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# *Hospitality in Diplomacy: the need of soft skills in a dynamic diplomatic arena*

*An exploratory study on the role of hospitality  
competences in the work of diplomats*

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## Abstract

This paper presents a study on hospitality-related competencies in diplomacy. The main research question “*To what extent do diplomats perceive hospitality-related competencies to be important to work successfully as a diplomat?*” was posed. For this exploratory study a group of 15 diplomats of different nationalities was interviewed. The transcribed interviews were coded and analysed with the qualitative data analysis tool Atlas.ti. The outcome of the research was that diplomats perceive hospitality-related competencies as important for their work regardless of their cultural background. Based on the output, a diplomatic hospitality competency framework was developed, which provides a theoretical background for improving diplomatic training.



# 1. Introduction

Soft skills become more important in multiple industries and workplaces (Deming, 2017). While the number of jobs requiring social interaction increased by almost 12%, the number of jobs requiring hard skills such as mathematical skills decreased by about 3% from 1980 to 2012 (ibid). Like in other industries, the importance of soft skills in diplomacy is growing as well; especially, in times of globalization (Starr, 2017). Due to globalization, the number of stakeholders such as international businesses, non-governmental organizations, interest groups and citizens is growing, which leads to an increasing need for soft skills such as empathy, integrity and openness (Mogensen, 2017). These skills are at the core of hospitality and hospitable behaviour.

Diplomats traditionally are well-equipped with 'hard', knowledge skills having undergone studies such as law, economics or international relations. They receive further trainings concerning protocol, but limited training on soft skills such as relationship-building and communication skills (Ruël, 2017). Hospitality leaders use soft skills such as relationship-building on a day-to-day basis (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003). However, with the increased number of actors in the diplomatic arena, besides 'traditional' diplomats, representatives of multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, interest groups, the importance of soft skills such as relationship-building, genuine empathy, service-orientation has increased for 'traditional' diplomats. The role these so-called hospitality skills play in diplomacy and how diplomats themselves perceive and define hospitality has never been studied to the best of our knowledge.

Therefore, the goal of the study presented in this paper is to explore to which extent diplomats perceive hospitality as a competency that is important to their work. The leading question of us is: *To what extent do diplomats perceive hospitality-related competencies to be important to work successfully as a diplomat?*

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Hospitality

Hospitality is a concept that remains difficult to grasp (Lynch, 2017). In general, it implies that a host offers something to their guest (Pijls et al., 2017). Hospitality has a social, a commercial and a private side (Lashley and Morrison, 2010) and is strongly connected to the concept of welcome, which triggers associations of kindness, welcoming strangers, acceptance, invite, hospitable and being received with pleasure (Lynch, 2017).

According to the 'Experience of Hospitality scale', hospitality implies care, comfort and the experience of inviting, which further connects to the nouns openness, freedom, care, servitude, empathy and acknowledgement (Pijls et al., 2017). Comfort implies that guests feel at ease, appreciated, comfortable and relaxed (ibid). To create comfort, employees in the hospitality industry must be courteous, patient, cheerful, linguistically talented and secure (ibid). These expectations are mirrored in the hospitality definition of Burgess, who sees hospitality as *"the social relationship fostered by the warm, friendly, welcoming, courteous, open, generous behaviour of the host"* (1982).



Lashley and Morrison add that hospitality has the ultimate aim to genuinely satisfy the guest through memorable experiences (2010). Authenticity and genuineness are also noted to be extremely important by Ariffin and Maghzi (2012). They add that personalization, a warm welcome, comfort and relationship-building are hospitality (ibid). Chan and Mackenzie connect the hospitality industry to cultural diversity and relationship-building (2013). Generosity, genuineness, openness, welcome, warmth and comfort are reoccurring keywords connected to hospitality. Inspired by the inputs from the literature we define hospitality as *'a host being genuinely generous, warm, open and welcoming to ultimately please the guest in a comforting setting'*.

## 2.2 Diplomacy

Diplomacy is generally accepted to be the *"conduct of international relations by negotiation and dialog by or any other means to promote peaceful relations among states"* (Cornago, 2008). Diplomacy is also referred to as persuasion management (Snow and Taylor, 2008), however different forms of diplomacy can be identified. An important form of diplomacy is public diplomacy, which implies to connect and collaborate with the society of the host countries and can further be split into business, economic and commercial diplomacy (Mogensen, 2017). Due to the multitude of stakeholders such as supranational organizations, multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations and international businesses, public diplomacy becomes an important mean to cooperate transnationally in times of globalization (Melissen, 2005; Ruël, 2013b).

