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Determinants of female career competencies: The role of family-supportive supervisor and career mobility

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the determinants of female career competencies. Two constructs—family-supportive supervisor and career mobility are developed as the determinants, while career satisfaction is developed as the outcome. The relationship between each construct will be examined by structural equation modeling. The findings of this study will help hotel operators to practice strategic human resources management and encourage female hotel managers to improve their career competencies.

INTRODUCTION

Women working in the hospitality industry constitute a significant proportion of labor force, and most of them are working in lower and middle management positions. Despite the increasing number of women pursuing hospitality-related careers, only a few of them succeeded to reach top executive positions. For example, only three of 72 hotels in Hong Kong, and only two of 77 hotels in Singapore, had female general managers (Li & Leung, 2001; Pine, 1997). In China, the general manager position is also dominated by males although female are the dominant majority of many hotel programs. Despite the phenomenon of women’s failure in competing with their counterparts may exist outside the hospitality industry, the issue of women careers is of particular importance given the large number female workforce in the hospitality industry. Therefore, this study aims to examine the factors that are important for women career competencies.

Despite the numerous studies on women careers, rare study has been found exploring career competencies, and very few have addressed the factors that influence their career competencies. This study, therefore, will differentiate itself from previous studies by exploring the determinants and outcome of women career competencies. The specific objectives of the study include:

- To explore the effect of family-supportive supervisor on career competencies
- To explore the influence of career mobility on career competencies
- To examine the relationships between career competencies and career satisfaction
To test the relationship between family-support supervisor/ career mobility and career satisfaction
To test the mediating effect of career competencies

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family-supportive Supervisor

Work and family constitute the dominant life roles for most employees. Although researchers have discussed work-family conflict in both women and men, women are more likely to experience such conflict because they often assume greater responsibility for dependent care than do men (Hattery, 2001). It has been found that commitment to family responsibilities is a common barrier to women’s advancement to senior levels (Lyness & Kropf, 2005).

The supportive supervisor is one who emphasizes with the employee’s desire to seek balance between work and family responsibilities (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). The application of supportive supervisor represents the organization’s effort to support workers with family responsibilities—those who must provide for the daily care and the management of immediate, dependent, or blended family members. Organizational supportive activities help reduce the stress the workers experience from work-family conflicts, and also contribute to employees’ high productivity (Clifton & Shepard, 2004). A family friendly work environment has several positive effects on employees’ work and life. For example, Thomas & Ganster (1995) found that work-family support program, especially supportive supervisors, is positively related to employees’ job satisfaction and family matters. With the help of supportive supervisors, women workers may balance life and work, and concentrate to their career management.

In summary, work-family support ensures women career development and achievements. A supportive relationship with superiors and networks can be balanced to maximize career success (Ferris, Perrewe, Anthony, & Gilmore, 2000; Igbaria & Wormley, 1992). As a result of high quality family supportive management, women may perform higher career competencies and, ultimately, achieve higher career satisfaction. Based on the discussion mentioned above, it is predicted that:

H1: Family-supportive supervisor has a positive effect on career competencies
H2: Family-supportive supervisor has a positive effect on career satisfaction

Career Mobility

Career mobility is identified to consist of two different systems: one based on a contest-mobility norm and the other based on a sponsored-mobility norm (Turner, 1960). A system which follows the contest-mobility norm allows for a fair and open contest for each promotion decision, while under the sponsored-mobility norm, selected individuals receive high levels of support and guidance from superiors. The contest-mobility norm assumes that employees’ attainments are largely a function of how hard they work and the ability, education, and training they possess (Rosenbaum, 1984). This implies that the
contest-mobility norm is represented by the employee’s effort on the job and by human capitals (Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999). This study focuses on contest-mobility norm, and examines employees’ desire for mobility.

Career mobility is one of the most commonly used strategies in individuals’ career advancement (Akrivos, Ladkin, & Reklitis, 2007). Traditionally, careers were viewed as stable, upward, and based on linear progression in one or two firms (Driver, 1982; Schein, 1979). However, dynamic working environment and flatter organizations have changed this model to one where unpredictable, lateral and multidirectional development both within and across organizations (Hall, 2003). Hence, both the internal and external labour markets are the vehicles for mobility (Ladkin & Riley, 1996).

Findings of previous studies indicated that a high degree of international mobility was the dominant route of hotel general managers’ career development. Hotel managers involved in self-manage of careers and tended to look for career advance opportunities both within their existing companies and at other companies (Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000). According to Ladkin (2002), the career strategy which was used by nearly three quarters of hotel managers was “always being prepared to relocate”, followed closely by the agreement that they had to “move around to gain knowledge and experience”. Together, these theoretical predictions and empirical findings led to the study hypothesis:

H3: Career mobility has a positive effect on career competencies
H4: Career mobility has a positive effect on career satisfaction

Career Competencies

According to Arthur, Clama & Defillippi (1995), personal competencies reflect different forms of knowing, and intelligent careers reflect the application of these forms of knowing. Career competencies comprise three components, namely, ‘knowing why’, ‘knowing whom’ and ‘knowing how’. The application of career competencies is related to career satisfaction.

