

Exploring the Professional Competency Contents for International Marketer in Taiwan

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Abstract — The main purpose of this study was to establish Professional Competency Contents for International Marketer in Taiwan. To establish these contents a set of interviews with international marketing managers and three rounds of Delphi Technique surveys were employed. Five international marketing managers were interviewed for discussions on definitions, framework, and items of international marketing competency. A questionnaire for the “Delphi Technique Survey” was developed based on the results acquired from the interviews. The resulting questionnaire was distributed to another group of 30 international marketer of trading companies in Taiwan. After three rounds of Delphi Technique Survey with these participants, the “Contents of Professional Competency for International Marketer” was established. Five dimensions and thirty indicators were identified. It is hoped that the proposed contents could be served as a self-evaluation tool for international marketer as well as the basis for staffing and training programs for international marketer in Taiwan.

Keywords — Professional competency, International marketer, Delphi technique

I. INTRODUCTION

CHARACTERIZED as a relative small-scaled market, the Taiwan market is called “Island’s Market”. Firms in Taiwan, after accumulating the manufacturing capabilities in the domestic market, are forced to enter international markets to expand their territories.

The domestic consumption market of Taiwan is inferior to American and mainland China, therefore, the performance growth of Taiwan firms will depend on the export trade. Under this situation, Taiwan’s firms will need more international marketing qualified personnel. In order to conformity with global customer’s highly changeable demand, and the high competition of the rival, it is very important to train and improve international marketer’s professional ability. But, the primary step of training is to find out the professional competencies that international marketer has to possess, then managers would be develop a series of effective training program for international marketer. And in fact, it has been suggested that the identification of key competencies during that recruitment phase will like result in better-quality hires who are able to apply sound marketing principles in the field, as well as lower overall staff turnover [16], [17].

Unfortunately, little research exists focusing on the individual competencies, knowledge, and skills required for

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success in international marketing. The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine the key competencies of international marketer in organizations in Taiwan.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Competencies

According to Webster’s Dictionary, competency means “The quality of being adequately or well qualified physically and intellectually”. Boyatzis [3] analyzed studies of more than 2,000 people in 41 management jobs in 12 organizations and set down an explicit definition of the notion of “competency”. A competency, he said, was “an underlying characteristic of an individual which is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job”. Competencies can be motives, traits, skills, aspects of one’s self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge which one uses [3].

Spencer and Spencer [23] 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”. The underlying characteristic means the competency is a fairly deep and enduring part of a person’s personality and can predict behavior in a wide variety of situations and job tasks. They point five types of competency characteristics: motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skill. Motives, traits and self-concepts are core or central competencies, which are at the base of the personality iceberg and are more difficulty to develop. On the other hand, surface knowledge and skills competencies are relatively easy to develop; training is the most cost-effective way to secure these people abilities.

B. Previous Studies on Professional Competencies of International Marketer

International marketing is simply the application of marketing principles to more than one country. Cateora and Ghauri [4] defined International Marketing is the performance of business activities that direct the flow of a company’s goods and services to consumers or users in more than one nation for a profit. Keegan [14] indicated the international market goes beyond the export marketer and becomes more involved in the marketing environment in the countries in which it is doing business. Then Muhlbacher, Helmuth, and Dahringer [19] defined international marketing is the application of marketing orientation and marketing capabilities to international business.

At its simplest level, international marketing involves the firm in making one or more marketing mix decisions across national boundaries. At its most complex level, it involves the firm in establishing manufacturing facilities

overseas and coordinating marketing strategies across the globe [8]. Therefore, the work of international marketers is more complicated than that of domestic marketers. International marketers have some uncontrollable elements (ex. culture influence, legal differences between countries, and various types of distribution channels, etc.) to deal with besides some controllable elements (ex. product, pricing, and promotion, etc.) [5].

Middleton and Long [18] found that the ten top desired skills identified as very important for entry-level marketing staff are communication, creativity, analytical skills, numeracy, resilience, entrepreneurship, initiative, organizational skills, planning, and selling skills. Interpersonal, leadership, and communication skills appear to high needs defined by marketing majors [9]. The literature identified the need to maintain a high-speed improvisation ability, problem-solving technique, and conflicts management ability as key factors facing the marketing profession [7], [22], [27].

