EMPOWERMENT OF FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES: A CASE STUDY OF THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN THE KLANG VALLEY

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree of qualification of this or any other university or institution of higher learning.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love to my beloved parents, Mr & Mrs N.R.K Pillai
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Title Page | ii |
| Declaration | iii |
| Acknowledgement | iv |
| Table of Contents | v |
| List of Tables | vii |
| List of Figures | viii |
| Abstract | ix |
| Abstrak | x |

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction  
1.1 Background of the study  
1.2 Statement of Problem  
1.3 Objectives  
1.4 Statement of Hypotheses  
1.5 Conceptual framework  
1.6 Significance of the study  
1.7 Definition of terms  
  1.7.1 Perception  
  1.7.2 Hospitality industry  
  1.7.3 Hotel industry  
  1.7.4 Five-star hotels  
  1.7.5 Employers  
  1.7.6 Top management  
  1.7.7 Middle managers  
  1.7.8 Supervisor  
  1.7.9 Front-Office Department  
  1.7.10 Food and Beverage department (F & B)  
  1.7.11 Front-line employees  
  1.7.12 KlangValley  
  1.7.13 Empowerment  
  1.7.14 Limitations of the study  

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction  
2.1 Definition of Empowerment  
2.2 Related theories of empowerment  
  2.2.1 Expectancy theory  
  2.2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs  
  2.2.3 Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory  
  2.2.4 McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y  
  2.2.5 Herzberg's Two-Factory Theory  
  2.2.6 Job Characteristics Model  
  2.2.7 Sociotechnical Systems (STS) Designs Theory  
2.3 Reasons for empowering employees  
2.4 Effects of empowerment  
2.5 Barriers to empowerment  
2.6 Factors which influence empowerment  
  2.6.1 Communication  
  2.6.2 Coaching
2.6.3 Participation
2.6.4 Training
2.6.5 Rewards
2.7 Related Studies
2.8 Specific Studies
2.9 Summary

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY
3.0 Introduction
3.1 Research Design
3.2 Population and Sample
3.3 Research Instrument
  3.3.1 Section A: Demographic Data
  3.3.2 Section B: Perception of front-line employees toward empowerment
  3.3.3 Section C: Factors that influence empowerment
3.4 Data Collection
3.5 Data Analysis
  3.5.1 Descriptive statistics
  3.5.2 Inferential statistics
  3.5.3 Independent samples t-test
  3.5.4 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)
  3.5.5 Pearson Correlation
3.6 Summary of Data Analysis Methods
3.7 Summary

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
4.0 Introduction
4.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents
4.2 Perception of front-line employees toward empowerment
4.3 Perception of front-line employees toward empowerment based on their selected socio-demographic characteristics
4.4 Relationship between empowerment and related factors
4.5 Summary

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
5.0 Introduction
5.1 Summary of the Study
5.2 Conclusion
5.3 Recommendations

