



From hotel career management to employees' career satisfaction: The mediating effect of career competency

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between perceived hotel career management, career competency, and career satisfaction. It also aims to examine the mediating processes through which hotel career management contribute to employees' career satisfaction. Results from structural equation modeling (SEM) show that career competency mediates the effects of three dimensions of hotel career management (career appraisal, career development, and career training) on career satisfaction. The article concludes with implications for theory development and management practice.

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1. Introduction

Attracting and retaining qualified talent is a major issue in the hospitality industry today. Over the past three decades, China has experienced the rapid and steady development of its hospitality industry. In response to the fast increases in the numbers of inbound and domestic tourists, China's hotel industry has expanded significantly. This rapid development has led to an increasing demand for high-quality hotel staff. However, hotels in China are encountering many problems in recruiting and retaining the best talent (Gu et al., 2006). As career development is an effective way of retaining and developing staff, it is important for hotels in China to practice effective career management.

Career development aims to achieve gradual improvement by operating in harmony with efforts to enhance employees' career competency. According to Arthur et al. (1995), personal competency reflects different forms of knowing, and intelligent careers reflect the application of these forms of knowing. They categorize career competency into three types: "knowing why", "knowing whom", and "knowing how". The first relates to career motivation, personal meaning, and identification; the second concerns career-relevant networks and contacts; and the third involves career-relevant skills and job-related knowledge.

Enhancing employees' career competency requires a cooperative relationship between hotel managers and hotel employees. From the employee perspective, successful career management emphasizes the possession of the requisite personal qualities, and thus career competency has become increasingly important (Arthur et al., 1999). From the hotel perspective, helping staff to develop their own careers and improving their career satisfaction is an effective means of attracting and retaining qualified staff members (Barnett and Bradley, 2007; Wong et al., 1999). Nowadays, most organizations work as enablers in the career management system by supporting employees' career development (Baruch, 2006). Effective hotel career management can contribute to the development of employees' career competency, thereby improving their career satisfaction. It would thus be useful to explore the mediating effect of career competency on the relationship between hotel career management and career satisfaction.

2. Literature review

2.1. Perceived hotel career management and career competency

In today's business environment, the organization plays an important role in career management systems, functioning as a supportive enabler and developer of its human assets (Baruch, 2006). Organizational career management (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 the career success of their employees (Ng et al., 2005; Orpen, 1994). The significance of OCM to the career development of

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employees' career has become increasingly important to the hotel industry. Hence, this study attempted to examine career management in hotels through employees' perceptions of hotel career management (HCM) practices.

Hotels can provide effective career management activities such as training, mentoring, performance appraisal, and development programs to their employees (Kong et al., 2010). These activities are beneficial to the development of career competency. For example, performance appraisal can provide input to career planning, and may help employees to be better aware of their performances (Baruch, 2003). Mentoring plays an important role in directing career development and decision making (Ayres, 2006). The use of these career activities can provide employees feedback on their strengths, and subsequently related to the competency of "knowing why", "knowing whom", and "knowing how". Employees obtaining feedback of their performance can develop specific career goals, leading to the "knowing why" career competency. In addition, mentoring and training provide networking opportunities (Higgins and Kram, 2001; O'Brien and Gardiner, 2006), and thus enhance the "knowing whom" competency. Organizational training and development programs can also enhance employees' learning and the "knowing how" competency (Sullivan et al., 1998). All of the above relationships lead to the following prediction that:

H1. Perceived hotel career management may contribute positively to career competency.

