

Creating Can-Do statements for hospitality communication:

Human resource development for the tourism sector

Reiko Fujita (Department of Business Administration, Seikei University, reiko-f@bus.seikei.ac.jp, Japan)

Harumi Kaseda (Global Center for Liberal Arts, Yokohama College of Commerce, kaseda@shodai.ac.jp, Japan)

Abstract

The tourism industry is currently facing a serious shortage of workers and needs to develop talented human resources. Workers in this industry, particularly those in hospitality need good interaction skills to ensure customer satisfaction. Thus, communication is one of the vital competencies for workers in this sector. This study aims to break down the elements of hospitality communication and present them in the form of Can-Do statements. Codes extracted from a previous study are used to draft Can-Do items and descriptors. Then, interviews are conducted with seven hotel staff, and the interview data were analyzed to improve the Can-Do statements related to hospitality communication. We report the process and rationale for changes made to the statements for improvement. Further, some of the important elements on the statements are explained and discussed to support the detailed description of the items. These statements would be a useful checklist for training the workforce in the hospitality sector.

Keywords

hospitality, communication, Can-Do statements, human resource development, hotel services

1. Introduction

Japan has grown to be one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world [World Tourism Organization, 2022] and hopes to attract more tourists when the COVID-19 pandemic ends. Tourism promotion is a highly prioritized national strategy to sustain the economy of this rapidly aging society. The Japanese government has set a target of 60 million tourists by 2030. However, there has been a chronic shortage of workers in the accommodation industry in Japan [Japan Tourism Agency, 2020]. According to the report by Japan Tourism Agency [2020], 80 percent of accommodation facilities are facing a manpower shortage. Additionally, in order for each accommodation facility to compete in the industry, gaining customer satisfaction by delivering superior service is important more than ever [Kandampully, 2006]. Thus, the need for personnel equipped with competencies required for hospitality service is very high, and developing talented human resources for the industry is considered to be an urgent matter.

Understanding what skills and abilities are required for hospitality staff is essential to increase such human resources. Such skills and abilities have often been studied as competencies for hospitality personnel since the late 20th century, most of which focus on hospitality managers [Yang et al., 2014]. Findings of many studies on competencies have highlighted leadership, problem-solving skills, teamwork, self-management skills, communication skills, and more [Tas, 1988]. According to Johanson et al. [2011], who summarized competency studies in the United States, three important domains of competency emerged: (1) functional business areas, (2) communication skills, and (3) customer relations focus. As this study suggests, one of the competencies highlighted in all these studies is com-

munication skill. Many researchers point out the importance of communication for hospitality workers [Shariff and Abidin, 2015; Bharwani and Jauhari, 2017; Millar et al., 2010]. By administering a questionnaire with hotel staff members ($n = 186$), Marneros [2020] revealed that communicating effectively with customers was ranked as the most important among 30 items of individual competencies. Rudd [2006] stated that communication skills are repeatedly cited by hospitality management professionals as vital but are lacking in many of today's college students.

Thus, communication skills for hospitality personnel have been deemed important; however, few studies have attempted to clarify what skills of communication are involved in hospitality services. A typical dictionary definition of communication is “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior”⁽¹⁾, yet communication in the guest service context should encompass a wider range of aspects, including the use of language, verbal and non-verbal communication, and interpersonal skills, to name a few. Lolli [2013] categorized communication in the hospitality industry into four categories—(1) listening, (2) body language, (3) verbal language, and (4) conduct—based on the previous literature and personal communication with several hospitality executives. Other researchers focus on the importance of appearance, soft skills, attitude [Alanzeh et al., 2019; Nickson et al., 2005], and intercultural competency [Cheok et al., 2015; Lam et al., 2022] as important aspects of communication for guest service.

