



Determinants and outcome of career competencies: Perspectives of hotel managers in China

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the determinants and outcome of career competencies. Based on the notion that organizations and individuals have respective obligations in the career management of employees', this study developed perceived "organizational career management" (OCM) and "career commitment" as determinants and career satisfaction as an outcome of career competencies. Data were collected in the state-owned hotels in China, and structural equation modeling was used to test the proposed relationships. The findings indicate that both perceived OCM and career commitments have positive, direct effects on career competencies. The findings of this study may benefit both hotels and hotel employees by providing valuable implications.

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1. Introduction

Technological advances, global competition and evolving organizational structures have revolutionized how people conceptualize and manage their careers. Traditionally, careers were stable, upward, and based on a linear progression in one or two firms (Driver, 1982; Schein, 1979). However, today's dynamic working environment and flatter organizations have changed this model to one that features unpredictable, lateral, and multidirectional development both within and across organizations (Hall, 2003). Individuals are now expected to navigate their own careers and lifelong learning opportunities (Hall, 2003; Patton and McMahon, 2001). In line with the need for career self-management is the increased emphasis on the personal qualities that are required for successful career management. Given the trend towards less stable career patterns, individuals who are successful are those who are able to achieve desired career progress by enhancing their career competencies (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994; Eby et al., 2003). In today's environment, career competencies have become increasingly important (Arthur et al., 1995).

Inspired by the competency-based and learning-centered view of the "intelligent enterprise" (Quinn, 1992), Arthur et al. (1995)

suggest that personal competencies reflect different forms of knowing, and the intelligent careers reflect the application of these forms of knowing ('knowing why', 'knowing whom' and 'knowing how') for applying and adapting to career opportunities (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994). 'Knowing why' is related to career motivation, personal meaning, and identification; 'knowing whom' concerns career-relevant networks and contacts; and 'knowing how' involves career-relevant skills and job-related knowledge.

With the emphasis on personal qualities in career management, it is necessary to explore the results of career competencies (Eby et al., 2003) as well as the influencing factors. Rapid economic and technological development has led to significant organizational change. To be competitive, organizations have to swiftly respond to changing market conditions. The organizational environment is dynamic, and careers are unpredictable, lateral, and multidirectional. Researchers (e.g., Adamson and Doherty, 1998) propose that organizations can no longer afford to direct their employee's careers only to achieve organizational objectives. Individuals have become more involved in managing their own careers rather than expecting their employers to manage them (Hall and Mirvis, 1996). However, the function of organizations in career management should not be neglected (Orpen, 1994). The responsibility for career management lied both in individuals and in the organization they work for (Orpen, 1994). As both organizations and individuals have respective obligations in the career management of employees (Baruch, 2006), this study aimed to explore the effects of organization and individual factors on career competencies. Thus, perceived hotel career management and career commitment were developed as the determinants. One

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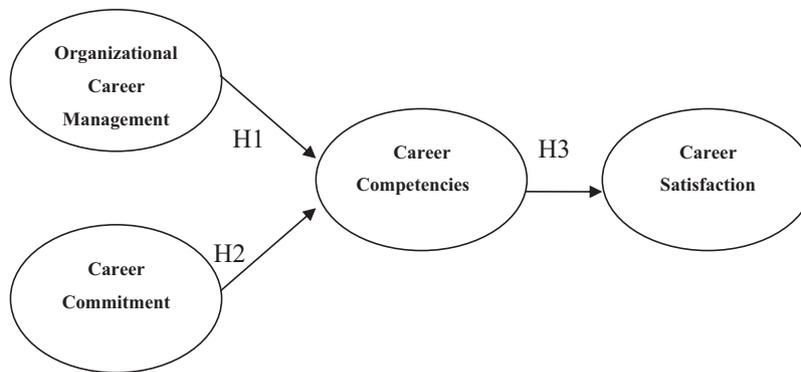


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

of the focuses of this study is placed on the role played by organizations in supporting the career management of employees. It is also important to consider the outcome that resulted by developing employees' career competencies.

