RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS ON CAREER BARRIERS AND CAREER PROGRESSION: A CASE STUDY IN SELECTED HOTELS, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS ON CAREER BARRIERS AND CAREER PROGRESSION: A CASE STUDY IN SELECTED HOTELS, MALAYSIA

WONG KAI YUN

This study aims to examine the relationship between women's perception on career barriers and their career progression in hotels. With reference to the empirical studies, career barriers (long hours culture, mobility, and old boy network) that faced by women employees are selected to be the independent variables and perceived career progression as the dependent variables in this study. This study was a quantitative research that uses the questionnaire in the form of five Likert Scale to collect the data from the respondents. This study was conducted in 16 hotels in Kuching, Sibu, Perak, Pahang, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur; and the sample consists of 72 female management respondents. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17.0 namely descriptive statistic and inferential statistic were used to analyze the data collected from the respondents. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between women perceived career barriers (long hours culture, mobility, and old boy network) and their career progression in hotels. The results also showed that old boy network was the dominant factor that can predict female employee's career progression. Thus, the hypotheses in this study were accepted. Discussion of the research findings and recommendation for hotels, human resource practitioners, female employees and future researcher were presented.
ABSTRAK

HUBUNGAN ANTARA HALANGAN YANG DIHADAPI OLEH WANITA DAN PEMBANGGUNAN KERJAYA: KAJIAN KES KE ATAS TERTENTU HOTEL, MALAYSIA

WONG KAI YUN

1.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of ten sections. The first section discusses the background of the study. The second section discusses the problem statement. The research question of the study is discussed in the third section. Furthermore, the fourth section explains the research objectives which consist of the general and specific objectives. Then, the fifth section explains the conceptual framework of the study. The next section states the research hypotheses followed by definition of terms in the seventh section. Moreover, the eight section of this chapter discusses the significance of study and the ninth section discusses the limitation of study. Finally, the last section discusses the conclusion of this chapter.
1.1 Background of the Study

In the globalised era today, human resource is the most valuable asset and source of competitive advantage that determines any organization’s long-term success. Thus, the key for organization be succeed is to maximize its human potential. There is evidence showed that managerial and professional women are not moving up to top managerial position at the comparable rates as compared to their male counterparts (Mavin, 2000). Nevertheless, those women are better qualified, trained, and are being recruited by their company with almost same number as their male counterparts (Mavin, 2000). This situation highlighted the fact that organizations appear to be successful by recruiting capable women, but they seem have difficulty in developing and advancing the talented women into the top managerial position.

Is the hotel industry a place for high-flyer women to advance to the higher level? Malaysian women increasingly consist of a significant proportion of labor force in hotel sector. The following table shows that the hotel industry is the fourth largest employer of women in comparison to other industry sector in Malaysia (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2010). The participation of Malaysian women in hotel sector has showed clearly the upward trend from 9.0% in 2005, to 9.6% in 2007, and 9.9% in year 2009 (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Industry</th>
<th>Year 2005</th>
<th>Year 2006</th>
<th>Year 2007</th>
<th>Year 2008</th>
<th>Year 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>20.05%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although a significant numbers of women are employed in the hotel sector (refer to table 1), there is still argument that total number of women in managerial positions remained low. Due to the policy of at least 30% of women participation in decision making positions that introduced by the government on August 2004, participation of women in top management positions have showed significant increase from 18.8 % in 2004 to 22.8 % in year 2008. However, this positive advancement figure is only applied for women in the public sector but not private sector.

In addition to this, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jalil also stated that women occupying managerial and president or CEO jobs in the companies has showed gradually increase from 13.5 % in 2004 to 26.2 % in year 2008 (The Star, 2009). Despite all of these, Mohd (2010), the general director of Malaysia department of women’s development argued that the number of women employed in decision making positions in politics and private sector is still too low. Obviously, though there are currently more women involved in decision making positions, this is only reflected in the public sector but not private sector such as hotel sector. Moreover, Kattara (2005) also mentioned that, women are still under-represented in top managerial position despite of the substantiated numbers of women in the hospitality industry. These phenomena underline the fact there is requirement to examine the career barriers that preventing women from reaching managerial positions in hotel.

