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Role of Vocational Education on Managerial Career Development in Three to Five Star Hotels in Kenya

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Abstract

The research study sought to discover the role of vocational education on managerial career development with specific reference to three to five star hotels in Kenya in order to provide conceptual clarity on the educational issues affecting the hospitality industry.

A cross-sectional survey was conducted. Stratified random sampling was used to obtain a representative sample of hotels and purposive sampling was used to select managers. Data was collected using a semi structured questionnaire and based on five and two level Likert Scale. Data was analyzed through SPSS.

The regression analysis indicates that vocational education explains 52% of changes in managerial career development. 50.5% of the respondents had a Diploma as their highest level of education with 20% having a degree. The study recommends changes in Education Policy on Hospitality to ensure vocational educational curriculum conforms to industry needs, averting the education-industry gaps in the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Vocational Education; Career Development; Managers; Hotel.

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1. Introduction

The Kenya Hotel and Restaurant Act (1986) [1] and the World Tourism Organization [2] define a hotel as any establishment that offers accommodation only or accommodation and other services to five or more people at any given time for payment. In commercial circles, a hotel is explained as a 'city within a city' [3]. The success of hotels especially those that are classified as three to five star is dependent on the quality of services they offer. This is due to the fact that such hotels boast of selling an experience better than their competitors for people to get value for their money.

Continued development in Transport and communication has turned the world into a global village where hotels strive to provide their clients with services able to compete on the local and global scene [4]. This phenomenon is not different even in developing countries such as Kenya where hotels endeavor to offer products and services comparable anywhere in the world. To do this the hotel industry in Kenya has to equip their human resource with knowledge and skills that will enable them to compete not only locally but regionally and internationally. Managerial career development in the hotel industry enables Kenya as a country to develop core competencies important in achieving world class standards [5].

According to [6], one of the areas in career theory that is most widely researched in the developed economies of the 'West' is that relating to career development. Though three to five star hotels will continue to grow in Kenya, the nature of career development for managers is not well understood. Career development refers to the career outcomes for individuals, and encompasses important issues such as economies, job transition, upward mobility, withdrawal, compromise and stages [7]. There is need to carry out more research on emerging issues in developing economies such as Kenya. The study to determine the role of vocational education in the industry will bring out the key issues in career development of managers in the Kenyan hotel industry.

Kenya's Vision 2030 is anchored on three pillars [8]. These are: economic pillar - moving the economy up the value chain, the social pillar - investing in the people of Kenya and the political pillar - moving to the future as one nation. The economic pillar identifies six key sectors that will deliver a ten percent economic growth rate per annum. These include: tourism, value addition in agriculture, a better and more inclusive wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, financial services and the business process outsourcing/off shoring (BPO). According to vision 2030, Kenya aims to be one of the top ten long-haul tourist destinations in the world offering high-end, diverse and distinctive visitor experiences that few of her competitors can offer. One of the strategies that the Kenyan government intends to adopt in attaining the above is creating a competitive edge through quality service delivery in its establishments. Quality service will only be possible thorough effective managerial development.

The success of all functions performed in the hotel industry depends on how well they are managed. The continuity of three to five star hotels is dependent on the quality and level of the personnel who manage these services and the continuous increase of quality service. Competition of these hotels

world-wide increases the importance of customer satisfaction and consequently the importance of developing managers of these establishments. Though research has been done on the factors that contribute to managerial career development in these hotels, the significance of vocational education in managerial career development in the Kenyan context is not understood. Consequently, the significant issue in question is:

What is the effect of vocational education on development of managers in the Kenya hotel industry?

2. Literature review

In a study on qualifications, Harper, [9] sought to examine the role of formal qualifications in the career development of contemporary hotel general managers in Scotland. The authors argue that formal qualifications are one of the most important pillars of the career development processes of managers in the hotel industry. Key findings identified that vocational qualifications were an integral part of career development. Formal qualifications were considered particularly beneficial in developing those functional managerial skills required to succeed. The research studies looked broadly on the effect of qualifications to becoming a general manager in the hotel industry. Further, the parameters for qualification only factored in the highest level of education without bearing in mind; all courses undertaken, all levels of education, hotel training, area of training in hotel areas and period of training.

Although there is a wealth of research that has explored the career development of managers in the hospitality industry[10-14,4], more study on career development related specifically to variables such as vocational training and the relative significance, if any, of the area of training as well as period of training needs to be done.

