




Employees' metacognitive knowledge and skills assessment in tourism and hospitality

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ABSTRACT

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This research explores academic knowledge, cognitive, emotional, and soft skills, according to the employees' perceptions, that lead to better service provision and career development enhancement in the tourism and hospitality industry. Moreover, the research explores the possible differences and correlations in reference to five individual traits: the educational background, the tourism and hospitality sectors, the seasonal or full-time character of the organization, the location of the organization, and the working experience derived. In order to investigate the perceptions of employees, 102 online questionnaires were fully completed. Cronbach's Alpha index, descriptive statistical analysis, correlations between first-ordinal factors, and several MANOVA tests provide information regarding the metacognitive assessment of the above-mentioned domains. According to their responses, the most important academic knowledge that entails the international nature of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry, is 'International Hospitality Management'. English is the most important foreign language, and Tourism Business Management is the most essential academic knowledge. The most important skills for the Tourism and Hospitality Industry that arise from the research are those of 'problem solving', 'dealing with clients', 'customer service', 'crisis management', 'self-control, and 'empathy'. The research concluded that, according to employees' responses, skills and knowledge in the tourism and hospitality industry are generic and universal in their nature and applicability, and they do not differ regarding their individual characteristics. The analysis of the research data provides fruitful information regarding the most important and essential skills and knowledge for the tourism and hospitality industry.

Contribution/Originality: The research is discovering the most important academic knowledge, cognitive, emotional, and soft skills in the tourism and hospitality industry and exploring the possible differences and correlations in reference to five individual traits: the educational background, the sector, the seasonal or full-time character of the organization, the location, and the working experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is based on the qualitative and hardworking productivity of each and every business personnel in order to adequately carry out, conduct business, and supervise/organize the target product (Amoah & Baum, 1997). The labor market is related to the characteristics of the workforce, either in direct terms or through educational programs (Riley, 1991). The stronger the internal labor market is, the higher the expectations of the workforce are expected to be. Due to the global economic environment, tourism and hospitality businesses expect their human resources to be educated (Belias & Trihas, 2022a; Mariger & Miller, 1999; Partlow & Gregoire, 1994).

Moreover, the development of value-adding skills among employees has resulted in great success for tourism and hospitality organizations (Baum, 1995). With respect to the subject at hand, the enhancement of competencies and academic expertise to comply with the requirements of diverse hospitality and tourism establishments is dependent upon the collaboration between the industry and educational curricula. (Belias & Trihas, 2022b; Christou & Chatzigeorgiou, 2019). The extent to which both are involved has to do with the targets and the level of training provided.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Metacognitive Assessment

Flavell (1976) first used the term “metacognition” to describe the idea that a person is aware of his own cognitive and emotional state. The major difference between “cognition” and “metacognition” is the fact that the former refers to the flow of information and the latter refers to the fact that someone is aware of this flow, monitoring its components, controlling this flow, or self-regulating their reactions to their benefit depending on the situation (Tarricone, 2011). Metacognition is considered a very important factor in cognitive development and skill enhancement. The ability for someone to firstly reflect upon their own personal condition, knowledge, or emotions, secondly be aware of this process, thirdly deduce meaningful conclusions, and finally self-regulate their behavior is all that is considered a “second” or “higher order mental process” (Goswami, 2008; Kuhn, 2000). To some extent, it is considered the most important mental function for cognitive development (Makris, Tachmatzidis, Demetriou, & Spanoudis, 2017).

The field of tourist psychology has seen an increase in research focused on investigating the connection between metacognition and service provision. Huang, Wu, and Shi (2018) explored how metacognitive awareness affects product evaluation and the persuasiveness of travel texts in a tourist management context, while Yusoff, Rahim, and Nordin (2022) are currently working on the relationship between metacognition and the skills acquired by university students in various areas of expertise, including tourism. In this research, we are trying to enhance this relationship by documenting the metacognitive assessment of employees working in the tourism industry. The participants (N. 102) are expressing their personal opinions and views of the skills and knowledge that are more or less important in hospitality services. While reflecting upon their personal working conditions and context, the views they are expressing serve as an important metacognitive factor because they are filtered and channeled through their personal working experience, acquired across a wide geographical and age range. This view may be considered an important aspect because it outlines (a) the academic background (degrees, diplomas, etc.) that may serve as a starting point in framing the personal or self-reflected views about what is essential in soft skills and (b) the academic knowledge (topics, courses etc.) in various domains and aspects of industry.