The ‘knowing-why’ competency is related to career motivation, personal meaning, and identification (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). People who know themselves well exhibit a very strong career identity. They are able to identify what kind of jobs they are interested in and clarify their career aims (Suutari & Makela, 2007). People with proactive personalities tend to identify opportunities and take action on them, and they do not yield to setbacks but bring about meaningful changes in their environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). In summary, proactive personality demonstrates significant positive correlations with career satisfaction (Chiaburu, Baker, & Pitariu, 2006; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). The trait of openness to experience broadly reflects the degree to which individuals are curious, imaginative, creative, reflective, independent, willing to accept changes, and accepting of diversity (McCrae & Costa, 1987; Mignonac, 2008). Individuals high on this trait tend to enhance job performance (Moss, McFarland, Ngu, & Kijowska, 2007) by means of challenging obsolete practices, proposing creative suggestions, introducing novel practices, and developing additional skills (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Given the reality of dynamic working conditions and individuals’ taking charge of their careers, it is expected that openness to experience contributes greatly to career satisfaction.
“Knowing whom” competency refers to career-related networks and contacts both inside and outside organizations (Arthur, Claman, & DeFillippi, 1995; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). The practice of mentoring brings together a person with valuable advice and important sources of learning for those who need the advice (Baruch, 2003). As individuals who involve themselves in a mentoring relationship shows great effectiveness in self-managing their own careers (Murphy & Ensher, 2001), we predict that mentoring relationships are positively related to individuals’ career satisfaction. Since both internal and external networking provides non-redundant sources of support (Raider & Burt, 1996), it is assumed that networking is important in predicting career satisfaction.

“Knowing how” competency consists of two dimensions: career/job-related skills and career identity. Career identity is the degree to which people immerse themselves in activities related to skill-enhancing and in professional activities (London, 1993; Noe, Noe, & Bachhuber, 1990). As such, people who have a strong career identity tend to seek regular training, acquire portable skills, and construct networks (Suutari & Makela, 2007). Furthermore, “knowing how” performance enhances self-confidence and occupational identity, and enables an individual to recast his/her career even if it had been in danger of faltering (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). Given the unstable employment situation and the need to constantly be on the lookout for ways to build new skills sets, it is predicted that ‘knowing how’ competency is important predictor of career satisfaction. In light of this, it is predicted that:

H6 Career competencies have positive effects on career satisfaction

**Career Satisfaction**

Career satisfaction is defined as the satisfaction individuals derive from intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of their careers, including pay, advancement, and developmental opportunities (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990). Consistent with the transfer of responsibility for career management from organizations to individuals (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Hall & Mirvis, 1995), career satisfaction has become increasingly important. For example, Parker & Arthur (2000) discussed the notion of the “intelligent subjective career”, suggesting that how one feels about one’s career accomplishments, is more important than external indicators like salary growth. A good understanding of employees’ career satisfaction may enable organizations to develop motivated and committed workforces (Judge et al., 1995).

**THE PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The present study will examine the determinants and outcome of female career competencies. In the conceptual framework, family-supportive supervisor and career mobility are conceptualized as exogenous variables, and are hypothesized to positively affect career competencies individually. They are also postulated to indirectly affect career satisfaction through their impacts on career competencies. Accordingly, career competencies and career satisfaction are hypothesized as endogenous variables in the framework. The construct of career competencies is also hypothesized to play a mediating role between family-supportive supervisor/ career mobility and career
satisfaction. On the one hand, career competencies are influenced by family-supportive supervisor and career mobility; on the other, career competencies exert their own effects on career satisfaction. A theoretical model can be drawn as follows.

**Fig. Conceptual Framework**

![Conceptual Framework Diagram]

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study will draw a picture of career competencies of female managers. About 700 questionnaires will be distributed through human resource managers of both international and China’s state-owned hotel. The respondents will be asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire which will be collected on the spot by the researchers to ensure confidentiality of the information provided. For practical reasons, a convenience sampling method will be used. Target samples are hotel managers in China who share the following characteristics, female managerial staff, in a managerial position, and with over 2-years working experience in four to five-star hotels in China.

Two ways will be conducted to collect final data. First of all, the researcher will approach some international and state-owned hotels in China. The human resources managers of selected hotels will then be contacted to assist with the distribution of the questionnaire. All questionnaires will be collected on spot by the researcher. Secondly, training courses offered by the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and various kinds of hotel conferences will also be accessed. Necessary survey will be conducted in the training class and conference sites to collect sufficient data.

Based on previous studies, such as Aryee, Chay, & Tan (1994), Judge et al.(1995), and Noe (1996), several control variables are included in the present study. Since age, gender, education, and pay may be associated with perceptions of career satisfaction, these variables will be controlled in all subsequent analyses. Likewise, career competencies may vary based on an individual job tenure (measured in years), and organizational family supportive activities may be different based on the size of the hotel.
(measured by the number of employees and star rate). Thus, these variables are also treated as control variables.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) will be used to examine statistically the specified relationships for this study. It is a powerful statistical tool that can examine the extent to which the model fits the data and the level of statistical significance of the hypothesised relationships. The essence of applying SEM is handling structural relationships, especially relationships between latent constructs or variables, by means of integrating two statistical methodological traditions: factor analysis and path analysis (Hox & Bechger, 1999). Factor analysis, especially confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) specifies the relationships of the observed indicators to their posited underlying factors, while path analysis specifies the causal relationships among the latent variables as posited by the underlying theories (Segars & Grover, 1993). By combining the two streams of statistical traditions together, SEM overcomes the methodological limitations of both factor analysis and path analysis. It is therefore a useful statistical tool for understanding interrelationships among several latent variables.

The present study involves the test of the relationships between latent constructs that cannot be directly observed and measured. These latent constructs—family-supportive supervisor, career mobility, career competencies, and career satisfaction, will then be measured by some observable variables or items. Following the principles of SEM, a total of 650 questionnaires is deemed appropriate for this study.

References


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