Being a good communicator requires interpersonal skills, and this aspect is a significant element of guest communication. Hayes [2002] defines interpersonal skills as goal-directed behaviors to generate a desired state of affairs. Interpersonal skills focus on the effect of communication on another person, while communication skills refer to the performance of some tasks and behaviors by an interlocutor [Duffy et al., 2004]. In

the field of medicine and nursing, communication and interpersonal skills are much-researched areas to offer better service to patients. For example, skills such as paying attention, showing respect, monitoring relationships, and being flexible are a few of the competencies necessary for doctor–patient communication. We believe that it is essential to investigate what guest and host communication and interpersonal skills are important for the workforce of the hospitality sector to have. By focusing on communication elements, it is possible to extract a wide range of competency items that are needed for hospitality workers, since, as mentioned earlier, communication is one of the most important elements in customer service.

2. About the project

This project aims to clarify essential factors for customer communication in the hospitality sector and list these factors in the form of Can-Do statements. We believe such a list will be beneficial and effective for human resource development in this sector and would contribute to solving the serious shortage of talents in the industry.

In the exploratory study [Fujita and Tanaka, 2022] preceding the present research, seven hotel employees were interviewed and asked about essential communication elements of guest service. The questions were asked following the arrival-and-departure flow suggested by Blue and Harun [2003]. During the arrival and stay, then the departure, hotel staff kept in contact with the guests and demonstrated verbal and non-verbal communication. The interview questions tried to extract the communication elements through this process. They conducted a quantitative analysis using NVivo software and extracted 13

codes necessary for hospitality communication (Table 1).

In the next step, using these codes, the researchers created a draft of Can-Do statements for hospitality communication and conducted more interviews with seven hotel personnel on different occasions for suggestions and confirmation [Kaseda and Fujita, 2021]. It was found that this draft needs further improvement. This study explains the rationale behind the changes made to improve this draft and presents the finalized list of Can-Do statements of hospitality communication for hotel service personnel.

3. Process of the revision

The following steps were taken to revise the draft of Can-Do Statements.

- (1) Careful examination of interview results with seven hotel personnel with the qualitative data analysis software NVivo.
- (2) Revision of the codes by Fujita and Tanaka shown in Table 1; extracting additional codes.
- (3) Redefining the codes and revising the Can-Do descriptors accordingly.
- (4) Final check with two hotel managers.

3.1 Careful examination of interview results

The researchers used the data described in Kaseda and Fujita [2021]. The details are as follows: Interviews were conducted with seven hotel employees from six hotels between July and September 2021. The informants were recruited through the researchers' acquaintances. They were either hotel staff involved

Table 1: Important elements in guest communication

	Codes (Sub codes)	Details
1	Giving information	Preparation for providing information and how to communicate the information
2	Safety and hygiene management	The methods of dealing directly with customers about safety management
3	Customer handling	(1) How to respond to problems and communicate with guests when problems occur
	(1) Handling problems	(2) Interpersonal communication in responding to customer requests
	(2) Response to requests	(3) How to respond to guest needs in the most appropriate way
4	(3) Methods for solutions	
	Using tools for communication	Use of text, image, or tools in communication
5	Empathy and perception	Understanding customers' needs and offering empathy, and communication behaviors based on those
6	Hospitality spirit and attitude toward service	Necessary attitudes and mindset in customer service. Specific actions to express them
7	Staging the approach	Attracting the attention of guests with words, such as greetings, and calling their name, as well as with non-verbal actions, such as body language
8	Physical expressions	Non-verbal communication such as smiling, bowing, grooming, etc.
9	Personalized services	Providing proactive services to guests to give them special feelings
10	Gathering information for guests	Ways to listen and observe guests to gather guests' information and needs
11	Cross-cultural issues	Cultural differences in guest service and matters arising from them
12	Languages	Polite language, foreign languages, tone of voice, proper expressions, etc.
13	Patterns and procedures	(1) Patterns of communication used in certain situations, etc.
	(1) Standardized patterns of communication	(2) How the manual is being adhered to and when it deviates from the manual
	(2) Established procedures	

Source: Fujita and Tanaka [2022].

in human resource development or staff who had been with the hotel for more than five years (Table 2). Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. In the interviews, the researchers presented the draft of Can-Do statements (see Kaseda and Fujita [2021]) based on previous research and asked the respondents' opinions about each item (e.g., the timing of learning, degree of difficulty, and impressions). In addition, they were asked the following questions in semi-structured interviews: (1) what type of hospitality is required in hotels, (2) how hospitality is taught in workplace training, (3) how hospitality is taught in on-the-job training (OJT), (4) whether there are differences in matters related to hospitality and the difficulty of learning hospitality depending on the nationality of the staff.

