

## **EXPLORING THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EMPLOYEE CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN STAR-RATED HOTELS IN MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study reports an exploratory qualitative study on career planning and development in hotels rated three to five stars in Malaysia. It explores what influences employee career planning and development in the hotel industry from the operation staff and supervisor perspectives. Specifically, it describes the factors that shape their personal career planning and development in the hotel industry. Data collection was carried out with selected hotel employees from the various departments in the three to five star-rated hotels in Malaysia from July 2015 to February 2016. A total of 151 employees were involved in data collection. Interviews and an open-ended profile accumulative technique survey were conducted with respondents as a data collection method at the respective hotels. Finding shows that majority of employee perceives positively in term of job and career opportunities and considers it quite promising due to the rapid growth of hotels. A majority of employees felt that there is a lack of proper career planning and career development provided by the hotel employers except few international chain hotels and five star rated hotels. Key factors emerged from the responses that shape and employee's career planning and development can be divided into seven themes: 1) nature of the job – interesting and fun but also challenging ; 2) job and career opportunities available in the hotel industry; 3) work environment and flexible work hours; 4) management practices; 5) opportunities for personal development and training programs to enhance their skill, knowledge and languages; 6) Individual attitude ; 7) hotel brand names and image. These findings benefit human resource practices to develop and strengthen employee's career planning and development. Having proper career planning and development in place may attract the right employees to remain in the hotel employment; and subsequently to reduce the staff turnover rate. It strongly suggests that human resource department should seriously look into employee's career path and development. It also suggest that in order to attract and retain competent staffs, a paradigm shift in human resource management and practices by giving more attention to formulate relevant career paths and development strategies is required.

**Keywords:** Career planning and development; star rated hotels; job opportunities in hotel; personal development; training program

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The rapid growth of tourism industry worldwide creates employment opportunities especially in the hotel industry that is people and labour intensive. It is estimated by the World Travel and Tourism Council that over the next ten years there will be 347 million tourism jobs worldwide (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2014). This implies the huge potential of both job and career opportunities in the hotel industry. However, hotels worldwide are

experiencing high staff turnover rates (Hinkin and Tracey, 2000) and it has become a serious problem for the hotel industry, such as in Malaysia. This implies that human resource management should also give more attention to the need on employee development. Employees' expectations and their career goals provide the hotel employers a clear picture of the preferences and demands. More importantly, the understanding of what influence the employees in terms of their career planning and development in hotel employment is an essential component of human resources management (Nebel, Braunlich, & Zhang, 1994). The understanding of interests, abilities, perceptions and career values, employers will be able to gain competitive advantages and develop successful human resource strategies (Baum, 2007).

The human resource model shows the key functions of human resource practices which include attracting and recruitment, compensation, training and development, performance evaluation. Human Resource Management (HRM) is the function within an organization that focuses on the recruiting, managing, and providing direction for the people who work in the organization (Tounta, 2015). The functions and roles of human resource management are widely discussed and researched. Career development is found to be an important activity of human resource management just like other human resource management activities.

As part of strategic planning, human resource practices should be responsible for not only determining and justifying staffing requirements but also the career development planning for the employees. The development of an individual's knowledge, skills and experiences attributed to the growth and development of organizations and thus potentially contributed to the long term success of organization. This function is vital to ensure hotel organization provide proper career path and development and thus to reduce the turnover and retention. Above all, the success of a hotel business depends entirely upon people and their application of knowledge, skill and attitude as well as their motives and perceptions toward the employment. These factors can be a major determinant and contributor to organizational performance. Career planning and development is important for both the employees and organization to ensure long term sustainable competent human resource in the hotel industry. Generally, hotel provides resources supporting careers such as individual development plan and job opportunities, mentoring, training program and coaching. Clearly, hotel organization without career planning and career development plan is likely to encounter the highest rate of attrition (Karim, Huda, & Khan, 2012)

In view of the high turnover labour and acute shortages of skilled and competent employees in the hotel industry, hotel employer needs to take a more active role in encouraging individual career planning (Pallet, 1989). In fact, it was found that employees are increasingly seeking assistance from the organization in personal career planning from some international hotel; such as Four Seasons Hotel indicate the importance of having personal career planning. It becomes clear that employees wanted more help in planning their careers, and more information about the opportunities that might be available to them in the future based on the employee survey (Pallet, 1989).