The engagement of governments, businesses, organizations and other stakeholders allows the realization of national interests; more specifically, an increase in economic value (Mogensen, 2017). In fact, globalization and the related geographical shifts lead to diplomacy changing from a state-centred field to integrative diplomacy (Jones and Clark, 2015). The need for engaging with various stakeholders implies a necessity of training diplomats (Melissen, 2005). Diplomats require a multitude of competencies to succeed. Diplomatic soft power can be used to build trust, and consequently economic value (Mogensen, 2017). Rana states *"Human Talent is the only real resource in a foreign ministry"* (2005). In order to achieve a mission successfully, diplomats should have strong cognitive skills such as problem-solving and analytical abilities, interpersonal skills, clear personal traits, ambiguity tolerance, cross-cultural competences, the ability to work in a team and an understanding of policies (Lindstrom and Corporation, 2002; Svetličič, 2014).

Furthermore, leadership skills, emotional intelligence, integrity, resilience, entrepreneurship, initiative, customer focus as well as a holistic and systematic way of thinking are valued in the public sector (Lindstrom and Corporation, 2002). On top of leadership and interpersonal skills, the ability to learn and adapt quickly is crucial in a dynamic environment (Saner-Yiu and Saner, 2018; Svetličič, 2014). Diplomatic competences move away from solely being academic and more towards an application and management-based approach (Saner-Yiu and Saner, 2018; Svetličič, 2014). With other words, the focus of diplomats is shifting from issues and problems to people and places increasing the importance of emotional intelligence and empathy (Sharp and Riordan, 2016). It can be concluded that diplomats more and more will need strong soft skills, hospitality competencies rather than only 'hard', knowledge-based skills.



## 2.3 Hospitality and Diplomacy

Historically, hospitality has proven to be important in post-colonial diplomacy in terms of staged meetings, soft power and spaces such as hotels (Craggs, 2014). Diplomacy strongly relies on generosity, openness, acceptance, approval, tolerance and multiculturalism, which are all keywords in hospitality (ibid).

It is argued that hospitality is closely related to governments and especially international relations, as different stakeholders become hosts and guests (ibid). Diplomats can profit from understanding the field of hospitality as *"a focus on hospitality calls on us to understand public displays of welcome, and small, informal gestures, as important in the construction, negotiation, and contestation of geopolitical relations"* (Craggs, 2014). Through understanding hospitality, diplomatic interventions can be authentic *"amongst the superficial in politics"* (ibid).

The practise-led hospitality approach can help diplomats to understand what is appropriate and acceptable in certain cultural contexts (Jones and Clark, 2015). Especially, since global governance seems to shift from politicians to a context with more stakeholders such as multinational corporations and organizations, it becomes crucial to maintain long-lasting relationships with various stakeholders, build trust, communicate appropriately and balance various interests (ibid). This service- and customer-oriented skills set is used on a day-to-day basis by hospitality leaders, which implies that diplomats can learn from hospitality leaders (Ruël, 2017).

## 2.4 Hospitality-related competencies

The following clarifies which skills are required by hospitality leaders and hence are suggested to be useful for diplomats. A study about future hospitality leaders suggests that 99 lodging competencies can be summarized into the categories self-management, strategic positioning, implementation, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal and leadership (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003).

Another study about competencies required by Spanish hospitality leaders indicates that economic-financial management, marketing and market analysis, work organization, people and work team management, human resources management, tourism products and services, and customer profiles and behaviour are important (Agut et al., 2003). A further study showcases the need for leadership, listening skills as well as ambitions, trustworthiness and integrity (Brownell, 2011). A more recent study summarizes 44 skills and competencies into six factors that are important for hospitality leaders. These skills are interpersonal skills, supervisory skills, hospitality skills, communication skills as well as food and beverage management skills (Suh et al., 2012). The importance of cultural awareness and listening skills is emphasized (ibid). Many of these competencies relate to human resource skills, which are crucial for hospitality leaders (Suh et al., 2012).

As stated in the introduction, hospitality competencies are assumed to become increasingly important for diplomats, however, empirical research investigating this is scarce to non-existent. This is where the study presented in this paper steps in.

## 2.5 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Based on the literature review, we assume that hospitality-related competencies (variable 1 in figure 1) help diplomats to succeed to be successful in diplomacy (variable 2 in figure 1). However, we also assume that the role of hospitality in diplomacy takes place in a context or may be influenced by factors such as a diplomat's cultural background (number 4 in figure 1). Since definitions and perceptions of hospitality as well as perceptions on successful diplomacy may be culture-sensitive, the role of hospitality in diplomacy can be more or less important given the national culture context.