2.2. Essential Academic Knowledge, Cognitive, Emotional, and Soft Skills for the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

With the aim of facing the huge global competition, the tourism and hospitality industry requires better skills and competences for better service quality provision. Because of the extreme multipart character of the industry, it is very hard to accurately describe the skills and/or academic knowledge a graduate may have (Chaicharoenthaweekit & Jarinto, 2013; Gamble & Messenger, 1990). For tourism and hospitality organizations, it is tremendously vital to discover which competencies are necessary for the employees to be recruited, selected, or developed, as those competencies are changing over time, district, country, and industry. According to Jolliffe and Farnsworth (2003), seasonality, a fundamental issue of the tourism and hospitality industry, affects all aspects of the contemporary industry, which leads the Human Recourse Departments to devote extraordinary resources to basic HR practices.

Tas, one of the pioneering researchers who studied the assets issued in the hospitality and tourism industry in 1988, describes competencies as activities and skills that are vital for doing a specific work, and his study is

considered to be innovative (Baum, 1991; Christou & Eaton, 1997), concluding that the important competencies for a hotel manager have to do with human relations skills, ethics, diplomacy, and communication capabilities. Tas' research was repeated by Baum (1990) in the UK, by Christou and Eaton (2000) in Greece in 1996, and by Kay and Russette (2000) in the U.S.A. The results of this research identify them as the most substantial competencies to deal with guest problems.

According to Tas, LaBrecque, and Clayton (1996), back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, technical matters were higher on the skill demand list. In Doyle's (1992) research results, elective communication, human relations, interpersonal, and teamwork skills were the most important assets through which recruiters were asked to select future employees. On the other hand, Williams and Hunter (1991) stated the necessity for supplementary improvement in numerous human resource skills. Moreover, researchers until 1990 have included technical, human, conceptual, organizational, and leadership skills as important competencies (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Van Dyke & Strick, 1990). Sandwith (1993) introduced cognitive, leadership, interpersonal, administrative, and technical skills as important elements of the essential competence discussion.

The significance of leadership has been acknowledged as a fundamental constituent of managerial accomplishment by many other researchers (Enz, Renaghan, & Geller, 1993; Lewis, 1993; O'Halloran, 1992; Umbreit, 1993; Williams & Hunter, 1991).

In their study, Okeiyi, Finley, and Postel (1994) specified that human relations and managerial skills were important qualifications for a hospitality and tourism management educational program. Also, Umbreit (1993) highlighted that the most significant fields of study for hospitality and tourism management programs are the Human Resource Management, Total Quality Management, service marketing, leadership, and financial analysis.

Petkovski (2012) added the skill of handling complicated and high-pressure situations. Tesone and Ricci's (2005) study, connected with manager's position skills and knowledge, concluded in seven broader categories of communication, which are efficiency management, leadership, interpersonal management, self-management, cross-cultural management, and conflict management.

Kay and Russette (2000) noted that skills and academic knowledge in accounting, finance, benchmarking, marketing, purchasing, planning, flexibility, quality, security, safety, cultural issues, and ecological issues in e-tourism are all very important for the industry. As far as the airline industry specifically is concerned, handling complaints effectively is the most significant qualification related to service quality (Basfirinci & Mitra, 2015; Hu & Hsiao, 2016; Tsaor & Tang, 2013). Ross (1992) also suggests management, evaluation, autonomy, discipline, and high work ethics as important assets for the industry. Within hospitality and tourism, an important issue related to the fundamentals of the sector is the importance of the food and beverage department's skills as the ground floor for running a business with success.

As mentioned above, the industry demands highly developed communicative skills from its employees. According to Bobanovic and Grzinic (2011), communication skills are an imperative component of the tourism and hospitality industry. As a result, dealing with guests from countries all over the world with different languages and cultures is of great importance (Musarat, Sarkar, & Sohail, 2016). Davies (2000) suggests that the use of foreign language skills is crucial for the industry and improves the provision of high standard service quality, reduces practical obstacles, and produces goodwill. In their study, Lumma-Sellenthin (2012) noted the positive correlation between self-regulation and communication skills. In reference to Kay and Russette (2000), for the industry, oral communication is more useful than written communication. Language skills are the ground floor of communication in an extroverted industry like tourism and hospitality (Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2011).

Tourism and hospitality are universal, and their service quality provision varies from culture to culture and guest to guest with individual cultural perceptions and travel practices (Clarke & Chen, 2007; Gee, 1994). According to Pinar (2014), hospitality and tourism expatriates working in international business environments are

likely to have knowledge of different geographic and social-cultural environments, but they may also take into account cultural differences and barriers.

Moreover, tourism and hospitality organizations realized the need to adopt green practices in their industry (Han, 2015). However, according to Chan (2008), there is a lack of skills and knowledge regarding green and sustainable practices and organizations must train their employees in order to improve their environmental knowledge and sustainability awareness (Chan, Hon, Chan, & Okumus, 2014).