Bibliography
Appendix A
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Table Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Summary of findings of other researchers</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Sample Size Required for the Study</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Total Number of Respondents Required According to Department</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Summary of Items in Questionnaire</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Number of Questionnaires Returned and Used</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Scores for Perception toward Empowerment</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>The Strength of Correlation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Summary of Statistical Methods Used</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Distribution of respondents by selected demographic Characteristics</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Perception of Front-line employees toward empowerment</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Results of t-test and Mean Values for Perception toward Empowerment based on Gender</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Results of One-way ANOVA and Mean values for Perception toward Empowerment based on Age</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Results of One-way ANOVA and Mean values for Perception toward empowerment based on Race</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Results of One-way ANOVA and Mean values for Perception toward Empowerment based on Academic Qualifications</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Results of One-way ANOVA and Mean values for Perception toward Empowerment based on Positions</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Results of One-way ANOVA and Mean values for Perception toward Empowerment based on Experience</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Results of the t-test and Mean values for Perception toward Empowerment based on Department</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Results of correlation analysis on Empowerment and related factors</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Summary of Hypothesis Testing on Perception of front-line employees toward Empowerment based on Selected Socio-Demographic Characteristics</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Summary of Hypothesis Testing on Relationship between Empowerment and Related factors</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Figure Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Conceptual framework showing the relationship between demographic characteristics and related factors which influence empowerment</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of this study was to determine the perception of front-line employees in five-star hotels toward empowerment and the factors that influence it. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to determine if there is any difference among front-line employees with varied socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, race, qualifications, position, working experience and department in terms of their perception toward empowerment. Another objective was to determine whether there is any significant relationship between empowerment and factors such as communication, coaching, training, participation and rewards. This study employed the survey research methodology. The respondents were 125 front-line employees from three 5-star hotels in the Klang valley. Stratified sampling was used to determine the minimum sample size required for the sample. The research instrument used was a questionnaire which was divided into three sections. The first part contained items pertaining to socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, race, position, years of service, department and academic qualifications. Items in the second part touched on the perception of front-line employees toward empowerment whereas the third part was concerned with the factors which influence empowerment. Statistical tests carried out were the one-way ANOVA and t-test. Pearson's Bivariate Correlation method was also used. The study found that the majority (92.8%) of front-line employees in the three hotels have a positive perception toward empowerment. The study also shows that there is no significant difference among front-line employees in terms of their perception toward empowerment based on their gender (t= 1.818, p=0.071), age (F= 0.477, p= 0.750), race (F=1.484, p=0.222), academic qualifications (F=1.245, p=0.296), position (F=0.266, p=0.767), years of service (F = 0.955, p=0.435), and department (t=-0.683, p=0.496). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient Analysis also revealed that there is a significant relationship between empowerment and factors such as communication (r = 0.475, p<0.01), coaching (r = 0.441, p<0.01), participation (r = 0.413, p<0.01), training (r = 0.453, p<0.01) and reward (r = 0.209, p<0.05). The findings of the study indicate that the contributions of front-line employees ought to be recognized and rewarded in order to benefit the organization and bring about customer satisfaction. Every effort must be made to enhance their skills and competence by providing them ongoing training, coaching and also allowing them to participate in making decisions which affect their jobs.
ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini ialah untuk menentukan persepsi pekerja-pekerja barisan hadapan di hotel terhadap pengupayaan dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhinya. Secara khusus, objektif kajian adalah untuk menentukan samada terdapat perbezaan di antara pekerja-pekerja barisan hadapan yang mempunyai ciri-ciri sosio-demografi yang berbeza (seperti jantina, umur, bangsa, pencapaian akademik, tempoh berkhidmat, jabatan dan jawatan) dari segi persepsi terhadap pengupayaan. Satu lagi objektif ialah untuk menentukan samada terdapat perhubungan yang signifikan dengan faktor-faktor seperti komunikasi, 'coaching', latihan, penglibatan dan ganjaran. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kajian survei. Responden terdiri daripada 125 orang pekerja barisan hadapan dari tiga buah hotel lima bintang yang terletak di Lembah Kelang. Kaedah persampelan rawak berlapis digunakan untuk menentukan saiz sampel minima yang diperlukan. Alat kajian yang digunakan ialah soal selidik yang dibahagikan kepada tiga bahagian. Bahagian pertama mengandungi item-item berkenaan ciri-ciri demografi seperti jantina, umur, bangsa, pencapaian akademik, tempoh berkhidmat, jabatan dan jawatan. Item-item dalam bahagian kedua pula berkenaan dengan persepsi pekerja-pekerja barisan hadapan terhadap pengupayaan manakala bahagian ketiga pula adalah berkenaan dengan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pengupayaan. Ujian statistik yang digunakan ialah ujian ANOVA dan Ujian t-sehala. Ujian Korelasi Pekali Pearson juga digunakan. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa kebanyakan (92.8%) pekerja barisan hadapan di ketiga buah hotel mempunyai persepsi yang positif terhadap pengupayaan. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara pekerja-pekerja barisan hadapan dari segi persepsi terhadap pengupayaan berdasarkan jantina (t=1.818, p=0.071), umur (F=0.477, p=0.750), bangsa (F=1.484, p=0.222), pencapaian akademik (F=1.245, p=0.296), tempoh berkhidmat (F=1.955, p=0.355), jawatan (F=1.265, p=0.767) dan jabatan (t=-0.683, p=0.496). Ujian Korelasi Pekali Pearson juga menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perhubungan yang signifikan antara pengupayaan dan faktor-faktor seperti komunikasi (r = 0.773, p<0.01), 'coaching' (r = 0.441, p<0.01), penglibatan (r = 0.413, p<0.01), latihan (r = 0.453, p<0.01) dan ganjaran (r = 0.209, p<0.05). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pekerja-pekerja barisan hadapan perlu diberi penghargaan dan ganjaran supaya dapat menguntungkan organisasi dan membawa kepada kepuasan pelanggan. Usaha mesti diambil untuk meningkatkan kemahiran dan kecekapan mereka dengan memberi latihan, 'coaching' dan memberi peluang kepada mereka untuk melibatkan diri dalam membuat keputusan yang mempengaruhi kerja mereka.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"It is immoral to misuse people, underuse them and abuse them but it is highly moral to call forth and make use of the talents that are in people. It is also certain that people will not use their gifts to the benefit of the organization unless they are treated as people with all the needs that people have"

St Thomas Aquinas

1.0 Introduction

This chapter lays out the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, statement of hypotheses and the conceptual framework. This is followed by the significance of the study, definition of terms used in the study and finally the limitations of the study.

