

## COMPETENCY-BASED HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: A RESEARCH ON TRAVEL AGENCIES

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### Abstract

With globalization, market conditions brought a high level of competition in the tourism industry. Human in the center are started to be carried out in a holistic system with competence-based management, which is a new management approach in organizations. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the competence-based human resources management (HRM) in travel agencies with a qualitative design and a semi-structured interview technique was used as the data collection technique. Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 employees who work in travel agencies operating in different regions of Turkey. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed in the NVivo 11 for Windows qualitative data analysis program. As a result of the research, various themes related to the questions have emerged. Findings of the study indicate that the employees give importance to this issue regarding the importance of competence in travel agencies which provide the necessary motivation to their employees starting from the planning stage. Applications that will reduce the turnover rate of the tourism sector, which has problems of qualified personnel, are written under the title of theoretical and practical implications within the scope of competency HR.

**Keywords:** Human Resources, Competence, Competency Based HR, Travel Agencies, Tourism.

**JEL Classification:** M0, M1, M12.

## YETKİNLİK TEMELLİ İNSAN KAYNAKLARI YÖNETİMİ: SEYAHAT ACENTELERİ ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

### Öz

Küreselleşmeyle birlikte piyasa koşulları turizm sektöründe yüksek bir rekabet ortamı yaratmıştır. İnsan odaklı yaklaşım, kurumlarda yeni bir yönetim yaklaşımı olan yetkinlik odaklı yönetim ile bütüncül bir sistem içinde yürütülmeye başlanmıştır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma seyahat acentelerinde yetkinlik odaklı insan kaynakları yönetimini (İKY) nitel bir tasarımla incelemeyi amaçlamış ve veri toplama tekniği olarak yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniği kullanılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, Türkiye'nin farklı bölgelerinde faaliyet gösteren seyahat acentelerinde çalışan 18 çalışanla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler NVivo 11 for Windows nitel veri analiz programında analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda, sorularla ilgili çeşitli temalar ortaya çıkmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları, çalışanlarına planlama aşamasından itibaren gerekli motivasyonu sağlayan seyahat acentelerinde yetkinliğin önemi konusunda çalışanların bu konuya önem verdiğini göstermektedir. Nitelikli personel sıkıntısı yaşayan turizm sektöründe işten ayrılma oranını azaltacak uygulamalar, yetkinlik İK kapsamında teorik ve pratik çıkarımlar başlığı altında kaleme alınmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İnsan Kaynakları, Yetkinlik, Yetkinlik Bazlı İK, Seyahat Acenteleri, Turizm.

**JEL Sınıflaması:** M0, M1, M12.

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of competence is widely used in today's organizations, especially in the field of Human Resources Management (HRM). Competencies first came to the fore in 1973, in McClelland's article titled "Testing for Competence rather than Intelligence", when he suggested that competency assessment should be developed as an alternative to traditional intelligence tests, especially in order to achieve high performance in senior positions (McClelland, 1973). The term competence has gained importance in the organizational literature, especially in the field of HR, in recent years. Some consider the concept of competence as an asset of companies, while others consider the concept of competence as the competence of employees (Çetinkaya, 2009).

The fact that tourism enterprises are highly dependent on the human element due to their labor-intensive structure makes so that HR planning is more significant compare to past. Because the factor that determines the quality of the institution in tourism enterprises is the qualities of HR rather than physical characteristics (Kıngır, Gürson & Karakaş, 2016: 413).

Although the number of studies focused on competency-based HR in the literature has increased in recent years, the number of studies on HR in the tourism sector is quite limited (Chan & Coleman, 2004; Cecil and Krohn, 2012; Karakuş, Onat & Ardiç Yetiş, 2018; Otoo, 2019; Onat & Karakuş, 2021). This research aims to create awareness for this deficit and form a basis for future practical and academic studies. In the research, competency-based HRM, which is applied in travel agencies as a professional group, is discussed. Due to the vital role of HRM in competitiveness in travel agencies, it has become necessary to conduct this research in tourism enterprises.

There are many studies on HR competencies in tourism-related fields in the foreign literature, studies in the Turkish literature are limited. Existing studies address the general framing of the HRQY framework, its implementation models, and existing applications in various sectors (Aungsuroch, Gunawan & Fisher, 2021; Gunawan, Aungsuroch & Fisher, 2018; Ganie & Saleem, 2018). They offer limited information on examples of service-oriented, regionally specific applications such as travel centers, and on the replication of sector-specific maps. In particular, while expansive and technological solutions are proposed for assessing, evaluating, and appropriately matching processes to job positions (Bohlouli et al., 2017; Fachrunnisa & Hussain, 2020). How these approaches are adapted to the specific needs of travel agencies remains unclear.