Swanson and Woitke (1997) defined career barriers as “events or condition, within the person or in his or her environment that make career progress difficult” (cited in Talib & Tan, 2009, p. 217). This is supported by Maimunah Ismail and Mariani Ibrahim (2007), where they defined barrier as a
‘factor, event or phenomenon that prevents or controls access to individuals from making progress’ (pp. 54). They suggested that the barrier that one faced can be in the form of both tangible (actual) or intangible (perceived). Moreover, they also mentioned that the present of barriers such as prejudices make the organization in today world more difficult in retaining their talented women workers. Thus, it is essential to identify types of barriers that the women encountered in their career. These allow the organization to be able to help their talented women workers to overcome the career barrier that facilitate their progression. These, in turn would help the organization in retaining the talented women by conveying the message that the organization value the contribution of the women employees.

1.2 Problem Statement

Traditionally, career is viewed as a vertical progression of an individual through a series of positions accompanied by increase in job responsibilities, status and rewards (McDonald, Brown & Bradley, 2004). Another traditional view of career is that it is an ordered sequence pattern of growth that spans over time and involves moving toward the more responsible roles within a profession (Jamali & Nejati, 2009). This definition highlighted the assumption that career is supposed to be linear upward movement from a relatively lower position to a more advanced position (Jamali & Nejati, 2009). In short, the traditional idea of career is associated with the image of ‘moving up a career ladder’ which is the central reason of why people work (Mavin, 2001). Thus, promotions and demotions that indicated the changes in employees’ status within a company are been recognized as two important events in most of the employees’ careers (Mavin, 2001). In fact, the traditional view of career has meant for people in the corporate world a series of progression or promotions toward a higher or better positions within an organization (Mavin, 2001). In recent research, career is defined more broadly as a lifelong process that associated with both objective and subjective aspects of employment-related activities (Hall, 2002 cited in O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).
Murtagh, Lopes and Lyons (2007) stated that most of the employees are required to deal with many of its potential career barriers. They believed that women and minority groups tend to face more constraints in their careers as compared to the men. In this study, they found that the not all potential events that experienced in one’s career can be interpreted as barriers. They stated that a barrier is interpreted as a barrier, only when the barrier/event prevents one from achieving oneself needs, wants, and values. For example, a participant in this study was very clear about her own values and aims where she expressed that redundancy is not a barrier in her career path but as an opportunity for her. Thus, not all potential events from one career can actually be interpreted as a barrier, even though ‘redundancy’ may be seem like a barrier in most people’s career that inhibit them from making progression.

There have been studies conducted regarding barriers to women progression in hotel industry. Early study done by Woods and Vichland (2000) discovered that only few of the women succeed from progressing to the top managerial positions in hotels due to positions that currently hold by majority of women managers are not in the right track that will lead them to the hotel general manager position in the future. Another study by Kattara (2005) in Egyptian also revealed that most of women managers in hotels are not in the situations that will help them progress to the position of hotel general manager. Moreover, this study result revealed several career barriers that prevent women from advancement in hotel sector.

Recently, Mooney and Ryan (2009) carried out a study in New Zealand and Australia to examine the barriers to career progression that faced by women in large hotels. This study discovered that women’s perception toward the hotel career barriers that they faced are different depending on where career stage that they are currently at in their career cycle. In addition to this, this study identified several career barriers that prevent women from advancing to the top level managerial positions in hotels. Additionally, there are two empirical studies has been conducted in Asian countries like Singapore and Hong Kong. One of the studies done by Li and Leung (2001), that aimed to study the profile of female
manager in Singapore and investigate the barriers that prevent them from moving up to the executive positions. Another study by Ng and Pine (2003) which aimed to investigate Hong Kong male and female hotel managers’ perception on the facilitators, barriers and gender issues on their career development; and examine whether these perceptions are different from the perception of their western counterparts.

From the above studies, it is obvious that many studies regarding barriers to women hotel career progression are undertaken mainly in western countries and Asian countries like Hong Kong and Singapore, but not in developing country like Malaysia. These shown that there is a paucity of research studies on the relationship between women’s perceptions on career barriers and their hotel career progression within the Malaysian context. Thus, it is vital for the researcher to further explore this issue.

