

Professional competencies for marketing managers in Taiwan: an application of the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to explore the professional competencies of marketing managers in Taiwan through four steps. First, the authors confirmed five major dimensions, 10 sub-dimensions and 62 basic competencies based on analysing the recruiting content on the 104 Job Bank Web site. Second, five dimensions and 29 basic competencies were selected by interviewing seven professionals and using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to determine their relative importance. Third, an AHP questionnaire was developed as an investigation tool to be used with 34 marketing managers. Finally, the AHP analysis was utilised and the relative importance of every hierarchical item was obtained. The findings presented in this article could be utilised as a self-evaluation tool for marketing managers, as well as the basis for staffing and training programmes.

INTRODUCTION

The effective management of marketing is the key to economic growth and competitiveness. In fact, Meldrum suggested that the identification of key marketing competencies during the recruiting phase could result in better quality employment [1]. Although prior studies focused on the marketing manager's competencies, knowledge and skills required for success in marketing management, only a small amount of research identified their relative importance [2-5].

The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) is a method for formulating and analysing decisions. Identifying and applying the required competencies in the training for marketing manager is as important as other decisions for enterprises. The AHP also can be utilised to rank the importance of various alternatives. In this study, the application of AHP technique helps identify the competencies the marketing manager needs and their relative importance.

REVIEW OF THE COMPETENCIES OF MARKETING MANAGERS

Competencies

Spencer and Spencer define competency as *an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation* [6]. The underlying characteristic means the competency is a fairly deep and enduring part of a person's personality and can predict behaviour in a wide variety of situations and job tasks. They point to five types of competency characteristics: motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge and skill. According to the study by Shore and Shaw, individual marketing employee competency is related positively to individual marketing employee performance [7].

Previous Studies on Professional Competencies of the International Marketeer

The top 10 desired skills identified as very important for entry-level marketing staff are communication, creativity, analytical skills, numeracy, resilience, entrepreneurship, initiative, organisational skills, planning and selling skills, which were identified by Middleton and Long [8]. Their study consisted of a literature review; a review of advertisements for marketing personnel; content analysis of graduates' commentaries; and a survey of employers. Interpersonal, leadership, negotiation, co-ordination and communication skills appear to be high needs defined by researchers [5]. The literature identified the need to maintain a high-speed improvisation ability, problem-solving technique and conflicts management ability as key factors when facing the marketing profession [9-11].

Earlier studies on marketing management competencies identified marketing planning and implementation as a major concern to marketing practitioners in the future [8][12-14]. The importance of strategic marketing planning and

implementation competencies is evidenced by the fact that marketing planning is evolving into an area of academic enquiry in its own right [1][15-16]. Taylor, and Melaia et al, found the marketing 4P management competencies of product development, pricing, distribution and channel management, advertising and project management are very important to marketing implementation [5][17]. The advent of relationship marketing indicates that the need for customer relationship management (CRM) competencies will increase in the future [5][18]. Ang and Buttle found that CRM competencies should include four areas: generating customer knowledge, customer acquisition, customer retention and customer development [19].

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

There are three phases in the present study. First, the authors began a content analysis by researching recruiting advertisements for a marketing manager position. This was to try to identify the competencies a marketing manager needs from an industrial perspective. Second, the important competencies were identified by creating an AHP questionnaire and interviewing marketing managers. Last, the authors surveyed marketing managers using the AHP questionnaire. In order to discover the basic competencies, analysis of the relative importance of each dimension and competency was conducted in this study:

- In phase one (content analysis) a search of recruiting advertisements on the Taiwan 104 Job Bank Web site for a marketing manager position, was carried out over one month. The authors selected 81 advertisements randomly in the marketing/planning/project management category and sales category. By generalising the data of competencies, a first version marketing manager competencies list was created.
- In phase two (focus group), the authors arranged to interview seven marketing managers, to specify the necessity of each competency item in the first-version marketing manager competencies list. For each dimension, there were five to seven basic competencies. These were addressed to identify the most important competencies. A second version marketing manager competencies list, therefore, was created and analysed with the AHP technique.
- In phase three (AHP analysis), based on the framework of the second version marketing manager competencies list, an AHP questionnaire was developed. This phase took two months to survey 34 industrial marketing managers. After collecting the data, the authors used AHP to analyse each dimension for their relative importance. Then, the most important basic competencies could be defined.