By examining competency-based HRM records in travel agencies, the study identifies clusters of sector-specific entities and, as yet, develops practical recommendations for the deployment of these centers. This study contributes to both the academic literature and the tourism sector.

## 2. Literature Review

Competency-based systems focusing on knowledge, skills and behaviors have been widely used in HRM. The leading organizations of the world are now building the most important HR functions such as personnel selection and placement, performance management, payroll, training and career development, performance management, motivation, remuneration career planning on competencies and increasing their effectiveness day by day (Akşirin, 2008). Competence-based HRM is a reflection of contemporary business understanding. At present, competencies are an important source of data on the qualifications of employees at the individual level and within the team. This data is an important criterion by HRM in training development, backup, performance evaluation, career development, remuneration and hiring decisions. For this purpose, most businesses tend to associate competency programs with the vision, mission and goals of the organization (Akgeyik, 2002).

The systematic and practical implications of competency-based human resource management have been extensively discussed in the literature, both academically and practically. Consistent and reliable scales have been developed for measurement, and their positive effects on work performance, job satisfaction, and organizational efficiency have been observed. Measurement methods include standardized scales, based on the model of Ulrich et al., file scales include dimensions such as knowledge, functional distribution, and change management (Bordbar et al., 2021), competency mapping, obtained in organizations is used to determine individuals' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personality traits. This method is supported by surveys, interviews, and performance evaluations (Puli & Sagi, 2022).

Competence-based HR planning can be considered as a strategic business plan because it shows the duties and objectives of the departments, their current weaknesses and strengths, the threats and opportunities that may be encountered, and long-term strategies (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003). Hauenstein (2000) listed the benefits of competencies to organizations as follows:

- It more clearly determines the determination of the labor force standards produced in the enterprise and the expectations from this labor force.

- It ensures fairness in making decisions about the value created in the business and the compensation for this value.

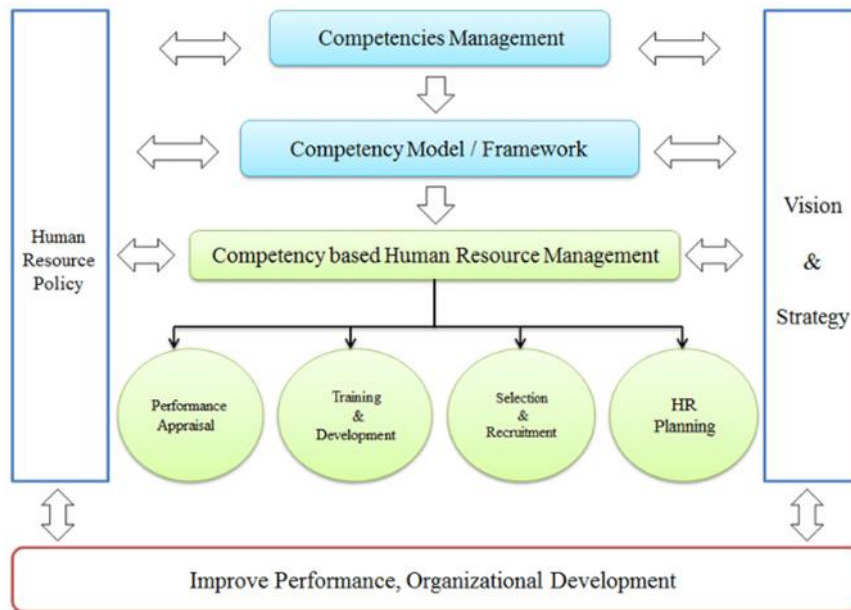
- It supports coaching, performance development, evaluation and empowerment processes.

- It brings individuals, managers and teams together under the same organization with the business strategies necessary for the success of the organization.

Furthermore, competency-based planning aligns individuals, managers, and teams with the overarching strategic goals of the organization, fostering greater cohesion and direction. While this framework provides a solid theoretical foundation, the inclusion of concrete examples and practical implementation details would significantly enhance the applicability of the approach. Incorporating the researcher's insights and experiences could also deepen the analysis, offering valuable context and increasing the contribution of the study to both academic and professional audiences.