The employees of the tourism and hospitality industry should be efficient in their theoretical knowledge and proficient in practical working terms. To conclude, someone can say that the vast majority of the essential competencies are related more to soft skills than technical skills for tourism and hospitality organization (Robles, 2012; Wilks & Hemsworth, 2012). According to Evangelos Christou and Sigala (2001), due to the extremely quick evolution of tourism and hospitality industry, students and employees must be taught how to put themselves in a constant state of learning. Moreover, they must be qualified with the skills of critical analysis so as to deal with problems and use effective learning strategies. As Tas (1988) asserted, hospitality and tourism graduates should be creative, flexible, and adaptable.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is studying the subject area of skills and academic knowledge in the hospitality and tourism industry with reference to the employees' perceptions. Due to the exploratory nature of the study in an effort to offer new insights into employees' metacognitive assessments and views about essential assets and their relation to their personal characteristics, the research was deemed appropriate (Robinson, 2014). In fact, the participants are asked to reflect upon their personal experience and academic background in order to correlate their academic studies with their professional experience and evaluate what is more or less important in their line of expertise. The questions of the research instrument were based on the theoretical part of this paper. The study is divided into two main research targets:

1st. To examine which are the most important academic knowledge, cognitive, emotional, and soft skills that lead to better service provision and enhance career development in the tourism and hospitality industry.

2nd. To explore possible differences and correlations in the employees' perceptions according to their individual traits. Based on the 2nd target, five research questions were formulated. The following five questions work in a duplex manner. First, they serve as a "mapping guide" in order to outline the factors that are considered important soft skills in relation to the required academic background. Second, they are trying to form metacognitive assessments because they derive from the personal working and academic backgrounds filtered through the personal experience of the people who have participated in this research. These metacognitive assessments, in return, will serve as a guideline to draw out the final conclusions.

1st Question (Q1): Do the skills and academic knowledge differ with regard to the educational background of the employees?

The following hypotheses were made:

H1₁: The skills and academic knowledge differ with regard to the educational background of the employees.

H1₀: The skills and academic knowledge do not differ regarding the educational background of the employees.

A survey was conducted in order to ascertain if there exist, in principle, differences among the educational backgrounds, the one that applies to the academic level background and the second that applies to the field of study of the questioned employees. Whether they are statistically significant in order to examine their influence in revealing the crucial skills and academic knowledge for the hospitality and tourism industry. As a result, two sub-hypothetical questions were developed. The skills and academic knowledge:

H1.1: Differ regarding the academic level background of the employees.

H1.2: Differ regarding the field of study of the employees.

For the purpose of the research, the academic background of the respondents was grouped into 5 groups (Undergraduate Level, Postgraduate Level, Post-secondary vocational education, and No studies), while the field of studies was grouped into Tourism and Hospitality Management Studies, General Tourism Studies, General Management Studies, and Other subjects that are not related to tourism and managerial subjects.

2nd Question (Q2): Do the skills and academic knowledge differ regarding the tourism and hospitality sectors in which employees are employed?

The following hypotheses were made:

H1_a: The essential skills and academic knowledge differ regarding the tourism and hospitality sectors that the employees are occupied with.

H1_b: The essential skills and academic knowledge do not differ regarding the tourism and hospitality sectors that the employees are occupied with.

For the purpose of the research, the occupations of the respondents were grouped into 5 groups: the industry sectors, namely Hospitality, Travel and Tourism Agencies and Organizations, DMO's, Airlines, and Education. It was investigated if, in order to accept the H2₁ hypothesis, there are differences among these groups in the extent to which they recognize different vital qualifications for their careers.

3rd Question (Q3): Do the essential skills and academic knowledge differ regarding the seasonal character of the organization that the employees are occupied with?

For the 3rd issue, the following assumptions were made:

H3_a: The essential skills and academic knowledge differ regarding the seasonal or full-time character of the organization that the employees are occupied with.

H3_b: The essential skills and academic knowledge do not differ regarding the seasonal or full-time character of the organization that the employees are occupied with.

For the purpose of the research, the organizations of the respondents were grouped into seasonal and non-seasonal operational organizations.

4th Question (Q4): Do the essential skills and academic knowledge differ regarding the location of the organization in which the employees are employed?

For the 4th issue, the following assumptions were made:

H4_a: The essential skills and academic knowledge differ regarding the location of the organization that the employees are occupied with.

H4_b: The essential skills and academic knowledge do not differ regarding the location of the organization that the employees are employed by.

The locations were grouped into 14 groups in the 13 Greek Regions, and 1 of those is working abroad.

5th Question (Q5): Do the essential skills and academic knowledge differ regarding the employees' working experience in the tourism and hospitality industry?

For the 5th issue, the following assumptions were made:

H5_a: The essential skills and academic knowledge differ regarding the employees' working experience in the tourism and hospitality industry.

