

**A Positive Mindset in the Service Industry towards Enhancing Employees' Competencies, Confidence, Performance, English Proficiency and Customer Delight: A Case Study of the Montien Riverside Hotel Bangkok**

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**Abstract**

The hospitality industry has currently become one of the primary sources of revenues for Thailand (Saibag & Schwindt, 2002). Therefore, the main purpose of this action research was to design appropriate organizational development interventions for enhancing employees' competencies, confidence, performance, English proficiency and customer delight for the focal company where its nature of business is in hospitality industry. The respondents were divided into two groups. The first group did not involve the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) concept and process while the second group did. Both groups responded on the domains of learning interventions through training package and human process intervention through dialogue with management. The interventions could generate positive effects on all variables as these variables were improved effectively and efficiently. Although the results were positive for both groups, group 2 had better results than group 1 because of the involvement in the AI concept and process. The relationship between each variable could be explained a way in relation to the results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. The interventions could not generate any significant relationship between several variables for respondents in both groups. These variables were proficiency and confidence for both meeting and exceeding the expectation dimensions. Conversely, the interventions could generate a significant relationship between performance and customer delight for both groups of respondents on both dimensions that surveyed on customers; nevertheless, neither competencies nor proficiency had any direct effect or significant relationship with performance in light of confidence.

*Keywords:* competencies, confidence, performance, English proficiency, customer delight, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) concept and process

**Introduction**

The hotel business is always concerned with the international level that directly requires staff training in this industry to reach the global standard. Cross-cultural training must be taken into account when planning and designing the training programs for the employees. Language training has inevitably also become essential in training programs for

international staff (Nickson, 2007). The ASEAN Economic Community has started to create a project that aimed to develop the skills and qualities of employees in the tourism industry. However, training materials toolboxes were additionally prepared with the intention of designing operations as core references at the regional level, strictly conducted by tourism training and academic institutions (Angliss Consulting, 2013).

Furthermore, Thailand has massively earned overseas revenues from the tourism industry that is considered to be one of the main sources of revenues injected to the country nowadays (Saibag & Schwindt, 2002). As for the consequence of the AEC blueprint, the country has to be responsible in the regional tourism industry. So, the Tourism and Sports Ministry has taken an important role in developing a master plan to meet standards (Amnatcharoenrit, 2012).

### The Focal Company

The Montien Riverside Hotel was established in 1994 and managed by the Tantakit family. The primary organizational structure of the hotel management is a functional structure that separates more than 400 employees into several departments. Nevertheless, it does not have the human resource department or training department to provide standard training programs for the employees. As a result, the quality of employees is considerably at a low level and they cannot deliver the best services to the customers, as there is not any standard procedure and formal practices for them to learn and follow.

In addition, there are two main issues of the current situation that create significant problems to be addressed. The first issue is about the general service standard of the employees who do not have qualified competency, low confidence and performance to work in the hotel.

The second issue is about the English language ability from employees who have to interact and communicate directly with foreign customers. This problem can be observed obviously when the hotel is selected to be a venue for meetings, incentives, conferences and events for foreign customers. In particular, the banquet staffs, which have to be on the spot to prepare their service and readiness to the customers, cannot understand what the customers really want and expect from them. This problem possibly leads to low customer satisfaction and can affect the revenue and opportunities because customers' needs should be recognized, predicted, understood and satisfied to allow a company to be able to earn greater revenue from them (Barsky & Nash, 2003).

### SWOTAR Analyses

The strengths of the hotel are from the reputation with a positive reputation whereas the weaknesses are from lack of training and developmental programs for employees. However the opportunities arise from the economic growth from both global and regional perspectives. The government has also declared the policy that motivates Thai tourists to

travel locally to get the benefits from income tax deduction. Nevertheless, the threats are from the price wars within the country, the unstable political situation, and the new trend of travel to neighboring countries, including the negative image from criminal incidents. As for its aspirations, the hotel aspires to be the leading hotel for the Meeting, Incentive, Conference, and Events (M.I.C.E.) industry but specifically scoped to the riverside area while the expected results are being a well-known hotel in the industry with increased sales revenues, the number of M.I.C.E. customers and positive comments that place online.

#### The Statement of the Research Problem

The main intention of this research is to utilize a positive mindset of employees in the hotel by enhancing their competencies, confidence, performance and English proficiency that can subsequently elevate customer satisfaction to customer delight.

#### Research Objectives

- To assess and diagnose company's current situation and existing problems on the competencies, confidence, performance and English proficiency of employees and customer delight level
- To design the appropriate OD interventions for enhancing employees' competencies, confidence, performance, English proficiency and customer delight
- To determine the differences of the competencies, confidence, performance and English proficiency of employees and customer delight between pre OD interventions and post OD interventions
- To determine the differences between the trained group with AI concept/process, and another trained group without AI concept/process through the OD interventions
- To determine the relationship between the competencies, confidence, performance and English proficiency of employees and customer delight

#### Research Questions

- What is the difference of competencies, confidence, performance and English proficiency of employees and customer delight between pre and post OD interventions?
- What is the difference between the trained group with AI concept/process, and another trained group without AI concept/process through the OD interventions?
- What is the relationship between competencies, confidence, performance and English proficiency of employees and customer delight?

#### Research Hypotheses

H1o: There is no difference between pre and post OD interventions.

H1a: There is a difference between pre and post OD interventions.

H2o: There is no difference between the trained groups with and without AI concept/process through the OD interventions.

H2a: There is a difference between the trained group with and without AI concept/process through the OD interventions.

H3o: There is no significant relationship between employee competencies and confidence.