Earlier studies on marketing management competencies identified marketing planning and implementation competencies as a key area of future concern to marketing practitioners [6], [18], [25], [26]. 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 on its own [11], [15], [17]. Taylor [24] found the marketing 4P management competencies of product development, pricing, and advertising are very important for marketing implementation.

The advent of relationship management suggests that the need for customer relationship management competencies will increase in the future [10], [12], [20]. Ang and Buttle [1] found that CRM competencies in the four areas: generating customer knowledge, customer acquisition, customer retention, and customer development.

The literature identified the need to maintain a global outlook, to track global best practices and trends, and to become or remain a global business as key challenges facing the marketing profession [2], [9], [21]. As to international marketing competencies, studies show familiar with global business etiquette, international business law, foreign language, and knowledge of international marketing are important [24], [27]. Kashani and Turpin [13] identified the necessity of cross-cultural communication ability and awareness skill in international marketing area.

III. METHODOLOGY

Interviews with international marketing managers and Delphi technique surveys were employed in the study. The methodology of the study is described in the following sections.

A. Procedure

First of all, relevant literature was collected and analyzed for the purpose of identifying the professional competencies of international marketer in Taiwan should possess. Interviews with international marketing managers were conducted to identify the elements and framework of international marketing competency. Three rounds of Delphi technique surveys were then conducted to determine

the dimensions, and the indicators. Finally, the professional competency contents for the international marketer in Taiwan were established.

B. Interviews with International Marketing Managers

The purpose of the interviews with international marketing managers was to identify the elements of international marketing competency, the framework of international marketing competency content, as well as develop the questionnaire for Delphi Technique surveys.

Participants

In-depth interviews were conducted with five international marketing managers of trading companies in Taiwan. The interviews consisted of several open-ended questions so as to draw out respondents' opinions and included a final question allowing the interviewee to state additional comments regarding the competencies of international marketer in organizations. All respondents were contacted by telephone or e-mail and informed of the nature and purpose of the research. Interviewees were informed that interviews would last approximately one hour and would be conducted in person at the respondent's place of business.

Instrument

Semi-structured questions based on the prior literature review were used in the interviews. The topics in the interview included: (1) the elements of competency for the international marketer in Taiwan; (2) the prospective dimensions of professional competencies for the international marketer; (3) the prospective indicators of professional competencies for the international marketer; and (4) the questionnaire for the Delphi Technique survey.

C. Delphi Technique

Delphi technique is a data collecting method by the means of individual experts. In the method, an administrator would send a questionnaire to a panel of experts for their opinions on a subject. After each round of questionnaire, the administrator would summarize findings of the questionnaires, and then formulate a second questionnaire based on the previous results to send out to the experts again. The answers basically act as a form of forecast to an issue; and summarized findings are to be anonymous if sent out on further questionnaires. The moderator can continue this process for as many times as necessary, until there is little ambiguity in the forecasts of the experts. The final results will be summarized and averaged to be presented as a general verdict.

Participants

The target population of this study was the international marketer of trading companies in Taiwan. The trading companies may be involved in export and/or import of all kinds of products. Those who were approached to participate in this study had to be in some kind of international marketing role; being merely a domestic marketer was not fitting for this research. Thirty-five questionnaires were distributed in total, by either email or fax, and thirty usable questionnaire results were returned.

Instrument

"Delphi Technique Questionnaire Survey on the

Contents of Professional Competency for International Marketer" was distributed to the participants via email. The survey consists of four parts, including a survey description section stating the purpose of the survey, instructions, demographics, and the questions related to the indicators for international marketing competencies.

The content of the questionnaire comprised two parts, including the first part "Dimensions", and the second part "Indicators", and a Likert five-point scale was adopted for the two parts. If the participants had other suggestions or comments about any items, their opinions could be written in the "Revised Opinion" columns. The third part was the rating of importance, adopting a five-point scale, with "5" for "Very Important", "4" for "Rather Important", "3" for "Important", "2" for "Less Important", "1" for "Least Important". If the participants had other suggestions or opinions, they could write them down in the "Revised Opinion" columns.

Data analysis

Descriptive analysis was adopted for means, modes, average means and standard deviations. If an item from the surveys of the group received a mode higher than 3, an average mean more than 3.5, and a standard deviation smaller than 1.0, it was considered that a consensus was reached on that item.