Many universities and colleges offer programmes leading to qualifications in the management of hospitality [15,16]. As such, an increasing number of university graduates with specialized qualifications are seeking employment in an environment where they can make use of their newly developed business skills. As a consequence, they increasingly demand entry higher up the hotel management career ladder and are set to challenge the traditional "Bureaucratic Model" of career development. However, no studies have been conducted to specifically find out the role of such vocational training on managerial career development in Kenyan three to five star hotels.

It is not enough for Kenyan colleges and universities to venture into hospitality training. Often, like in the case studies, most developing economies have invested in mass education and production of graduates whose skills do not fully satisfy the market needs [5] Further research should, thus, focus on finding out the role of vocational education in development of managers in the hotel industry so that as a country Kenya can take stock of her training in vocational education and determine whether there are missing gaps between the education provided and industry needs.

The authors in [17] conducted a survey on career psychology in South Africa: *Moral perspectives on present and future directions* and found out that the quality of the relationship between industry and education will most certainly influence the professional development of the individual. The author in [18] argues that a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship will most certainly enhance the students' professional development opportunities. Unfortunately, this relationship is often characterized by a lack of trust, understanding and vision. Many times it seems that the industry has a completely different agenda compared to the institutions entrusted with delivering the educational experience. Theoretically, this is logical and expected since the industry has a profit orientation which contradicts the mission of most academic institutions. Nevertheless, it is important to restate the complementary nature of this relationship which is based on trust and mutual understanding and the inability of any side to survive without the existence of the other. Unfortunately, this relationship is often characterized by antagonistic behaviours, lack of recognition, appreciation, and respect for the other side [13].

In [19]; the authors in their study on exploring connections between teaching and research in hospitality management found out that there was a gap between hospitality training and industry needs. Although there was a good range of industry respondents in management positions, only three general managers responded. As many hospitality students expect to be a general manager in the future, the study would no doubt have benefited from their insights. Importantly, their perceptions of what they believe graduates need to accomplish in order to reach the position of general manager would have been of considerable value, so further research of a qualitative nature focusing on general manager's views is recommended. This study sought to find out the role of vocational training on development of managers in three to five star hotels in Kenya.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The study was conducted in Nairobi and Mombasa. The reason for choosing Nairobi is that it is the administrative capital of Kenya and hosts most administrative offices for both the public and private sector. Mombasa is the second largest city in Kenya whose main economic activity is tourism and related businesses. The two cities have the largest population of three to five star hotels in the country and also have the largest diversity of the target population.

The sample population was 108 comprising of general managers, assistant general managers and operational departmental heads from 36 three to five star hotels in Nairobi and Mombasa, which are approved by Hotels and Restaurants Authority within the Ministry of Tourism. The researcher adopted Cochran formula to come up with the sample size. Questionnaires were the main research instruments used. The data collected was analyzed in respect to study objectives using SPSS software.

4. Discussion of findings

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the researcher found it paramount to establish the level of education, hotel training, type of training and the period it has taken the staff from first appointment to the current one. The study findings are shown in the table below.

Table 1 Vocational Education

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	NUMBER	% (PERCENT)
Level of Education		
Certificate	26	24.8
Diploma	53	50.5
first degree	21	20.0
Other (specify)	5	4.8
Hotel Training		
Yes	101	96.2
No	4	3.8
Type of Training		
Housekeeping	20	19.8
front office	11	10.9
food and beverage service	16	15.8
food production	13	12.9
hotel management	39	38.6
Other	6	5.7
How long did you take from your first appointment to current position?		
0-2 yrs	16	15.2
3-4 yrs	14	13.3
5-6 yrs	23	21.9
7-8 yrs	15	14.3
Over 8 yrs	37	35.2

The analysis indicates that 53 (50.5%) of the respondents had a Diploma as their highest level of education and 21 (20%) had a degree. This is indicative of the fact that Kenya Utalii College solely

used to train personnel in the hotel industry until recently when universities introduced similar training in hotel related courses such as Bachelors in Hospitality Management and Tourism Management among other programs.

When asked the type of training they had undergone; 39 (38.6%) of the respondents cited hotel management, 20 (19.8%) housekeeping, 16 (15.8%) food and beverage service while 13 (12.9%) cited food production. This indicates that majority of the study respondents have been trained in one or more aspects in hotel management. These findings agree [12] who found out that many managers in five star hotels in Sub-Saharan Africa had adequate training in hospitality management. This affects the competency and efficiency of such graduates once they are posted out.