H3a: There is a significant relationship between employee competencies and confidence.

H4o: There is no significant relationship of employee competencies and confidence with employee performance.

H4a: There is a significant relationship of employee competencies and confidence with employee performance.

H5o: There is no significant relationship between employee competencies and performance.

H5a: There is a significant relationship between employee competencies and performance.

H6o: There is no significant relationship between employee's English proficiency and confidence.

H6a: There is a significant relationship between employee's English proficiency and confidence.

H7o: There is no significant relationship of employee's English proficiency and confidence with employee performance.

H7a: There is a significant relationship of employee's English proficiency and confidence with employee performance.

H8o: There is no significant relationship between employee confidence and performance.

H8a: There is a significant relationship between employee confidence and performance.

H9o: There is no significant relationship between employee performance and customer delight.

H9a: There is a significant relationship between employee performance and customer delight.

## Review of Literature

### Employee Competencies

Spicer (2009) defined competency as the sets of skills, abilities, knowledge and attributes or characteristics that allow employees to accomplish their jobs successfully. The concept of competency management is suggested to be applied to the hotel industry because the nature of hotel business is labor focused and people oriented. Thus, if the employees have competencies at work, then the outcome is in a positive aspect to the hotel (Lee, Kahn & Ko, 2008). Therefore, employees' knowledge, skills and abilities need to be developed in terms of competency because their job performance creates significant impacts on the service quality and the hotels' productivity (Kim et al., 2011).

According to the studies of Chung-Herrera, Enz and Lankau (2003) on the specific required behavioral competencies in the hospitality industry under their modified competency model to rate the significance of each of the ninety-nine aspects of competencies. However there were 137 executives at various hotels who responded and their results explained that the industrial workers should actually have competencies in different aspects and dimensions such as the ability to foresee impediments and develop contingency plans, be able to adjust any uncertain circumstances and monitor progress of colleagues with the effort when they are in need. Also, time management for ensuring the productivity works effectively in obscure situations; therefore, the abilities to prepare workforce to understand change are also essential in which they have to seek feedbacks from others in order to work towards win-win solutions or outcomes altogether whenever possible.

In addition, Christou (2000) revealed that the expected competencies in the hospitality and tourism industry for potential employees were interpersonal skills, decision making and problem solving skills, teamwork and initiative. Moreover, Malone (2007) identified a range of competencies, which were determined as transferable skills, such as time management, basic information communication and technology (ICT) knowledge, oral communication skills, teamwork and presentation skills. Also, Velo and Mittaz (2006) found out that in order to deal with competitive challenges that confront hotel chains in the global expansion, the expected variety of competency were flexibility, cultural awareness and openness.

### Linguistic Theory

The accomplishment of the hospitality industry relies on the effective communication among hotel employees and foreign customers who have differences in linguistic backgrounds (Leslie & Russell, 2006). Swift and Smith (1992) conducted studies on the attitudes toward language learning and the fact revealed that the most important primary source of employee motivation for learning a foreign language is actually from their own personal motivation with the degree to which they perceived and felt that the organization supported them as a positive factor through the language learning process.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was discovered during a period of change in the traditional British language teaching in the late 1960s. This change is about a language teaching theory that emphasizes learner-centered and experience-based perspectives of teaching the second language (Richards & Rodgers, 1987). The main objective of CLT is to enhance communicative competence that is comprised of the interaction of psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, grammatical and probabilistic language components (Hymes, 1972).

English for Special Purposes (ESP) is another English language teaching theory created to reach specific needs of the learners (Dudley-Evans, 2001). As to ESP for the hospitality industry, the learning results of the designed courses are actually affected by the coordination of teaching and learning together with the industry demands on the English proficiency of employees (Man & Xi, 2012). Nevertheless, Kaur (2007) argued that several issues in the development of ESP courses are not easy to overcome through the matching process between organizational objectives and methods.

Therefore, Chang (2009) insisted that it is crucial to conduct a need analysis prior to developing a framework for ESP courses if they are to be practical and applicable as well as additionally increase the level of employee motivation after she did her studies with a group of 24 hotel employees in Taiwan.

### Employee Confidence

Employee confidence is how employees sense their own abilities to be successful at a particular attempt or consider their effectiveness when a given task has been completed (McCarty, 1986). Similarly, it is a sort of attitude that provides an opportunity for the individuals to have a positive and real attitude towards self as well as causes them to rely on their own abilities at work and increases perceived control over their own life (Want & Kleitman, 2006). Meanwhile a positive mindset is a disposition of thinking or feeling about someone or something that an individual is functioning within a positive state of mind, which in turn, obviously reflects the behavior of that individual (Pitman, 2014).

Moreover, there are many “self” concepts that have similarities to the self-confidence concept. For example, self-efficacy refers to the belief in the capacity of an individual to perform a specific given task (Gist, 1987). Self-esteem refers to the appraisal that each individual usually makes and maintains regarding the self. It also reveals the attitude of agreement or disagreement that indicates whether the individual chooses to believe the self is capable, achievable or worthy (Coopersmith, 1967). In relation to the perspective of Tharenou (1979), self-esteem can be called self-acceptance, self-satisfaction, self-worth, self-respect or self-confidence.

Self-confidence, within the concept of learning and development, continuously increases human resource management research interest due to its importance to employees’ performance. It can become a crucial determinant of performance in a new work setting where a new set of skills and knowledge are required (Vithessonthi & Schwaninger, 2008). In

order to promote self-confidence, in-service training can assist employees to create strength and solve their disabilities (Spreitzer, 1995; Kamal, 2003). Therefore training can extend self-confidence, job satisfaction and career development of employees while lowering the level of contrasts and stress at work (Alavi, 2000).