3.2 Fujita and Tanaka's [2022] code revisions

The above data were recorded with the respondents' consent, transcribed verbatim, and then compiled as a dataset. The data were analyzed and coded using the inductive analysis method,

referring to Sato [2008]. Specifically, Fujita and Tanaka's [2022] coding method was used to extract the elements that were considered necessary for the hotel staff to perform their duties from the verbatim interview data. Furthermore, each code was carefully examined, and its concept was interpreted.

3.3 Code redefinition and modification of Can-Do descriptors

After summarizing the similar codes, the concept was redefined. A total of 251 comments on "services with hospitality in hotel hospitality situations" were analyzed. Interpretations of the elaborated concepts were re-examined, and sub-codes were added as necessary. These tasks were carried out individually by the two researchers and then the output of tasks was reconciled. This process was repeated several times, resulting in a final set of 18 codes. Table 3 shows the contrasts with previous studies.

In addition, keywords were extracted from the comments

Table 2: Respondents' backgrounds

Respondent	Job title or position	Years of experience	Hotel category	Date of interview
A	Rooms division manager	15	Foreign luxury	2021.08.16
B	Front desk staff, accommodation dep.	6	Foreign luxury	2021.08.17
C	Human resources section	6	Domestic luxury	2021.08.26
D	Head waitress, food & beverage dep.	10	Domestic luxury	2021.08.26
E	Director of human resources	30	Foreign luxury	2021.09.03
F	Manager, learning & development	18	Foreign luxury	2021.09.03
G	Duty manager	12	Foreign luxury	2021.09.25

Table 3: Comparison with previous studies

	Representation codes in this study	Fujita and Tanaka [2022]
(1)	Understanding and practicing basic forms	13-(1) Standardized patterns of communication 13-(2) Established procedures
(2)	Self-regulation	6 Hospitality spirit and attitude toward service
(3)	Foreign language support	12 Language
(4)	Speech	12 Language
(5)	Staging the approach	7 Approach
(6)	Direction of words	7 Approach 12 Language
(7)	Physical expression	8 Physical Expression
(8)	Observation and perception	5 Empathy and perception 10 Gathering information for guests
(9)	Detecting needs and making suggestions	5 Empathy and perception
(10)	Preparing and providing information	1 Giving information 4 Using tools for communication
(11)	Mind of hospitality	6 Hospitality spirit and attitude toward service
(12)	Hospitality practice	6 Hospitality spirit and attitude toward service
(13)	Special response practices	9 Personalized service
(14)	Response to requests	3-(2) Response to requests 3-(3) Methods for solutions
(15)	Handling complaints	3-(1) Dealing with problems 3-(3) Methods for solutions
(16)	Teamwork	Not applicable
(17)	Cross-cultural knowledge	11 Cross-cultural issues
(18)	Cross-cultural understanding and practice	11 Cross-cultural issues