RESULTS

Phase one (content analysis): According to the 81 advertisements for a marketing manager positions listed on the Taiwan 104 Job Bank Web site, the authors generalised the competencies into five major dimensions, 10 sub-dimensions, and 62 basic competencies, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Framework of marketing manager competencies.

Major Dimension	Sub Dimension	Basic Competencies	Phase One	Phase Two	
			Shown on 104 Job Bank Web site (frequency)	Selected by industrial marketing managers (frequency)	Keep in AHP questionnaire (V)
Professional attitude	Professional attitude	Observe marketing ethics & law	5	5	V
		Setback tolerance	13	5	V
		Learn happily	6	2	
		Initiative	12	4	V
		Subjection & co-ordination	19	0	
		Teamwork	18	4	V
		Careful	3	3	
		Serious & responsible	11	5	V
		Optimistic & aggressive	8	3	
Professional efficiency	Professional efficiency	Adventure & challenge	6	4	
		Independent working ability	10	2	
		Logical thinking	4	2	
		Creative thinking	12	2	
		Implementation ability	28	3	
		Foreign language ability	16	1	
		Problem solving	2	5	V
		Induction & integrate	7	3	V
		Stress management	6	3	V
Communication & co-ordination	43	5	V		
Conflict management	2	2			

		Leadership	13	6	V
		Personnel management	12	1	
Marketing Planning	Planning process	Possess industry's knowledge	24	5	V
		Market competition environment analysis	19	6	V
		Plan & draft the marketing strategies	73	6	V
		Look for & confirm target customer	39	4	V
		Cost-benefit analysis & budget planning	13	5	V
		Write proposal	40	2	
		Project management ability	24	3	
		Presentation skills	7	2	
		Evaluate marketing plan/strategy performance	3	4	V
		Information management	Understand the source of market information	11	2
	Familiar with the methods to collect market information		14	4	
	Familiar with the methods of data analysis		11	0	
	Predict market trends		11	5	V
	Word processing		13	0	
Marketing 4P management	Product management	Possess the knowledge of the products	39	2	
		Understand customer's demands	12	6	V
		Develop new products	10	5	V
		Brand management	28	1	
	Price management	Familiar with all kinds of pricing strategies	6	2	
		Calculate product cost	15	2	
		Negotiate & adjust the price	3	4	V
		Draft the price strategy of the goods	6	3	V
	Promotion management	Design all kinds of advertising documents	41	2	
		Media/public relation skills	29	2	
		Update Web site information	10	0	
		Business development and sale skills	8	3	
		Design and hold all kinds of promotion exhibition activities	43	2	
		Promote the company's brand image	12	5	V
	Place management	Possess the knowledge of distribution channels	6	3	V
		Expand the new channel	14	4	V
		Horizontal alliances	19	2	
Web site management		16	1		
Customer relationship management	Relationship development	Good communication with customers	8	5	V
		Good after-sale service	8	1	
		Discover customer problems	3	3	
		Solve customer problems	4	5	V
	Relationship performance	Retain existing customers	12	5	V
		Create new customers	12	4	
		Improve customer satisfaction	11	6	V
		Improve customer loyalty	8	6	V

Phase two (focus group): With the AHP analysis, the preference is for fewer questions and so seven industrial marketing managers were interviewed, to select representative competencies. The dimensions of *professional attitude*, *professional efficiency* and *customer relationship management* contained the top five competencies in each dimension, and the top seven competencies were in both *marketing planning* and *marketing 4P management*.

The competency selected most frequently was included in the AHP questionnaire. A competency achieving the same frequency was discussed by the marketing managers, who then made another choice. The result is shown in Table 1. The AHP questionnaire was designed using these five dimensions and 29 competencies.

Phase three (AHP analysis): the AHP analysis was applied to the results of surveying 34 industrial marketing managers. The AHP results are shown, in Table 2 to Table 8. There are five major dimensions in the professional competencies of marketing managers, with the composite weights shown in Table 2. The most important competency dimension is *professional attitude*.

Table 2: The results of pair-wise comparisons for important major dimensions.