Up until now, the extant literatures (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Tracey et al., 1995) have specified three major influencers of the training transfer model that consists of trainee characteristics or individual factors, training design or enabling factors and work environment or transfer climate (Velada et al., 2007). However, Kavanagh's (1998) review revealed that the original model has significant gaps among three major influencers. As a result, there is a need for investigation into the impact of this issue on the transfer of training process. Holton et al. (2000) therefore, created the Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) in order to investigate the influencers. Nonetheless, researchers argued that LTSI did not count several significant individual difference variables, for example, cognitive ability and training retention (Chen et al., 2005; Khasawneh et al., 2006). In general, this model actually insinuates that training inputs generate the impacts on the learning process and the generalization of learning results cause the transfer of training for the overall improvement in performance (Lee et al., 2014).

For example, the Renaissance Shanghai Yuyuan Hotel employs many different training methods such as English language training and a 15-minute job rotation training program in different departments while the Marriott Hotel Group has created a training program called "passport to success" that is divided into 8 levels for employee participation (Xiao, 2010). However, The Pearl Continental hotels in Pakistan do not use only their own training department but they also use outsourced training organizations in order to provide the professional training experience in the hotel industry to their employees (Afaq, Yusoff & Thukiman, 2011). Training methods are, therefore, dependent on the situational process of each organization, thus there is not any single method that can be appropriate and suitable for every circumstance (Ahammad, 2013).

McCokll-Kennedy and White (1997) reported that in the hotel industry, there is a significant link between training programs and the service quality provided by the hotel's employees. Moreover, in this industry training has an outstanding and important role in accomplishing a competitive edge among rivals (Jane, 2005). As a result, successful hotels always add and implement training programs as their considerable development strategy (Nickson, 2007).

### Employee Performance

Employee performance is a key psychological concept within work and an organization. For more than a decade, researchers have made continuous progress in order to clarify and extend this concept (Campbell, 1990). However, not all of the employees' behaviors are subsumed to the concept of employee performance because it counts only the



### Action Research Framework

The action research framework consists of three phases: pre-ODI, during ODI and post-ODI. In short, the intervention was deliberately designed after the organizational assessment was conducted and diagnosed in order to solve the weaknesses and the existing problems of employees at the focal company with the objectives to improve their competencies, confidence, performance and English proficiency. The expected outcome is to achieve performance that exceeds customer satisfaction and acquires customer delight.

The training programs are the main interventions for this focal organization because there is a significant assumption that the benefits of training can assist the organization in reaching the expected outcome. In addition, dialogue with management will be implemented to provide the trainees with the opportunities to discuss and express their feeling, thoughts, ideas and suggestions on the implemented interventions with management for implementation in future training programs for those who have never participated in this ODI.

As a result, the significant objectives of ODI and this action research not only aims to reach customer delight but supposedly to eventually enable the hotel to generate a positive mindset in employees when they are at work for long term performance.