Table 4: Can Do statements (final version) for hospitality communication

	Category (Code)		Elements (Sub-codes)	Can Do Statement
1	Understanding and practicing basic forms	(1)	Understanding and practicing basic forms	Understands the flow of a guest's relationship situation and can respond to guests using the basic forms found in manuals and other materials
2		(2)	Self-regulation	Able to deal with guests with control and professionalism
3	Ability to use foreign languages	(3)	Foreign language support	Able to provide guest services in foreign languages (especially English) when necessary
		(4)	Speech	Response in an appropriate language, including choice of honorifics and euphemisms
4	Language performance	(5)	Staging the approach	Uses appropriate tone of voice and verbal inflection, makes eye contact, and actively greets and talks to others
		(6)	Direction of words	Calls guests by their names, adds a few words, or uses other words to get their attention
5		(7)	Physical expression	Performs job duties with attention to physical communication, including smiling, bowing, good behavior, and grooming
6	Anticipation	(8)	Observation and perception	Observes and understands guests and their surroundings and communicates with them as necessary to understand their feelings and needs
		(9)	Detecting needs and making suggestions	Interacts with guests to elicit their needs and makes the most appropriate suggestions
		(10)	Preparing and providing information	Always prepared to provide necessary and up-to-date information and communicate it in an easy-to-understand manner
7	Customer engagement	(11)	Mind of hospitality	Has a sense of hospitality to satisfy and please guests
		(12)	Hospitality practice	Treats all guests with sincerity in all situations
		(13)	Special service practices	Communicates with guests to understand their preferences and give them a personalized experience, especially for repeat guests
8	Individual support	(14)	Response to requests	Communicates with guests in a way that is attuned to their emotional state by offering alternatives to their requests if they cannot be met
		(15)	Handling complaints	Able to respond to guest complaints by listening attentively, showing empathy, apologizing if necessary, and offering a solution to the guest's problem
9	Teamwork	(16)	Teamwork	Can work as part of a team to provide better service to customers
10	Intercultural relations	(17)	Cross-cultural knowledge	Knowledge of cultural differences by country, religion, etc., and preparation for dealing with guests
		(18)	Cross-cultural understanding and practice	Able to deal with guests from different cultural backgrounds without imposing one's own values

associated with each competency code. The implications of the keywords were noted as descriptors in the form of Can-Do statements. As a result of repeating this process and analyzing the results, 10 categories were generated from 18 codes (concepts). Furthermore, "Can-Do statements (final version) for Hospitality Communication" (Table 4) were created.

4. About the final version

4.1 Can-Do statements for hospitality communication

The "Can-Do Statements (final version) for Hospitality Communication" (Table 4) was obtained by the procedure described in Section 3.

4.2 Changes made to the final version

As mentioned above, the results of this study revealed some codes different from those of Fujita and Tanaka [2022]. The codes are "teamwork" and "self-regulation." There were 13 references related to the importance of working as a team. In a hotel, several staff members are in contact with the same guest,

working at different positions such as door, bell, front desk, housekeeping, and so on. Longer periods of contact between the guest and staff members offer more opportunities to obtain information about the guest, but the contact time is divided between multiple staff members. Therefore, it is important to share information quickly and cooperate not only with the staff concerned but also with other related parties in providing services. Additionally, working spaces for hotel staff, such as the entrance and lobby, are shared with guests, so guests can easily sense the atmosphere that conveys the relationship among the hotel staff. Therefore, they try to create a harmonious relationship, and the staff should "of course treat the guests in a kind manner but also be kind to colleagues." In other words, in hotels that aim to provide a variety of services such as accommodation, food and beverage, and relaxation, cooperation among employees is important for smooth service provision. Therefore, "Teamwork" is important to create a harmonious customer space.

In terms of "self-regulation," a close examination of the 50

references to “how you should feel when dealing with guests” yielded six references, such as “put yourself in the customer’s shoes,” “hold your feelings back (even from unreasonable demands),” “change your mood (even if you feel nervous or feel you cannot get over a small complaint),” and so on. These indicate that staff controls their own feelings when performing hospitality services, which is important, and thus item (2) “self-regulation” was newly established as a code.

Furthermore, after carefully examining the 44 references for “hospitality spirit and attitude toward service,” we could classify the references into the mental aspect of how the staff feels toward their guests and the behavioral aspect of how they express their feelings toward their guests through their actions. In the former aspect, comments such as “I want guests to be satisfied and happy” and “I want (guests) to experience a feeling of being at home” are representative. For the latter aspect, comments such as “responding with sincerity,” “selflessly offering a helping hand,” and “offering additional extras (from the staff) after helping with (the guest’s) requests” are notable.

Through this process, Fujita and Tanaka’s “hospitality spirit and attitude toward service” were classified into three categories, one of which was made an independent code as (2) “self-regulation” and the remaining two elements were separately incorporated as sub-codes of the code “customer engagement.”

