

ARTICLE REVIEW OF “WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A MANAGER: THE CASE OF MALAYSIAN FIVE STAR RESORT HOTELS” BY ROZILA AHMAD AND NOOR AZIMIN ZAINOL¹

Wan Nazriah Wan Nawawi
Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Terengganu
23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia
Tel: 017-9192243 E-mail: wanna035@tganu.uitm.edu.my

Gopala Krishnan Sekharan Nair
Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Terengganu
23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia
Tel: 012-9002602 E-mail: gopal792@tganu.uitm.edu.my

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Tourism is among the main contributor for the economic growth and its alignment with hotel industry has created many job opportunities to the local population. This has led to the continuous growth of public and private institutions offering hotel management courses to fill the workforce needs of these hotels. Despite the increasing number of hotel graduates, hotels are still facing worker shortages (Malaysian Association of Hotels, 2011b). The shortage of skilled workers in Malaysian hotels is caused by the unattractive work atmosphere of the industry. On the other hand it is caused by Malaysian workforce perception that it is difficult to get promotion and attain management positions in the hotel industry. Similar to the developed countries, Hotels in Malaysia are facing problems in attracting and retaining skilled and knowledgeable workers due to low salary, rigid job traits and conventional style of top-down operation (Ahmad, Solnet & Scott, 2010; Yamashita & Uenoyama, 2006; Davidson, Guilding & Timo, 2006). Numerous academic literatures in Malaysia have discussed on how the industry can retain their skilled employees. However, literature on how academicians can increase their students' employability for management position is scarce despite the indication of Malaysian workforce inferiority to attain management position.

The author seeks to investigate and highlight the knowledge, skills and abilities required by the local graduates to attain management positions in Malaysia. This article makes theoretical and practical contribution to the area. It increases the amount of academic literature concerning human resource issues in the Malaysian hotels. It investigates the practitioners' perception of what is required for management posts. By including non-management employees' perception, it provides comprehensive information of the requirements. This article will benefit the hotel industry in the long term. It hopes to contribute new knowledge which might assist in reducing skilled workers shortage and hotel graduates' unemployment; it hopes to coordinate industry demand with academic institutions supply.

The methodological approach used by the author is framed within qualitative research. Respondents were contacted through e-mails and phone calls to request for an interview. A personal interview method was used for data collection which was carried out in May and June 2008. The interviews were unstructured to give respondents the opportunity to provide more information. The interview started with informing respondents the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw from the research at any time to ensure they were comfortable. To ensure confidentiality, develop trust and encourage the respondents to provide full information, names were coded. M1 refers to the first managerial employee interviewed while NM2 refers to the second non-managerial employee interviewed.

Interviews were recorded on tape with the respondents' permission. Taping the interview allows the researcher to concentrate on the discussion and listen to the interview as often as needed. Repeatedly listening to a taped interview enables the researcher to capture the essence and meanings of words, which facilitates quality analysis of data.

The author found that having work experience is a necessity for graduates' to get managerial posts. Knowledge and leadership skills are developed through education and work experience. While management theories and basic technical skills can be taught by academic institutions, leadership skills such as analytical and conceptual thinking, relationship building, and self control requires experience in the field (Brownell, 2006). Furthermore, work experience enhances students' technical skill. Technical skill efficiency is important for the first level managers due to their proximity with the non-managerial employees (Daft, 1998). Therefore, a partnership with the industry through industrial training is crucial to develop students' leadership skill which is much needed in high-performing organizations (Brownell, 2006). Sending students for industrial training is a normal practice for hotel schools. However, it was perceived insufficient by the hotel managers. Therefore, it is beneficial to lengthen the industrial training period and to encourage students to do part-time work at hotels. Part-time employees are employed during peak season when there is too much tasks to be completed. Therefore, besides earning some money, students can gain experience and enhance the required skills.

Different from developed countries, education is perceived as secondary to work experience in Malaysian five-star hotels. However, the importance of education keeps increasing due to the increasing number of hotel management schools and hotel management graduates. The author's study reveals that currently even those without higher education could attain management positions in Multi National Corporation (MNC) five-star hotels. However, these managers have had many years of working experience and have gone through a number of supervisory and management trainings conducted by the hotels. Even the local independent and chain hotels provide continuous training to their employees (Ahmad et al., 2010). Due to the social and demographic changes, at present more educated individuals are required for management posts. Thus, only those with sufficient work experience and academic qualification could attain management positions while others have to start from entry-level position. To encourage hotels to recruit management candidates straight from the university like in the developed countries, local universities need to produce graduates who have sufficient work experience and are capable of handling management duties.

The author found that English proficiency is important for graduates for employment and career development in the hotel industry of Malaysia. English proficiency is indeed vital for graduates' employment and career development especially in the hotel industry is prevalent in Malaysia (Hanapiah, 2002). Due to its importance, Malaysian five-star resort hotels have been providing English language training to their employees (Ahmad et al., 2010). Academic institutions can produce graduates who are fluent in English by using the language as the medium of instruction. Other than that, it is beneficial to interview students during their admission process to assess their personal characteristics and English proficiency (Brownell, 2006). Selecting the right candidates for admission into the relevant faculties can make producing quality graduates easier for the academic institutions.

Interest in the field is another factor which figures in qualifying candidates for management posts. Unlike other professions such as architecture and engineering, it is difficult to find students whose ambition is to be a hotelier or hotel employees. Academic institutions play an important role in developing students' interest. Such interest can be developed by inviting successful guest speakers from the industry to share their experiences and provide information of their job and how much they earn. However, the interest built can be destroyed overnight if the students encounter negative experience such as workplace bullying during their industrial training or part-time employment in the industry (Patah, Abdullah, Naba, Zahari and Radzi, 2010). Therefore, practitioners have to ensure that their employees can be role models to the

students and not someone they want to avoid. On the other hand, students should be groomed to face the challenges at the workplace.

The author concludes that it is essential for the industry and the academic institutions to have a partnership and unity of effort to mitigate the issue of skilled employees' shortage. The academicians need to realize the importance of producing skilled workforce compatible with the industry's human capital needs and the industries' need to provide a more favorable workplace that graduates may perceive as an avenue to build their career. Increased unemployment of hotel management graduates coupled with increased dependency on foreign workers does not benefit the country, the industry nor the academic institutions. Parents will eventually stop sending their children for hotel management programs when they realize that it does not guarantee a good future for their children. To be in business, academic institutions need to produce quality graduates rather than merely a high number of helpless graduates.

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