

## Workplace learning competencies for female beauticians

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**ABSTRACT:** This study was aimed at exploring female beauticians' workplace learning competencies, their needs for the competencies, and the relationships between these competencies and the beauticians' demographic variables. A descriptive survey method was employed to carry out the cross-sectional study. Purposive sampling was used to determine clusters, followed by simple random sampling to select participating female beauticians. The conclusions are as follows: (1) Female beauticians acknowledged the importance of workplace learning competencies, but admitted their lack of learning for better beauty services; (2) Female beauticians have a strong need for workplace learning competencies, particularly those that help them fit in with the work teams; and (3) The higher level of education the beauticians have, the more they value workplace learning, and the longer they have worked in the beauty industry, the more desire they have for learning.

### INTRODUCTION

Most literature on human resource development regarding the management of beauticians is confined to the discussion and planning of training programmes. It is necessary to emphasise the importance of human resource management to improve the performance of beauticians. However, the passing down of the beauty service career must rely on human resource development. Since women represent the majority of practitioners in the beauty industry, this study focused on the discussion of human resource development for female beauticians.

The more conventional approach of personnel management needs to be adjusted to that of human resource management. However, it is insufficient to simply consider beauticians as valuable assets of the organisation and conduct strategic human resource management. Given the scarcity of research on human resource development, this study has its significance in contributing to the related literature. The study probed the variables concerning female beauticians' possession of workplace learning competencies, as well as their needs for these. At the same time, relationships among the variables were presented. In short, the study focused on discussing human resource development for female beauticians. Its purpose was three-fold:

1. To discuss the workplace learning competencies that female beauticians possess.
2. To explore female beauticians' needs for workplace learning competencies.
3. To study the relationships between demographic variables and the workplace learning competencies for female beauticians.

### OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF JOB HOLDERS

With the prevalence of education and increasing self-awareness, women are playing a more important role in the job market than ever before. According to the statistics on Index to Gender published by the Taiwan government, Accounting and Statistics, the female employment rate in 1998 was 45.6% (with 3.767 million female employees). The rate climbed to 46.6% in 2002. By the end of 2007, it had risen to 49.4% with more than 4 million women being employed. This represents a 2.8% addition to the 1998 rate (over 500,000 female employees). During this period, the average monthly salary of female employees was over NTD\$30,000, reaching NTD\$35,868 in 2002. Statistics show that women are gaining significant status in the job market; their contribution to the economy is widely recognised, and the salary gap between them and their male counterparts is gradually decreasing.

### WORKPLACE LEARNING FOR FEMALE BEAUTICIANS DESERVES MORE ATTENTION

According to Rothwell, workplace learning is part of lifelong learning. Despite the recognition of the employee-based, learning-centred, and performance-oriented concept of human resource development, disputes still exist among various

programmes that aim to improve performance [1]. The common trend, however, is that all schools of thought in the human resource development field have switched their attention from training and learning to the workplace learner. Rothwell argues that training in the workplace has undergone questioning and attacks. Many employees complain that the training they have received is not comprehensive enough to help them respond to organisational reform and the rapid change in technology. Such training is, therefore, of low value and poor efficiency [2]. Based on the concept of developing human resource within the organisation, *workplace learning* has gradually replaced *workplace training*.

In the competency study, *ASTD Models for Learning Technologies*, Piskurich and Sanders combine the concepts of learning and workplace, focusing on the management of workplace learning technologies and targeting workplace learners and performance professionals [3]. Rothwell, Sanders and Soper further upgrade the topic of the competency study from training and developing to workplace learning and performance [4]. This leads human resource development to the fourth level, *workplace learning and performance* (WLP). Therefore, workplace learning for female beauticians deserves more attention and should become the emphasis of human resource development.

## METHODOLOGY

Based on the logic of scientific research and the purpose of the study, a cross-sectional study was carried out using the descriptive method, literature reviews, field interviews and a survey. It aimed to describe the variables concerning the workplace learning competencies that female beauticians already possess and those they need to acquire. Relationships among related variables were dealt with, and suggestions about female beauticians' workplace learning were proposed for better performance and greater enthusiasm. This section is to be continued with elaboration on the research method, subjects and sampling, instrument, hypotheses and research framework, and data processing. It is then followed by major findings, conclusions and suggestions.