The original code list included “safety and hygiene management.” However, during the interviews, it became clear that “safety and hygiene management” are not subcategories of hospitality in hotel operations but important elements that are fundamental to hotel management. Therefore, the researchers felt that they should be treated separately and decided to remove them from the revised list of competencies (codes) for hospitality communication.

4.3 Final confirmation by two hotel managers

To check the validity of the “Can-Do statements (final version) for hospitality communication” (Table 4), interviews were conducted with two hotel managers (see Table 5). The table was presented to each of the managers to check if there were any problems or details that should be added to the table. Their feedback confirmed the validity of Table 4.

5. Discussions

The coding analysis suggested that some of the codes in the Can-Do statements had many references from the interviewees. These codes are worth elaborating on in this section.

5.1 Acquiring basics to communicate

A total of 21 references were made in code (1) “Understand-

ing and practicing basic forms.” Acquiring basic knowledge about the hotel, staff duties, and systems is indispensable to interacting with guests. Thus, this must be learned quickly and efficiently at the beginning stage. Managers consider understanding the company philosophy for service important as it allows the staff to communicate with guests professionally. Some of these basic aspects are greetings, grooming, and timing. For example, one of the managers informed us that at their hotel, they first teach employees the appropriate timing to acknowledge guests in the facility. One way is for the staff to make eye contact 15 steps ahead when passing guests and then greet them when they are 5 steps away in front of them. They call this rule “15 steps and 5 steps,” and new employees learn this as the basis of how to interact with guests properly. After obtaining such basic knowledge, the staff can expand their skills for better guest communication.

5.2 Unspoken communication

The importance of non-verbal communication is displayed in our research. There were 22 references in code (7) “physical expression.” Grooming, bowing, smiling, and eye contact are some of the elements frequently commented on. These elements are not vocalized communication, but place impressions on guests. The result is supported by Alananzeh et al. [2019], who found that appearance and body language are as important as spoken language in establishing a hotel restaurant’s image, and appearance is the most influential one. In our study also, many respondents mentioned that grooming or appearance is extremely important and rules for hairstyles or how to wear uniforms are often set for the employees to follow. Moreover, where and how they stand in the hotel lobby is considered to be significant in service. One of the interviewees said that they always try to stand with their eyes not fixed to the front but also to their back so that they can see their surroundings 360 degrees and observe guests’ needs so that they can offer service in a timely manner.

5.3 Communicating to provide special services

(13) “Special service practices” is another code that received many references during the interview. Hotel staff seems to consider this a vital part of their service. Special service means giving extra service, for example, giving a small birthday gift. Hotel staff finds the needs of their guest in two ways. First, most hotels record the information about the guests, particularly the repeat guests, in their system. When the guest comes back, the hotel staff can find their preferences in the system and prepare things in advance. For example, they put an extra towel in the room in advance since this particular guest usually asks

Table 5: Informant background

Informant	Job title or position	Years of experience	Hotel category	Date of interview
X	Training manager	20+	Domestic luxury	2022.06.17
Y	Deputy manager, front service	20+	Domestic luxury	2022.06.18

for an extra towel. Another way to find guests' needs is through communication. Through conversations with the guest, the hotel staff can find out the purpose of their trip or their preferences. If they find the guest has a birthday or an anniversary during their stay, they can place a message card in the room or offer a small dessert plate with *origami* flowers after dinner in the hotel restaurant. If they find a guest is pregnant through conversation, they can offer an extra pillow in the room. They offer such services to make guests feel special, which would contribute to higher customer satisfaction. According to the study on hotel guests by Walls et al. [2011], such proactive services make a difference in the guest experience. Thus, communication with guests plays an indispensable role in providing special services. Therefore, the skills for initiating small talk cannot be underestimated in hotel service.