Taking the above views into consideration, the paper sets to explore the factors influencing the career planning and development based on the employees' and supervisors' perspectives in the star rated hotels in Malaysia.

## **1.1 CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Career planning is a process of managing career goals with individual capabilities with opportunities for their fulfilment. It is a lifelong series of activities that contribute to a person's career explorations, establishment, success and fulfilment. According to (Manolescu, 2003: page 332) *career planning is a continuous process of discovery in which an individual slowly develops his own occupational concept as a result of skills or abilities, needs, motivations and aspirations of his own value system.* In other words, it is a process where an employee matching his career goals and capabilities with opportunities for an improvement. In addition, it is a path that enhances the employee's future value (Gomez, 2014). Career planning shapes the progression of individuals within an organization in accordance with assessments of organizational needs, defined employee success profiles and the performance, potential and preferences of individual members of the enterprise (Palade, 2010).

A career development path provides employees with an on-going mechanism to enhance their skills and knowledge, which leads to mastering their jobs and added professional development (Cao & Thomas, 2013). It is postulated that personal career planning at every job level in the hotel organization is vital to ensure sustainability of the business performance. Career planning recognizes the individual unique needs, desires and skills. It also motivated an individual and thus offer organization is able to offer such opportunity to individuals (Palade, 2010). It provides employees several advantages, which include the potential to succeed faster in the aimed career, employee have more autonomy and responsibilities, gain broaden work experiences and increase work contentment (Palade, 2010).

A wide range of measures is being used in human resource management , aimed at career development, such as systems of vocational trainings, rewarding incentives, and the promotion of healthy working environment, with stress minimization in the workplace. Hotels have an important role to attract, engage and maintain top talents, by redefining working environment and creating stimulating work ambiance (Silva & Martins, 2016). This measure can be done by having a clear career planning and development for the employee. There are numerous methods used in career management by the human resource management as recorded in the studies by Maryrhofer et.,al, (2004), Heraty and Morley (2000), Papalexandris and Panayotopouton (2004) and Berber and Slaiv (2014). However, the review of literature shown limited understanding of and little attention given to the factors influencing the employee's career planning and development in the hotel organizations, especially in the context of Malaysia.

Career development has been defined as the accumulation of work-related experiences, activities, and roles during a person's working life (Wang, 2013). Generally, career development identifies training and educational opportunities to enable employees become more proficient in their current positions and to prepare them for career advancement (Vinesh, 2014). Having career development path for the employee allows managers to address gaps in training and thus lead to knowledge gained in an employee's current position, promotions and transfers to new positions as pointed out by Gurdjian, Halbeisen and Lane (2014). Indeed, career planning and development benefit both the employees and organizations. It provides an avenue to reach individual career goals while fulfilling the company's mission. Career development also has a direct impact on the entire organization by improving morale, career satisfaction, motivation, productivity and responsiveness in meeting departmental and organizational objectives (Musriha, 2013). In the same vein, employees feel more engaged when they know that the employer is

concerned about their development and well-being of its employees (Gray, 2014). This shown the organization commitment to developing its employees and career concerns and to strengthen its human resource planning.