H5_b: The essential skills and academic knowledge do not differ regarding the employees' working experience in the tourism and hospitality industry.

The working experience was grouped into 5 groups (0-1 years, 1-3 years, 3-5 years, 5-10 years, and more than 10 years of working experience).

In order to investigate the employees' perceptions regarding their skills and academic knowledge in relation to their individual traits, questions were developed according to the literature review.

3.1. Definition of Population and Sampling Framework

Convenience sampling was chosen to attract employees who would be interested in participating in the study. The sample for the research was the tourism and hospitality industry employees' forums and Facebook groups. Due to the fact that the examined employees are from different regions in Greece and from some European countries [Table 7](#), the sample provides a multifarious geographical perspective. Before the questionnaire was sent to those groups, a small number of employees were asked to test it. Some employees found difficulties in completing the questionnaire because of time limitations, interest in the examined subject, and willingness to answer due to COVID-19 pandemic effects ([Del Chiappa, Bregoli, & Fotiadis, 2021](#); [Trihas et al., 2023](#); [Tsalpara, Soulopoulos, Sklias, & Grammalidis, 2021](#)). Totally, 102 were fully completed.

A review was performed, the Cronbach's Alpha was examined, and a descriptive statistical analysis took place to give a summary of the manner of actions that the respondents stated that they applied as well as some tendencies that became prominent from their replies. Moreover, the statistical importance and the correlations between variables were examined in order to draw further reliable conclusions by performing Multivariate Analysis Of Variance-MANOVA and tests and Correlations ([George & Mallery, 2019](#)).

4. CASE STUDY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

As stated above, the purpose of this paper was to examine respondents' self-evaluation and perception, which serve as metacognitive indexes, regarding the assets that are crucial for the hospitality and tourism industry. The questionnaire was formulated with the intention of stimulating the respondents to contemplate their individual work experiences and articulate their personal perspectives on the required abilities and academic knowledge necessary to deliver superior-quality services and achieve notable professional accomplishments. The participants were asked to provide socio-demographic data as well as information about their academic background, the sector in which they work, the location of their organization, and their working profile. Most of the respondents (61.8%) were males, while 38.2% of them were females ([Table 1](#)). Regarding their age, most of the respondents were between 31-40 years old ([Table 2](#)).

Table 1. Gender.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Female	39	38.2	38.2	38.2
Male	63	61.8	61.8	100.0

Table 2. Age.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
18-25	7	6.9	6.9	6.9
26-30	14	13.7	13.7	20.6
31-40	51	50.0	50.0	70.6
51-60	24	23.5	23.5	94.1
Above 60	5	4.9	4.9	99.0

Table 3. Educational level.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
.00	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Undergraduate level	31	30.4	30.4	31.4
Postgraduate level	48	47.1	47.1	78.4
Post-secondary vocational education	11	10.8	10.8	89.2
No studies	11	10.8	10.8	100.0

47.1% of the participants were postgraduate graduates and 30.4% were undergraduate graduates, while 10.8% had not attended any educational program [Table 3](#). Among them, 70.6% were graduates of tourism and hospitality

management programs [Table 4](#). The above findings require the answers of the respondents to be considered with more care due to their academic backgrounds.

Table 4. Field of studies.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Tourism and hospitality	72	70.6	70.6	70.6
General tourism studies	8	7.8	7.8	78.4
General management studies	14	13.7	13.7	92.2
Other studies	8	7.8	7.8	100.0

As far as the sector of the industry that the respondents are coming from, most of them are coming from the hospitality industry (55.9%), and 11.8% are dealing with education. The rest of them are working in the travel and airline industries and in Destination Management Organizations, while 22.5% are in other sectors such as wine tourism, conference and event management, tour guides, tourism counseling, etc. [Table 5](#). An interesting thing regarding the respondents is that 74.5% of them are working in full-time occupations and not as seasonal employees, which is a typical characteristic of the industry (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003) [Table 6](#).

Table 5. Hospitality and tourism sectors.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Hospitality	57	55.9	55.9	55.9
Travel and tourism	4	3.9	3.9	59.8
DMO	3	2.9	2.9	62.7
Airlines	3	2.9	2.9	65.7
Education	12	11.8	11.8	77.5
Other	23	22.5	22.5	100.0

Table 6. Seasonal or not character of the working positions.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Seasonal	26	25.5	25.5	25.5
Non seasonal	76	74.5	74.5	100.0

45.1% of the research respondents are working in the Region of Central Macedonia. An interesting finding is that 13.7% of the respondents are working abroad, mainly in the EU, with the majority of them in the UK (England and Ireland) [Table 7](#).