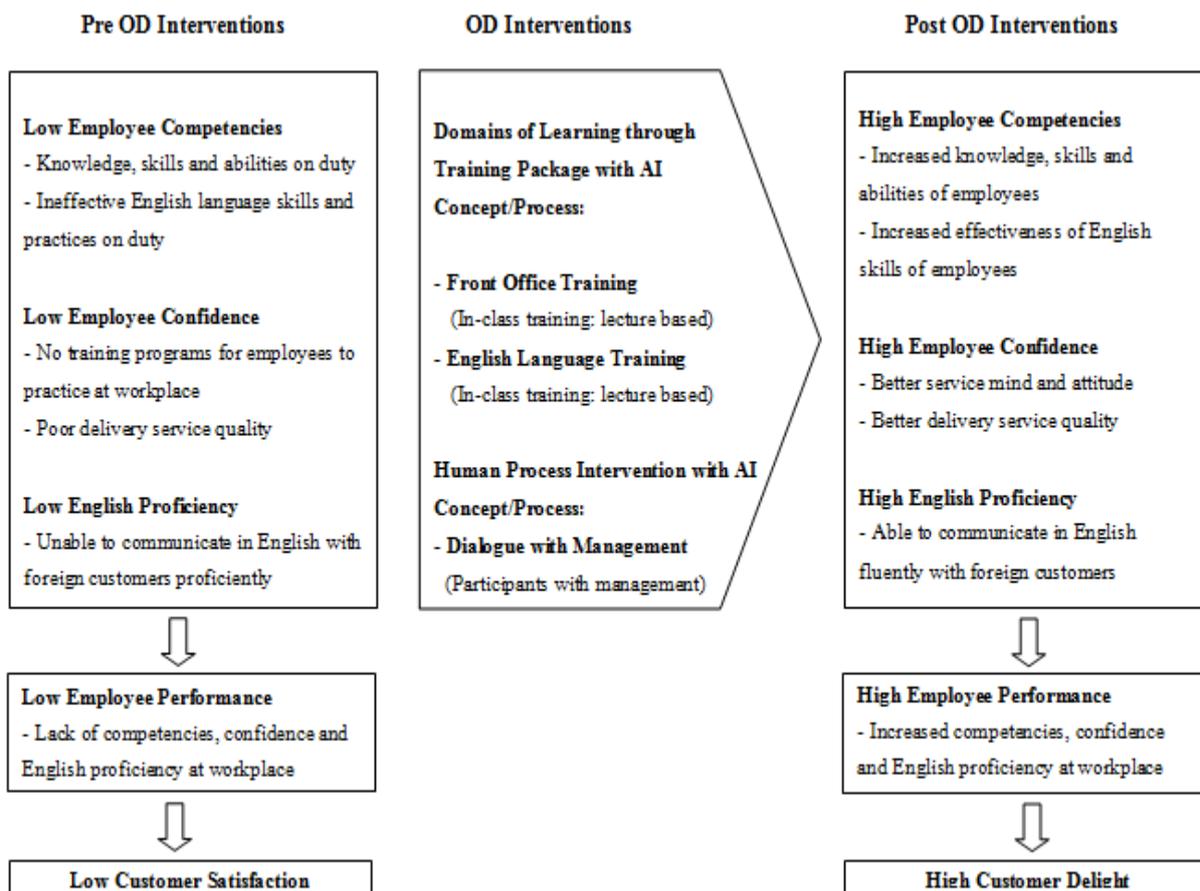


Figure 2 Action Research Framework

## Research Methodology

### Pre OD Interventions

This stage emphasized on the current situation and the existing problems of the focal organization that can be identified through an organizational assessment under the concept of SWOTAR analyses. This stage refers to the use of various appropriate data collection tools in both qualitative and quantitative methods prior to the analysis and feed back of information. This research implemented semi-structured interviews, focus group, questionnaires and observations as the methods to collect the data needed.

### OD Interventions

This stage involves the implementation of the ODIs that has been elaborately planned and designed after the diagnosis stage.

### Front Office Training

This training focuses on increasing employee competencies and aims to offer them practice in how to deal with potential problems. The trainer will use the appreciative inquiry to elicit positive mindsets and service-mindedness of participants to enhance their performance in which the expected result is a customer's delight.

### English Language Training

This training aims to expand the competencies of participants who must interact and communicate with foreign customers. The AI concept/process will also focus on using many positive questions, phrases and offers for services when participants must deal with customers to create a positive feeling and derive a wow reaction from customers.

### Dialogue with Management

This ODI is actually designed in relation to the concept of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as this intervention can follow the process of 5-D cycle model that uses many positive questions with the respondents that starts from define, discover, dream, design through deliver phases, respectively.

In fact, AI focuses on appreciating and valuing the best of “what is” under discover phase, envisioning “what might be” under dream phase, dialoguing “what should be” under design phase and innovating “what will be” under delivery phase (Hammond, 2013). With the use of the AI concept through this intervention, a positive mindset of employees is expected to be utilized because the respondents are given the opportunities to share, involve and make decisions with the management team. They would also feel that they are recognized and important to the organization to listen to and accept their desired needs and suggestions through this process.

Post OD Interventions

The measurement of evaluation feedback for this action research is the comparison between pre and post OD interventions that consists of the methods listed below:

- ☑ Employee competencies were measured by using Srinakharinwirot University’s standard test from Hospitality and Management program
- ☑ English proficiency were measured by using Srinakharinwirot University’s standard test from Hospitality and Management program
- ☑ Employee confidence will be measured by using observation checklists
- ☑ Employee performance were measured by using SERVQUAL model through customer questionnaire
- ☑ Customer delight were measured by using questionnaire

A quasi-experimental research design is also conducted on the purpose of comparing the results between the trained group with AI concept/process and the trained group without AI concept/process in order to determine the differences between the two groups.

Subjects of Study

In order to collect relevant data, the sources of data are from employing both qualitative and quantitative methods that use the respondents from two main groups. They were the selected employees from the Front Office department and foreign customers.

Group One: Although the researcher had a strong intention to have the number of respondents as many as possible but due to the limitation in that the Front Office department has only 45 employees in total and splits into three shifts that are day shift, afternoon shift and night shift in which each shift has 15 employees. Eventually, there were only those respondents who were from day and night shifts, who could participate in the ODIs. Nevertheless, the additional respondents, who were two managers and three assistant managers, were requested to participate because they had to observe and monitor their own subordinates during all ODIs sessions. Importantly, these respondents were purposively selected in relation to their duties that require them to compulsorily use the English language when delivering their services to foreign customers during their daily routine.

However, the researcher also aimed to compare the results of employees’ competencies, confidence, performance and English proficiency with those who were trained with and without AI concept/process in order to determine which group of respondents could reach the better level of customer delight. As a result, the respondents were split into the following groups for further comparison:

Employees:			
Group 1	Training without AI concept/process	15	respondents
Group 2	Training with AI concept/process	15	respondents

Group Two: In fact, the hotel has several travel agents that support groups of foreign customers who have to stay at the hotel twice in relation to the tour programs that they have already purchased before travelling to Bangkok. But, based on the observation on the reservations of accommodation from several travel agents, it was revealed that there is one biggest group of customers that consists of 40 foreign customers who would stay at the hotel twice during the expected timeline of the implementation of pre and post ODIs. Therefore, this group was selected as it is crucial to use the same groups of customers, who have experienced and used the service of the hotel, in order to measure the trained groups during pre and post OD interventions accurately.

Generally, these customers have to stay at the hotel for two nights before starting the tour programs that may combine with Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Phuket or Samui for the first stay. After finishing the tour programs, they must come back to stay at the hotel for one night as the second stay before they fly back to their home country. As a result, there is a gap between the first stay and the second stay that allows the designed OD interventions to be implemented with the selected respondents.

Customers:

Group 1	Foreigners for group 1	20	respondents
Group 2	Foreigners for group 2	20	respondents

As a result, there were a total of 75 respondents who were selected to participate in the interventions that were split into four sub-groups; two groups from hotel employees and two groups from customers.