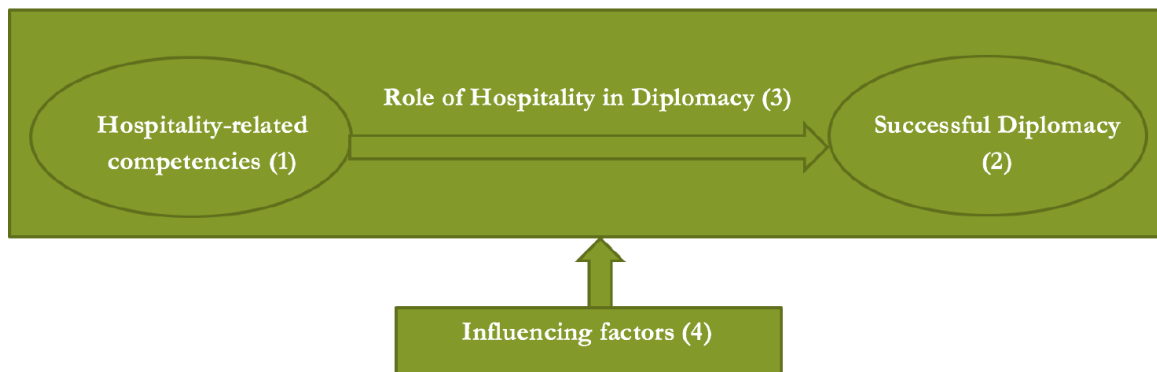


Figure 1: conceptual model

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1.1 Research strategy

Since research on the role of hospitality competencies in diplomacy and especially in the work of diplomats is non-existent to the best of our knowledge we chose for an exploratory research strategy. This study is indeed based on a basic assumption (conceptual model in figure 1) that hospitality competencies play a role in the work of diplomats and influence the extent to which diplomats are successful in their work.

However, the aim of our study is not to test this basis assumption yet in this study, but to explore whether there are grounds for more detailed and in-depth hypotheses building (Saunders et al., 2015). Furthermore, this exploratory study is qualitative, since the aim is to gain a deeper and better understanding of whether and how hospitality competencies play a role in diplomacy.

### 3.1.2 Data Collection

We chose for semi-structured interviews that provide a general conceptualization for further research rather than statistical outcomes. An interview protocol, a topics list and set of guiding questions were prepared for the interviews to ensure a basic standardization and as a result ensure a basic reliability of the data collection process.





Since we used semi-structured interviews, the interviewees we invited to respond to questions without predetermined conditions and probing was used to ensure that the responses were understood correctly. Some closed questions were used to confirm the shared responses. The interviews took place between January and April 2018. A convenient location and time was chosen by the diplomats. The interviews took between 30 and 60 minutes and were all recorded for transcription purposes. We invited 15 diplomats of different nationalities for an interview. We estimated that approximately 15 interviews sufficed to reach saturation (Guest et al., 2006). The interviewees list displays the order of interviews. Names have been anonymized; nonetheless, all outputs can be traced back if necessary.

14 out of 15 interviewees were on a posting in Tokyo to allow personal meetings in the embassies. Only one diplomat posted in the EU headquarters in Brussels was interviewed via Skype. 13 of the 15 interviewees are ambassadors. The other two follow a career path that will shortly allow them to become ambassadors. One is a deputy head of division at the EU headquarters in Brussel. Another one is the deputy chief of mission of an embassy. Both shall be referred to as diplomats rather than ambassadors. 4 of the interviewees were female, 11 were male. All 15 diplomats have different nationalities, which was purposeful in investigating whether cultural background has an impact on the perception on the role hospitality in diplomacy.

Ambassador	Nationality:	Date:
1	Belgium	22.1.2018
2	Philippines	29.1.2018
3	Germany	29.1.2018
4	Denmark	5.2.2018
5	Ireland	6.2.2018
6	Kenya	6.2.2018
7	Paraguay	13.2.2018
8	India	13.2.2018
9	Bangladesh	16.2.2018
10	Brazil	1.3.2018
11	Columbia	14.3.2018
12	Slovenia	14.3.2018
13	EU	25.3.2108
14	Greece	28.3.2018
15	Mexico	4.4.2018

### 3.1.3 Analysis

The interviews were analysed with Atlas.ti, which is a qualitative data analysis tools (SoSciSo, 2017). The tool was used to code, organize and visualize data (Nentwich, 2016; Atlast.ti, 2017). To answer the research question, the elements hospitality, diplomacy, role of hospitality in diplomacy, and influences as well as the corresponding codes definition, competencies, goals, characteristics, success factors, competences, future, nationality, educational path, gender and motivation were created.