2.2. Career competency and career satisfaction

Career satisfaction is the satisfaction that individuals derive from the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of their careers, including pay, advancement, and developmental opportunities (Greenhaus et al., 1990). Employees' perceived career satisfaction reflects how they feel about their career-related roles, accomplishments, and success. Career satisfaction is an important predictor of career success that has been conceptualized as comprising both extrinsic and intrinsic outcomes, and is thus measured using both objective and subjective indicators (Barley, 1989; Nabi, 1999; Stebbins, 1970). Objective career success indicates an external perspective that delineates more or less tangible indicators of an individual's career situation (Arthur et al., 2005). Indicators of objective career success include salary (Tharenou, 2001), promotion (Judge et al., 1999), family structure (Schneer and Reitman, 1993), and job level (Judge and Bretz, 1994). Subjective career success is defined as "individuals' feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with their careers" (Judge et al., 1995, p. 487), and is most often measured by career satisfaction (Judge et al., 1999; Ng et al., 2005). As objective career success comprises visible outcomes, it usually depends on a third-person perspective, and thus does not reflect an employee's appraisal of his or her own success. In recent years, subjective measures of career success have become increasingly important (Arthur et al., 2005; Parker and Arthur, 2000), with career satisfaction being one of the most significant predictors of career success. This study thus focused on employees' career satisfaction.

As stated, career competency comprises three types: "knowing why", "knowing whom", and "knowing how". The "knowing-why" competency encompasses career insight, a proactive personality, and openness to experience. People who know themselves well are able to clarify their career aims (Suutari and Makela, 2007), while people with a proactive personality tend to seek opportunities and act on them (Bateman and Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). Openness to experience refers to the degree to which individuals are curious, imaginative, creative, willing to accept changes, and accepting of diversity (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Goldberg, 1992;

Mignonac, 2008). Individuals who score highly on this trait tend to achieve higher levels of job performance and seek regular training and development opportunities to acquire transferable skills (Banai and Harry, 2004). It has also been found that employees with high job performance scores are perceived to have more favorable advancement prospects, which is associated with a higher level of career satisfaction (Igbaria and Wormley, 1992).

The "knowing whom" competency relates to the career-related networks, mentoring, and contacts of an individual both inside and outside the organization (Arthur et al., 1995). Individuals in a mentoring relationship show great effectiveness in self-managing their own careers (Murphy and Ensher, 2001) and better career success (Janasz et al., 2003). Individuals often benefit greatly from networks, as networking inside and outside the organization helps them to stay on top of new developments and approaches (Higgins and Kram, 2001). An employee can also gather career-relevant information and social capital through networks (Moss and Barbuto, 2010). As both internal and external networking aid career development (Raider and Burt, 1996; Sturges et al., 2010), it is assumed that the "knowing whom" competency is an important predictor of career satisfaction.

The "knowing how" competency involves career- or job-related skills and career identity. Career identity is the degree to which people immerse themselves in skill-enhancing and professional activities (London, 1993; Noe et al., 1990). As employee skills are an important predictor of job performance (Semadar et al., 2006), employees who are strong in a variety of skills are expected to receive better compensation and promotion opportunities (Todd et al., 2009), which increases their career satisfaction. Thus, the accumulation of career- or job-related skills may help to increase employee career satisfaction. This leads to the following prediction that:

H2. Career competency may contribute positively to career satisfaction.

2.3. Perceived hotel career management and career satisfaction

Hotels can enhance the career satisfaction of their employees by engaging in effective career management activities. It has been found that specific career management activities, such as job rotation schemes, are positively related to career satisfaction (Campion et al., 1994). Other career management practices, such as career sponsorship, training, and career development programs, also contribute positively to career satisfaction (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Ng et al., 2005). Organizations try to enhance employee career satisfaction by providing effective career support, such as training, performance appraisal, and challenging jobs (Burke, 2001; Burke and McKeen, 1995). This engenders a perception among employees of being supported by the organization, which leads to better career satisfaction and retention intention (Allen et al., 2004; Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel, 2009; Baruch and Rosenstein, 1992). Therefore it is hypothesized that:

H3. Perceived hotel career management may contribute positively to career satisfaction.

2.4. Mediating effect of career competency

In addition to its direct influence on career satisfaction, career competency may mediate the relationship between hotel career management and career satisfaction. The function of a mediator represents the generative mechanism through which the focal independent variable is able to influence the dependent variable of interest (Baron and Kenny, 1986). There are two forms of mediation: full mediation and partial mediation. When the direct effect between the independent variable and the depen-

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