#### Data Analysis

The tools for data analysis of observation checklists and customers' questionnaires are the SPSS-PC software and AMOS program for SEM analysis that can interpret data into means, standard deviations, frequency, percentage and the relationship between employees' competencies, confidence, performance, English proficiency and customer delight. The observations and questionnaire provide a 5-point Likert scale rating for respondents to select their own level of expression.

### Results

The data were collected from the observation checklists, employee competencies tests, English proficiency tests, customer questionnaires and dialogue with management.

The tables for paired sample t-test were provided to reveal comparisons of the means of each group that were measured twice during pre and post ODIs. So, the results would also reveal whether after the implementations of ODIs the results would be higher than that of pre test. If yes, it means the ODIs could generate positive results based on research objectives.

The tables for independent sample t-test were provided to reveal comparisons of the means difference between Group 1 and 2. Consequently, the results would reveal whether which group between Groups 1 or 2 could generate better results. If Group 2’s results are higher than that of Group 1, this meant the AI concept/process could generate better results in employees’ performance, confidence, performance, English proficiency and customer delight.

Employee Competencies Tests

Table 1

*Employee Competencies: Paired Sample T-Test*

	Pre		Post		Pre-Post		Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff	t	
<b>Group 1</b>	17.73	3.788	20.80	3.075	-3.070	-6.946*	0.000
<b>Group 2</b>	18.27	3.218	23.07	1.751	-4.800	-5.913*	0.000

\*p<.05

The results above revealed that the training sessions could consequently enhance employees’ competencies as both groups received related and relevant knowledge for their assigned tasks on their daily routines. Therefore both Groups 1 and 2 could gain higher results for post ODIs.

Table 2

*Employee Competencies: Independent T-Test*

	Group 1		Group 2		Pre & Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Pre Test</b>	17.73	3.788	18.27	3.218	-0.540	-0.416	0.681
<b>Post Test</b>	20.80	3.075	23.07	1.751	-2.270	-2.481*	0.021

\*p<.05

Group 2 gained better results than Group 1 in both pre and post ODIs but the results for pre test for both groups were similar to each other and this was the reason why there was not any significant difference between the two groups concerning the comparison of pre test. However every respondent in both groups had initially had a similar level of knowledge for their job and duties but after the training their results were improved.

English Proficiency Tests

Table 3

*English Proficiency: Paired Sample T-Test*

	Pre		Post		Pre-Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Group 1</b>	22.00	4.629	24.13	3.907	-2.130	-6.346*	0.000
<b>Group 2</b>	21.60	4.703	26.93	3.305	-5.330	-9.869*	0.000

\*p<.05

The results above revealed that the training sessions could consequently enhance employees’ English proficiency as both groups received proper English language training and appropriate dialogue. Therefore, both Group 1 and Group 2 could gain higher results for post ODIs after the participation in the training sessions.

Table 4

*English Proficiency: Independent T-Test*

	Group 1		Group 2		Pre & Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Pre Test</b>	22.00	4.629	21.60	4.703	0.400	0.235	0.816
<b>Post Test</b>	24.13	3.907	26.93	3.305	-2.800	-2.119*	0.043

\*p<.05

Group 2 gained better results than Group 1 only for post ODIs. As for the pre test, the results for both groups were similar to each other and this was the reason why there was not any significant difference between the two groups regarding the comparison of pre test. In addition, the results of pre ODIs were quite similar to Group 1, so it was probably because all of them had initially had a similar level of English proficiency before the training but their results were improved after ODIs. As a result, there was a significant difference between post ODIs for both groups.

Employee Confidence (Observed by Researcher)

Table 5:

*Employee Confidence (Observed by Researcher): Paired Sample T-Test*

	Pre		Post		Pre-Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Group 1</b>	4.072	0.42709	4.315 2	0.38087	-0.2430	-2.615	0.020*
<b>Group 2</b>	4.211	0.39070	4.478 8	0.25820	-0.2677	-3.364	0.005*

\*p<.05

These results based on the researcher’s observation further revealed that although the designed trainings were effective to increase the level of confidence of all respondents, the mean scores for both groups could slightly gain higher results for post ODIs after the participation. However, these results were from the researcher’s personal judgment in which the results would have to be compared with the employees’ own judgment later on.

Table 6

*Employee Confidence (Observed by Researcher): Independent T-Test*

	Group 1		Group 2		Pre & Post	T	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Pre Test</b>	4.072	0.42709	4.211 1	0.39070	-0.13889	-0.929	0.361
<b>Post Test</b>	4.315	0.38087	4.478 8	0.25820	-0.16364	-1.377	0.179

\*p<.05

Although Group 2 could gain better results than Group 1 in both pre and post ODIs, the results for both groups were similar to each other so there was not any significant difference between the two groups in the comparison. Nevertheless, it could be explained that because every respondent in both groups had initially a similar level of knowledge, skills and abilities for their job and duties but after the training, their confidence was improved.

Employee Confidence (Observed by Employees)

Table 7

*Employee Confidence (Observed by Employees): Paired Sample T-Test*

	Pre		Post		Pre-Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Group 1</b>	3.694	0.29991	3.977 8	0.38378	-0.28333	-2.643	0.019*
<b>Group 2</b>	4.011	0.37117	4.177 8	0.28845	-0.16667	-1.212	0.246*

\*p<.05

These results based on the employees’ observation further revealed that although all training sessions could increase their level of confidence, the mean scores could be increased only a little. Perhaps, the respondents had a low level of motivation or they were being tried from work when they participated in the sessions.