Element	Code
<b>Hospitality</b>	Definition
	Competencies
	Goal
<b>Diplomacy</b>	Characteristics
	Success factors
	Competences
<b>Role of Hospitality in Diplomacy</b>	Future
<b>Influencer</b>	Nationality
	Educational Path
	Gender
	Motivation

Figure 2: the codes used for the analysis with atlas.ti

### 3.1.4 Limitation

Personal bias of the interviewer and the interviewees was seen as a potential limitation. Especially since the interviewer had pre-determined views on hospitality, influence on the interviewees had to be avoided. Interview questions were prepared beforehand and presented to interviewees without much personal input. Besides, the interviewer conducted research on hospitality to have an insight into various opinions. Moreover, the potential issue of not being able to convince diplomats of the added benefit of this research for themselves was anticipated, which is why many diplomats were contacted initially to reach a sufficient amount. In the end about 1/3 of the contacted diplomat agreed to participate. Another potential limitation was that most of the interviewees were posted in Tokyo which could have led to a distorted outcome. Since this is an exploratory research and initial insights were gathered, no further restrictions based on this limitation were set. Selective sampling could have become a limitation. The interviewer tried to select ambassadors from different parts of the world to avoid this limitation.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Perceptions of hospitality?

All interviewees agreed that hospitality is related to guest-host interactions. An ambassador defines, *"you would see hospitality as how do you treat your guests and strangers."* A shared view was that every aspect of hospitality in diplomacy aims either at representing one's culture and/or extending and maintaining one's network.

From the interviews three different layers of hospitality emerge. The base layer are hospitable actions such as inviting guests, exchanging business cards or providing food and beverages.



An ambassador suggests: *"When I hear hospitality, the first thing I think is receiving people, hosting people, to organize events, to organize visits of different levels and to serve in general."* She goes on stating that *"to be a good host, means to be a good person."*

Another ambassador states that a part of hospitality is *"to offer them drinks, offer them food."* This could take place at dinner and cocktail parties for example.

On top of cuisine, *"the decorations, the entertainment"* are important. To interact and behave correctly, one needs a good knowledge of protocol. This implies preparing and planning following specific rules such as specific seating arrangements. *"Protocol is a very important matter in terms of hospitality because protocol gives you the frame and all the rules on how you receive people."* It helps *"to avoid political, diplomatic or cultural mistakes."* It is crucial to get hospitality right, for example seating arrangements according to ranks; otherwise, one might lose access to crucial information.

The next layer is the creation of a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere. One ambassador states, *"hospitality is simple in concept: make your guest feel welcome at home"*, and says that hospitality is equal to representation. According to one ambassador *"Hospitality is about welcoming you"* and the goal is *"that each and every guest feels like he or she is the main guest."* This is not only the task of the ambassador, but the task of the entire embassy according to this ambassador and two other ambassadors.

A further definition is *"the friendly and generous treatment of guests (...). Making people feel welcome and at home and treating them with respect and generosity."* Hospitality also implies *"to greet, to entertain, to interact with the guest."* The ambassador admits that this is a very technical definition and adds *"It has a positive connotation that word. The positive connotation is about (...) things that you do as a host to make your guests feel comfortable and open up in an empathetic way."* Most ambassadors mention the concept of comfort.

The third and most complex level is to provide extraordinary and personalized experiences or presenting surprising cultural elements, which is mentioned by three ambassadors. According to one ambassador, one has *"to play a bit with these expectations, always trying to communicate something relevant about your country."* One ambassador looks up personal hobbies of people that he meets and creates personalized menus to really engage and involve people. Another ambassador mentions that the guest should feel like the host *"has gone out of their way to accomplish"* the creation of a special moment, which can be achieved through personal input of the ambassador.

## 4.2 Successful diplomacy?

The interviewed diplomats mention many success factors. An ambassador generally states that one must marry *"the goals of ministry with what you see you can do on the ground of any particular job."* Another ambassador agrees stating: *"Successful outcomes are mainly the result of good preparation which is planned in accordance with HQ (headquarters) such as targeted sectorial company visits or cultural activities aimed at a certain public may lead to increased investments, exports, tourism expansion – but the impact can only be seen years later."* One should have *"the best economic, political and cultural exchanges that are possible."*



More particular successes according to the interviewees could be to host a high-level state visit, buying land for a new embassy or holding a celebration in the hosting country. Moreover, having companies set up new branches in the sending countries, improving infrastructure, increasing development aid, number of tourists and number of scholarships are mentioned. Of course, investments in general are regarded as a success by multiple ambassadors. Besides, providing visa services and consular services are crucial. A diplomat mentions that success depends on personal performance, which is evaluated by a superior according to set objectives.

Another ambassador mentions that success is *"if you are not quitting whichever obstacle you face."* All ambassadors mention connections and relations as a crucial factor to being successful. Generally, *"overall economic growth, people-to-people relations"* define success. One ambassador states *"You come to a new country, you maybe don't know anybody, but your work is to make friendships."* Diplomacy is compared to a *"matchmaking exercise for two countries."* A diplomat's success depends on both countries understanding each other and information being conveyed. According to two ambassadors, reports concerning policy-making, for example, require the understanding of both cultures.

