



Hotel career management in China: Developing a measurement scale

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop a measurement scale for organizational career management (OCM) in China's hotel industry. The scale development procedure includes four steps: developing initial items, implementing purifying measures, data collection, and assessing the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement scale. Both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are used to test the reliability and validity of the measurement scale thus developed. The development process results in a reliable and valid scale for hotel career management incorporating three dimensions: (1) career appraisal and advice, (2) a career development program, and (3) career training. Given the scarcity of research on career management in China, the measurement scale developed in this study will serve as a foundation for future research. The findings of this study may help to stimulate further empirical research on the relationship between hotel career management and employees' career commitment and career satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

Organizational career management (OCM), also known as “organizational support for career development” or “organizational sponsorship,” refers to programs, processes, and other forms of assistance provided by organizations to support and enhance their employees' career success (Ng et al., 2005). The modern day organization plays a significant new role in the career system by acting as a supportive developer of its human assets (Baruch, 2006), in contrast with the cradle-to-grave career development role played by firms in earlier decades. Although the responsibility for career management has shifted from the organization to the individual, the function of OCM should not be neglected. The organization is the enabler of a successful career, and effective career management will help to increase the company's competitive competencies (Baruch, 2006).

The development of China's hotel industry has been impressive over the last three decades. However, the increasing growth rate in the Chinese hotel sector has been hindered by the quantity and quality of human resources available, such as the shortage of qualified staff at both operational and managerial levels (Xi,

2005; Zhang and Wu, 2004). A recent survey reveals that hotel employees are dissatisfied with their current job and see little professional development in the industry (Kong and Baum, 2006; Zhang et al., 2002). Another study shows that China's hotel industry is faced with a shortage of qualified managerial and operational staff (Gu et al., 2006). One way in which hotels may attract and retain qualified employees is by helping them to develop their own careers and increasing their career satisfaction (Barnett and Bradley, 2007). Given that career advancement has been identified as one of the most effective motivational strategies to retain qualified staff (Gu et al., 2005; Wong et al., 1999), career management has become a critical issue for the hospitality industry in China.

However, the research which is specially contextualized in the hotel sector in China is quite limited. Most previous studies (Baruch, 2003; Baruch and Peiperl, 2000; Gutteridge et al., 1993) focus on OCM activities undertaken in Western countries, they might not be applicable in China. Although Chow (2002) conducted a survey of perceived organizational support and middle managers' career planning, the target sample of his study are managers in Hong Kong not in mainland China. Furthermore, the organizational career practices in Chow's (2002) study are limited, there remains a need to explore a wider variety of career activities. Other researchers, such as Bjorkman and Lu (1999), Li and Wright (2000) explored relevant issues on career planning in China, and the findings provide important reference for future study in the career area. However, Li and Wright's (2000) study merely explored the relationship between networking (Guanxi) and career development, while Bjorkman and Lu's (1999) study focused more on the gen-

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eral human resources management rather than the specific career management.

China's hotel industry displays characteristics of fierce competition, and multiform ownership and management systems (Pine, 2002). The hotel industry in China was characterized by diverse ownerships, namely state-owned, collective, private, alliance, stock, foreign-invested and Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan-invested hotels (CNTA, 2007). Of all the ownership types, state-owned hotels are by far still the dominant force, consisting of more than 42.7% of the total hotels in China. Although the hotels in China, such as state-owned hotels have successfully developed and innovated their management practices by combining international management skills with Chinese culture (Cai et al., 2000), it still takes time for them to practice comprehensive career management activities as the hotel management system in China is still immature. Furthermore, although hotels in China may adopt career management practices from western country, it remains difficult to implement effective career management strategies in the Chinese context due to the lack of professional trainers and special cultural influences (Bjorkman and Lu, 1999). For example, the role of 'face' and harmony are significant aspects of social life in China (Bond, 1991). As most Chinese managers tended to minimize the loss of face and preserve harmonious relationships, the issue of face may complicate the process of employees' performance appraisal. During the interviews of this study, it is also found that written personal career planning has not been implemented in China. This is because Chinese manager do not prefer to write everything clear in black and white. It is therefore necessary to explore how career management is handled in the Chinese hotel sector and develop a new scale that captures hotel career management in China.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research on OCM activities

The career development strategies used by organizations have been well-researched and implemented in Western countries. Many researchers such as Baruch (2003), Baruch and Peiperl (2000), Bowen and Hall (1977), Walker and Gutteridge (1979), Gutteridge et al. (1993), and Louchheim and Lord (1988) have explored OCM across a broad range of Western economies.