Competency-based management encompasses all core HR areas which all functions centered on competencies and job descriptions can be carried out holistically, in the diagram below (Özdiller, 2005):

**Figure 1: Competencies and Human Resources Systems**



**Source:** Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Laakso-Manninen & Iitala, 2007; Beeck & Hondeghem, 2010; Campion & Odman, 2011.

Performance management in competency-based HR is a system where the performances of employees are evaluated and monitored. Wage and reward management helps determine employees' salaries, bonuses, premiums and social benefits based on market research. Recruitment makes it easier to find candidates to fill vacancies, to be selected and placed by various methods. Training planning contributes to determining the training needs, determining and organizing the training to be received depending on the performance evaluation and the need in the job. It helps its employees to determine their career planning and steps. Succession is the identification, monitoring and management of their development to develop the key managers and leaders of the future (Anonymous, 1996).

Competency-based HRM practices are observed to increase the productivity of salespeople and employees and to increase job satisfaction (Rastgoo, 2016; Daguplo & Daguplo, 2019), placement in the right position (Puli & Sagi, 2022), training and development (Andueza & De Mendoza Cánton, 2016; Belényesi & Dobos, 2022). In small and medium enterprises (SMEs) solutions significantly enhance personal information, knowledge, and skills (Prastiwi, Widnyani & Adnyani, 2023).

The research conducted by Otoo (2019) examines the mediating role of employee competencies in the relationship between HRM practices and organizational performance. The results show that some HRM practices affect organizational performance through their effects on employee competencies. The study also revealed that employee competencies mediate the relationship between HRM practices and organizational performance. Hajiali, Kessi, Budhiandriani, Prihatin & Sufri (2022) examined the effect of work motivation, leadership style and competence on job satisfaction. According to the findings, employee performance is positively affected by competence and positively affected by competence through job satisfaction. Their findings indicate that competence not only directly improves employee performance but also does so indirectly through its positive effect on job satisfaction. While both studies highlight the central role of competencies in enhancing performance, they approach the issue from different angles. Otoo (2019) employs a broader organizational perspective focused on HRM practices and performance outcomes, using mediation analysis to explore indirect effects. In contrast, Hajiali et al. (2022) adopt a more individual-level focus, analyzing how personal and managerial factors affect satisfaction and performance. Clarifying this methodological distinction helps to situate both studies within the broader discourse and underscores the multifaceted role of employee competence in organizational success.

The purpose of the research conducted by Suhairom, Musta'amal, Amin, Kamin & Wahid (2019) is to identify quality kitchen workforce competencies for sustainable career development among culinary professionals. Most of the interviewees agreed that chefs should be well-rounded individuals, especially when it comes to specializing in technical competencies. It has been concluded that such competencies, although considered essential as various competencies, are necessary to produce superior job performance.

### 3. Method

In this research, the case study model, which is one of the qualitative research designs, was used. The purpose of this model of study is to investigate a phenomenon in depth. The qualitative case study consists of the in-depth investigation of one or more cases (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The question of whether competency-based human resources management is implemented in travel agencies is addressed within the scope of the research question. In this context, it is aimed to collect comprehensive information to determine the perspectives of employees in travel agencies on competency-based HRM practices. The sub-goals of the research are to determine the importance of the concept of competence in human resources management in travel agencies and the importance of competence in human resources management for career.

#### 3.1. Working Group

The working group consists of 18 travel agency employees operating in Turkey. Eas accessibility sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was preferred in determining the study group (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). When determining travel agency employees, diversity is ensured by taking into account the gender, age, education level, marital status, working hours and positions of the employees. General information about the subjects included in the research is given in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic variables of the participants**

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Educational Status</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Duty Period</b>	<b>Position</b>
<b>P1</b>	Male	30	Postgraduate	Single	1 year	Manager
<b>P2</b>	Male	25	Bachelor	Single	4 years	Personnel