With the career planning and development program, employees are able to make better informed decisions and proper career pathway; they become more realistic and able to strengthen their skills and interests and preferences. At the same time, a career planning program provides more realistic idea of where the employees stand and expectations of advancement or job opportunities. Likewise, it also provides vital information for management development and succession planning activities. Hence, it argues that hotel organizations should support employees in career planning so that both can satisfy each other's needs (Amelia & Nicoară, 2003). In this sense, career development is important for both individual employee and organization, however, commonly it always developed base on the needs of organization. However, the idea that companies should support employees in their career planning is also quite limited and are relatively new one. Arguably, individual needs must satisfy in order to meet the needs of organization.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

An inductive approach was adopted to address the research objectives, which are subjective in nature, within an interpretative paradigm from verbal and written responses of employees to achieve a more holistic understanding. The use of qualitative techniques offers more depth in seeking personal beliefs, thoughts and attitudes and in-depth understanding of how and what shape the employee career planning and development that is grounded and constructed in their own responses and reactions. Multi-methods (interviewing, profile accumulation technique (PAT)) are deemed relevant as little is known about the said issues within the hotel context. In-depth interviewing is used to understand the subjects through an oral assessment. PAT (open ended questions) is used to collect information through written assessment from the employees. The PAT is a self-written assessment with great flexibility (Johns & Lee-Ross, 1997) and extended to understand factors shaping employee's career planning and development. The two sets of data allow data triangulation; methodological rigour is achieved through multi data sources and coherent justification is manifested in the data sources. The process of data triangulation acts as a means of verifying results, eliminating methodological limitations or data and investigation bias (Oppermann, 2000).

## **3. DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

Empirical data was collected from employees at three to five star rated hotels listed in the Tourism and Hospitality Malaysia directory. The data collection was carried out with selected respondents from the various departments in the three to five star rated hotels in Malaysia from July 2015 to February 2016 at the respective hotels. The sample size consisted of the various departments and was determined by the data saturation of each data collection method as shown in Table 1 below. A total of 151 respondents were involved in data collection; 59 respondents were from five star hotels, 34 respondents from four star hotels and 58 respondents from three star hotels. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted to gain understanding of the perception of hotel employment and factors leading to career planning and development. Open-ended profile accumulative technique surveys were given to respondents as a data collection method during the visit at the respective hotels after the interview sessions.

The recorded interviews were transcribed into a written format and read and re-read several times. The responses and statements were identified, and meanings were derived from further analysis and interpretation. The data was then reviewed repeatedly, revised and analyzed to identify and develop appropriate themes guided by the research subject. A single phrase or several significant statements, grounded in the respondents' own descriptions, enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings. Data collected from the interviews and PATs were triangulated.

**Table 1:** Respondent Profile for interview and profile of accumulation questionnaire in 3- 5 star rated hotel

No.	Hotel Star Rating	Department	Profile Accumulation (Questionnaire)	In-depth interview	Total
1.	5-Star Hotel	Front Office	8	8	59
		Housekeeping	11	11	
		Accounting/ Finance	4	4	
		Food and Beverage (F&B)	16	16	
		Kitchen	11	16	
		Sales & Marketing	5	5	
		Security	4	4	
		Engineering & Maintenance	5	5	
		Sports & Recreation	5	5	
		Landscaping	3	3	
		Marina	1	1	
2.	4-Star Hotel	Front Office	5	5	34
		Housekeeping	10	10	
		Accounting/ Finance	4	4	
		Food and Beverage (F&B)	8	8	
		Kitchen	3	3	
		Sales & Marketing	2	2	
		Security	2	2	
		Engineering & Maintenance	4	4	
3.	3-Star Hotel	Front Office	13	13	58
		Housekeeping	11	11	
		Accounting/ Finance	10	10	
		Food and Beverage (F&B)	8	8	
		Kitchen	9	9	
		Sales & Marketing	4	4	
		Security	4	4	
		Engineering & Maintenance	8	8	
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>151</b>	

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT FROM THE EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVES

Findings from employees' responses shown several a range of factors shape their career planning and development. These factors can be categorized as seven themes: 1) nature of the job – interesting and fun but also challenging; 2) job and career opportunities availability; 3) work environment and flexible work hours; 4) management practices; 5) personal development and training opportunities to enhance skill, knowledge and languages; 6) Individual attitude; 7) hotel brand names and image. These evidences emerged from the interview and profile accumulation questionnaire are reported in the Table 2.