5.4 Anticipating guests' needs

Closely related to the special service is the code "anticipation." Anticipation is one of the elements of the renowned Ritz Carlton Hotel Gold Standard. The second step of its Three Steps of Service is as follows: "Use the guest's name. Anticipation and fulfillment of each guest's needs." Their Credo also states that Ritz Carlton "... fulfills even the unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests."⁽²⁾ Thus, the anticipation of guests' needs is considered to be vital in performing excellent service. In this study, there are two subcodes under the code "anticipation": (8) "Observation and perception" and (9) "Detecting needs and making suggestions." The total number of references for the two codes in the interviews was 25. Interviewees consider observing guests' actions and facial expressions indispensable to finding their needs and taking action. For example, if a guest looks lost or seems to look for something, the staff would promptly approach them and say "May I help you?" or "Are you visiting our hotel restaurant?" depending on the situation. Without observation, these proactive actions derived from anticipation cannot be performed.

Another way to anticipate guests' needs is to have a conversation with them. Staff members do not ask guests about their needs directly but try to determine their needs by developing conversations. For instance, the staff would indirectly lead the conversations to find the purpose of the visit. One of the reasons to find such information is to see if they can offer any special services genuinely to make the guests happy. Another reason is to lead to an upselling. Upselling strategy is important for any hotel in doing business. If the purpose of the stay, for example, is the birthday of a girlfriend, the staff may suggest a room with a romantic night view or a room service of a wine bottle. According to one of the managers in the interview, however, such suggestions should be made with careful observations and through a good analysis of the conversations. Hence, if the guests ever feel the upselling is pushy or insistent, it could lead to a bad impression of the hotel. The skill to maneuver communication while reading the feelings of guests, therefore, may be difficult but is desired to provide excellent

service.

5.5 Engagement

In (7) "Customer engagement," 61 references were found. As the hotel business is a human service, it is important to delight and satisfy guests. What pleases and satisfies guests is highly subjective and temporary and difficult to itemize and quantify. However, it has been confirmed as a rule of thumb that customer satisfaction encourages return visits and has a positive effect on publicity through word-of-mouth and other means. Of these, 22 references were made for each of (11) "Mind of hospitality" and (12) "Practice of hospitality." The former includes the skills to "treat guests so that they experience a sense of home," "enjoy conversation with guests," and "earn favor with guests." The next step was to practice hospitality mindset-based behavior. Specifically, they were required to "respond with sincerity in all situations," "offer a helping hand when needed," and "go the extra mile." Furthermore, the importance of gathering as much information as possible and providing it appropriately was mentioned as actions to support this practice. The ability to "always be prepared to provide necessary and up-to-date information and communicate it in an easy-to-understand manner" and "stock knowledge" are elements that can strengthen the staff's bond with guests. It seems that hotel staff is required to strengthen the bond with guests and build a better relationship with them in order to be able to meet the diverse needs of guests and reach and respond to their latent wishes.

5.6 Foreign language skill

As tourism activities have become more global in scale, the demand for foreign language skills among tourism workers has increased. On this point, there were 15 references to (3) "Foreign language support." Among them, there were comments on the creation of "English conversation expression materials" and the provision of "English conversation lessons to learn English for customer service" in order to improve the foreign language skills of staff. Additionally, "a dedicated English teacher" or "an American supervisor" in the hotel provides guidance on honorifics and so on., or "staff members who are not good at English are given a thorough explanation beforehand." The tendency was to improve skills on the job; adapting rather than studying. From these references, it became clear that there were situations where the staff had to deal with guests with inadequate foreign language skills such as honorifics and formal conversation. In contrast, as can be seen from the comments about teaching onsite, efforts are being directed toward improving foreign language operational skills, and a higher level of foreign language proficiency is actually desired.

Morishita [2021] conducted a study on three Japanese inns that are popular among international tourists. The results showed that foreign language services were supplemented by "basic English at check-in and check-out" and "written communication, hand gestures and free translation apps." In the present researchers' survey, there was no mention of written

communication or free translation applications when foreign language support was difficult. The fact that Morishita's survey covered inns and guesthouses, while our survey covered hotels in the Tokyo metropolitan area, may be one of the reasons for the differences in foreign language skills. Foreign language is one of the most important skills in accommodation services. However, it takes time to master more advanced foreign languages. Hence, we see the use of AI technologies such as machine translation and conversational robots. It is necessary to investigate what hoteliers think of these in the future.