<b>P3</b>	Male	25	Associate	Single	4 years	Accounting Supervisor
<b>P4</b>	Female	27	Bachelor	Single	6 years	Sales-Marketing Supervisor
<b>P5</b>	Male	40	Bachelor	Married	1 month	Operation Director
<b>P6</b>	Male	30	Bachelor	Single	8 years	Sales Development Assistant Manager
<b>P7</b>	Male	53	High school	Married	10 years	Manager
<b>P8</b>	Male	34	Associate	Married	14 years	Sales-Marketing Supervisor
<b>P9</b>	Male	29	Associate	Single	10 years	Sales and Operations Manager
<b>P10</b>	Male	25	Bachelor	Single	1 year	Sales Supervisor
<b>P11</b>	Male	27	Postgraduate	Single	1 year	Sales Supervisor
<b>P12</b>	Male	45	Bachelor	Married	25 years	Reservation and Sales
<b>P13</b>	Female	21	Bachelor	Single	3 months	Travel Supervisor
<b>P14</b>	Male	33	Bachelor	Married	3 years	Travel Supervisor
<b>P15</b>	Female	29	Bachelor	Single	1 year	Sales-Marketing Supervisor
<b>P16</b>	Male	36	Associate	Single	8 years	Accounting Supervisor
<b>P17</b>	Female	42	Bachelor	Married	12 years	Operation Director
<b>P18</b>	Female	29	Postgraduate	Married	4 years	Sales-Marketing Supervisor

In order to collect data in this research, ethics committee permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Selçuk University Beyşehir Ali Akkanat Faculty of Tourism in 05.02.2024.

When the employees from whom information was received started to give approximately the same information, the interviews were terminated with the idea that the saturation point had been reached. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes, conducted in accordance with the predetermined purpose and within a mutually interactive conversational setting.

### **3.2. Data Collection Tool**

In this research, a standardized interview form with open-ended questions was used as data collection tool. Interview questions were created with reference to the literature and were finalized with expert opinion. In this study, a semi-structured interview form was used as the primary data collection tool. The form was developed based on a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and aligned with the research objectives. It included open-ended questions designed to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and practices related to competency-based human resources management within travel agencies. Prior to the data collection process, the interview questions were reviewed by subject matter experts to ensure content validity and clarity. One-on-one interviews were held with 18 travel agency employees meet face-to-face, and via e-mail, whatsapp and messenger.

### **3.3. Data Analysis and Coding**

Nvivo 11 program was used in the analysis of the data. The collected data was transferred to the word environment and coded by uploading to the Nvivo 11 program. The generated codes were themed under the interview questions. In order to better reflect the views, code names close to the expressions in the opinions of the employees were used. The questions of the interview form are as follows:

Q1: Give information about the HRM of the travel agency you are working with.

Q2: Do you think competence in HRM in travel agencies is important? Why?

Q3: Do you think competence in HRM is important for your career? Why?

Q4: Did you have sufficient knowledge and skills before you started your job in the agency you work for? What are your experiences in the process?

Q5: Do you get enough resources and support to complete your tasks and be successful at the travel agency you work for? How?

Q6: What would you recommend to improve/change HRM in the travel agency you work for?

After the interviews were deciphered and written down, the themes and codes were determined as a result of the analysis with the Nvivo 11 package program. The themes and codes of the interviews are explained in detail in the findings section.



#### 4. Findings

The coding process began with an initial reading of the interview transcripts to become familiar with the data. A preliminary set of codes was then developed through open coding, in which significant statements, patterns, and concepts were identified and labeled. These initial codes were iteratively refined and grouped based on conceptual similarities to form sub-nodes. Subsequently, related sub-nodes were clustered under broader categories to establish main nodes (themes) that aligned with the research objectives. The process of categorization was guided by both inductive reasoning, allowing themes to emerge from the data, and deductive approaches informed by existing literature. To ensure transparency and consistency, coding decisions and category definitions were documented throughout the process. This structured approach contributed to a more coherent analysis and enhanced the credibility of the findings.

The expressions that were coded as a result of the interviews with the employees of the travel agencies were classified into 6 categories. To find the categories in question in the study, before starting the analysis, the data set was examined together with the answers obtained from the interview according to the research questions and design. According to the meanings of the words and messages used, main nodes and sub-nodes were created and coded via the "nodes" menu in the NVivo 11 program. The following themes were formed by interpreting the data of the research as follows:

##### HRM in the Travel Agency

The questions directed to the employees regarding the HRM in the travel agency they worked for were gathered under 4 themes. These are coded as planning, recruiting, motivation, and wage management. The number of participants, percentage and subcodes are presented in Table 2:

**Table 2. Themes and Subcodes Regarding HRM in Travel Agency**

Main Theme	Subcode	n	%	Quotation
HRM in Travel	Planning	4	22,2	<i>The company I work for is corporate and one of the leading companies in its market. There is a HR department and it carries out relevant activities by</i>
	Recruiting			
	Motivation			
	Wage management			