**Table 2:** Factors influencing career planning and development from the employee's perspectives

No	Responses and respondent	Themes
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I'm interested with the nature of job...different with others sector (Respondent TPSM2)</li> <li>The nature of job...it's fun, enjoy and challenging (Respondent CM3)</li> <li>I can meet tourists from all around the world (Respondent DS3, DS2)</li> </ul>	Nature of the jobs
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operation hour is flexible. Staff can spend more time with family (Respondent TM1)</li> </ul>	Flexible working hours
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthy working environment which is no office politic (Respondent DM1)</li> <li>Happy environment...having a friendly staff (Respondent SLKKM2)</li> </ul>	Working environment
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's a great opportunity for me to work or starting my career with reputed hotel (Respondent DS4)</li> </ul>	Job opportunities
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benefits, opportunities, career, (Respondent HSS3)</li> <li>Opportunity for career advancement and high position (Respondent DO2, DO6)</li> <li>"I can build my career and become a Manager in the future. So, this is a good opportunity for me working in hotel industry" (Respondent CO5&amp; CO7)</li> </ul>	Benefits and career opportunities
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management encourages us to join the competition to develop our skills and see the extent of our capabilities (Respondent GO3)</li> <li>Our management is approachable (Respondent SLKKO3)</li> <li>"Our boss very open-minded, approachable. We can share anything problems with them directly and discuss my career" (Respondent TPHO2)</li> <li>The supportive and encouraging superiors guide me and I am able to plan my career"</li> </ul>	Management practices- Caring management
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide training each level of job, and increase or improve staff's English command ability (Respondent DM1)</li> <li>We invite trainers from outsiders to conduct the training and sending our staffs to join outside training (Respondent SLKKM1)</li> <li>"Exposure to work in other department which means opportunities to learn and improve my skills as part of my career plan" (Respondent MO5)</li> </ul>	Training opportunities
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can learn many languages. And at the same time, I want to gain more knowledge and skills to improve myself (Respondent GO1)</li> </ul>	Personal development : knowledge and skills
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's depend for ourselves for career advancement" (Respondent HSO1 &amp;</li> </ul>	Individual

	<p>HSO4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Depend on the staff itself if they want to take it or not that opportunity given to them"(Respondent GO1)</li> </ul>	attitude
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Working in international brand name hotel offer good career paths.. Starwood Career Program"</li> <li>• "Big hotel such as international chain provides career path for those who perform well in their job"</li> <li>• "It provides both internal and external program at different phases of their professional career with Starwood"(Respondent FO5)</li> </ul>	Brand name

In general, the finding shown that employees tend to relate their career planning and development to the nature of the jobs they are doing and work environment, the job and career opportunities in the hotel industry, personal development through trainings as well as the management practices, as indicated in Table 2.

Majority of respondents indicated that their career planning and development in the hotel industry is largely attributed to the nature of the hotel job being different, fun and meeting tourists from worldwide as well as challenging; whilst others the flexible working hours and healthy and friendly working environment. Other employees highlighted the career opportunities and training provided that will enhance their personal development. Hence, it seems to conclude that the nature of the job, working environment and management practices are vital factors whilst personal development and training seems less significant to the operational employees.

Likewise, the positive perception of international hotel images and brand names influence an individual to seek employment as these hotels tend to provide career paths. This finding is consistent with the studies by Mazur (2015) and Turban and Cable (2003) state that organizations with good reputations tend to attract more job applicants with more high –quality employees. In addition, new generation of job applicants may tend to look for more environmentally responsible organization and provides range of training program for their career development as well as the caring management. It seems to conclude that international chain or international brand name hotels provide a wide range of job opportunities and diverse training and development programs to enhance technical and operational skill, they also provide opportunities for career advancement and mobility for those who perform well. The conducive working environment and caring management have attributed to the positive perceptions of their career in hotel organization. These are deemed important factors for generation Y and X employees as they value good working environments and caring supportive management in the workplace.