The impact of global competition, developments in information technology, decline of faith in traditional autocratic management and new demands for quality and service has brought about a drive to increase employee participation, commitment and power in today's workplace as opposed to the traditional workplace. Empowering others is a vital element of the modern business environment whereby individuals and teams are given more authority and responsibility to make decisions and take actions pertaining to their jobs. According to Stewart (1994), "empowerment can increase people's sense of control by enabling them to make their own decisions about what they do and how they do it, to a much greater extent than under traditional management systems" (p.13).

Empowerment is connected historically with such initiatives as employee involvement, participative management, quality circles and a variety of team development initiatives (Kinlaw, 1995). Thorlakson and Murray (1996) state that attempts to give employees the power to control their own work environment have focused on job enlargement, job enrichment, management by objectives and quality circles. According to McBride and Clark (1996), an empowered workforce is an essential element of any Total Quality Management programme.

Smith (1996) points out that getting closer to the customer, improving service delivery, continuous innovation, increased productivity and gaining the competitive edge is not possible unless organizations find new ways to empower their people. Bowen and Lawler (1992) state that empowerment is particularly suitable as a management strategy where competitive advantage is sought in an unpredictable market environment through superior service quality and customisation. According to Horner (1995), managers can spot quality problems but only employees can prevent problems from happening. Thus, today's workplace needs employees who can make decisions, invent solutions to problems, take the initiative and who are accountable for results (Scott and Jaffe, 1991). Only highly skilled, empowered employees can be flexible enough to respond quickly to ever changing customer needs.

Covey (1994) is of the opinion that empowerment is necessary to tap into the creative resources of employees so that they can release their full potential to produce high quality work at lower costs. McBride and Clark (1996) state that empowerment is a modern style of management which gives team members and front-line employees greater control over decision making, problem solving, action planning and goal setting, thereby liberating creativity and innovation. Ang Seng Chai (1999) supports this view by stating that "empowerment frees employees from
the domination of an omnipresent and omniscient boss by providing them the impetus to think creatively and take calculated risks in problem solving and decision-making" (p. 109). Instead of employers telling employees what they should do and how, when, and where to do it, employees should be encouraged to think and make their own decisions. According to Scott and Jaffe (1991), empowerment is the building and enhancement of basic self-esteem in the workplace. Self-esteem is enhanced when people are allowed to exercise more judgement in their work and given the information, skills, tools and responsibility to do their work. In other words, empowerment relies on conditions of participation, innovation, access to information and accountability among employees.

Empowerment and delegation are sometimes referred to as the same thing. According to McBride and Clark (1996), delegation assumes that the person who delegates tasks keeps ultimate authority and responsibility for them. Empowerment, on the other hand, passes down authority and responsibility for tasks to subordinates, while the manager retains responsibility for overall strategy. Kinlaw (1995) views delegation largely as something that a more superior (more powerful) person allows a less powerful or inferior person to do. This involves a manager giving a subordinate a job to complete with various degrees of freedom and reporting responsibility. Sibson (1994) describes empowerment as the delegation of authority by the manager to each worker, mostly with respect to work practices and methods. Empowerment, therefore, may include delegation, but it should include a lot more.

Empowerment is a process that can only begin in a climate in which there are high expectations, where everyone feels respected and valued and where people will offer their best at all times. Examination of the literature shows that empowerment will not work in an organization that has a centralized or bureaucratic style of management. According to Blanchard, Carlos and Randolph (1996), empowerment has a sense of ownership at its core and it starts with the belief system of top management. For empowerment to succeed, change must occur throughout an organization-- involving commitment from top management, a long-term perspective, trust between people and between different levels of an organization and appropriate reward systems (McBride and Clark, 1996). DuBrin (1996) states that empowerment turns over considerable control to workers but a manager should not abdicate control. Empowerment needs more highly skilled and committed managers and the exercise of different management skills from traditional forms of management. These skills include enabling, facilitating, consulting, supporting and mentoring (Stewart, 1994). According to Smith (1996), empowerment cuts right through the traditional relationship between managers and their subordinates. Smith also states that to empower others, managers have to trust their people's abilities and commitment as well as believe that empowerment is both possible and beneficial. To commit themselves and to take on ownership of the organization's goals, employees also must be able to trust and respect their managers.

In the hospitality industry, interest in employee empowerment has been associated chiefly with interest in gaining competitive advantage through service quality. Increasing purchasing power, proliferation of competing suppliers, and advances in technology have made customers more sophisticated in their tastes and demanding in their requirements (Domingo, 1997). If a hotel wants to stand out and gain an edge over its competitors, it needs to provide excellent customer service. Research shows that an employee empowerment approach to service delivery has the potential to remedy problems such as poor customer service and inefficient operations (Bowen & Lawler, 1995).
A number of organizations in the hospitality industry have taken up the challenge of empowerment and implemented programmes with varying success. The Sheraton Sydney Airport Hotel and Ritz Carlton Hotel in Sydney have both implemented formal employee empowerment programmes and attribute the success of their operations in part to their implementation of an empowerment programme (Carter, 1997).