In addition, most of the research studies on the barrier to women career progression were conducted mainly in accounting (Abidin, Penafort, Jusoff & Marzuki, 2008; Abidin, Rashid, Jusoff, 2009; and Jaffar, Abdullah, Seddek, Yatim & Husen, 2010), education (Lunn, 2007), banking (Aziz, 2001), and oil industry in Malaysia (Maimunah Ismail & Mariani Ibrahim, 2008). These indicated that there is paucity of empirical knowledge that emphasized on the barrier to women career progression in hotel industry in Malaysia. Since service sector (i.e. hotel industry) is the most important main driver of the growth of the Malaysian economy, which accounts for around 50% of the nation’s GDP (Awang, Ishak, Radzi & Taha, 2008). Thus, this motivates the researcher to conduct this study to explore the relationship between women’s perception on career barriers and effects on their career progression in the hotel sector in Malaysian context.
1.3 Research Questions

1) Is there any relationship between women’s perceptions on long hours culture and their career progression?

2) Is there any relationship between women’s perceptions on mobility and their career progression?

3) Is there any relationship between women’s perceptions on old boy network and their career progression?

4) What is the most dominant component of career barriers among the long hours culture, old boy network and mobility perceived by women in their career progression?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objective of this study is divided into two main types:

1.4.1 General Objective

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between women’s perceptions on career barriers and their career progression in hotel sector.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1) To examine the relationship between women’s perceptions on long hours culture and their career progression.
2) To examine the relationship between women’s perceptions on mobility and their career progression.

3) To examine the relationship between women’s perceptions on old boy network and their career progression.

4) To examine the dominant career barriers perceived by women that influences their career progression.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s perceptions on career barriers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Long hours culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mobility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Old boy network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career progression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of women’s perceptions on career barriers and their career progression.


Figure 1 above shows the conceptual framework of the study, which is developed based on the recent empirical study by Mooney and Ryan (2009) that was conducted in hotel industry. This conceptual framework consists of the independent and dependent variables of the study. As shown in Figure 1, the
independent variables include women’s perceptions on career barriers (long hours culture, mobility and old boy network). The dependent variable is the career progression of women.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

In studying the relationship between women’s perceptions on career barriers and their career progression in hotel sector, several hypotheses have to be tested:

H1: There is a significant relationship between women’s perceptions on long hours culture and their career progression.

Doherty (2004) stated that the requirement to work long hours plus the lack of flextime at senior level positions in hospitality industry is the stronger reason that explains women’s failure to progress to senior management positions. Thus, H1 is supported.

H2: There is a significant relationship between women’s perceptions on mobility and their career progression.

Mooney and Ryan (2009) stated that the employees’ ability to move is necessary to work in the hotel sector. The demands of ‘being able to move hotels’ has been reported by women employees as a barrier to advancing, especially for those women with family responsibility. Thus, H2 is supported.

H3: There is a significant relationship between women’s perceptions on old boy network and their career progression.

A study by Li and Leung (2001) revealed that Singapore female hotel managers perceive being excluded from accessing to old boy and similar network make them become more difficult to network with influential executive (usually
males). These lead Singapore female hotel managers to be more likely to miss promotional opportunity. Thus, H3 is supported.

H4: There is a dominant career barriers perceived by women that influences their career progression.

1.7 Definition of Term

1.7.1 Career barrier

According to Swanson & Woitke (1997), career barrier is defined as “events or condition, within the person or in his or her environment that make career progress difficult” (cited in Talib & Tan, 2009, p. 217).

This is supported by the study of Maimunah Ismail and Mariani Ibrahim (2007), where it defined barrier as a ‘factor, event or phenomenon that prevents or controls access to individuals from making progress’ (pp. 54).

In this study, career barrier refers to the work related obstacles that perceived by women such as long hours culture, mobility and old boy network, which inhibit them from making progression to the highest level positions.

1.7.2 Long Hours Culture

According to English Collins Dictionary (2003), long hours culture is defined as the expectations of the workers to work longer hours than they are paid to work.

Kodz et al. (1998) cited by Wise (2005) defined long hours culture as a culture that long working hours are valued by the company or as a signal of employee commitment to work.
In this study, long hours culture refers to the expectation of working longer hours in the hotel industry.

1.7.3 Mobility

According to Bauer and Bender (2002), the definition of mobility can be described based on inter-firm and intra-firm mobility. ‘Inter-firm mobility is defined as a change of an individual’s firm identifier. Intra-firm mobility is defined as a change in the skill classification of an individual that does not change the firm identifier’ (pp. 11-12).