#### **4.2 KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT FROM SUPERVISORS' PERSPECTIVES**

The findings shown six factors influencing the career planning and development from the supervisors' perspectives. These are personal development, career opportunities and advancement, job performance, job promotions and personal attitude. These themes with supported responses from interviews and profile accumulation questionnaires are presented in Table 3 below.

From the supervisor's perspective, it seems to suggest that employees career planning and development are largely attributed to an individual employee personal development and attitude toward job performance and promotion. Employee's attitude is

considered an important factor in term of career planning and development of the employees. Most supervisors viewed that the availability of job promotions, career opportunities and advancement in hotel organizations serve as a key attraction in seeking job and long term employment. However, in term of career planning and development, it is subjected to an individual consideration and also human resource practices with regards to employee career development.

Majority of employees consider great job opportunities and career development due to the rapid growth of hotels in Malaysia. However, the human resource management need to shift the focus on employee development and retention through proper career planning and development plan. It is no points continuous hiring and facing high turnover. It is high time for human resource management to develop proper career paths and advancement for the employees as part of the human resource activity that can no longer ignore. Simply, many employees are uncertain about their career development or they do not have their own career plan and they depend largely on the hotel career management system or career path.

**Table 3:** Responses from supervisors

<b>No</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Themes</b>
1	We have Personal Development Plan (PDP) that monitor every 6 months (Respondent HS10, HS11)  improve interpersonal skills (Respondent DS4) Gain experience and skills (Respondent IS1 & IS3)	Personal development
2	Career opportunity... opportunities are higher due to more developed industry (Respondent GS1, GS5, GS4) Lots of opportunity... a lot of jobs (Respondent DS4, DS3) It's a great opportunity for me to work or starting my career with reputed hotel (Respondent DS4)	Career opportunities – industry , jobs available, as stepping point for career
3	Opportunity for career advancement (Respondent DS1, DS4, DS3) Career advancement...I being offered to become supervisor since I applied job in this hotel (Respondent RICS1)	Career advancement
4	Based on job performance. If you perform well, is easier to move to next level (Respondent RICS4 & RICS1)	Job performance
5	Be promote to next level (Respondent SCS1) ...promoted to high level but it take time...(Respondent RICS2)	Promotion
6	If you willing to learn and has right attitude , you'll become a General Manager in future due working in hotel industry (Respondent HGSU4)	Attitude

## **5. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The paper provides deeper understanding of career planning and development in the star rated hotel in Malaysia by the human resource management and employee's perspectives. Evidently, career planning and development is deemed and important activity of human resource practices and also vital for an individual employee. The finding shown that common practices and methods used in career planning and development are largely associated with job performance for promotion, job and career opportunities, provision of trainings and



enhancement of personal development. Methods such as mentoring, succession plan and career development plan are found in few international chain hotels. Hence, it suggested that greater emphasis should be given on career planning and development for hotel employees by the human resource management department. With this, it is likely that hotels are able to retain competent human resource and thus reduce employee turnover.

The research suffers few limitations. Firstly, the research was undertaken in Sabah, one of the several states in Malaysia and focused only on the operation level of employees. Secondly, the scope of research covered only three to five star rated hotels and it did not encompass the budget hotels or the one and two star rated hotels in other states. A further limitation is the access to the respondents which is limited to those who were available during the visit days; and the possibility that hotels may have preselected the respondents. As such, the findings may not represent all hotels in Malaysia and all the hotel employees. It would be beneficial to conduct similar studies in other states in Malaysia or other countries in order that some comparisons may be made.

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