5.7 Cross-cultural communication competency

With the increase in tourists worldwide, cross-cultural interactions between hosts and guests are almost unavoidable nowadays. Accordingly, cross-cultural competency is required along with foreign language skills for people working in this sector. The staff needs to have knowledge of various customs, values, and religions around the world ((17) "Cross-cultural knowledge") to prepare for providing services. Then, based on their knowledge, the staff should be able to deal with guests with different cultural backgrounds ((18) "Cross-cultural understanding and practice").

There were 23 references on these subcodes. In many cases, the hotels provide study sessions or information so that employees become familiar with these issues. Many references were about dealing with religious matters such as meals or prayer rooms. The staff "tries to accommodate such requests by communicating with the guests attentively." They also think communication among the staff to satisfy the needs of such guests is extremely important. Information needs to be shared with the restaurant staff and any other staff who would be serving the guests during the stay. Some other references were made about providing information on Japanese culture. For example, to ensure that the guests do not feel at a loss while trying Japanese kaiseki cuisine, the restaurant staff observes the guests and gives explanations, for instance, on what sauce goes on what food items, if necessary. Such communication helps guests to not only understand Japanese culture but also enjoy the new experience. In the preceding study by Fujita and Tanaka [2022], their interview with six hotel staff revealed that implicit differences arise among people who come from countries with high-context culture and low-context culture ⁽³⁾ [Hall, 1959]. In Japanese service, indirect communication is valued, whereas in Western culture, guests tend to be more direct and vocal. There were cases where these differences cause some problems. In their study of cross-cultural service interactions, Cheok et al. [2013] found that guests' asserting power and gaining control in some situations seem to be largely culturally dependent. Subsequently, they suggested cross-cultural sensitivity training to foster effective interaction under cultural differences.

6. Conclusion and further studies

This study presented important elements for hospitality

communication in a form of Can-Do statements. Anyone who has traveled and stayed at accommodation would agree that communication between guests and hosts is one of the crucial factors contributing to customer satisfaction. Many researchers also mention the significance of communication in the hospitality sector. Yet, not much research has been done to investigate what elements and aspects of communication are essential. In this study, we were able to elicit 18 elements under 10 categories that people engaged in hotel guest service considered important. All the elements are related to the way they interact verbally or non-verbally with guests, and acquiring these skills would lead to better service. The researchers believe that this kind of Can-Do statements would be beneficial for training new or prospective employees in the sector. Using this as a checklist, staff or students can find what aspects of communication they need to improve.

Although the data were analyzed as carefully as possible and meticulous attention was paid to creating these descriptors, further research is still needed to assess the validity of this version. Therefore, the next step for our project will be to investigate how the items on the list can be educated efficiently while testing their use. Through the interviews, the researchers found that some of the items are learned quickly, yet others take a long time and require extensive experience. Thus, creating some type of framework indicating the learning steps to visualize the difficulty would be one of the tasks to be tackled. Then, detailed information on each item on the list should be added for learning support. While doing so, improvements to the Can-Do statements should be continuously made.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the participants of this study for their cooperation. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 20H04441.

Notes

- ⁽¹⁾ This definition was taken from Merriam-Webster online dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>. (As of August 15, 2022). It is the first definition that appeared among the six.
- ⁽²⁾ Gold Standard of the Ritz Carlton Hotel can be viewed on <https://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/about/gold-standards/>. (As of August 15, 2022). The Gold Standard is the description of their values and philosophy. It includes the Credo, Motto, Three Steps of Service, Service Values, The 6th Diamond, and The Employee Promise.
- ⁽³⁾ In a low-context culture, communication needs to be clearly expressed, while in a high-context culture, communication is often implicit.

