

VOLUME 5 NO. 1
JUNE 2008

ISSN 1675-7017

SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH JOURNAL



RESEARCH MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE



SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Social and Management Research Journal is jointly published by Research Management Institute (RMI) and University Publication Centre (UPENA), Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

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The Paradigm Nature of Today's Office: Approaches for Achieving Quality Outcomes in AOM

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been an increased respect and responsibility given to Administrative Office Managers. In this paper, we seek to explore the most challenging factors encountered by them, strategies practiced to minimize the challenges, and the benefits gained. With the globalization, human utilization and information technology advances issues, and the need for the organizations to sustain the growth, the role of Administrative Office Managers becomes even more challenging because of the need to help employees overcome resistance to the new system. A cross-sectional questionnaire survey was then conducted at hospitality organizations in West Malaysia. The findings suggest that regardless of hotel ranking and the origin of the organization, administrative office managers face and adapt similar factors. There is also a significant relationship between challenges and strategies, and the ICT investment and deployment provide a substantial role in nurturing employees in the organizations. The study is imperative to intensify and enrich the current administrative management and hospitality management research.

Keywords: *administrative office management, globalization, management/human resource, ICT advancement, hospitality organizations*

Introduction

As business becomes more complex, organizations continually face with new challenges that form a new paradigm in today's office (Green, 2002). Globalization, information technology, electronic commerce, human resource (Costea, 2005) and knowledge workers are parts of the challenges. As a mean to remain competitive amidst these challenges, organizations increasingly rely on administrative office managers. Much has been discussed about these challenges, and how they affect the workforce of today in attaining to perform in a competitive environment. However, there is still a lack of research that has been conducted in determining the challenges that administrative office managers have to face, and the strategies practiced by them. This research intends to identify and analyze the degree of the above challenges faced by administrative office managers in the hospitality organizations, particularly those who serve the hotel industry.

Using a numeric trend from a survey, the study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges faced and strategies adopted by the office managers, and the benefits gained by practicing the strategies?
2. Are there any significant differences between hotel ranking and the origin of the hotel, and the challenges faced, strategies practiced and benefits gained?
3. Is there any significant relationship between the overall challenges and the overall strategies taken, and between the strategies carried out and benefits gained?

Based on the review of the related literature, the challenges were grouped into three categories; globalization, management/human resource and the information and communication advancement. In addition, the strategies were also clustered into respective three categories; globalization, management/human resource and the information and communication advancement. Finally, the benefits were classified according to customer satisfaction, continuous improvement and people development.

Although the scope of the study was limited to hotels located in West Malaysia, the findings are deemed significant as they provide a deeper understanding of the current phenomena in the field of administrative management, which has been given little attention in previous research.

Statement of the Problem

An office manager has a significant impact on employees throughout its organization. The most significant impact is that he or she enables them to

enhance their productivity. Being a change agent within the organization, an office manager must always be adaptable towards the internal and external environment. Office of today has changed tremendously compared to office of yesterday. This paradigm shift has made it necessary for an office manager to understand the challenges of office today and find ways and strategies to overcome these challenges in order to make the organization remain productive and competitive.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was (1) to identify the challenges faced and strategies adopted by the office managers, and the benefits gained by practicing the strategies, (2) to find if there are significant differences between hotel ranking and the origin of the hotel, and the challenges faced, strategies practiced and benefits gained and (3) to identify any significant relationship between the overall challenges and the overall strategies taken, and between the strategies carried out and benefits gained.

Methodology

The study used a cross-sectional one time survey in order to get responses from the field. The population of the study was the Office Managers or employees holding the responsibilities of managing the administrative work, who served in hospitality organizations in West Malaysia. More specifically, they were those who worked in 4-star and 5-star hotels in the Federal Territory (Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya), Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Malacca. The sample was derived from the list of Malaysian Association of Hotels (2005).

In most of the questions, 5-point likert scale measures were used to represent responses of the subjects. The instrument was designed to get inputs in accordance to the challenges faced, strategies practiced and benefits gained. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement to each items asked. The items were derived based on the review of the literature. Besides the above items, demographic factors of hotel star ranking, hotel location, hotel type and nationality of the organization were also measured. Validity and reliability tests were conducted to measure the validity and reliability of the instrument. Based on the validity test, some amendments were made to the item statement in order to provide better clarity to the respondents.

Table 1 shows the results of the reliability test for the constructs. The results show all items are reliable; therefore no deletion of any constructs is necessary.

Table 1: Construct and Reliability Test

Construct	Items in scale	Cronbach's A
Challenges	14	.739
Strategies	17	.897
Benefits	13	.889

Findings

In answering the first question, the challenges were grouped according to three components; globalization, management/human resource and information technology advances. The descriptive statistics on the challenges show percentage differences in each item. The highest percentage, 96.7% of the respondents agreed that the most challenging globalization issue encountered was new management functions (planning, organizing, leading, staffing and controlling) ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.59$). Similarly, from the perspective of the management/human resource, 100% of the respondents agreed that it was very crucial to invest in human capital training and training ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.49$). Additionally, 96.7% of the respondents believed that the information technology advances require all employees to have new skills and competencies, which become a challenge to them ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.57$). Looking at the overall challenges, based on the analysis, it was found the most challenging factor faced by the respondents was the ICT advancement. The finding is in lieu with the most significant issues as measured by the International Society of Hospitality Consultants (as cited by Hospitality Industry for 2005).

