

Chapter 12

E-Skills and ICT Certification in Greek Cultural and Travel Agencies: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

ICT skills are fundamental for the further enhancement and development of productivity and knowledge-intensive products and services. The long-term-demand for professionals with ICT skills still exceeds the supply, particularly in user industries such as the travel industry. This paper presents the results of a study aimed at analysing the impact of ICT certification for people working in cultural and travel agencies in Greece. The authors consider if the e-skills acquired during training for an ICT certification are of practical value while presenting the opinions of the survey participants, statistics about the required e-skills, and the correlation between these skills and the syllabus of the ECDL ICT certification. It is claimed that the ECDL ICT certification plays a crucial role in cultural and travel agencies as their employees being technologically skilful can offer better services to their customers.

INTRODUCTION

In the Lisbon summit held in the year 2000, the European governments agreed that “Businesses and citizens must have access to an inexpensive, world-class communications infrastructure and

a wide range of services. Every citizen must be equipped with the skills needed to live and work in this new information society” (Bulletin EU 3, 2000).

Therefore, the task of equipping every citizen with the skills necessary to live in the information society is very challenging. The importance of

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e-skills is globally recognized (e-Europe, 2002; Curley, 2003) and several programmes have been launched towards this direction in European countries. One initiative was the establishment of a certification related to basic ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) skills, called Computer Driving Licence (CDL) (Haarala-Muhonen & Sokura, 2000). CDL, presently named ECDL (European CDL), is globally recognized as the certification which holds the larger market share (CEPIS, 2004). A few other private organizations and Universities followed the ECDL paradigm issuing analogous ICT certifications. Calzarossa et al. (2007) presented the results of a monitoring exercise aimed at analyzing the impact of the ECDL programme in the Italian Universities. In (Cole & Kesley, 2004), the ECDL programme is used as a reference standard to define basic skills of nurses and nursing staff.

ICT certifications are nowadays considered quite important for most people. According to the eSkills Certification Consortium (eSCC, 2004) and CEPIS, ICT certifications are important primarily because employees stay current with information technologies and because they help them to find a job. This is verified by independent academic studies as well (Sokura, 2005). The key-benefit of ICT certifications is that candidates need to follow a well-organized ICT seminar in order to obtain the certification.

ICT skills are essential in the travel industry as the travel and cultural promotion agencies greatly rely on ICT to attract more visitors and buyers. In particular, over the years the nature and development of the travel industry have undergone major changes. For attracting and serving tourists and visitors, new practices were applied, which are heavily dependent on ICTs (Buhalis, 1998; Sigala, 2002). Most of the people working in these types of agencies need to be computer literate in order to efficiently serve their customers. However, many of them have only partial knowledge of the various IT tools used in their every day duties or they have to face a lot of difficulties when utilizing them.

Based on the previous discussion, the main aims of the survey reported in the current paper are:

- i. To record the e-skills required by people working in Greek travel and cultural agencies,
- ii. To identify the importance of proper training, and
- iii. To measure the correlation between the syllabus of the international ECDL certification and the required e-skills of the employers of the cultural and travel agencies.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section we focus on the e-skills required by employees of the travel and cultural agencies. Soon after we briefly present the structure of the ECDL certification. Then we present the findings of the study and, finally, the conclusions and future developments are outlined.

REQUIRED E-SKILLS IN TRAVEL AND CULTURAL AGENCIES

The Internet is expected to change the role of tourism promotion agencies as information providers. There are arguments for and against the disintermediation of travel agents (Buhalis, 1998, p. 416). The most extreme opinion suggests the end of travel agencies in the near future. As the power of the Internet grows and empowers customers to develop and buy their own itineraries, the very existence of the travel agents will be threatened.

On the other hand, the role of the travel agencies is expected to grow in importance, since their greatest ability is “to collate, organize and interpret large amount of data in a way that delivers the best value and the most exciting travel experiences for the customer” (O’Connor, 1999, p. 114). It is claimed that travel agencies provide not only information, but also advice. Therefore, as long as they strengthen their advice-giving capacity, they will remain secure in the chain of distribution. ICTs are having the effect of changing mainly:

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