The main topic of this research is the workplace learning competencies for female beauticians. Due to a lack of literature related to human resource development for female beauticians' workplace learning competencies, the study was designed with an exploratory perspective, and was conducted using the survey method. The study adopted purposive sampling in December 2008, taking 22 beauty institutions suggested by senior beautician supervisors and professionals as a cluster. A total of 539 female beauticians were then randomly sampled from the cluster for face to face interviews.

The questionnaire involved was referred to two tools proposed in Rothwell: (1) the behaviour event interview guideline, and (2) self-reported questionnaire *Assessing workplace learning competency* [1]. It was then amended after scholars, specialists, senior beauty supervisors, and beauticians were consulted, taking into account the actual beauty service practicing sites. Furthermore, a pilot test, as well as tests on validity and reliability, were undertaken to finalise the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three parts: (1) demographic variables of the interviewees; (2) experience and opinions regarding beauty service; and (3) attitudes and perceptions toward workplace learning competencies.

Table 1: Research Hypotheses.

Research Hypotheses		Null Hypothesis	Alternative Hypothesis
H1	H1a	Age is not related to the possession of workplace learning competencies.	Age is related to the possession of workplace learning competencies.
	H1b	Education is not related to the possession of workplace learning competencies.	Education is related the possession of workplace learning competencies.
	H1c	Marital status is not related to the possession of workplace learning competencies.	Marital status is related to the possession of workplace learning competencies.
	H1d	Years of working is not related to the possession of workplace learning competencies.	Years of working is related to the possession of workplace learning competencies.
H2	H2a	Education is not related to the level of beauty service satisfaction.	Education is related to the level of beauty service satisfaction.
	H2b	Years of working is not related to the level of beauty service satisfaction.	Years of working is related to the level of beauty service satisfaction.
H3	H3a	Beauty service satisfaction is not related to the needs for workplace learning competencies.	Beauty service satisfaction is related to the needs for workplace learning competencies.

According to the workplace learning explained by Rothwell, an individual's personality and life experience (generally referred to as demographic variables) affect workplace learning performance. However, the relationship between the beauticians' demographic variables and their workplace learning performance are rarely explored. In addition, many scholars believe that working experience and job satisfaction are related to workplace learning competencies [1][5-8] [9-12]. A total of 358 valid samples and 66.4% questionnaire recovery rate were obtained after data sorting.

## FEMALE BEAUTICIANS' POSSESSION OF WORKPLACE LEARNING COMPETENCIES

Of the 20 workplace learning competencies, eight received more than four points, indicating that the female beauticians had most confidence in their possession of these eight competencies: persistence and confidence (4.6), initiative (4.6), honesty (4.5), being respectful of others (4.3), shared visioning (4.3), speaking (4.3), reading (4.2) and questioning (4.2). At the other end of the scale, six competencies received two or fewer points, showing that the beauticians believed that they lacked these competencies: data processing (1.3), computation (1.5), subject matter knowledge (1.6), sense of urgency (1.8), writing (1.8) and team learning (2.2). Among all the workplace learning competencies, interpersonal (3.2) exhibited the greatest standard deviation, reflecting the female beauticians' varying self-identification of this competency. Contrarily, initiative had the lowest standard deviation. Female beauticians generally agreed that all the 20 workplace learning competencies are helpful when they conducted volunteer services. Among the competencies, persistence and confidence (4.7) and being respectful of others (4.7) were most valued. By contrast, computation (1.2) and short- and long-term memory (1.3) were two least valued workplace learning competencies. Interviewees thought that the most needed competencies during beauty practices are speaking (4.5), subject matter knowledge (4.3) and team learning (4.3). Nearly 20% of the interviewees suggested that time management skills should be added to the workplace learning competencies.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMALE BEAUTICIANS' DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND WORKPLACE LEARNING COMPETENCIES