5. Managerial Career Development

The study also sought to analyze the career movement of the respondent managers for the past ten years. The career path is as shown below in the table. Scores for managerial career development were tabulated as follows. one move up the career ladder gained one point, two moves up gained two points, three moves up gained three point, four points up gained four points and five points up the career ladder gained five points,. On the contrary one move down the career ladder got negative one, two moves down gained negative two and so on till five moves down the career ladder gained negative five-point ladder.

Table 2 illustrates the number of respondents who held a particular job in the last five career moves, prior to their current position as hotel managers. From the findings it is clear that majority of the managers started from the bottom as interns or sales representatives and rose to their current positions as top managers. In fact 19 (18.07%) of the current managers who were interviewed were once sales representatives in the hotel industry.

In addition, 3(2.86%) of the managers were once interns in the hotel industry and that was their entry point.

Overall, it is vital to note that most top managers who were interviewed had moved jobs up the ladder (or down the ladder) at least 5 or more times before they became top managers. This may indicate that the top positions require dynamic and experienced people owing to the fact that the sector is mostly service oriented.

From the analysis of the table and figure above, it is interesting to note that there were more “external” than “internal” moves made between positions. The balance of “internal” and “external” moves was random. Overall, 71% of the external moves were 3 to 4 with 22% of the respondents having made more than 4 moves externally in their past five career moves. This implies that every time they moved, it was to a different employer. This is a high rate of changing jobs. This arguably supports [20] proposal that for the most successful managers it is strategically timed moves between companies that allow them to progress further and faster up the management career ladder.

Table 2 Managerial Career Development (Last Five Career Moves)

	Hotel General Manager	Assistant General Manager	Heads of Department	Operations Manager	Front Office Manager	Room Manager	Sales and Marketing Manager	HRM Manager	Sales Representative	Intern	Other (hotels)	Other (not hotels)
Current position	41 (39.0%)	34 (32.3%)	24 22.8%	6 (5.71%)								
Position 5	29 (27.6%)	40 (38.1%)	5 (4.8%)	11 (10.5%)	3 (2.86%)	0 0%	12 (11.4%)	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 (0.95%)	4 (3.81%)
Position 4	6 (5.71%)	13 (12.4%)	9 (8.6%)	6 (5.71%)	12 (11.4%)	35 (33.3%)	15	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	8 (7.62%)	7 (6.67%)
Position 3	7 (6.67%)	9 (8.6%)	12 (11.4%)	8 (7.62%)	23 (21.9%)	16 (15.2%)	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	19 (18.1%)	11 (10.5%)
Position 2	0 0%	15 (14.3%)	23 (21.9%)	0 0%	0 0%	32 (30.5%)	17 (16.2%)	0 0%	12 (11.4%)	0 0%	0 0%	6 (5.71%)
Position 1	00.0%	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.4%)	5 (6.02%)	9 (10.8%)	17 (20.5%)	9 (10.8%)	4 (4.8%)	7 (8.4%)	3 (3.61%)	8 (9.6%)	19 (22.9%)

NB: Current position is excluded from calculations; over the last 10 years

In the first position where the total no of managers was 83, it was evident that some of them 22 (20.9%) had not joined employment in the last ten years and majority were students.