IV. RESULTS

A. Interviews with International Marketing Managers

The findings from the interviews are as follows: (1) the five dimensions of professional competencies for international marketer are Professional Effectiveness, Marketing Planning, Marketing 4P Management, Customer Relationship Management, and Internationalize ability; (2) the indicators of international marketing competency include items such as the Apply Problem-solving techniques, and etc.; and (3) confirmed the overall framework of the competency dimensions and indicators, and the questionnaire for the Delphi Technique survey.

B. Delphi Technique

The results of three rounds of Delphi techniques expert questionnaire are shown in Table 1. The dimensions include professional effectiveness dimension, marketing planning dimension, marketing 4P management dimension, customer relationship management dimension, and internationalize ability dimension. With respect to professional effectiveness, it includes five indicators; as for marketing planning, it includes seven indicators. With respect to marketing 4P management, customer relationship management, and internationalize ability, they include six indicators separately.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The establishment of contents for international marketing professional competency plays an important role in the culture of international marketer. The main purpose of establishing the professional competency contents is for international marketer to acknowledge where they are and where they should be, so that they can adjust their training

Derived from the conclusion of interviews and the Delphi Technique surveys, a international marketer's professional competency should be include five dimensions (professional effectiveness, marketing planning, marketing 4P management, customer relationship management, and internationalize ability) and 30 indicators.

With respect to the professional effectiveness aspect, one should have the ability to problem-solving, stress management, conflict management, interpersonal communication, and lead marketing employees. With respect to the marketing planning aspect, one should able to understand the influence factors on marketing planning, identify marketing strategies, conduct SWOT analysis, select target market, analyze financial performance, develop a marketing plan, and write the plan.

With respect to the marketing 4P management aspect, one should have the ability to implement product and service management, describe pricing strategies, implement distribution and logistics management, and develop and implement promotion plan. With respect to the customer relationship management aspect, one should have the ability to analyze basic customer relationship, manage customer service, acquire new customers, retain existing customers, and create additional value for and from those customers.

As to the internationalize ability aspect, one should be familiar with foreign language, international business etiquette, international business law, cross-cultural communication, and possess international marketing knowledge.

One of the main purposes of the professional competency contents is to measure international marketer's professional competency levels; the second purpose is to identify what the international marketer's need to learn for promoting their skills and abilities; and the third purpose is to increase the work effectiveness of international marketer. Managers should implement a policy that all international marketers review their professional competencies regularly and encourage international marketers to apply what they have learned so that the functions of the contents could be realized. Courses for training programs should be designed based on the proposed contents.

This paper uses Delphi technique and simple descriptive statistics to establish the contents for international marketing professional competency. To further validate the results of this study, further research is recommended on a wider sample and more complex AHP analyses, to confirm the relative importance of every hierarchy item.

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Table 1 The Professional Competency Contents for International Marketer

Dimensions	Indicators
1. Professional Effectiveness	1.1 Apply problem-solving techniques
	1.2 Management stressful situations
	1.3 Conflict management
	1.4 Development interpersonal skills with individuals and teams
	1.5 Provide leadership to marketing employees
2. Marketing Planning	2.1 Analyze influence of internal and external factors on marketing planning
	2.2 Identify considerations in implementing international marketing strategies
	2.3 Market identification and select target market
	2.4 Explain role of SWOT and conduct SWOT analysis for use in marketing planning process

Dimensions	Indicators
	2.5 Analyze financial performance and use financial statements to make marketing management decisions
	2.6 Develop a marketing plan
	2.7 Writing for Marketing
3. Marketing 4P Management	3.1 Product and service management
	3.2 Evaluate branding concepts and build brand identity
	3.3 Management the selling function
	3.4 Describe pricing strategies and determine prices
	3.5 Distribution and logistics management
	3.6 Develop and implement promotion plan
4. Customer Relationship Management	4.1 Analyze basic customer relationship
	4.2 Management customer service
	4.3 Generating customer knowledge, that can be used by companies to
	4.4 Acquire new customers
	4.5 Retain existing customers
	4.6 Create additional value for and from those customers over time
5. Internationalize ability	5.1 Foreign language ability
	5.2 Familiar with international business etiquette
	5.3 Familiar with international business law
	5.4 Cross-cultural communication skill
	5.5 Cross-cultural awareness
	5.6 International marketing knowledge