In an early study of OCM practices, Bowen and Hall (1977) describe alternative career planning techniques and discuss their potential advantages, shortcomings, and probable impacts on psychological success and identity integration. They propose a variety of career management activities such as individual activities, counselor–client activities, and boss as counselor or coach, and focus on career practices that are individually based rather than organizationally based.

Walker and Gutteridge (1979) propose 10 OCM practices, yet combine OCM activities with human resources management activities such as recruitment, and work–family interface. Gutteridge (1986) profiles five groups of common practices included in organizational career development programs. These five groups of career management practices include individual counseling, internal labor market information, placement exchanges, organizational potential assessment processes, and developmental programs. In addition to classifying career management practices, Gutteridge also elaborates on the detailed activities undertaken as part of each practice and their respective function.

Gutteridge et al. (1993) provide perhaps the most comprehensive list of OCM activities (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000) to date. They investigate over 1000 large U.S. organizations and identify 32 kinds of career development activities they use. These activities are classified into six groups: employee self-assessment tools, organizational potential assessment, internal labor market infor-

mation exchanges, individual counseling or career discussions, job-matching systems, and development programs. The general overview of OCM practices Gutteridge et al. present has become a foundation for later research. However, their study focuses purely on career management in the U.S., a country in which OCM practices are comparatively advanced.

Based on a survey of 120 British managers undertaking an MBA programme, Iles and Mabey (1993) summarize nine aspects of career management and further explore their effectiveness, availability, and acceptability. The career management activities investigated in their study consist of career reviews with superiors, psychometric testing and feedback, career planning workshops, self-assessment materials, information on career paths, fast-track programs, developmental assessment centers, assigned mentors, and informal mentors. Of all the OCM programs examined in their study, career reviews with superiors is the most commonly adopted, followed by informal mentoring and the provision of career path information. However, the results of this study should be treated with care as the small sample of 120 managers limits the significance of the author's findings which may not represent the broader practice.

According to Herriot et al. (1994), the career management practices of an organization can be measured on the basis of five items: (1) the importance the organization attaches to training and development; (2) the extent to which the organization informs employees about job moves and opportunities; (3) whether the organization provides career development opportunities for a few or for employees more widely; (4) the degree of choice the organization allows individual employees with respect to career moves; and (5) the extent to which the organization operates fair career procedures and agreements. The authors do not define specific OCM practices given their view that the classification of OCM techniques is too general.

Selmer et al. (2000) review a number of OCM practices including job postings, career path information, annual performance reviews, fast-track programs, career planning information, individual career counseling, career testing, coaching/mentoring, assessment centers, and career planning workshops. Of all these OCM practices, the most commonly used is annual performance reviews while career path information is the least practiced. Assessment centers and job postings are also rarely used. Although the researchers clearly describe the different types of career support provided in OCM practices, there remains a need to explore a wider variety of activities.

Baruch (1996, 2003) and Baruch and Peiperl (2000) provide a detailed analysis of OCM practices. These studies identify a total of 20 OCM practices based on a survey of 254 companies and 25 leading academic scholars. The findings of these studies are comprehensive in that they cover the full range of possible career management activities. Baruch (2003) uses these earlier studies as the basis for proposing a normative model for organizational career management and gives a detailed explanation of each career practice discussed. Therefore, the 20 items developed by Baruch (1996, 2003), and Baruch and Peiperl (2000) are important references for the study reported here.

2.2. OCM in the hospitality industry

Tourism researchers have shown an interest in examining the influence of particular OCM activities on careers. For example, Ayres (2006) notes the increasingly value and popularity of mentoring programs in the hospitality industry as they help individual employees to cope with the dynamic nature of their tourism careers. Walsh and Taylor (2007) find that the main benefits hotel employees seek from their employers are opportunities for growth and development, support, and compensation. Iverson (2000)

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