Major Dimensions	Priority	Rank
Professional attitude	0.2357	1
Professional efficiency	0.2275	2
Marketing planning	0.1839	4
Marketing 4P management	0.2115	3
Customer relationship management	0.1415	5

Professional attitude includes five competencies, and the importance of these is listed in Table 3. *Observe marketing ethics & law* is the most important competency in this dimension.

Table 3: Ranked results of pair-wise comparisons for the important competencies of professional attitude.

Competencies of Professional Attitude	Priority	Weighted Priority	Rank
Observe marketing ethics & law	0.2452	0.0578	1
Setback tolerance	0.1798	0.0424	4
Initiative	0.2335	0.0550	2
Team work	0.1481	0.0349	5
Serious & responsible	0.1934	0.0456	3

Professional efficiency includes five competencies, and the ranking of these is listed in Table 4. *Leadership* is the most important competency in this dimension.

Table 4: Ranked results of pair-wise comparisons for important competencies of professional efficiency.

Competencies of professional efficiency	Priority	Weighted Priority	Rank
Problem solving	0.1986	0.0452	3
Induction & integrate	0.1006	0.0229	5
Stress management	0.1454	0.0331	4
Communication & co-ordination	0.2647	0.0602	2
Leadership	0.2908	0.0661	1

Marketing planning includes seven competencies, and the ranking of these is listed in Table 5. *Plan & draft the marketing strategies* is the most important competency in this dimension.

Table 5: Ranked results of pair-wise comparisons for the important competencies of marketing planning.

Competencies of marketing planning	Priority	Weighted Priority	Rank
Possess industry knowledge	0.1462	0.0269	3
Market competition environment analysis	0.1778	0.0327	2
Plan & draft the marketing strategies	0.2046	0.0376	1
Look for & confirm target customers	0.1348	0.0248	6
Cost-benefit analysis and budget planning	0.1396	0.0257	5
Evaluate marketing plan / strategy performance	0.0865	0.0159	7
Predict the market trends	0.1103	0.0203	4

Marketing 4P management includes seven competencies, and the importance of these is listed in Table 6. *Understand customer's demands* is the most important competency in this dimension.

Table 6: Ranked results of pair-wise comparisons for the important competencies of marketing 4P management.

Competencies of marketing 4P management	Priority	Weighted Priority	Rank
Understand customer's demands	0.4229	0.0894	1
Develop new products	0.0959	0.0203	4
Negotiate & adjust the price	0.0706	0.0149	6
Draft the price strategy of the goods	0.1136	0.0240	3
Promote the company's brand image	0.1476	0.0312	2
Possess the knowledge of distribution channels	0.0640	0.0135	7
Expand new channels	0.0855	0.0181	5

Customer relationship management includes five competencies, and the ranking of these is given in Table 7. *Good communication with customers* is the most important competency in this dimension.

Table 7: Ranked results of pair-wise comparisons for the important competencies of customer relationship management.

Competencies of customer relationship management	Priority	Weighted Priority	Rank
Good communication with customers	0.3181	0.0450	1
Solve customer problems	0.2219	0.0314	2
Retain existing customers	0.1237	0.0175	5
Improve customer satisfaction	0.2101	0.0297	3
Improve customer loyalty	0.1262	0.0179	4

Among all the competencies, the most important was found to be *understand customer's demands*. The top five important competencies are highlighted in Figure 1. The main results of analysis, including the hierarchy of competencies and the relative importance of every hierarchical item, are shown in Figure 1.