Two other ambassadors similarly see success as increasing awareness of their country. Success is *"to promote friendly relations, frequent engagements between (sending and hosting country), to promote trade and economic ties, people to people ties, cultural ties and (...) how we can work together, promote relations also for (...) the larger cause of peace and development and prosperity."* Another ambassador agrees and adds on that success is *"to penetrate these top high circles."* This is confirmed by another ambassador who states: *"to be successful means that you promote the whole spectrum of relationships"*– with the spectrum ranging from political and economic to cultural fields and more specifically tourism and the maritime sector. Not only promoting ties is important, but also *"coordinating the interaction with representatives, governments, academics or the civil society or others."* Besides the importance of creating new relations, it is also crucial not to harm existing relations. Hence relations with various stakeholders are crucial.

One ambassador concludes mentioning many of the abovementioned success factors stating that: *"First, you represent your country. Second, you protect your community and the nationals visiting Japan. Third, you provide them with legal services and advice. Fourth, you promote the image of a country especially from an economic point of view for trade and commerce. And fifth, you enhance as much as possible corporate relations in a field like university agreements, scientific corporations, cultural activities, relationships between cities and prefectures and subnational entities in my country."* While there is an agreement on success factors, there are different opinions on whether success can be quantified. Two ambassadors simply define success as reaching the goals set together with the headquarters, which cannot necessarily be quantified. One of these ambassadors adds that the *"impact (of actions) can only be seen years later."* A third ambassador agrees to that motion stating that *"you cannot measure the outcomes. We cannot do what companies do when they present their results every year."* He also mentions that treaties take years. This does not imply that progress is not measured; relations built or not built are closely observed by the foreign ministry. A further issue with measuring success as a diplomat is that *"you can prepare yourself all your life and you never get the opportunity to demonstrate your skills."* One ambassador disagrees stating that his home country has succeeded in quantifying success and connecting the budget of an embassy to success. He states: *"So today, I think we are the forerunner of commercial diplomacy. I consider myself a business man. The only kind of difference between myself and a business*



*man is that I have a diplomatic passport. But basically, we are working in the same way. I have a contract selling out the targets, positive ones as well as negative ones. (...) here at this embassy, (...) we have a target which means that we have to generate a certain income, how we have to get into a certain market and we have to generate xyz. And we have a lot of KPIs and if they are not met, then we are punished, so to say, in the following year."*

Hence, success, whether it is quantified or not by the embassy, depends on people-to-people relations. Building more relations, maintaining them and improving them is crucial to access information and reach specific goals.

### 4.3 Competencies for hospitality in diplomacy

The interviewed diplomats mention various competencies. Some technical skills such as serving food and beverages and having good manners are required, as mentioned by a majority of the interviewees. Besides, knowledge is necessary. According to one ambassador, knowledge concerning economic, political and technical information of the hosting and the sending country is necessary. Another ambassador says: *"You should be able to carry out a conversation, appear to know things genuinely, you should be able to relate to people about what they find interesting, not necessarily what you find interesting"* with people from different nationalities. The ambassador goes on specifying that one should know government interests and government policies.

An ambassador states *"If you are advancing your countries position in the world, then you need to have a very good grasp of the political and social understanding and intellect and capacity."* Knowledge concerning policies, international relations and economy, especially trade and promotion, is important. Another ambassador mentions *"knowledge of international affairs, domestic issues, a foreign language, group dynamics and personnel."* Tacit knowledge, which implies being able to *"decode a society, (...) decode the structures, the political ones, the underlying ones"* is also important as it gives ambassadors *"a sense of how you're going to engage."*

Language skills and communication skills are also important according to a majority of the ambassadors. The ability to build bridges and readiness to communicate are mentioned. Furthermore, presentation skills are important. One also needs the ability to gather and analyse information.

One ambassador says: *"the ambassador must be an all-rounder, generalist, a good conversationist, his conversational skills must be good, knowledge of languages is key to communication."* Another diplomat adds *"you need to be a good listener, a good analyst (...) and a good understanding of foreign policies. You need to have good interpersonal skills, social intelligence in order to interact with people in the right way, aggregate people in the right way, be a good talker, a good communicator."* The importance of public communications and engagement is also highlighted.

An ambassador points out that *"managerial skills are very important"* as well. Two other ambassadors also point out the importance of teamwork. One also must see opportunities and brand themselves, which relates to having strategic long-term visions.

