, namely, graduates in the TVET, those who are already in the vocation system have not had their potential be optimally utilised. These potential highly-skilled workers need to be developed further so that they can be fully utilised and thus, increase the rate of job retention (10th Malaysia Plan, 2011-2015).

Highlighting the concept of competencies is important during the delivery of educational interventions and training, as well as in the actual profession. From the perspective of education, the delivery and assessment method of competency is apparent because it is embedded in the system, allowing institutions to gauge the value of programs offered. For the profession, especially in the culinary industry, assessment methods of competency are not defined and tailored for the profession because the definition of chefs' competencies has not been thoroughly explored (Zopiatis & Kyprianou, 2006; Zopiatis, 2010). The significance of such assessment and measurement is perceived to be less valuable as the turnover rate is high for the culinary industry. This is one of the key challenges for implementing competency assessment and measurement in the industry.

Having such an assessment and measurement is important because this will allow the industry to have standards linked to education and training that will eventually contribute to the quality of the profession. By having a reliable and valid

instrument, organisations could identify the area of competencies that is needed, as well as those which have to be improved or strengthened to be used by organisations in identifying and developing specific training and/ or education in the culinary field. Additionally, findings from the needs analysis of this study proposed that the existing assessment process and instrument are in need of improvement. However, further research in this area is recommended to include more samples in the quantitative survey, as well as the qualitative techniques in order to provide more comprehensive perspectives from industrial stakeholders. Therefore, the preliminary findings of the study have shown that there is an urgency to develop an instrument specifically for competency assessment and measurement in the culinary industry as this will be beneficial in facilitating issues related to technical and vocational training, education and ultimately providing skilled workforce.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study is an initial step to addressing this issues, it contributes to our understanding on the needs of a meticulous and comprehensive instrument which precisely addresses the employees' competencies. Further empirical investigation with a more refined classification of the respondents who represent the population of culinary professionals in Malaysia is needed on this issue. As this study includes a small sample from various levels of job positions, a

larger number of sample which focuses on a targeted job position is also recommended for future study in order to provide a better understanding on the specific level of the chefs being studied. More definitive empirical study in this area is required to provide the most convincing evidence on the value of developing instrument for competency measurement among culinary professionals in the industry.

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