2. Conceptual framework

The ideal way for career management is that practiced by organization and individual jointly. Baruch (2006) proposes a balanced view of career management, which focuses on the relationship between the employee and the organization and the joint managing of the individual's career. The balanced view provides the theoretical foundation for the current study, which aims to identify the individual and organizational factors that facilitate the development of employees' career competencies and career satisfaction. Perceived organizational career management (OCM) and career commitment were developed as determinants, and career satisfaction as the outcome of career competencies. It was posited that perceived OCM and career commitment may exert a significant influence on career competencies, which in turn influence career satisfaction.

Perceived OCM was proposed to be an organizational influencing factor. OCM, which is also known as "organizational support for career development" or "organizational sponsorship", refers to the programs, processes and assistance provided by organizations to support and enhance employees' career success (Ng et al., 2005; Orpen, 1994). OCM indicates various activities established and practiced by organizations to improve the career effectiveness, career competencies, and career satisfaction of their employees. These activities include meeting employees' career needs, providing appropriate career opportunities, evaluating the outcomes of career management programs (Orpen, 1994; Williams, 1979). These practices are specifically relevant to the pursuit of an individual's career goals, and help employees to develop career competencies. Thus effective organizational career support can help to promote the career success of employees.

Career commitment was proposed to be an individual influencing factor, as committed people invest more in their careers. Career commitment is defined as one's attitude towards one's profession or vocation (Blau, 1985). It reflects one's motivation to work in a chosen vocation (Carson and Bedeian, 1994). Career commitment is characterized by the development of personal career goals, and the attachment to, identification with, and involvement in those goals (Colarelli and Bishop, 1990). Individuals who are committed to their careers are willing to persist in pursuing career goals, building networks, and improving job-related skills (Cheng and Ho, 2001; Crant, 2000). Hence, a result of career commitment is the development of career competencies.

Career satisfaction is defined as the satisfaction that individuals derive from the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of their careers, including pay, advancement, and developmental opportunities (Greenhaus et al., 1990). It reflects how people feel about their career-related roles, accomplishments, and career success. Career satisfaction was developed as the outcome of career competencies in the conceptual framework. Fig. 1 shows the proposed framework.

3. Literature review and hypotheses

3.1. Effect of perceived OCM on career competencies

Organizations can provide a series of activities including mentoring, training, assessment centers, and networking opportunities (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000; Gutteridge et al., 1993; Hall, 2002). All of these activities are specifically relevant to the pursuit of career goals, and can help employees to develop career competencies. For example, mentoring can play a valuable role in directing career development and decision making (Ayres, 2006). Through these OCM activities, employees obtain knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses and develop specific career goals, which leads to greater 'knowing why' career competencies.

In addition to the contribution of 'knowing why' competencies, mentoring also provides networking opportunities (Higgins and Kram, 2001). Acting as supporters, organizations provide employees with the chance to develop new skill sets and to build internal and external networks (Eby et al., 2003). These increase both 'knowing how' and 'knowing whom' career competencies.

Organizations can enhance employees' 'knowing how' competencies by providing organizational training and development programs (Sullivan et al., 1998). Organizational activities including co-learning between coworkers (Hall and Mirvis, 1996), developmental assignments (Seibert, 1996), on-line internet training, and career assessment (Baruch, 2003) help employees remain marketable and keep them up to date with current developments. In summary, effective career management boosts employees' competitive competencies, which can contribute significantly to the unfolding competencies of the firm and its host industry (Arthur et al., 1999; DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994). As a result, effective OCM activities increase the organization's ability to compete in the market (Hall and Moss, 1998). Based on the foregoing discussion, it is predicted that:

H1 (:). Perceived OCM may have a positive effect on career competencies.

3.2. Effect of career commitment on career competencies

Career commitment should facilitate the development of career competencies. Previous research has found that committed

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