Table 7. Geographic location.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Central Macedonia	46	45.1	45.1	45.1
Epirus	2	2.0	2.0	47.1
Crete	3	2.9	2.9	50.0
Thessaly	5	4.9	4.9	54.9
Attica	11	10.8	10.8	65.7
South Aegean	8	7.8	7.8	73.5
Peloponnese	1	1.0	1.0	74.5
Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	8	7.8	7.8	82.4
Ionian Islands	4	3.9	3.9	86.3
EU countries	14	13.7	13.7	100.0

As far as their working experience is concerned, most of our respondents are working more than 10 years in the industry (47.1%), and 27.5% of them are working 5 to 10 years, which is more useful information regarding the value of the responses [Table 8](#).

Table 8. Working experience.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
0-1 Years	7	6.9	6.9	6.9
1-3 Years	11	10.8	10.8	17.6
3-5 Years	8	7.8	7.8	25.5
5-10 Years	28	27.5	27.5	52.9
More than 10 years	48	47.1	47.1	100.0

In order to thoroughly examine and further analyze the research findings, skills and academic knowledge were grouped into four order factors, namely:

1. Essential academic knowledge regarding the international nature of the tourism and hospitality industry.
2. Essential foreign languages for the tourism and hospitality industry.
3. Essential academic knowledge for the tourism and hospitality industry, and
4. Essential cognitive, emotional, and soft skills for the tourism and hospitality industry.

4.1. First Order Factor: Essential Academic Knowledge Regarding the International Nature of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

According to their responses, the most important academic knowledge entails the international nature of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. 'International Hospitality Management' came first with the most important responses, while 'International Marketing' and 'International HRM' follow. An interesting finding was the recognition of 'Cultural Studies' as an important subject to be taken into greater consideration for better service quality provision Table 9. Although Cultural Studies are not often taught in Tourism and Hospitality related curricula, the results confirm the literature that talks about the necessity for the industry's employees to have a broader view of the cultural environment's differences and barriers. Also, Cultural Studies are considered crucial due to economic and industrial globalization. Also, they are quite significant as they affect the service quality provision depending on the individual guests' perspectives (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022).

Table 9. Essential academic knowledge regarding the international nature of the tourism and hospitality industry.

Academic knowledge	Not at all	To a lesser extent	To an extent	To a large extent	A lot
International management	0	1	13	40	47
Cultural issues	1	2	24	37	37
International marketing	0	2	11	46	42
Multinational companies	1	4	32	39	25
International human resource management	1	1	17	40	41
International geography	2	9	20	38	32

4.2. Second Order Factor: Essential Foreign Languages for the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Regarding their answers, the most important foreign language for the tourism and hospitality industry, is the English language, confirming the fact that, in the current global economy, speaking English is the best passport for finding a job in the tourism and hospitality industry. In addition, reflecting upon their personal experience, the participants expressed the notion that speaking English is "the ground floor" of the industry (Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2011; Yasmin, Sohail, & Mangrio, 2015). The German language is also considered an important language for providing greater service quality in the tourism and hospitality industry Table 10. This can be explained due to the great importance of Germany's outgoing tourism flow, which, according to the WTO, is one of the biggest source markets in the world (WTO, 2020).

Table 10. Foreign languages.

Foreign languages	Not at all	To a lesser extent	To an extent	To a large extent	A lot
English	1	1	0	0	100
French	3	11	52	24	12
Italian	7	13	52	24	12
German	1	5	18	54	24
Spanish	3	21	39	25	14
Russian	1	7	28	46	20
Chinese	9	22	49	17	5

4.3. Third Order Factor: Essential Academic Knowledge for the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Reflecting upon their own experiences, 61 participants stated that Tourism Business Management is the most essential academic knowledge in the tourism and hospitality industry. In addition, participants noted the importance of Information Technologies and Digital Marketing. 68 and 60 of the respondents accordingly answered that IT is the most important asset Table 11, reflecting the importance of the new technologies in the industry, or so-called smart tourism (Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang, & Koo, 2015; Stylos, Fotiadis, Shin, & Huan, 2021).

Table 11. Academic skills and knowledge.

Academic skills and knowledge	Not at all	To a lesser extent	To an extent	To a large extent	A lot
Tourism business management	0	2	4	35	61
Tourism business marketing	0	1	13	41	47
HRM	0	1	16	41	44
IT in tourism	0	2	6	26	68
Digital marketing in tourism	0	0	14	28	60
Finance and accounting	0	4	26	38	34
Sustainable management	2	4	22	41	33
Operations management	0	1	9	45	47
Events and conferences management	1	5	29	33	34

4.4. Fourth Order Factor: Essential Cognitive, Emotional, and Soft Skills for the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

As per the research findings, the Tourism and Hospitality Industry places significant emphasis on cognitive, emotional, and soft skills. The importance of interpersonal contact between service providers and consumers is highlighted, owing to the real-time provision and consumption of services within the industry. A major characteristic of the service provision of the industry is the process that has been described in various ways as the 'moment of truth' (Carlzon, 1987), 'service stars' (Armistead, 1994), 'service encounter' (Czeipel, Solomon, & Suprenant, 1985), and "brand representatives" (Chen, Hu, & King, 2018; Milliman, Gatling, & Kim, 2018). According to the participants, the most important skills are those regarding 'problem solving' (cognitive) and 'dealing with clients' (soft) (81 and 76, respectively). In addition, 79 noted 'customer service' (soft) as equally important, and 74 noted 'crisis management' (soft). Moreover, 'self-control' (cognitive) and 'empathy' (emotional) received 66 responses regarding their importance in a career in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry Table 12.