References

Alananzeh, O., Jawabreh, O., Alhalabi, R. Syam, H., and Keswani, F. (2019). The association among employees' communication skills, image formation and tourist behaviour:

- perceptions of hospitality management students in Jordan. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 257-272.
- Blue, G. M. and Harun, M. (2003). Hospitality language as a professional skill. *English for Specific Purposes*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 73-91.
- Bharwani, S. and Jauhari, V. (2017). An exploratory study of competencies required to cocreate memorable customer experiences in the hospitality industry. In *Hospitality marketing and consumer behavior*. 159-185. Apple Academic Press.
- Cheok, J., Hede, A. M., and Watne, T. A. (2015). Explaining cross-cultural service interactions in tourism with Shenkar's cultural friction. *Current Issues in Tourism*, Vol. 18, No. 6, 539-560.
- Duffy, F. D., Gordon, G. H., Whelan, G., Cole-Kelly, K., and Frankel, R. (2004). Assessing competence in communication and interpersonal skills: The Kalamazoo II report. *Academic Medicine*, Vol. 79, No. 6, 495-507.
- Fujita, R. and Tanaka, N. (2022). A study to investigate hospitality competencies for tourism guest service: From a communication perspective. *The Tourism Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 35-45. (in Japanese)
- Hall, E. T. and Hall, T. (1959). *The silent language*, Vol. 948. Anchor Books.
- Hayes, J. (2002). *Interpersonal skills at work*. Routledge.
- Japan Tourism Agency. (2020). *Kankosangyo niokeru jitumujinnzai kakuho ikusei jigyo* [A project for securing and developing practical human resources in the tourism industry] (Retrieved August 8, 2022 from <https://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001346797.pdf>). (in Japanese)
- Johanson, M., Ghiselli, R., Shea, L. J., and Roberts, C. (2011). Changing competencies of hospitality leaders: A 25-year review. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 43-47.
- Kaseda, H. and Fujita, R. (2021). Towards creating Can-Do statements for customer service communication: Human resource development for hospitality. *Proceedings of 36th JITR Annual Conference*, 251-256. (in Japanese)
- Kandampully, J. (2006). The new customer-centred business model for the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 173-187.
- Lam, R., Cheung, C., and Lugosi, P. (2022). The impacts of cultural intelligence and emotional labor on the job satisfaction of luxury hotel employees. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 100, 103084.
- Lolli, J. (2013). Perceptions of the importance and preparedness of interpersonal communication skills of the entry-level hospitality leader: Implications for hospitality educators. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 354-373.
- Marneros, S., Papageorgiou, G., and Efstathiades, A. (2020). Identifying key success competencies for the hospitality industry: The perspectives of professionals. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 237-261.
- Millar, M., Mao, Z., and Moreo, P. (2010). Hospitality & tourism educators vs. the industry: A competency assessment. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 41-42.
- Morishita, S. (2021). The hospitality and management for foreign tourists visiting Japan in the accommodation industry. *Journal of Japan Management Diagnosis Association*, Vol. 21, 1-6. (in Japanese)
- Nickson, D., Warhurst, C., and Dutton, E. (2005). The importance of attitude and appearance in the service encounter in retail and hospitality. *Managing Service Quality*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 195-208.
- Rudd, D. (2006). Incorporation of communication skills in hospitality education. *International Journal of Learning*, Vol. 12, No. 7, 261-270.
- Sato, I. (2008). *Shitsuteki deta bunsekiho:genre, houhou, jissen* [Qualitative Research Method: Principle, Method and Practice]. Shinyosha. (in Japanese)
- Shariff, N. M. and Abidin, A. Z. (2015). Developing an index of the Malaysian tourism and hospitality graduates competencies. *International Journal of Business and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 422-435.
- Tas, R. F. (1988). *Teaching future managers*. Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration.
- Walls, A., Okumus, F., Wang, Y., and Kwun, D. J. W. (2011). Understanding the consumer experience: An exploratory study of luxury hotels. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 166-197.
- World Tourism Organization (2022). Compendium of tourism statistics, data 2016-2020, 2022 edition. UN-WTO, Madrid (Retrieved July 18, 2022 from <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284423583>).
- Yang, L. T., Partlow, C. G., Anand, J., and Shukla, V. (2014). Assessing the competencies needed by hospitality management graduates in India. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 153-165.

(Received September 14, 2022; accepted October 7, 2022)