*making plans according to our company's management approach. (P8)*

*The pandemic has created a bad economic environment for agencies all over the world. Most companies experienced serious losses of trained and well-trained personnel. The sudden opening of jobs and a rapid statistical increase has created an incredible need for experienced employment. That's why almost all agencies are currently experiencing the problem of not being able to find personnel. Therefore, HR must first be able to determine the future need and plan accordingly. Doing this is not an easy thing to do. Agencies that can achieve this will reach great potential in the future. (P12)*

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Recruiting	7	38,8	<i>The HR unit is managed by the head office HR unit located abroad. The personnel preliminary interview is carried out by the unit manager and other procedures are transferred to the HR unit. Unit manager approval is required for recruitment. (P3)</i>  <i>Our company is progressing professionally in recruiting workers. (P17)</i>
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Motivation	9	50	<i>In our company, HR is about the comfort of employees and motivating them. (P14)</i>  <i>In our company, HR proceed mostly through motivation and job evaluation (P15)</i>
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Wage Manageme nt	5	27,7	<i>Since we are a local and new company, the workload is low. However, there is an increase in the commission and bonus system in order to increase the employees'</i>
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*confidence and psychology in the job. In relations with customers; Since the company is new, various discount opportunities are offered through healthy communication within the scope of reliability and customer acquisition. (P11)*

*Our agency's sales are low due to reasons such as the current increase in diesel prices and the pandemic, but our HR show sufficient activity and work to keep the morale of our staff high and to prevent them from experiencing economic difficulties. (P17)*

When the table is examined, it is observed that the agencies have deficiencies in HRM. It is stated that the main problem is caused by the insufficient number of employees.

Since the number of employees is not high, there is no working mechanism for HRM. (P1)

The HR department determines personnel needs by collecting information from the workforce; then matches these needs with suitable candidates from a wide range of applicants. A comprehensive staffing strategy involves identifying future staff members during the hiring process, rather than relying solely on employee recommendations.

Motivation in the working environment is of great importance for businesses because of its ability to trigger human behavior and affect employee productivity. In this sense, employee motivation is one of the most fundamental issues for businesses.

Wage management process includes all the necessary activities related to the determination and payment of the wages of the employees. Compensation management is the process having benefits, bonuses, rewards, and salaries. When the answers given are evaluated, it can be said that employees focus on planning, motivation and wage management from the beginning of their recruitment in HRM.

## The Importance of Competence in Travel Agencies

Practices related to the importance of competence in travel agencies are grouped under 2 sub-codes. These codes are; efficiency and qualified personnel. In Table 3, the number of participants, percentage and sub-codes of this theme are given:

**Table 3. Themes and Sub-Codes Regarding the Importance of Competence in Travel Agencies**

Main Theme	Subcode	N	%	Quotation
The Importance of Competence				<i>Competence in HRM is important as it is necessary to organize the salaries and benefits of employees and to train qualified personnel in order to work efficiently. It is very important to develop honesty, healthy communication, organisation and most importantly problem solving skills.</i>
	Efficiency	4	22,2	<i>(P2)</i>
				<i>Competence in HR in travel agencies is very important in terms of meeting the expectations of our staff and bringing new colleagues to the sector. (P7)</i>
				<i>It is important. Professionalism before and after recruitment is important for personnel motivation. (P9)</i>
				<i>Of course it is important. Because the work carried out with good planning, in addition to selecting the right personnel for the company; They also play an active role in directing these personnel to units where they will be competent and useful.(P11)</i>
	Qualified personnel	13	72,2	<i>Travel agency business owners should be subjected to an awareness and training process on HRM. The consultancy</i>

*used will play an active role in the satisfaction and performance process of the personnel. (P16)*

*Even though all agencies seem to do the same job, each department works with different hotels, different systems, and different customer potentials than other agencies. For this reason, it is necessary to place the right people in the right places. When it is realized that the wrong people have been placed, restructuring becomes very difficult. (P18)*

Considering that the human factor is quite intense due to its structure, the role of the employees is very important in the success of the activities carried out in the tourism sector. The performance of the employees is one of the important factors in the formation of consumer satisfaction (Yoo & Park, 2007). The most important prerequisite for employees to be able to perform at a level that can reach the goals of the business is to have the competencies required by the job.