5. ANALYSIS AND TEST OF THE SECOND RESEARCH TARGET

The first step was to examine the internal consistency of the instrument. The overall Chronbach alpha score for all of the items was 888, which is a very high score (Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items, 920). Regarding the Inter-Item correlation, Matrix, there were no important correlations, and for the Mean values, almost all items were close to 4, apart from some questions. The results from the Item-Total Statistics (Corrected

Item-Total Correlation and Squared Multiple Correlation) showed that there is no necessity in deleting some items because they don't significantly affect the overall Cronbach's index.

Table 12. Skills.

Skills	Not at all	To a lesser extent	To an extent	To a large extent	A lot
Emotional skills					
Motivation	0	3	27	35	37
Development of positive relationships	0	0	2	26	74
Empathy	1	3	3	29	66
Emotional intelligence	2	2	9	34	55
Cognitive skills					
Writing capabilities	0	1	16	31	54
Critical analysis	0	2	12	33	55
Problem solving	0	1	2	18	81
Self-control	1	1	2	30	66
Flexibility	2	1	4	29	66
Critical analysis thinking	2	1	5	32	62
Soft skills					
Leadership	1	0	15	33	53
Dealing with clients' problems	0	0	2	24	76
Time management	2	1	3	28	68
Working under pressure	3	1	5	18	74
Training	2	2	7	36	55
Interviewing	1	3	17	38	43
Selling your-self	2	3	7	35	55
Sustainability / Green skills	1	5	21	40	34
Customer service	2	2	0	19	79
Presentation	1	0	9	47	44
Negotiations	3	1	8	29	61
Crisis management	4	0	3	21	74
Cultural awareness	1	3	13	33	47

5.1. 1st Question (Q1): Do the Skills and Academic Knowledge Differ with Regard to the Educational Background of the Employees?

As mentioned above, two sub-hypothetical questions were developed regarding a) the academic level background and b) the field of study of the employees.

5.1.1. Skills: Knowledge and Academic Level Background of the Employees

A MANOVA and an X² test were carried out to examine the association between the four order factors, namely academic knowledge pertaining to the international nature of the tourism and hospitality industry, proficiency in a foreign language, academic knowledge and cognitive, emotional, and soft skills for the tourism and hospitality industry, and the academic level background of the employees.

For the X² test, most of the values were close to 0 (low positive or low negative correlation coefficient), indicating that there is a trend but not a certainty in the above correlation. For the MANOVA test, the criteria show an exact probability of error p greater than 0.05 and indicate that there is a statistically not significant effect of the academic level background on the 47 variables.

Regarding the four skills and academic knowledge that were categorized into four ordinal factors and analyzed as a whole, it appears that solely one aspect, namely 'essential academic knowledge' that pertains to the global character of the tourism and hospitality sectors, exhibits a correlation with the academic background level. The remaining three appeared not to be correlated with the academic level background of the examined employees.

5.1.2. Skills, Knowledge and Field of Study of the Employees

A MANOVA and an X² test were performed to correlate the relationship between the four order factors (the academic knowledge regarding the international nature of the industry, the essential foreign language, the academic knowledge, and the cognitive, emotional, and soft skills for the tourism and hospitality industries) with the field of study of the employees. For the X² test, most of the values were close to 0 (low positive or low negative correlation coefficient), indicating that there is a trend but not a certainty in the above correlation. For the MANOVA test, the criteria show an exact probability of error p greater than 0.05 and indicate that there is a statistically not significant effect of the academic level background on the 47 variables.

According to the above results, it could be accepted that the skills and academic knowledge that are essential in the tourism and hospitality industry are not different with regard to the respondents' field of study. Moreover, out of the two sub-questions, only in one case, on the first sub-question, the 'Essential academic knowledge regarding the international nature of the tourism and hospitality industry' seemed to be correlated with the academic level background. The rest of the cases, either on the first or second sub-question, appeared not to be correlated. As an overall result of the two sub-hypotheses, the H₁₀ hypothesis was rejected and the H₁₀ null hypothesis was confirmed. The essential skills and academic knowledge for the tourism and hospitality industries, according to the employees' perception, do not differ regarding the educational background of the employees.