Most of the recent attention given to empowerment, however, has been in connection with front-line service employees who deal directly with the customers (Grönroos, 1992; Lashley, 1995). It is claimed that these employees must be given the discretion to act immediately and sensitively to satisfy unpredicted customer requirements and delight customers by giving extra or unexpected service. According to Lashley (1995), front-line service employees are in a unique position to contribute to problem resolution and to communicate trends in customer service needs and the impact of company policies on service delivery. By giving front-line employees the tools and authority to resolve problems on the spot, organizations can reduce the number of dissatisfied customers and significantly reduce the cost of handling complaints (Clutterbuck, 1994; McBride & Clark, 1996). This is because customers whose problems are solved quickly are generally satisfied with a smaller compensation than customers who have been further inconvenienced by having to wait for a management decision.

The empowered employee can help develop the organization, to influence its processes and strategies, just as the organization can help develop the employee and the managers. Mutual development is the key to meeting change. The empowered individual has information that the organization needs, just as the organization has information that the individual needs (Foy, 1994).

1.1 Background of the Study
Managers are sometimes not available to personally solve problems which require immediate solutions so organizations push down decision making responsibility to those close to the customers, that is the front-line employees. No one hears the complaints or sees indications of dissatisfaction more frequently than they do. According to Daft (1998), front-line workers often have a better understanding than do managers of how to improve a work process, satisfy a customer, or solve a production problem. Moreover, those who know the work the best are likely to have ideas for improving productivity that others would not have.

In some hotels in the West, such as, the Hampton Inn Hotel and Marriott Hotel, employees at every level of hotel operations are empowered to do whatever is necessary to deliver total customer satisfaction at any cost (Bowen & Lawler, 1995). They believe that people who are nearest to the problem are best able to judge its solution provided they follow guidelines within which to make their decisions and exercise discretion while delivering the service. Thus, empowered work environments enable employees to take care of customers, keep them coming back and maintain good customer relations.

Ideally, the front-line employee should be given the authority to make prompt decisions and respond to the ever changing needs of customers as less time is wasted in referring customer requests to line managers. What is of utmost importance to the customer is the attitude, efficiency, resourcefulness and flexibility of the front-line personnel whom they regard as the hotel's representatives (Domingo, 1997). Otherwise, they will vote with their feet and go elsewhere and also tell others about their dissatisfaction which can potentially damage the organization's reputation. In other words, if the customer does not win, the company loses.
In Malaysia, the hotel industry operates in a dynamic and competitive market and this is especially so in the Klang Valley. Since there are ample hotels to suit the budget and taste of various types of customers, providing excellent customer service is important to gain a competitive edge and in the hope of repeat business. The extent to which the employees are empowered might differ from hotel to hotel as each hotel has its own policies on empowerment. Empowerment cannot happen overnight and many things have to be taken into consideration before a hotel can implement a formal empowerment programme. This includes conducting training for both managers and employees as well as providing coaching to employees. Some of the front-line employees are still young and inexperienced so they need training and coaching to handle different types of customers and problems they face in the workplace.

In order for employees to be able to provide quality service, they must be given guidelines on what to do when they encounter problems with customers and have the support of the organization to break the rules when necessary. Managers and supervisors should constantly guide and monitor the exercise of authority by employees especially those who are new to the job and are still inexperienced. According to Salisbury (1994), employee empowerment will have the best chance of succeeding when the organization conducts a training programme to provide employees with skills to exercise additional responsibility and authority, encourages and rewards innovative behaviour, provides access to important information, and supports employee decision making even in risky situations. In an empowered workplace, employees can also count on each other rather than just working on their own.

With the participative style of management and being granted greater authority, employees will tend to feel more motivated and confident. It also gives employees a sense of personal power and control over their work. Recognizing and valuing employees decreases errors and turnover and increases productivity and quality. With both employees and customers being satisfied, this should lead to improved organizational performance. This could happen through repeat business and word-of-mouth recommendation, and secondly, improved employee morale, increased effort and lower turnover and absenteeism, as well as creativity and innovation (Pfeffer, 1995).

Empowerment demands an increase in the knowledge and learning capability of each individual employee. This means that employees need to be competent in recognizing problems, creating solutions and implementing these solutions. To be empowered, people need freedom and choices, the scope to take initiatives, to make decisions and to really believe that learning and development is highly valued by the organization. Thus, empowerment should support and promote learning from experiences and personal growth.

In Malaysia, studies on empowerment have mostly focused on the perception of teachers toward implementation of empowerment in schools (Nor Aiza bt. Zamzam Amin, 1997) as well as empowerment of teachers in schools (Nair, 1998). The researcher was not able to locate any studies on empowerment in the hotel industry in Malaysia.