Table 8

*Employee Confidence (Observed by Employees): Independent T-Test*

	Group 1		Group 2		Pre & Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Pre Test</b>	3.694	0.29991	4.0111	0.37117	-0.3167	-0.242	0.811
<b>Post Test</b>	3.9778	0.38378	4.1778	0.28845	-0.2000	-4.499	0.000*

\*p<.05

Although Group 2 could gain better results than Group 1 in both pre and post ODIs, the increment in means for Group 1 was more than Group 2's. It was possible that all of the requested training topics were mainly from the respondents in Group 1 when a focus group discussed these with all respondents. So, Group 1 gained the majority of their desires for their needs, so they consequently evaluated their level of confidence higher than that of Group 2.

Employee Performance

Table 9

*Employee Performance: Paired Sample T-Test*

	Pre		Post		Pre-Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Group 1</b>	4.05	0.510	4.10	0.308	-0.050	-0.370	0.716
<b>Group 2</b>	4.10	0.308	4.15	0.489	-0.050	-0.438	0.666

\*p<.05

The results above revealed that initially both groups had a similar level of performance as evaluated by the same group of foreign customers and after the ODIs, their performance was better, which could be explained that the designed ODIs were effective and efficient to enhance employee performance for both groups of respondents. However, their mean scores did not increase that much; therefore, the ODIs should be revised and the methods should be improved to train employees for further ODIs.

Table 10

*Employee Performance: Independent T-Test*

	Group 1		Group 2		Pre & Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Pre Test</b>	4.05	0.510	4.10	0.308	-0.050	-0.632	0.531

<b>Post Test</b>	4.10	0.308	4.15	0.489	-0.050	-0.822	0.743
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\*p<.05

These results were based on the customer evaluations and although the designed ODIs were effective to increase the level of employee performance for both groups, Group 2 could gain better scores as a result of the involvement of the AI concept/process.

Customer Delight

Table 11

*Customer Delight: Paired Sample T-Test*

	Pre		Post		Pre-Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mea n	Std. Dev.	Mea n	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Group 1</b>	4.05	0.605	4.05	0.221	0.000	0.000	1.000
<b>Group 2</b>	4.00	0.459	4.15	0.366	-0.150	-1.143	0.267

\*p<.05

These results revealed the fact that after the employees were trained and they participated in all ODIs, they could perform and service customers better than when they were at pre ODIs stage. Therefore, those customers evaluated them and expressed their level of satisfaction that shifted to the customer delight level.

Table 12

*Customer Delight: Independent T-Test*

	Group 1		Group 2		Pre & Post	t	Sig (2 tailed)
	Mea n	Std. Dev.	Mea n	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff		
<b>Pre Test</b>	4.05	0.605	4.00	0.459	0.050	0.295	0.770
<b>Post Test</b>	4.05	0.221	4.15	0.366	-0.100	-1.042	0.305

\*p<.05

Group 2 could perform their service better than Group 1 while the mean scores of Group 1 remained the same at 4.05 but their standard deviation decreased from 0.605 to 0.221 in which the designed ODIs that involved the concept/process of AI should be applied to every respondent in order to reach the objectives of acquiring customer delight. These results also reconfirmed that there were significant differences between the groups that were trained with and without the AI concept/process.

Data from Mean Scores and Paired Sample T-Tests

The data were from the competencies tests and English proficiency tests which revealed that after ODIs all respondents had actually gained more knowledge than what initially. Importantly Group 2 that was trained with the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) concept/process could gain better results in both tests, namely, competencies and English proficiency tests when compared with Group 1. This issue could, therefore, explain that the AI concept/process assisted ODIs to gain better results that would benefit the hotel to reach the business objectives on customer delight.

It is interesting to be addressed that the results from both pre tests done by the two groups of respondents were similar to one another. Therefore, these results could indicate that before the implementation of ODIs, the groups of respondents had a similar level of knowledge, skills and abilities whereas, after the ODIs it was successful to increase these factors for their daily work routine.

As to the employee confidence, the observation checklists revealed that after they were given more knowledge, skills and abilities that were related to their daily work routines, they could gain higher level of confidence when they had to perform their given tasks and duties with customers. Group 2 could, however, gain a higher mean score than Group 1 because of the involvement of the AI concept/process when evaluated by the researcher and themselves.

As for the employee performance, the customer questionnaires were intentionally used to reveal customer satisfaction levels towards service quality in which it showed that the overall performance of employees for both groups were better than their first stay at the hotel. Nevertheless, the mean score of Group 2 was better than that of Group 1.

Customer delight was the last variable to be separately evaluated in which their results revealed that the level of customer satisfaction increased for both groups and could eventually enhance the level from satisfied to delight feeling. Notwithstanding, Group 2 gained a higher mean score than Group 1 in post ODIs.

#### Dialogue with Management

This OD intervention was split into two sessions. After the dialogue with management completed, there were four main issues that specified the differences between pre and post OD interventions as shown in the following table.

Table 13

#### *Comparison between Pre and Post ODI*

No.	Description	Pre	Post
1	Employee Satisfaction	Low	High
2	Mutual Understanding	Low	High

3	Employee Involvement	Low	High
4	Positive Attitude	Low	High

The first dimension involved employee satisfaction on the training sessions that answered their needs and elicited their motivation to learn for their own career path. Undoubtedly, these trainings were provided and prepared in relation to their initial requests.

The second dimension involved a mutual understanding between the management and respondents because of the open communication between each party. Usually the communication flow was from top to down whereas this ODI offered the opportunity for down to top direction.

The third dimension was about employee involvement in the decision making process during the implementation of the ODI. It was the first time that the management allowed the respondents to inform and exchange what their inner needs and desires were.