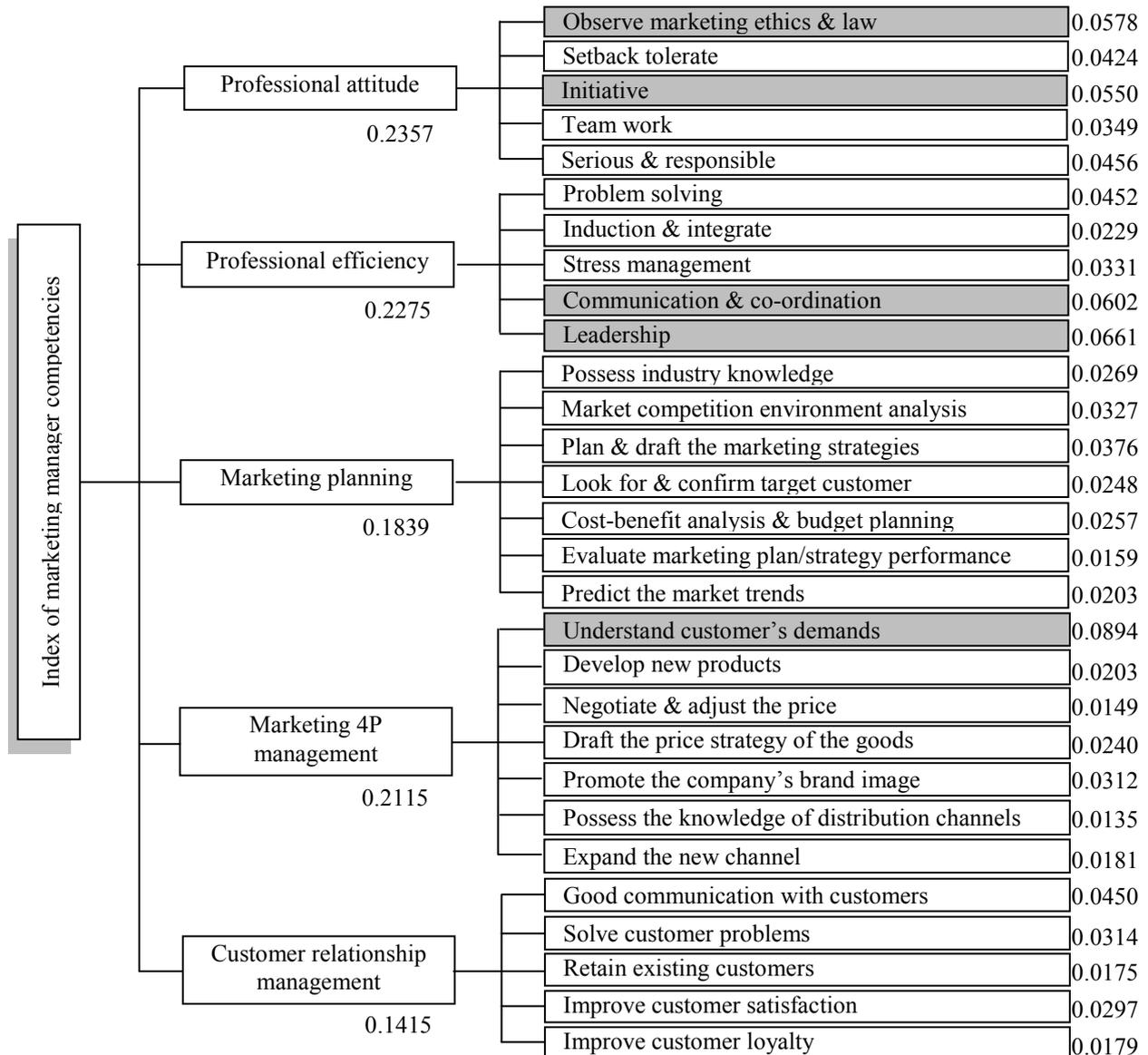


Figure 1: The framework of the marketing manager competencies index.

CONCLUSIONS

Little research exists focusing on the individual competencies required for success in marketing management [1]. The conclusion of this exploratory study was to determine the key competencies of the marketing manager in Taiwan. The main purpose was to identify the professional competency contents for marketing managers, to acknowledge where they are and where they should be. Therefore, a company's training can be adjusted accordingly.

Derived from the results of content analysis, interviews and the AHP analysis, the professional competency of marketing managers should include five dimensions (professional attitude, professional efficiency, marketing planning,

marketing 4P management, and customer relationship management) and 62 competencies. Among these competencies of the marketing manager, the most important are: understand customer's demands; leadership; communication and coordination; observe marketing ethics and law; and initiative.

The main contribution on the professional competency list was identified as: measurement of the professional competency level of the marketing manager; the second contribution was: understand the relative importance of each competency that was identified; the third contribution was: identify what the marketing manager needs to learn to improve their skills and abilities; and the fourth contribution was: increase the work effectiveness of the marketing manager.

Companies should set up a policy that all marketing managers review their professional competencies regularly and encourage them to apply that learning. Hence, the suggestions of the findings can be realised. Courses for training programmes should be designed based on the proposed findings. This could provide the major basis for the education and training of the marketing manager in Taiwan.

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