### **The Importance of Competence for Career**

The codes of the participants regarding the importance of competency in travel agencies in terms of careers were gathered under 3 themes; experience, performance, knowledge and skill level. In Table 4, the number of participants, percentage and sub-codes of this theme are given:

**Table 4. Themes and Sub-Codes Related to the Importance of Competence in Career**

Main Theme	Subcode	n	%	Quotation
Competence-				<i>Spending a long time and gaining experience in the sector</i>
	Experience	5	27,7	<i>means gaining some kind of problem solving competence, communication competence, organizational competence and HRM competence. For this reason, the more challenges you</i>

			<i>face, the more your competencies will develop. In this context, it has an important place for one's career. (P1)</i>
			<i>It provides an opportunity for both the agency and the person to develop each other in the right direction. (P16)</i>
			<i>HR unit actions can be used in team management, the actions taken can be applied to team motivation. (P5)</i>
Performance	7	38,8	<i>Competence is very important for career because the worker's career progresses thanks to his skills, performance and distinctive knowledge. (P9)</i>
Knowledge and Skill level	9	50	<i>When we have long-term experience in a tourism agency, we solve any problems we encounter through HR. That's why HRM competence has a very important place in our careers. (P3)</i> <i>Yes, it is important. Because the worker's career progresses thanks to his working style, skills and performance. (P4)</i>

When there is an effective career planning system in the enterprises, the knowledge, skills and skills of the employees are used in the best way, and there is a noticeable increase in the productivity and motivation levels, so that it is easier for the enterprise and the employees to reach their goals. For this reason, businesses should create career plans for their employees and provide various opportunities for their employees to develop their careers.

### **Adequate Knowledge and Skill Level Before Starting the Job**

The sub-codes for the sufficient level of knowledge and skill before starting the job were formed by the participants as education, insufficient knowledge and experience over time, and were collected in 3 sub-codes in total. The number of participants, percentage and sub-codes related to this theme are given in Table 5:

**Table 5. Themes and Sub-Codes Related to Adequate Knowledge and Skill Levels Before Starting the Work**

Main Theme	Subcode	n	%	Quotation
Sufficient Knowledge and Skill Level Before Starting Work				<i>I did not have even a little knowledge about the infrastructure, but with the training and support I received here, I have now reached the desired level. (P7)</i>
	Education	4	22,2	<i>I started as an intern at the agency I work for. I learned and gained experience here many things that I did not learn at school. I learned more about hotels. Over time, I began to better understand what the customer wanted and give guidance accordingly. (P8)</i>
				<i>I didn't have enough knowledge and skills. Because the tourism sector includes many areas. I continue to improve and learn the areas in which we are lacking over time. (P2)</i>
	Insufficient knowledge	1 2	66,6	<i>I didn't have enough knowledge and skills. During the process, my development about the programs, product contents and operation was completed. (P16)</i>
				<i>Before working at a travel agency, I did not have sufficient knowledge and skills. I have become more experienced over time and continue to become more experienced and knowledgeable as time goes by. (P4)</i>
	Experience over time	1 2	66,6	<i>Over time, we gained knowledge and improved, first getting to know the hotels, then getting to know the location and roads, then creating a customer portfolio, of course, many years of experience, but every mistake has become</i>

*an experience. In fact, even though I have been doing this job since 2009, I still continue to learn something. (P12)*

One of the most important activities in the HR department for new employees in order to use the HR efficiently and to reduce the operating costs of the enterprises is to organize and implement the programs for the newly recruited employees.

### **Adequate Resource and Support Sharing in the Workplace**

When the codes of the data related to adequate resource and support sharing in the workplace are examined, it is seen that they are gathered under 3 themes as individual effort, manager support, inventory and equipment. The number of participants, percentage and sub-codes for this theme are given in Table 6:

**Table 6. Themes and Subcodes Regarding Adequate Resource and Support Sharing in the Workplace**

Main				
Theme	Subcode	N	%	Quotation
Adequate Resource and Support Sharing				<i>Adequate resources and support emerge as a result of my personal efforts. In order to be considered sufficient, it is necessary to be able to communicate and exchange information with people, companies and agencies in different fields. For this reason, since individual effort is a progressive learning process, it can be said that sufficient resources and support are not provided. (P1)</i>
	Individual effort	6	33,3	<i>I don't think I get enough support. Since I am currently a staff member, I do not think I receive enough support as I can achieve things with my individual efforts. (P4)</i>
	Manager support	7	38,8	<i>I receive sufficient support from my colleagues and manager at the agency I work for. When I encounter any problem, we</i>