All ambassadors mention people skills and personal traits. One ambassador mentions *"cultural openness, patience, understanding, respect for other views"* and intellectual honesty. Another diplomat mentions open-mindedness and acceptance towards different cultures. He also states, *"being able to relate to others, being able to project a good*





*image as well as make the other person feel comfortable to deal with you."* Concerning open-mindedness, there seems to be a general agreement. Furthermore, the ability to *"look across cultural barriers, differences of mentality, differences of statehood and things like that"* is mentioned. Another ambassador also finds it important to establish contacts by going beyond stereotypes and being empathic. Another ambassador mentions the necessity of being able to tolerate hierarchy, which one has to put up with during the career. Two other ambassadors also explicitly state the importance of being extrovert. Another ambassador states that: *"We have to be friendly, you have to be courteous, you have to be firm, you have to be honest. And you have to have the ability to gradually bring people around to your point of view even if they are completely opposed to you. You have to be ready to talk and negotiate and find solutions peacefully."* Regarding people skills, an ambassador also mentions that *"one cannot be abrasive, aggressive or think one is right."* The terms positivity, niceness and kindness are mentioned.

According to three ambassadors, certain competencies are crucial, but *"foreign office lives by the diversity of its members."* Another ambassador states *"My predecessor in this office (..) had a completely different leadership style than me and he was very successful too. So there is not THE diplomatic personality or THE diplomatic mind-set."* Another ambassador says: *"some degree of surprise and some degree of personality is still very welcome in diplomacy."*

#### **4.4 Hospitality in diplomacy in the future**

Five ambassadors see the importance of hospitality in diplomacy remaining the same in the future due to the constant need for personal contacts. All interviewees though express that hospitality is changing. One ambassador states *"I think today everything is faster and you have to adapt and the quality of personal relations remains very important. I meant especially that you cannot replace personal relations by Internet or Skype relations. But I think, hospitality to me was always very important for me. I've seen it because my parents were also diplomats."*

Another ambassador states that hospitality might change and become *"not as formal. Not as black-tie occasion."* Another diplomat disagrees stating that *"you see less and less of this informal part"* at least in the EU. She mentions that in locations where relations are extremely important, hospitality might remain the same. *"The way in which you show hospitality"* is also changing due to information and communication technology. Another ambassador states that hospitality changes together with the needs of a country.

The other ten ambassadors see an increasing importance. An overarching theme impacting the importance of hospitality in diplomacy is technological advancement. An ambassador states *"Because of the internationalization of communication, people all over the world have access to all aspects of culture everywhere and move around frequently, in mind or in body. Thus, the actors in international life are changing and growing, Differentiation, specialization into hospitality efforts are becoming more decisive. The traditional wining and dining – still important and not to be underestimated – will change into a more cultural and or personal experience."* He goes on stating that *"It is not just the quality or quantity of the services or gastronomy that will do, the story behind has to attract as well, the interactiveness has to be increased (..). And all this has to be delivered in a framework of much more budgetary scrutiny."* Another diplomat states that if technology keeps on advancing, meeting people solely online may increase the need for hospitable competencies such as reading body language. He



states: *"being more attuned to other cultures, being able to read another person's body language through your interaction can become more important because the technology sort of distances people. So if you are able to (..) make a person feel comfortable if they are thousand miles away that would be an asset."* Furthermore, he states that the increased availability of information facilitates better cultural awareness leading not only to the heightened importance of hospitality, but also to a change. Another ambassador states that *"as a reaction to some technological advancements like texting, internet, social networks, robotics or AI, precisely, the human connection – if it is true – if it is not just the imitation of life or business, but if it is real, I think it is and it will be more and more important."* Another ambassador brings up a different aspect of why the importance might grow. Every country is fighting for more attention and hospitality can showcase why a country is important. *"It is about utilizing hospitality as a kind of proactive tool to bring people closer to your country and your culture."* Similarly, two other ambassadors see a growing importance of hospitality in times of tensions and misunderstandings. Another diplomat mentions that *"wherever you have a crisis, there will be more hospitality"*, since it facilitates unofficial and under-the-radar meeting with interlocutors. Another ambassador suggests that the importance of hospitality might grow, since it helps to reach out to different target groups such as students and elderly. Whether changing or growing in importance, all ambassadors regard the importance of hospitality in diplomacy to be high. As mentioned, some ambassadors see a challenge in growing budgetary restrictions that often imply cuts in hospitality despite it being crucial as an influential soft power.

#### **4.5 Factors influencing hospitality in diplomacy**

Since we interviewed ambassadors of different nationalities, we also asked them about the role of nationality, educational background, gender and country size on the role of hospitality in diplomacy.

Nationality seems to have a strong impact on one's understanding of hospitality as cultural background influences the definition of hospitality and an impact on how much weight one puts on hospitality. Diplomatic competencies are not necessarily influenced by nationality, but are rather universal. It can be concluded that nationality has an impact on the relation of diplomacy and hospitality. It cannot be evaluated at this stage which specific nation or culture puts more emphasis on hospitality.

Since educational background vary strongly, but views on hospitality and diplomacy are rather similar, educational backgrounds does not seem to have a considerable impact on the perception on the relation of diplomacy and hospitality. It is striking that little training concerning hospitality is provided.