1.2 Statement of Problem
As every organization goes about meeting challenges and making continual work improvements, they seek the support, involvement and commitment of their employees. Often resistance to empowerment can come from any level of the organization. Front-line employees may fear being empowered as they may be unable to handle their new roles. Furthermore, they may view it as an unwanted source of stress or as additional responsibility. There might also be a possibility that employees do not understand fully the concept of empowerment.
Most employers acknowledge customer service as a key component in their business' success formula, but few understand the importance of empowered employees in attaining their goals. They do not realize that they cannot have a successful organization without providing exceptional customer service and they cannot provide exceptional customer service without empowering their employees. According to Stewart (1994), the employees who deal with customers on a day-to-day basis and are closest to them however have the least say in how the organization operates. Most organizations are more concerned to restrict and control staff effort than to enable and support it.

Some managers have very little confidence in their front-line employees who have the most customer contact. They think that if they are paying someone a minimum wage, they could not possibly trust that person to make a decision without the customer taking advantage of him or her (Tschohl, 1998). According to Clutterbuck (1994), one of the biggest worries with empowering customer-facing staff is the fear by management that staff will be more accommodating than necessary or in other words, give away the shop.

Sometimes, empowerment involves employees making decisions which have direct financial implications for the company. To make empowered decisions means taking risks, but employees are concerned that they will be reprimanded or fired for making what management sees as a bad decision. Besides, employees are told that they are empowered and can deal with complaints as they see fit, but it is not made clear to them what authority they have to deal with complaints. In other words, they are given the responsibility to make decisions but not the responsibility. Kirkpatrick states that to tell people they have power and responsibility, and then not to empower them with responsibility dissolves morale, lowers their leadership, credibility and creates hostility and opposition (cited in Petrini, 1992). This view is supported by Riley (1996) who states that "phony empowerment is when the employee only has the 'power' to make a profuse 'apology' but cannot put the problem right" (p. 173).

Furthermore, there are employees who do not receive proper training on handling customer problems. They are also not given any recognition or reward for doing extra work. Some do not receive regular feedback about the performance of their job and are not coached by their supervisors or managers. The management too does not provide any guidelines on how much resources (such as budget) they have access to in order to satisfy the customer and in which situations they can bend and break the rules to take care of customer satisfaction.

According to Tschohl (1998), businesses operate under the myth that empowerment will diminish or eliminate the role of middle managers. They may be reluctant to share decision making, problem solving and other management activities with their subordinates. Byham (cited in Clutterbuck, 1994), states that empowerment is really hard for supervisors and managers because all their lives they have been trained to make decisions and solve problems for people. Many managers are concerned that to empower is to lose control and to invite chaos (Smith, 1996). They may fear losing their own jobs to subordinates who display increased capabilities or believe that to empower subordinates is to lose one's own power. According to Daft (1998), many managers mistakenly believe power is a zero-sum game, which means they must give up power in order for someone else to have more.

In traditional organizations, managers often censor and withhold information about costs, forecasts and plans of the organization, as they fear such information will reach their competitors outside the organization. Lack of trust and openness can lead people to believe that
the working environment is governed by politics rather than a desire to promote mutual support (McBride & Clark, 1996).

Therefore, this study intends to identify how employees perceive empowerment and whether factors such as training, coaching, participation, rewards and communication influence empowerment. The study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What is the perception of front-line employees in five-star hotels toward empowerment?
2. Do employees with varied background perceive empowerment differently?
3. Do factors such as communication, coaching, participation, training, and rewards influence empowerment?

1.3 Objectives
The primary objective of this study is to determine the perception of front-line employees toward empowerment and the factors that influence it. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

a) describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents;
b) determine the perception of front-line employees toward empowerment;
c) determine if there is any difference among front-line employees with varied socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, race, academic qualifications, years of service, position and department in terms of their perception toward empowerment; and
d) determine whether there is any significant relationship between empowerment and factors such as coaching, communication, participation, training and reward.

1.4 Statement of Hypotheses
The following hypotheses are formulated based on the objectives of the study.

1.4.1 To determine if there is any difference in the perception of front-line employees toward empowerment, the null hypotheses are:

a) There is no significant difference between male and female front-line employees in terms of their perception toward empowerment.
b) There is no significant difference among employees of varied age in terms of their perception toward empowerment.
c) There is no significant difference among employees of varied races in terms of their perception toward empowerment.
d) There is no significant difference among employees with varied academic qualifications in terms of their perception toward empowerment.
e) There is no significant difference among employees with varied years of service in terms of their perception toward empowerment.
f) There is no significant difference among employees occupying varied positions in terms of their perception toward empowerment.
g) There is no significant difference among employees in the Front Office department and Food and Beverage department in terms of their perception toward empowerment.