5.2. 2nd Question (Q2): Do the Skills and Academic Knowledge Differ Regarding the Tourism and Hospitality Sector that the Employees are Occupied with?

A MANOVA and an X² test were performed to correlate the relationship between the four order factors (the academic knowledge regarding the international nature of the industry, the essential foreign language, the academic knowledge, and the cognitive, emotional, and soft skills for the tourism and hospitality industry) with the tourism and hospitality sectors where the employees are employed. For the X² test, most of the values were close to 0 (low positive or low negative correlation coefficient), indicating that there is a trend but not a certainty in the above correlation. For the MANOVA test, the criteria show an exact probability of error p greater than 0.05 and indicate that there is a statistically not significant effect of the academic level background on the 47 variables.

Out of the four skills and academic knowledge that were grouped into four order factors examined in total, only one, 'Essential Foreign Languages for the Tourism and Hospitality Industry' seems to be correlated with the tourism and hospitality sector where the employees are employed. The remaining three appeared not to be correlated with the tourism and hospitality sectors that the examined employees are employed in. As a result, the H₂₀ hypothesis was rejected and the H₂₀ null hypothesis was confirmed. The essential skills and academic knowledge for the tourism and hospitality industry, according to the employees' perceptions, do not differ regarding the tourism and hospitality sectors that the employees are occupied with.

5.3. 3rd Question (Q3): Do the Essential Skills and Academic Knowledge Differ Regarding the Seasonal Character of the Organization that the Employees are Occupied to?

A MANOVA and an X² test were performed to correlate the relationship between the four order factors (the academic knowledge regarding the international nature of the industry, the essential foreign language, the academic knowledge, and the cognitive, emotional, and soft skills for the tourism and hospitality industry) with the seasonal character of the organization to which the employees are assigned. For the X² test, most of the values were close to 0 (low positive or low negative correlation coefficient), indicating that there is a trend but not a certainty in the above correlation. Only in the fourth-ordinal factor did two variables, 'Sustainability-Green Skills' and Critical Analysis Thinking' have, 000, indicating that there was not even a low positive or negative correlation. For the MANOVA test, the criteria show an exact probability of error p greater than 0.05 and indicate that there is a statistically not significant effect of the academic level background on the 47 variables.

Of the four skills and academic knowledge that were grouped into four ordinal factors examined in total, none appeared to be correlated with the seasonal or full-time character of the organization to which the employees were occupied. As a result, the H_{3_0} hypothesis was rejected and the H_{3_0} null hypothesis was confirmed. The essential skills and academic knowledge necessary for the tourism and hospitality industry, do not differ regarding the seasonal or full-time character of the organization that employees work for.

5.4. 4th Question (Q4): Do the Essential Skills and Academic Knowledge Differ Regarding the Location of the Organization that the Employees are occupied by?

A MANOVA and an X² test were performed to correlate the relationship between the four order factors, the academic knowledge regarding the international nature of the industry, the essential foreign language, the academic knowledge, and the cognitive, emotional, and soft skills for the tourism and hospitality industry with the location of the organization that the employees are occupied with. For the X² test, most of the values were close to 0 (low positive or low negative correlation coefficient), indicating that there is a trend but not a certainty in the above correlation. For the MANOVA test, the criteria show an exact probability of error p greater than 0.05 and indicate that there is a statistically not significant effect of the academic level background on the 47 variables.

Of the four skills and academic knowledge that were grouped into four order factors examined in total, none appeared to be correlated with the location of the organization that employees are employed by. As a result, the H_{4_0} hypothesis was rejected and the H_{4_0} null hypothesis was confirmed. The essential skills and academic knowledge necessary for the tourism and hospitality industry, according to the employees' perceptions, do not differ regarding the location of the organization that employees are employed by.

5.5. 5th Question (Q5): Do the Essential Skills and Academic Knowledge Differ Regarding the Employees Working Experience in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry?

A MANOVA and an X² test were performed to correlate the relationship between the four ordinal factors, the academic knowledge regarding the international nature of the industry, the essential foreign language, the academic knowledge, and the cognitive, emotional, and soft skills for the tourism and hospitality industry with the employees working experience in the tourism and hospitality industry. For the X² test, most of the values were close to 0 (low positive or low negative correlation coefficient), indicating that there is a trend but not a certainty in the above correlation. Only one variable on the third ordinal factor, 'Sustainable Management' had, 000, indicating that there was not even a low positive or negative correlation. For the MANOVA test, the criteria show an exact probability of error p greater than 0.05 and indicate that there is a statistically not significant effect of the academic level background on the 47 variables.