Gender does not seem to play a large role according to the findings. It is mentioned a few times though that a spouse is helpful to take care of some hospitality-related tasks. Personal influences do seem to have a limited impact on the view on hospitality and its roles in diplomacy for those who come from a diplomatic family.

It is mentioned that size and impact of a country may have an impact on the relation of hospitality and diplomacy. The biggest influencer that reappeared throughout various interviews is personality, which is influenced by all researched factors.



## 5. Conclusions

All interviewees perceive hospitality-related competencies as crucial to be successful as a diplomat. To understand why hospitality is important, one needs to understand how diplomats perceive hospitality, what successful diplomacy is, how the elements intersect and which factors influence the perception.

All interviewed diplomats connect hospitality to the guest-host relationship and the concept of welcoming somebody. The goal of hospitality is representation as well as relationship- and trust-building. Hospitality-related competencies that ambassadors are cognisant about are open-mindedness, respect, empathy and cultural awareness. Hospitality implies actions such as serving food and beverages or visiting cultural events. Some ambassadors explicitly connect using hospitality-related competencies to the creation of an atmosphere such as comfort or easiness in a negotiation for example. Ambassadors also connect hospitality to surprising guests through personalized and meaningful experiences.

Diplomacy is commonly accepted to be a very diverse field mainly involving economic, political and cultural tasks. One is successful if one reaches the goals set in accordance with the foreign ministry and the sending government. Every interviewee suggests that these set goals can only be reached with an effective and extensive network consisting of various stakeholders. To create and maintain this network, one needs technical skills, people skills, diverse knowledge, managerial skills communication skills and specific personality traits.

Hospitality ties into these competencies as hospitality-related competencies allow diplomats to create, maintain and expand networks, which facilitates achieving goals. Hospitality-related competencies also allow to showcase one's culture successfully.

The perception on the relation of hospitality and diplomacy is influenced first and foremost by the personality of the diplomat. Cultural background or nationality also plays a role as it influences what weight or importance one puts on hospitality and how one perceives hospitality. Educational paths do not seem to have an impact on the perception. Gender only seems to have a very limited impact, if any. Personal influences may play a role in the perception, for instance, a correlation in growing up in a diplomatic family and understanding the importance of hospitality was found.

Consequently, primary findings suggest that hospitality-related competencies are crucial to diplomats. Cultural backgrounds only influence the perception on the relation hospitality and diplomacy to an extent; personality of the diplomat is a more important factor.

## 6. Discussion

According to the literature review, hospitality was defined similarly. Being hospitable was defined as 'a host being genuinely generous, warm, open and welcoming to ultimately please the guest in a comforting setting'. The diplomats agree connecting attributes such as welcome, open-mindedness, respect, empathy and cultural awareness to hospitality as well as seeing the goal of hospitality in creating a comfortable atmosphere, in which the guest feels important.





According to the study, diplomatic skills range from technical skills, knowledge, communication skills, people skills, managerial skills, to personal traits. Initial research also suggested that diplomats need cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, clear personal traits, cross-cultural competencies, leadership skills and emotional intelligence amongst others (Lindstrom and Corporation, 2002; Svetličič, 2014; Saner-Yiu and Saner, 2018; Sharp and Riordan, 2016).

These diplomatic competencies intersect with and include hospitality-related competencies, which centre around human resource skills (Suh et al., 2012), hence allow diplomats to interact with various stakeholders. According to the study, the importance of hospitality-related competencies will grow or at least remain due to technological advancements and globalization. Literature confirms that as globalization increases the need for long-lasting relationships (Jones and Clark, 2015). Consequently, the initial hypothesis of hospitality-related competencies being important to successful diplomatic work has proven to be correct.

## 6.1 Towards a diplomatic competency framework

To better understand to what extent hospitality-related competencies tie into diplomatic competencies, a competency framework was developed. A competency framework does not only enable discussions about capabilities and performance, but also allows guidance concerning Human Resource practises such as training (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003).

All competencies mentioned in the interviews were extracted and sorted into the determined six categories of diplomatic competencies technical skills, knowledge, communication skills, people skills, managerial skills, and personal traits. Hospitality-related competencies that were explicitly mentioned in the literature interview or by ambassadors were highlighted. One could argue that even more competencies are hospitality-related competencies.

Diplomats do not only need to exert hospitable actions, but also to create an atmosphere and wow guests with extraordinary experiences. To act hospitable, technical skills and knowledge, especially protocol knowledge, are required. To create an atmosphere, one also needs managerial skills, communication skills and people skills. If an ambassador additionally boasts necessary personal traits, one can provide guests with extraordinary experiences. These three levels of hospitality and the connecting competencies allow diplomats to build up and maintain contacts to an array of stakeholders, which is required to succeed in diplomacy.