In answering the question of the strategies adopted by administrative office professionals to encounter the challenges, the strategies were grouped according to three components; globalization, management/human resource and information technology advances. The results also show varying percentages of strategies. It was found that the most practiced strategy by the respondents in meeting the globalization challenges was complying with the modern policy, legislative and institutional framework which ensures an effective industrial relations system, adopted by 90% of the respondents ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.54$). On the other hand, the most practiced management/human resource strategy with 96.6% of the respondents was encouraging the individuals to listen to each other and find a mutually agreeable solution ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.53$). However, the assessment of the information technology strategies adopted did not give illuminating results as the mean scores for all strategies were below 4.00. The most information technology strategy adopted was allocating funds for information technology investment, with 97.3% of the respondents agreed they practiced it ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.62$). Comparing the different approach of the

strategies, it was found the strategy of managing and human resource was the most adopted approach. This shows that the organizations place and value the labor capital as the most important subject of investment, and are also willing to make imperative changes for organizational survival.

In answering the next question of the advantages to the practiced strategies, the benefits were grouped to customer satisfaction, continual improvement and people development. The interval measures also provide different results of the descriptive test. It was found the most customer satisfaction benefit achieved was in terms of profitability as 73.4% of the respondents corresponded compared with the industry average, they are more profitable ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.66$).

On the other hand, 80% of the respondents agreed the most achieved continual improvement benefit was over the past 12 months, the organization has met its performance objectives ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.50$). The most beneficial people development advantage was in terms of the ability of the organization to respond proactively to the competition and maintain market niche, in which 90% of the respondents agreed ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.64$). Based on a further analysis between the components, it was found both customer satisfaction and continual improvement were the highest benefits gained, although the level of agreement was not high. The following table provides the mean score for the constructs of the above discussion.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Challenges, Strategies and Benefits

Construct	Mean	SD
Challenges: globalization	4.17	0.59
Challenges: management and human resource	4.60	0.49
Challenges: ICT advancement	4.50	0.57
Strategies: globalization	4.10	0.54
Strategies: management and human resource	4.30	0.53
Strategies: ICT advancement	3.87	0.62
Benefits: customer satisfaction	3.90	0.66
Benefits: continual improvement	3.86	0.50
Benefits: people development	4.00	0.64

The study was also conducted to determine if there are any significant differences between the challenges, strategies practiced and benefits between the 4-star and 5-star hotel ranking. The results of running an independent sample t-test because the different number of sample size among two type of hotels showed that no statistically significant mean differences existed in challenges [$-t(28) = 0.960$, $p > 0.05$] between 4-star hotels ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.35$)

and 5-star hotels ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.33$). The results of running an independent sample t-test also showed that no statistically significant mean differences existed in strategies [$t(28) = 1.023$, $p > 0.05$] between 4-star hotels ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.33$) and 5-star hotels ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.52$). The results of running an independent sample t-test also showed that no statistically significant mean differences existed in benefits [$t(28) = 0.180$, $p > .05$] between 4-star hotels ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.50$) and 5-star hotels ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.54$). The findings suggest both hotel rankings face similar challenges, take similar strategies and gain similar benefits. Besides, they also suggest due to the approximate closeness of the hotel ranking, therefore no significant differences were found.

The data was also tested for mean differences between the challenges, strategies practiced and benefits between Malaysian based and non-local based organizations. All results showed there are no significant differences in any of the measures between the two types of organization nationality; challenges [$t(28) = 1.459$, $p > 0.05$] between Malaysian based ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.29$) and non-local based ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.41$), strategies [$t(28) = 0.446$, $p > 0.05$] between Malaysian based ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.37$) and non-local based ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.56$) and benefits [$t(28) = 0.180$, $p > 0.05$] between Malaysian based ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.49$) and non-local based ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.57$). The findings further explain, regardless of the nationality of the organization, each of them finds similar characteristics. These perhaps imply that the nature of business is the determinant factor, and not the origin of the organization.

A correlation test was also run to determine if there is a significant relationship between strategies adopted and challenges encountered.

The result of running a Pearson test showed there was a significant relationship between strategies practiced and challenges faced, $r = 0.520$, $p < 0.05$. However, running a correlation test between the overall strategies and the overall benefits achieved did not show any significant relationship between the variables, $r = 0.275$, $p > 0.05$. Yet, a correlation test between the overall strategy and benefits in term of customer service improvement did provide a significant result, $r = 0.315$, $p < 0.05$. A further linear regression test was run between different strategies components and various benefits. The results indicate there is only one significant relationship existed, which is between the strategy adoption of the ICT investment and deployment, and the development of the people, $F(3, 26) = 3.682$, $p < 0.05$. The result suggests the ICT plays a substantial role in ensuring the organizational success by nurturing and improving the employee performance.

Conclusions

In summary, our findings suggest the most encountered challenge faced by the office managers in the hospitality organizations is the information and

communication technology advancement. Although the technology is the main issue, the most practiced strategies were not from the category of the ICT advancement. The office managers put a greater emphasize to managing change and better manage the human resource. This shows they place a greater value to the labor capital than to technologies. In addition, the ICT plays an imperative role to the success of the organizations in terms of people development.

Recommendation for Further Research

However, the findings may be used in caution as there were limited number of respondents (only 30 respondents) and limited scope of the territorial study. Therefore, we plan to extend the research into a wider area in order to get a higher number of respondents.

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