The fourth dimension was about the positive attitude of respondents who seemed to be better as they were lectured by the monks about how to think positively and the opportunities were offered to them to discuss such with management.

#### SEM Analysis

The SEM analysis was used to analyze the relationship between variables that specified in the hypotheses; they were Competency, Confidence, English Proficiency, Performance and Customer delight. The data collection was from observation checklist for researcher and employees as well as customer questionnaires.

#### Observation Checklists

The data revealed that the ODIs had a significant effect on Group 2 in which the interventions for this group involved the AI concept/process and could obviously assist the trainings to generate a significant relationship or a direct effect between Confidence and Performance where the influence coefficient value was 0.000 and increased to 0.654 after the interventions. These results were observed by the respondents themselves, so it meant that they actually felt more confident out of their own feelings while Group 1's Confidence did not have any effect on Performance after the training sessions.

Unexpectedly, when the researcher observed Group 2, although the result of influence coefficient values were positive for both pre and post interventions, the value decreased from 0.598 to 0.488. The causes might have stemmed from the researcher's consideration and evaluation on each respondent that may have accidentally been involved with bias or prejudice. It was also important to state that when Group 1 was observed by the researcher and respondents themselves, their self-confidence did not have any effect on Performance in both pre and post ODIs. In consequence, these results could underpin and support the fact

that the AI concept/process was definitely resourceful to increase Confidence on Performance in which the final outcome could eventually reach the customer delight.

#### Customer Questionnaire

The analysis of the questionnaire could be separately divided into two dimensions; they were meeting and exceeding expectations on Group 1 and Group 2 for both pre and post ODIs. The results revealed that there was not only a difference between pre and post ODIs for both dimensions but also a difference between Group 1 and Group 2 for both dimensions.

#### Group 1 that was trained without the AI concept/process

As for meeting the expectation dimension, there were only two pairs of variables that had already had a significant relationship or effect between each other in pre ODIs. As Proficiency had a direct effect on Confidence where the influence coefficient value was 0.525 and increased to 0.618 after post ODIs. Similarly, Performance had a direct effect on Customer delight where the influence coefficient value was 0.786 and increased to 0.907 after post ODIs. However, only Competencies had a direct effect on Performance where the influence coefficient value was 0.000 and increased to 0.803 after post ODIs.

As for exceeding the expectation dimension, the results were similar to the above as there were three pairs of variables that had had a significant relationship for pre ODIs. Proficiency had a direct effect on Confidence where the influence coefficient value was 0.861 but decreased to 0.621 while Performance had a direct effect on Customer delight where the influence coefficient value was 0.795 and increased to 0.910. Nevertheless, Competencies initially had a direct effect on Confidence where the influence coefficient value was 0.548 but decreased to 0.000 after post ODIs. Whereas Competencies had a direct effect on Performance where the influence coefficient value was 0.000 and increased to 0.531 after post ODIs.

According to the above findings, it could be described that the implementation of ODIs could only generate a new significant relationship between Competencies and Performance; therefore, the front office training sessions could enhance the employee competencies that positively affected employee performance for both meeting and exceeding the expectations. In addition, ODIs could increase the influence coefficient values of several variables but the most significant ones were Performance and Customer delight because these values were highly increased from pre to post ODIs for meeting and exceeding the expectation dimensions.

#### Group 2 that was trained with the AI concept/process

As for meeting the expectation dimension, there were only two pairs of variables that had already had a significant relationship or effect between each other for pre ODIs. Proficiency had a direct effect on Confidence where the influence coefficient value was 0.623 and slightly decreased to 0.620 after post ODIs. Similarly, Performance had a direct effect on

Customer delight where the influence coefficient value was 0.793 and decreased to 0.718 after post ODIs. Meanwhile, Competencies had a direct effect on Confidence where the influence coefficient value was 0.000 and increased to 0.725 after post ODIs. Also, Confidence had a direct effect on Performance where the influence coefficient value was 0.000 and increased to -0.317 after post ODIs.

As for exceeding the expectation dimension, the results were similar to above as there were only two pairs of variables that had already had a significant relationship or effect in pre ODIs. Proficiency had a direct effect on Confidence where the influence coefficient value was 0.485 and increased to 0.630 while Performance had a direct effect on Customer delight where the influence coefficient value was 0.803 and increased to 0.913. Nevertheless Confidence had a direct effect on Performance where the influence coefficient value was 0.000 and increased to -0.565 after post ODIs.

According to the findings above, it could be described that the implementation of ODIs could generate two new significant relationships between Competencies and Confidence as well as between Confidence and Performance. Nevertheless, there was no any data or evidence that revealed there was a significant relationship between Competencies and Performance through Confidence in which this finding supported that Competencies variable did not have any effect on Performance. As a result, the front office training sessions could actually enhance Competencies that positively affected Confidence for both meeting and exceeding expectations. However the implementation of ODIs could increase the influence coefficient values of several variables but the most significant ones were Competencies and Confidence where these values were highly increased from pre to post ODIs for meeting and exceeding the expectation dimensions.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Quantitative Findings**

##### **Employee Competencies and English Proficiency**

The training package could significantly increase both employee competencies and English proficiency for Group 1 and Group 2 in which their results were similar to one another as the results of post tests were higher than those of pre tests. However, the comparison between the two groups revealed that Group 2 could obviously gain higher mean scores than Group 1 in both training sessions.

##### **Employee Confidence**

The observation checklists, observed by the researcher, revealed that Group 2 gained better results in employee confidence than Group 1 as their post test was higher than that of pre test. Similarly, when another checklist, observed by the employees, revealed the same results as Group 2 gained higher mean score than Group 1. As a result, both findings supported that the employee confidence was increased after the implementation of ODIs.