According to Forster (1993), mobility means the employees can seek for any job promotional opportunities anywhere within the country.

In this study, mobility focuses on two of the aspects: geographical mobility (the need to move hotels for promotion), and stay within the company for social capital.

1.7.4 Old Boy Network

Oakley (2000) defined old boy network as ‘an informal male social system that stretches within and across organizations, and excludes less powerful males and all women from membership’ (pp. 328).

According to Bagchi-Sen, Rao, Upadhyaya and Chai (2010), old boy network is described as an ‘informal networks based on masculine activities isolate women and limit their opportunities’ (p. 26).

In this study, old boy network refers to the common attitude (shared background and history) that held by male managers which are unhelpful to women career progression; and the degree to which women employees felt that they are included in the informal network in the company.
1.7.5 Career Progression

Maimunah Ismail and Roziah Mohd (2006) defined career progression as a linear upward movement through a series of job positions in an organization that involved an increase in more job responsibilities and salary.

According to Maimunah Ismail and Arokiasamy (2007) career progression is the ‘processes that one undergoes toward changes in performance, job position, promotion, and a better relationship with management in any organization’ (p. 142).

In this study, career progression refers to the extent to which women felt that they have opportunities to advance to the highest level positions within the organization.

1.8 Significance of Study

1.8.1 Importance to Human Resource Practitioners

The result of this study is important to human resource manager to help them to add more insight into factors that inhibit their women employees' career progression. This, in turn would enhance their women employees' developmental opportunities. Moreover, Human resource manager can base on this study as a guideline to help them to identify and develop necessary plan as to help their talented women employees to overcome the barriers in career development. These allow the human resource manager to optimize the potential of their women employees that will help the organization to retain the talented women and thus enhance its competitiveness. Thus, this study result will greatly benefit human resource manager in term of management of human resource as the organization's most valued asset because the contribution of the women employees are valued and recognized.
1.8.2 Importance to Theory

Theoretically, this study is important to amend the balance of the study in women’s career progression in hotel sector as there are limited studies concerning on the relationship between women’s perceptions on career barriers and their career progression in hotel sector, especially between the components of women’s perceptions on career barriers and career progression. Moreover, this study also presents evidences for comparison and understanding into perceptions of women toward career barriers and their hotel career progression within the Malaysian context with the western context.

1.8.3 Importance to Research Methodology

This study use quantitative research design to examine the relationship between women’s perceptions on career barriers and their career progression in hotel sector. In this study, the questionnaires that used to collect the data were developed and modified based on the previous study in order to suit the purpose of the present study. In addition, the statistical methods (descriptive statistics, pearson product moment correlation, and multiple regression analysis) were used to analyze the research objectives in this study.

1.8.4 Importance to Future Researchers in the Hospitality Field

This study will also benefit the future researchers in the hospitality field. The researchers can based on this study to design their study framework by looking into in depth in each of the independent variables in the current study. Moreover, researchers can use this study as a guideline for them to develop necessary career strategies that can use by the employer to help women employees to minimize or overcome the barriers that they faced in their career development.
1.9 Limitation of the Study

There are several limitations that will occur which conducting this study.

Firstly, this study only focuses on three types of barriers that are faced by women in their career progression in hotel sector. However, there could be other important barriers which could also have the impact on women career progression or developmental opportunities, which were not considered in this study. Moreover, this study only focuses on the direct relationship of the barriers on women career progression without take into consideration mediators which might also have impact on women career progression.

Another limitation of this study is the researcher only uses the questionnaires to collect the data. But, researcher admits that the use of qualitative data through interview can help researcher to gain more additional data or information from the respondents. Combination the use of both quantitative and qualitative data in the study is significant to get more accurate findings. However, it is impossible to conduct both of the quantitative and qualitative studies at the same time.

Next, this study results might not be generalized to or served as guidelines for the hotels in developed countries. There are several reasons for this. It could be due to the differences in cultural values between developed and developing countries that might influence the perceptions of female management employees toward barriers that they faced in their career progression in hotel sector. Also, female management employees in hospitality industries of developed countries that had reached the maturity stage might perceive barriers and career progression issues differently than the female management employees in hospitality industries of developing countries. These serve as the direction for future researcher to investigate whether different stage of the industries and the cultures across countries have the moderating effects on the perceptions of the female