1.4.2 To determine the relationship between empowerment and factors such as communication, coaching, participation, reward and training, the null hypotheses are:

a) There is no significant relationship between communication and empowerment.
b) There is no significant relationship between coaching and empowerment.
c) There is no significant relationship between participation and empowerment.
d) There is no significant relationship between training and empowerment.
e) There is no significant relationship between reward and empowerment.

1.5 Conceptual framework
This study seeks to find out if empowerment is influenced by demographic characteristics specifically gender, age, race, academic qualifications, years of service, position and department. In this case, the dependent variable is empowerment while the independent variables are the demographic characteristics.

This study also seeks to find out if empowerment is influenced by factors such as communication, coaching, participation, training and reward. Thus, in this case empowerment is the dependent variable while communication, coaching, participation, training, and reward are the independent variables. The relationship between demographic characteristics and factors which influence empowerment is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

![Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework showing the relationship between demographic characteristics and related factors which influence empowerment](image)

1.6 Significance of the Study
This study will help to provide some insight into how front-line employees in the Front-Office department and Food and Beverage department of five-star hotels perceive empowerment in their workplace. The findings of the study would help the management of the hotels to identify whether their employees need to be given more authority and responsibility to handle problems in the workplace and also to provide better customer service. They would also be able to determine how their employees view communication, coaching, participation, training and reward in the workplace, and which areas need to be improved to make it a more empowered workplace. The findings could also serve as a guideline for the management of the hotels concerned to decide whether they should introduce a formal empowerment programme in future which covers all the employees in the hotel. The findings might also benefit other hotels which believe in continuous improvement.
It is also hoped that the findings of this study would contribute to the limited literature on empowerment in the hotel industry in Malaysia.

1.7 Definition of terms
The following terms are defined as they are used in the context of this study.

1.7.1 Perception
In this study, perception refers to the unique way in which each employee views, organizes and interprets things and situations that occur in his workplace. It is based on his thoughts, feelings, impressions, understanding and opinions. Employees differ in their personalities, needs, demographic characteristics and past experiences so they may view empowerment differently.

1.7.2 Hospitality industry
It refers to collection of businesses providing accommodation and/or food and beverages to people who are away from home for long or short periods of time. It includes not only famous hotels or restaurants but also a wide range of businesses, such as small guesthouses, snack bars and fast-food outlets.

1.7.3 Hotel industry
It refers to establishments which cater for the specific needs of people who spend their time away from home either for business or pleasure. They have as their core business the provision of food, drink, leisure, business facilities and accommodation.

1.7.4 Five-star hotels
It refers to the top-rated or most luxurious hotels which are given this rating by the Ministry of Tourism based on the wide selection of guest services and facilities they provide. Among their services are specialty restaurants, 24-hour room service, health club, cocktail lounges, business facilities, sauna, banqueting facilities and more.

1.7.5 Employers
Employers in this study refer to the top management (General manager) and managers in the departments where the front-line employees are employed.

1.7.6 Top management
They are responsible for the overall management of the organization and establish operating policies.

1.7.7 Middle Managers
They are the Front-Office and Food and Beverage managers who plan, organize and lead the activities of the supervisors and the other front-line employees. Besides, they co-ordinate the activities of their department and are accountable to the General Manager. These managers implement the policies of the hotel.

1.7.8 Supervisor
This is the individual who is usually in direct contact with his or her subordinates (the non-managerial front-line employees in this case) and is the link between the management and the employees at the lowest level. This individual is usually responsible for the day-to-day activities of the area in which he works and making sure the work gets done according to the plans provided by the managers.
1.7.9 Front-Office department
This department is usually the place where guests form the first impression of the hotel. The different types of guest transactions and services handled by the Front-Office department may comprise cashiering, mail and information, check-in and registration, reservations, uniformed service and baggage handling, handling guest accounts, check-out and bill settlement and room assignment.

1.7.10 Food and beverage department (F&B)
This department offers a variety of facilities to guests but concentrates mainly on the provision of food and drinks. These services may be provided by bars, lounges, coffee shops and specialty restaurants, and also by the banqueting and room-service departments.

1.7.11 Front-line employees
Front-line employees in this study refer to non-managerial employees (excluding supervisors) in the Front-Office and Food and Beverage Departments who have direct contact with external customers and provide service to them. They are the people who perform the everyday tasks within the operation and are usually instructed by supervisors or managers. In this study, front-line employees in the Front-Office include reservations clerks, guest service agents, telephone operators, doormen, bellboys and concierge. Waiters, waitresses and bartenders are employed in the Food and Beverage department. Captains are employed in both the Front-Office department and Food and Beverage department.

1.7.11.1 Reservations clerk
This individual takes the bookings, which may be made by telephone, fax, computer or mail and records all the relevant details of each booking.

1.7.11.2 Guest service agent
This individual prepares for the guests' arrival, greets the guests when they arrive, checks the guests into the hotel, assigns suitable rooms and checks the guests' method of payment.