			<i>support each other and solve the problem. Our successes are increasing because we are in unity. (P6)</i>
			<i>At the company I work for, I receive the necessary support in every aspect, such as for the website, for online sales, for future tour programs, for early booking and to benefit from hotel discounts, etc. In addition, constant investments are made in terms of visibility within the office for customer satisfaction. Material and moral support in this regard is always provided by the company owner. (P15)</i>
			<i>I receive the necessary support in every aspect at the company I work for, by investing in summit and arkman programs to improve accounting (P5)</i>
Inventory			<i>Yes. Team setup, inventory, sales system and field equipment.</i>
and	8	44,4	<i>(P8)</i>
equipmen			<i>Resources are of course important, but since it is a service sector, ensuring customer satisfaction depends on experience and positive bilateral relations. You can reach a sufficient level by coping with a lot of problems. (P11)</i>
t			

While labour, machinery, money, and material are sufficient for the definition of a resource, it becomes necessary to consider the concepts of time and information in the resource today. Knowledge sharing, on the other hand, means that employees share their work-related experiences, expertise, technical knowledge and new knowledge with other colleagues. In this case, agency employees stated that they could access these resources by the company they work for.

### **Issues Required to be Improved/Changed Regarding HRM in Travel Agency**

A total of 3 codes were obtained for the issues that need to be developed/changed regarding HRM in the travel agency. These codes are formed without effective marketing techniques,

social support and openness to innovations. Table 7 shows the number of participants, percentages and sub-codes for this theme:

**Table 7. Themes and Sub-Codes Related to the Issues Required to be Improved/Changed Regarding HRM in the Travel Agency**

Main				Quotation
Them	Subcode	n	%	
e				
Issues that need to be improved/changed	Effective marketing techniques	5	27,7	<p><i>Professional and effective marketing techniques should be developed in order to reach sales and customers better. Tourism-related training, seminars, etc. If opportunities are available, agency employees should take advantage of these opportunities. Since people in the tourism sector need to meet and benefit from each other, such events should definitely be organized. (P2)</i></p> <p><i>I think it should be improved in terms of providing agency staff with the necessary opportunities and support when necessary. I also think that one should not be seen as someone who just gives commissions to the staff and brings in customers, and that sufficient work should be done and marketing techniques should be applied for this. (P3)</i></p>
	Social support	11	61,1	<p><i>Some importance should be given to social relations. (P5)</i></p> <p><i>There may be an improvement to ensure that not working on public holidays is reflected as overtime when worked. A decision may be made not to deal with anything work-related outside working hours. (P7)</i></p>

Openness  
to  
innovations

4 22,2

*Travel agencies operating in our city can be considered as small-scale businesses. Therefore, due to the low number of personnel and high work capacity and responsibilities, each employee must be competent in many areas. Having this awareness of responsibility and reward system will positively reflect on the working staff in terms of moral motivation and will increase the sense of belonging and selflessness in work. (P16)*

*They can be open to innovations. How can they make people happier? Periodic bonuses, surprises, etc. can be given. Personal goals can be given to increase motivation. (P15).*

Travel businesses are the businesses where mutual relations and human-to-human service are experienced so intensely. The management of the human element can only be achieved with a good planning and HRM, which requires expertise in this field. In terms of tourism businesses, planning in HR is one of the main factors affecting and determining productivity.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

Nowadays, the concept of competence has become increasingly important and widely used. In general terms, competence is observable behavior that includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes that an individual or group must possess in order to perform perfectly in a job. Accordingly, competency-based HR practices aim to provide maximum efficiency from HR, which is the most important resource of organizations.

The research aims to determine how the competencies, which are seen as the key point of success for businesses, are perceived by the personnel working in travel agencies. According to the results of the research, when evaluated in terms of travel agencies in the tourism sector, it is seen that the agencies generally apply a competency-based approach.

When the results of the research are evaluated, there are the themes of planning, recruitment, motivation and wage management in the context of HRM in the travel agency. According to this theme, starting from the planning stage in line with the comments of the employees, it is

seen that the travel agencies provide the necessary motivation to their employees. On the other hand, it was also stated by the employees that some agencies do not attach much importance to HR practices. Considering the effect of motivation on productivity in the working environment, it has a great importance for businesses. This movement is the most important trigger behind successful projects. In this sense, it is essential for businesses to effectively plan motivation and wage management, which have an effect on employee satisfaction.