This insight led to the diplomatic competency pyramid (next page) that highlights hospitality-related competencies and their usage. The competency framework is a start to further explore the field of diplomatic hospitality. The pyramid displays that diplomats need training regarding hospitality-related competencies. After improving the awareness of what hospitality-related competencies are, I especially recommend training the ability to make people feel at ease, comfortable, relaxed and welcome, the ability to provide meaningful experiences as well as the acceptance of different cultures, customs and beliefs closely relating to being open-minded and respectful. The display of friendliness, kindness and generosity should be practised. The aim should be that every ambassador is able to create an extraordinary experience for guests, hence easily extend and maintain his network as well as successfully represent their country. Therefore, competencies of the pyramid should be trained with an emphasis on higher level skills .

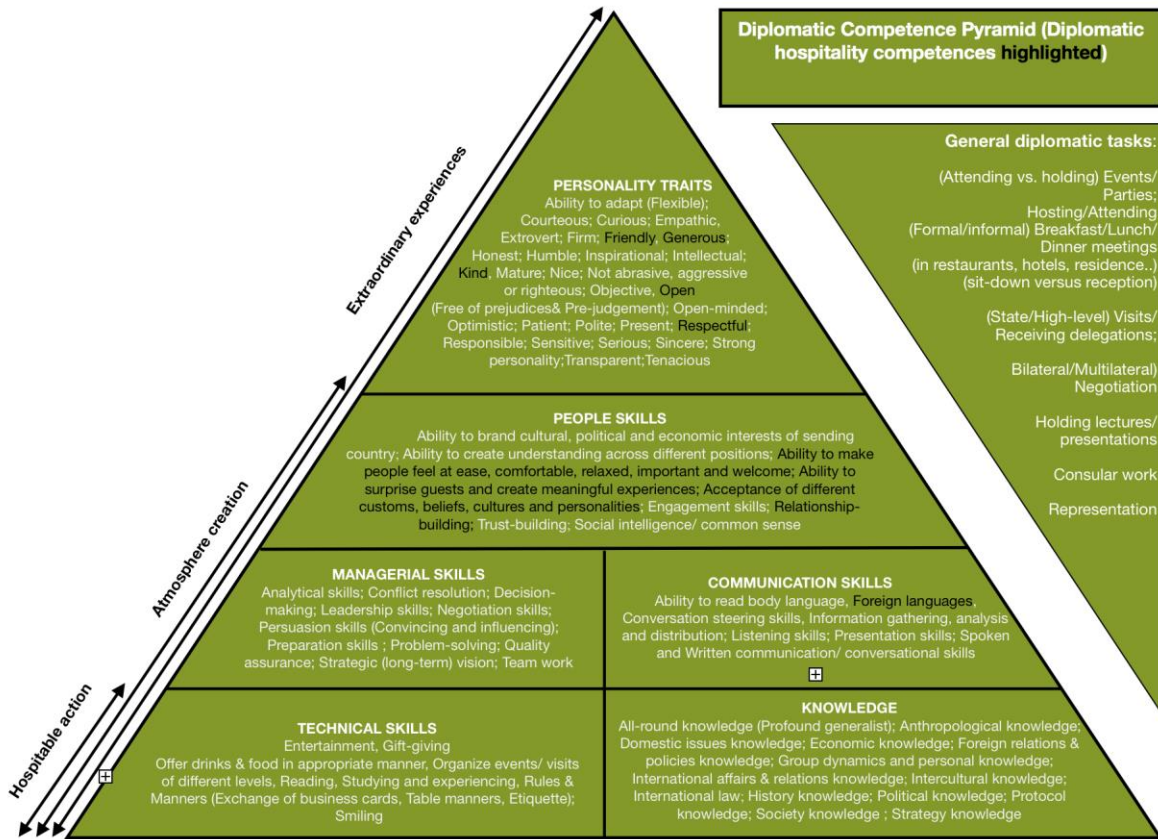


Figure 3: Diplomacy competencies pyramid

## 6.2 Recommendation further research

Further research regarding the relation of hospitality and diplomacy is recommended as the research was limited with the input of 15 ambassadors mostly posted in Tokyo. Quantitative research concerning the diplomacy competency framework should be conducted.

Further quantitative research regarding which culture is more hospitable in a diplomatic context should be conducted. The impact of diplomatic academies on hospitality-related competencies should be researched more closely through further qualitative research. The findings also suggest that more research regarding the impact of gender on hospitality might be interesting. A more detailed study could research the correlation of diplomatic work and the rise of tourism as some diplomats suggested that they influenced tourism and support the hospitality industry of their sending country. Moreover, the increased need of diplomatic hospitality in times of crisis leaves space for research.

In Tokyo or in Japan, more research on the meaning of omotenashi (hospitality) in the diplomatic context could be conducted.



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