### Employee Performance

The customer questionnaires were evaluated by the same group of foreign customers, who had to stay at the hotel twice in relation to their travel itinerary and were at the hotel during pre and post ODIs, revealed that although both groups of respondents or employees who participated in the ODIs, could actually gain better results in their overall performance, Group 2's result was better than Group 1's.

### Customer Delight

Customer delight was expressed by those customers who rated their overall feelings on the hotel in every dimension that consisted of quality of staff, service and accommodation. As a result of the implementation of ODIs, both groups could increase the level of customer satisfaction to reach the customer delight level although Group 2's results were better than Group 1's and the research objectives were fulfilled with positive results.

### Qualitative Findings

The ODIs made positive changes and outcomes for the hotel, where general manager, the management team, managers and respondents explained the benefits of participating in the processes that could be clustered into four main dimensions. The first dimension was employee satisfaction that they satisfied with training sessions as they selected their own topics that they initially requested the researcher and the hotel to provide for them prior to participating in. They also agreed that they gained more knowledge, skills and abilities that were related to their duties.

The second dimension was a mutual understanding between the management and respondents as both parties conducted open communication to each other. Both parties, therefore, understood what the others expected and they discussed the solutions and future plans for training together.

The third dimension was employee involvement in the decision making process through the dialogue with management. As a result, it was the first time that the management team allowed the respondents to share their ideas by informing and exchanging what their inner needs and desires were directly to them.

The fourth dimension was the positive attitude of respondents who were lectured by the monks who influenced and taught them about how to think positively with an open heart and mind. Together with the AI concept/process that was implemented through the training sessions, this concept/process supported the respondents to acquire a positive mindset in the service industry.

## SEM Analysis

### Observation Checklist

SEM analysis revealed the findings that there was not any effect on Group 1 as there was only Group 2 that ODIs could generate a significant relationship between or a direct effect on Confidence and Performance where the influence coefficient value was dramatically increased after the implementation of ODIs and these checklists were observed by employees. On the other hand, the influence coefficient value was decreased where there was a potential involvement of bias or prejudice unexpectedly when observed by the researcher.

### Customer Questionnaire

Group 1, SEM analysis revealed the findings that the implementations of ODIs could generate only one new significant relationship between or the direct effect on Competencies and Performance for both meeting and exceeding the expectation dimensions. In addition, it was crucial to address that the front office training could actually enhance the overall effectiveness of employee competencies that consequently, affected their performance after they attended and participated in the sessions.

Group 2, SEM analysis revealed the findings that the implementations of ODIs could generate only two new significant relationships between or direct effects on Competencies and Confidence as well as Confidence and Performance for both meeting and exceeding the expectation dimensions. Nevertheless, there was a supportive finding which revealed that Competencies did not have any effect on Performance.

### Comparison between Group 1 and Group 2

When the findings and results of these groups were compared with each other for both meeting and exceeding the expectation dimensions on pre and post ODIs, it was revealed that ODIs could not generate any effect on several variables. In particular, Competencies did not have any effect on or significant relationship between Performance and Confidence. Similarly, Proficiency did not have any effect on or significant relationship between Performance and Confidence. Whereas ODIs could actually generate the effect or significant relationship for both meeting and exceeding the expectation dimensions at pre and post stages for Group 2 only between Confidence and Performance as well as Competencies and Confidence. ODIs created the direct effect between Performance and Customer delight for both meeting and exceeding the expectation dimensions at pre and post stages for Group 1 and Group 2.

## Conclusions

The implementation of ODIs could actually generate positive effects on employee competencies, confidence, performance, English proficiency and customer delight as these variables were developed and improved effectively and efficiently. Although the results were

positive for both groups but Group 2 had better results than Group 1. A positive mindset from the management team could lead to and elicit a positive mindset from employees as a whole because a healthy organization must be originated from the top-level management as they are the ones who specify vision, mission, policies, procedures and direction to lead the organization. Therefore, ODIs are considerably appropriate tools for them to consider and select in order to implement accordingly. It could be described that a set of these designed ODIs consisted of a training package and a dialogue with management could answer the needs of employees and a management team. Consequently, employee involvement and management support worked well together. As a result, all designed ODIs could overcome the existing problems of the hotel at a certain level but there were several areas that were unexpectedly found out to be improved later on.

### **Recommendations**

In order to improve the effectiveness of ODIs, it is a must to understand and realize that there were the relationships between variables in which they could be explained by the results of SEM analysis. The motivation tactics and methods to shift employee mindsets to enjoy learning should be created in order to elicit their learning behavior and expectedly change the whole organization to become a learning organization where every employee is positively eager to learn. Likewise the career path program with the attractive benefits may be possibly set up to influence and retain employees to work for the hotel as long as possible. This option is also able to reduce the number of staff turnover for a long term result.

The further research should also consider adding more variables to improve the level of customer satisfaction that turns to delight and eventually creates customer loyalty for the focal company that applies both ODIs and the concept/process of AI. However, one of the most important further variables is motivation that must be added into the model because when the employee motivation is increased, then their performance will absolutely better than the current level of their performance.

What if the third language is added into the model such as Chinese, Japanese or French instead of English language? It will be interesting to see the results whether the intervention of learning domain can impress or create a wow reaction from these customers. However, this is dependent on the nature of that focal company as to which country their main customers are from. For example, the main customers who stay at Pattaya hotels are from India and Russia, so the third language can be one of these languages or both.

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