About 60% to 70% of the interviewees were aged between 40 and 60, with the average age of 45.3. The majority of them were high school graduates (53%). Only 13%, including illiterate ones, graduated from elementary school. 93% of the interviewees were either married or living with partners. The average years of work experience was 3.1. Except for education, other demographic variables appeared to have no relationship with the female beauticians' possession of workplace learning competencies. Competencies that appeared to have positive relationship with levels of education include speaking, listening, systems thinking, shared visioning, team learning, self-knowledge and subject matter knowledge. However, age, marital status and years of working have no significant relationship with workplace learning competencies. This finding differs greatly from the conclusions stated by Rothwell and Sredl, Simon, and Prahalad and Hamel [8-10]. Such differences resulted mainly from the increase of senior beauticians' needs for workplace learning during their beauty service practices [13]. This, in turn, provides them with comparatively better workplace learning competencies. The beauticians' years of working, as well as levels of education were significantly related to their satisfaction with the beauty institutions they worked for. In other words, the longer the beauticians were engaged in the beauty service and the higher education they received, the more satisfied they were with the institutions that hired them. This finding is in accord with those proposed by Lin and Yeung et al [12][13].

The satisfaction level of the beauticians' service is both significantly related to their possession of, and needs for, workplace learning competencies. That is, the more satisfactory the service provided by the female beauticians, the more workplace learning competencies they possessed and needed, as Rothwell has argued. A positive significant relationship was found between the satisfaction level and the needs for competencies such as interpersonal, resource-allocation, data processing and sense of urgency [1]. The finding indicates that the beauticians were as positively motivated and had as much need for workplace learning as enterprise employees. Although it is not easy for beauty institutions to require that beauticians possess specialty and experience, beauticians themselves, motivated by self-expectations and a need for development, tend to sense their lack of certain workplace learning competencies and, hence, the needs for them.

## CONCLUSIONS

Female beauticians acknowledged the importance of workplace learning competencies, but admitted their lack of learning to provide better beauty services. The workplace learning competencies most widely possessed by the female beauticians are persistence and confidence, initiative, honesty; while the least possessed one is data processing. The beauticians generally believed that workplace learning competencies, particularly persistence and confidence and being respectful of others, are helpful for self-learning and team learning when providing beauty services.

Female beauticians have strong needs for workplace learning competencies, particularly those that help them fit in with the work teams. Among all the workplace learning competencies, speaking, subject matter knowledge and team learning are most needed. Since people are the objects of beauty services, how to enhance interpersonal relationships and communication is a crucial issue. Most of the beauticians admitted that self-improvement would benefit service quality. To improve themselves, on the other hand, they need to count on workplace learning.

The higher the education level the beauticians have, the more they value workplace learning; the longer they have worked in the beauty industry, the more desire they have for learning. Beauticians who have a higher level of education possess better speaking, listening, systems thinking, shared visioning, team learning, self-knowledge and subject matter knowledge competencies. However, age, marital status and years of working have no significant relationship with workplace learning competencies. This indicates that the service quality of a beautician depends on her personal ability,

which is related to her workplace learning competencies. Although better workplace learning competencies come with higher levels of education, a higher demand for the learning also follows suit; hence, the need for further research into this phenomenon.

To improve the quality of beauty service, it is better to develop human resource for the beauticians than to emphasise on their education background. The finding of this study pointed out that beauticians with higher levels of education possess more workplace learning competencies. It is a fact, however, that with many staff but limited resource, a beauty institution can rarely afford to conduct human resource development for their beauticians. It is impractical to expect an increase of service performance only from beauticians with higher education degrees. In light of this, it is suggested that beauty institutions involve the beauticians in planning workplace learning programmes to build good learning atmosphere.

The workplace learning atmosphere should be taken into account when inquiring into workplace learning competencies for female beauticians. Women value team work as well as social participation. Among the findings of the study are that female beauticians are concerned about how to learn, and also how to utilise limited time and resource to undertake workplace learning. Future research could be based on workplace learning theories to look into the relationship between learning atmosphere and the roles and competencies of workplace learners to establish an effective programme for human resource development.

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