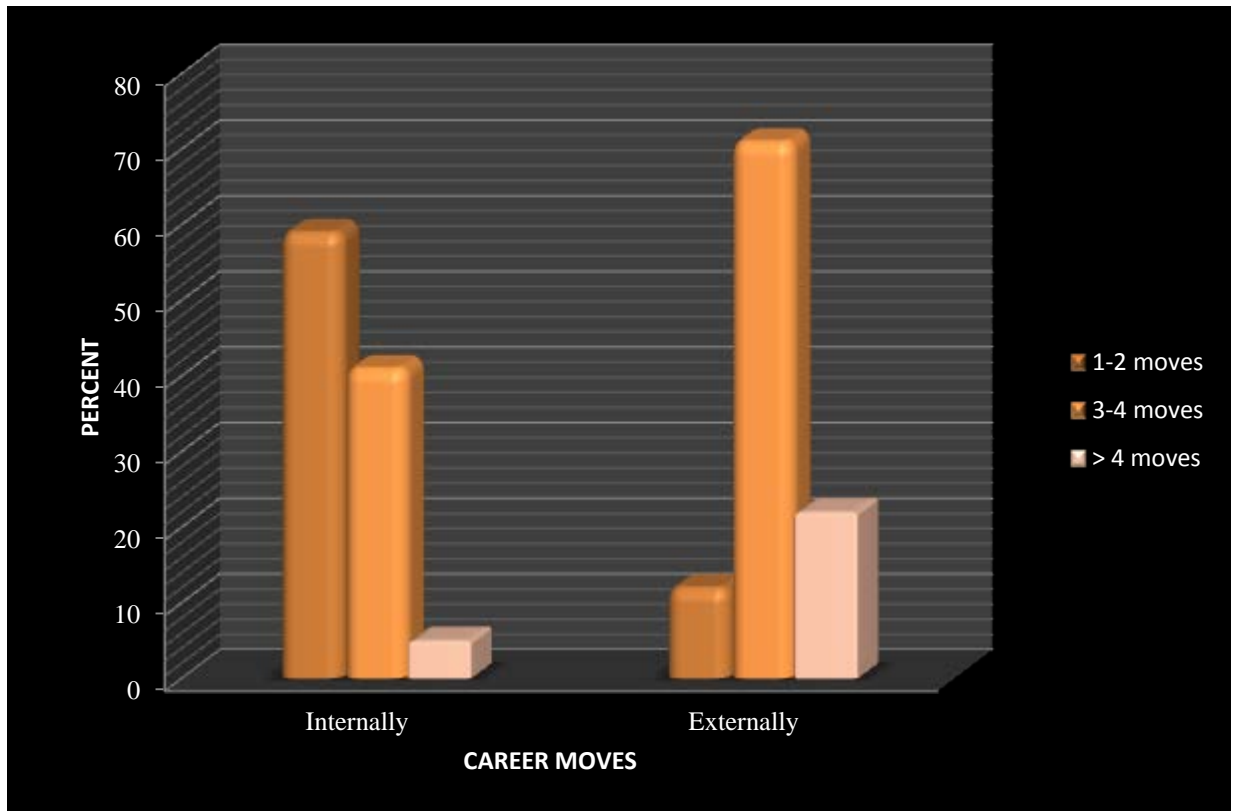


Figure 1 Career Moves Internally and Externally

6. Linear regression equation

Dependent Variable: Managerial career development index

The table above shows that the relationship takes the form of the linear regression model below.

$$\text{Managerial Career Development} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{vocational education} + e$$

Where, β_0 - Constant term

β_1 - Coefficients

e- Random error

$$\text{Managerial Career Development} = 2.258 + 0.520 * \text{vocational education} + \text{error term}$$

The regression analysis indicates that vocational education explains 52% of changes in managerial career development. This is explained by coefficient of 0.52. Vocational education is positively related to managerial career development and has the most statistically significant coefficient as indicated by a t-ratio of 2.938. This implies that a one unit change in vocational education will change the managerial career development by 0.52 units. This variable has significance of 98%. As such, this study proves that vocational education enhances managerial career development.

Table 3 Vocational education & managerial career development- Coefficients

Model	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R squared = 0.410	
	B	Std Error	Beta	T	p-value
(Constant)	2.258	0.830		2.938	0.021
Vocational education	0.520	1.570	0.972	0.106	0.000

7. Conclusion

In a nutshell, it was established that the majority of the staff had undergone professional training relevant to hotel management. Majority (39%) had specifically trained in hotel management, 20% in housekeeping, 16% in food and beverage services and a paltry 13% in food production. Indeed, the diversity of the hotel and tourism industry demands a sector-by-sector analysis as an integral part of tourism education provision.

8. Recommendation

From the findings, it is recommended that The Kenya Hotel and Restaurant Act [1] be reviewed so that these findings can inform the Education Policy on Hospitality. This will ensure that the curriculum is prepared in line with the study findings. A policy should also be drafted to be adopted by the hotel industry in managerial career development detailing the core components that leaders and managers should be guided by. This will make managerial career development a fulfilling progression with known expected output. The study found that managers in the hotel industry are eager to be educated, enriched, and empowered through further training. However, hotel

operators mainly stress pre-job and on-the- job training. It is recommended that hotels consider formal further training for and invest heavily in long-term management training of their managers. It is also recommended that more detailed documents that guide practices should be developed to match employees' exact needs.

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