1.7.11.3 Telephone operator
This individual processes all incoming and outgoing calls through the hotel switchboard. They will also place international calls and give wake-up calls as required by guests.

1.7.11.4 Doorman
This individual organizes baggage handling for both arriving and departing guests and opens car doors.

1.7.11.5 Bellboy
This individual is normally responsible for assisting in the transportation of a guest's luggage to the room and introducing the facilities of the room to the guest and demonstrating their usage.

1.7.11.6 Concierge
This individual provides information to guests concerning hotel services as well as tours, recreational facilities and other enquires guests may have.

1.7.11.7 Waiter/waitress
This individual greets customers, shows them to the table, takes orders and serves meals in restaurants or to guests in rooms.
1.7.11.8 Bartender
This individual serves drinks at the bar.

1.7.11.9 Captain
This individual is usually given more authority and is put in charge of a particular section in the department. He is also accountable to the supervisor and managers.

1.7.12 Klang Valley
This region comprises the state of Selangor and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur.

1.7.13 Empowerment
In this study, empowerment refers to a combination of perceived competence, sense of meaning, perceived control, goal internalization and self-determination. The individual employee believes he is competent to do his work, finds his work meaningful and has authority to make decisions at work. Besides, he also believes in the goals of the hotel and is able to use personal initiative in carrying out his work.

The employee is also involved in decision making and is given the necessary resources (access to information and material resources), training, on-the-job coaching and support by the management and other employees in his workplace. He is also rewarded either in economic or non-economic form for initiative, competence and innovation. By doing so, the employee will tend to feel more motivated and confident and it enhances his or her personal development. In short, the empowered front-line employee is motivated, informed, competent, committed and well-trained. It is also assumed that each employee has the ability to do the job and the will to do it as well as he or she knows how, in order to ensure total customer satisfaction.

Although the management grants authority and responsibility to the employees, managers and supervisors still practise accountability and monitor and guide the performance of their employees to ensure that departments and employees meet their goals.

1.7.13.1 Dimensions of empowerment
a) Perceived Control
The belief that an employee has control to influence decisions in his or her workplace.

b) Perceived Competence
The employee feels confident about his ability to do his work; he knows he has the skills necessary to perform the tasks and is doing good, quality work.

c) Meaning
Work is important and meaningful to the employee so he cares about what he is doing.

d) Goal Internalization
The employee believes and cherishes the goals of the organization and is ready to act on its behalf.

f) Self-Determination
The employee is able to use personal initiative in carrying out his work.
1.7.13.2 Factors which influence empowerment

a) Communication
The concept of communication in this study refers to the pattern of directions (i.e. upward, downward and lateral communication) in which information flows between top management, managers, supervisors and front-line employees at the lowest level. Employees are kept informed about the hotel's policies and programmes through newsletters, brochures, bulletin boards and policy statements. They are also clear about the organizational and department goals, the boundaries of authority and the resources available to complete the task. Information sharing can raise the level of trust in the organization.

b) Coaching
Coaching is a direct process by a manager or supervisor to help an employee use his existing knowledge and skills more effectively. This leads to improvements in an individual's job performance.

c) Participation
It is a sharing process in which employees are involved in contributing ideas and making decisions regarding their jobs. With participation, it is hoped that the employee's job satisfaction, self-esteem and motivation will increase and this will result in customer satisfaction.

b) Training
In this study, training refers to the hotel's efforts to help front-line employees learn job-related knowledge, skills and behaviour through on-the-job training or attending training outside the hotel. Front-line employees should receive ongoing customer service training to successfully relate to customers.

c) Reward
The mechanism which the top management and managers employ for defining behaviours, evaluating and recognizing good performance. It can be in the form of favourable performance appraisals, pay increases, bonuses, awards and praise.

1.8 Limitations of the study
As this study is conducted in three five-star hotels in the Klang Valley, the findings obtained can only be generalized to the front line employees in that region. It may not be a general conclusion that applies to other hotels of similar (5-star) or different status (4-star, 3-star, 2-star) in other parts of Malaysia.

Some hotels initially agreed verbally to participate in the study but refused after going through the questionnaire. This was despite the fact that they were given assurance that the identity of the hotels would not be revealed unless permission was given to do so. The top management of several hotels were also not willing to allow outsiders to conduct research in their hotels as some of them conduct their own internal survey. Some hotels could not accommodate the researcher as there were other students doing research in their organization. Another reason given was that the managers and front-line employees were extremely busy and could not spare the time to participate in the study. This was because their hotels were fully booked during certain local and international functions or events.
If the research were to be carried out over a longer period of time, formal, structured interviews could be conducted with the managers and employees to obtain in-depth information about the practice of empowerment in the hotels.

The Malaysia Association of Hotels as well as the hotels involved in the study could not provide any written literature on the topic of empowerment pertaining to the local hotel industry or their own hotels. It was also assumed that the respondents would express their true feelings and opinions while answering the questionnaire but there might have been cases where socially accepted answers were given.