Regarding the importance of competence in travel agencies, it can be said that employees give importance to this issue in order to work efficiently and effectively. In order for businesses to reach their goals in a competitive environment, the performance of their employees must be at a high level. It can be stated that the prerequisite for this is the concept of competence.

The importance of competence in terms of career is among the issues that employees attach importance to. Related to this subject, the themes of experience, performance, knowledge and skill level were revealed. In general, employees stated that competence is very important for their careers, because their careers are progressing thanks to the skills, performance and distinctive knowledge of the employees. Accordingly, travel agencies should provide opportunities for their employees to develop their careers by creating career plans so that both the business and the employees can achieve their goals.

On the adequate level of knowledge and skill before starting work it is seen that the employees did not have sufficient knowledge and skill level when they first started to work, and they gained experience over time. Accordingly, necessary training and orientation programs should be organized in order to put the knowledge gained over time into practice and to bring the employees to a better level.

In order to share sufficient resources and support in the workplace, 3 themes are observed: individual effort, manager support, inventory and equipment. It has been stated that travel agencies mostly support their employees, while some are insufficient in providing this support. In this direction, a more effective way of working can be achieved by providing agencies with time and information resources on labor and equipment as well as time and information resources.

Regarding the issues that need to be developed/changed regarding HRM in the travel agency, it was emphasized by the employees that both professional and effective marketing techniques should be developed and social rights should be presented to the employees. Since the

communication and interaction of people with each other in the tourism sector is important, it is necessary to organize such events.

## **6. Practical Implication**

This study, which deals with the travel agencies related to competency-based HRM, is important in providing detailed information about the current situation of the enterprises from the recruitment to the motivation of the personnel. In this context, the study guides businesses in competency-based HR activities. In line with the results, travel agencies should use competencies by integrating HR functions and involving all personnel in this process. In addition to this, HR departments in travel agencies should embrace the issue of competency to increase the benefits of competencies and to be perceived more, and should emphasize its importance in the whole agency, particularly in the management level. In our global competency business world, employee motivation requires more than high salary or wage. A qualified employee will need more than a higher salary such as health insurance, some special discounts about children's school or flexible working hours. Employees want to be given privileges in scope where the company is an expert, and this makes them feel valued. This also creates higher organizational commitment.

Besides, to be fair in management HR managers should ensure that adequate resources and support are provided to agency personnel when necessary. An employee has to feel herself to reach all kinds of resources related to her job. For instance; if a featured computer is needed to do one's job better, the company should buy it; if a car is needed to transport people more comfortably, the company should provide it. this makes an employee motivate and adore herself to her job.

Another implication is about rearranging employees' rights like annual leave, maternity leave, working hours and job description. Due to the dynamic structure of the tourism industry, employees have to work long hours and they have only one day off. Therefore, the turnover rate and the rate of leaving the tourism sector completely is very high. Human resource managers need to take into consideration these regulations and apply them in the company.

Human resource managers should also support employees career development. Understanding their needs about employees career path and give them opportunity for their development will better result as competency. For example, training employees to learn new technology or a language, help them to make rotation abroad for international companies.

Additionally, these points are strongly interconnected each other, supervisor support or coaching employees (McCarthy & Milner, 2020) can make them feel valuable and improve HR competency in tourism. Empowering (Huang & Hsieh, 2015) employees at the job gives them the to opportunity handle situations and problems. This also results as self-efficacy and organizational commitment in the long run for the company (Wheeler, 2011).

In light of this information, HR managers should provide employees with areas where they can show themselves and help them to combine mind and physical skills. Only in this way can competency HR be created (Werdhiastutie et al., 2020).

When the research results are evaluated in general, the employees' opinions in the travel agencies about the competency-based HR practices are explained with the qualitative research method and evaluated in terms of competencies. With this research, the importance of competency-based HR practices for employees is revealed. It is considered that it will guide researchers for future studies on the subject.

## **7. Limitations and Suggestions for further research**

This research has several limitations. First, this study collected 18 different employees who work in travel agencies in Turkey. More travel agency interviews may give better results to generalize. Second, 6 open-ended questions were asked to 18 travel agency employees, it might be better if more questions were asked for more data analysis and more inferences could be drawn about what would apply in practice and theory. Third, this research is based on Turkish travel agencies, interviews with travel agencies in different countries may give different results about competency-based HR practices. Last but not least, further studies are needed for a deeper understanding of competency-based HR practices and other related variables in order to spread competency-based HR and adopt this management style in the tourism industry.

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