Of the four skills and academic knowledge that were grouped into four ordinal factors examined in total, none appeared to be correlated with the working experience that employees have in the tourism and hospitality industry. As a result, the H_{5_0} hypothesis was rejected and the H_{5_0} null hypothesis was confirmed. The essential skills and academic knowledge for the tourism and hospitality industry, according to the employees' perceptions, do not differ regarding the working experience that employees have in the tourism and hospitality industry.

6. DISCUSSION

This research explores the domains of academic knowledge, cognitive, emotional, and soft skills that are considered essential to the hospitality and tourism industry, according to the employees' perceptions and assessments. This examination derives from 102 participants that have significant experience in the field, and they expressed their own views and beliefs according to this experience. Under this scope, the participants are not simply stating their views; instead, they are actually reflecting and assessing what is and is not important in their line of work. To that extent, they are articulating their own metacognitive evaluations that may serve as a starting point

in discussing the importance of soft skills in the tourism industry. In relation to the above, the research aims to examine the most important skills and academic knowledge that lead to the provision of better services while enhancing career development in the industry. In addition, this research explores possible differences and correlations in employees' perceptions according to their individual traits. All the data provided by the participants is derived from their own working experience and academic background, and, thus, they serve as important metacognitive markers that outline their own context about what is more important in the domain of tourism. To examine each research aim, five research questions were formulated in order to test if the essential skills and academic knowledge necessary for a successful career differ regarding:

1. The educational background of the employees.
2. The tourism and hospitality sectors that the employees are occupied with.
3. The seasonal character of the organization that the employees are occupied with.
4. The location of the organization that the employees are employed by.
5. The employees' working experience in the industry.

In order to better examine and analyze the findings, the skills and academic knowledge were grouped into four broader categories (first ordinal factors). Regarding the first category, the most interesting finding was the recognition of 'Cultural Studies' as an important subject to be taken into greater consideration for the future employee's development. As far as the second category, the English language remains the most important foreign language for the tourism and hospitality industry, with the second most important language being German. The above findings can be explained by the fact that those two countries are the biggest source markets in the world (WTO, 2020). For the third category, although IT and Digital Tourism in general seem to be advancing very fast and cannot put aside traditional fields of study, knowledge regarding general Tourism Business Management is the most important theoretical knowledge for the tourism and hospitality industry.

As far as the five hypotheses examination is concerned, all were rejected, and the five null hypotheses were confirmed. That means that, in reference to the employee's perceptions, the essential skills and theoretical knowledge for the tourism and hospitality industry do not differ regarding the personal traits and characteristics of the employees. A finding that reaches the conclusion that those important skills are universal in their application. All the aforementioned information is useful either for those programing and planning educational and training programs or for hiring employees who place emphasis on service quality excellence.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Skills and academic knowledge are significant markers for the effectiveness of professional and leadership roles in many sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry. They are also very crucial, both for the HRM department of every hospitality and tourism organization and for the courses offered by educational institutions. This importance is triggered by the fact that it can be described by the participants' metacognitive assessment, which outlines a triptych of skills, emotions, and cognition. To this extent, a very important issue is the fact that the tourist industry and academic education need to be seen as intertwined agents, i.e., they need to cooperate because education and training are strongly linked to the development and success of the industry (Belias & Trihas, 2022). According to Amoah and Baum (1997), tourism education and national tourism policies must cooperate with each other. In order to provide high standards of hospitality and tourism services, due to the labor-intensive nature of the industry, the need for highly qualified and skilled employees is imperative.

From a practical point of view, this survey is trying to explore the metacognitive assessment of the participants working in the tourism industry in order to identify the most important assets according to their perceptions and evaluations. Statistical analysis shows that an important array of skills are deployed, covering a wide range of domains from cognition to emotion, from leadership to language knowledge etc. But at the same time, academic knowledge, cognitive, emotional, and soft skills essential in the tourism and hospitality industry are universal in

their application. Moreover, it can be used as a useful tool either for the tourism and hospitality organizations to require, select, evaluate, and train their employees or for the educational establishments to provide the industry with future capable and skilled employees.

Taking these findings into consideration, the following stage is to consider the relation between employees' personal characteristics and skills and theoretical knowledge in a wide range of professional occupations in industry, as well as the study of their respondents in the different groups and departments of the sample (male or female, job post, location, academic level, etc.) and not as a total sample. Moreover, it is important to examine which skills and theoretical knowledge strengthen the workers' participation in the provision of quality services in practice. Additionally, upcoming research could also examine the degree to which the implementation of the aforementioned most important skills and knowledge will affect the employees' intentions and whether they will implement them in terms of real working conditions or not. It would be of significant academic interest to investigate the aforementioned inquiries while considering the implications of COVID-19. (Del Chiappa et al., 2021; Trihas et al., 2023; Tsalpara et al., 2021).

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