Other variables such as teamwork, recruitment and selection were not included in the study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction
This chapter starts off with the different definitions of empowerment, related theories of empowerment, reasons for empowering employees, effects of empowerment, barriers to empowerment and factors which influence empowerment. The focus then shifts to related studies and specific studies on empowerment.

2.1 Definition of Empowerment
Reviews of the literature revealed that researchers differ in their definition of the concept of empowerment and that there is no universal definition of empowerment. Some look at it as control of one's own work, autonomy on the job, and an individual's ability and desire to be empowered. Others focus on the techniques that management uses to create an environment that facilitates employees opting for an empowered state.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined empowerment as a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness, and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information. Job design factors which they stated, led to a lowering of self-efficacy, are lack of role clarity, training and technical support, appropriate authority, necessary and appropriate resources, meaningful goals and tasks; unrealistic goals; limited contact with senior management and participation in programmes, meetings and decisions that have a direct impact on job performance.

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) referred to empowerment as increased intrinsic motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role, that is, meaning, competence (or self-efficacy), self-determination and impact. Organizational conditions which they felt led to powerlessness included major organizational changes, impersonal bureaucratic climates, competitive pressures, poor communication systems and highly centralized resources. Supervisory style and reward system factors included authoritarianism, negativism and lack of reason for actions for the former, arbitrary reward allocations, low incentive value and lack of innovation and competence-based rewards for the latter. Spreitzer (1995) also defined empowerment as increased motivation in the same four cognitions as Thomas and Velthouse. They are:

a) A sense of meaning: Work is important to the employees; they care about what they are doing.
b) A sense of competence: Employees feel confident about their ability to do the work; they know they can perform.
c) A sense of self-determination: Employees feel free to choose how to do the work; they are not "micromanaged."
d) A sense of impact: Employees feel that they have influence in their unit: people listen to their ideas.

According to Van Outdithoorn and Thomas (1993), feelings of empowerment will involve both the objective facts of what an individual is authorized to do and the subjective feelings of energy and ability -- "having a sense of power." Randolph (1995) states that empowerment is recognizing and releasing into the organization the power that people already have in their wealth of useful knowledge and internal motivation.
Bowen and Lawler (1992) include in their definition of empowerment the sharing of information about the organization’s performance, rewards based on the organization’s performance, knowledge that enables employees to understand and contribute to organizational performance and power to make decisions that influence organizational direction and sharing. Sharing of information with front-line employees is regarded as important so that the employees understand the context in which they work. Empowered employees also ought to be remunerated appropriately and these rewards should be based on individual and collective performance.

Berry (1995) states that empowerment is a state of mind. An employee with an empowered state of mind experiences feelings of 1) control over how the job shall be performed; 2) awareness of the context in which the work is performed; 3) accountability for personal work output; 4) shared responsibility for unit and organizational performance; and 5) equity in the rewards based on individual and collective performance.

Rothstein (quoted in Honold, 1997) described empowerment from the team concept as an act of building, developing and increasing power through cooperating, sharing and working together. Reynolds (1997) defined empowerment as giving employees the opportunity to manage themselves and make their own decisions.

Menon (in press) states that to understand the empowerment process, it is more efficacious to study empowerment from the perspective of the individual employee. Menon also defines empowerment at the individual level in terms of three psychological dimensions, namely, perceived control, perceived competence and goal internalization. Perceived control refers to beliefs about autonomy in the scheduling and performance of work, availability of resources and authority. Perceived competence denotes self-efficacy and confidence with regard to role demands -- the individual believes that he or she can successfully meet routine task demands as well as any non-routine challenges that might arise in the course of work. The third dimension, which is goal internalization, denotes that the individual believes and cherishes the goals of the organization and is ready to act on its behalf. Menon also describes the psychologically empowered state as a cognitive state characterized by a sense of perceived control, competence and goal internalization.

Others, however, define empowerment more in terms of transfer of decision-making power from one, usually more senior group (manager or trainer), to another. It also requires that the person is helped to take on the new power for themselves (Boer, 1991; Megginson, Joy-Matthews & Banfield, 1999).

2.2 Related theories of Empowerment

The following are some of the theories that are related to empowerment and are referred to in this study.

2.2.1 Expectancy theory

Conger and Kanungo (1988) as well as Thomas and Velthouse (1990) have tied empowerment to constructs from expectancy theories of motivation. This theory states that people will choose behaviours that they perceive will bring valued outcomes based on three factors. These factors are expectancies, valence and instrumentality. Expectancies are beliefs about the link between trying to perform a behaviour and actually doing it well. Instrumentality is a belief that performing a given behaviour is associated with a particular outcome, whereas valence refers to the satisfaction that a person expects to receive from that outcome.