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Developing a career in the Malaysian hotel industry: A narrative analysis of the career experiences of local middle managers

by

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of
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ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	American Automobile Association
BHA	British Hotels Association
CDP	Chef De Partie
EM	Executive Manager
ETP	Economic Transformation Programme
F&B	Food and Beverage
FM	Former Middle Manager
FO	Front Office
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GM	General Manager
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HK	Housekeeping
HOD	Head of Department
HR	Human Resource
IER	Institute for Employment Research
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IR	Industrial Relation
ITM	Institut Teknologi MARA
KDU	Kolej Damansara Utama
KK	Kota Kinabalu
KL	Kuala Lumpur
MAH	Malaysia Association of Hotels
MEF	Malaysian Employers Federation
MM	Middle Manager
MOF	Ministry of Finance, Malaysia
MQA	Malaysian Qualification Agency
MQF	Malaysian Qualification Framework
PJ	Petaling Jaya
RQ	Research Question
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Education Certificate)
UiTM	Universiti Teknologi MARA
UK	United Kingdom
UNWTO	United Nation's World Tourism Organisation
VMY	Visit Malaysia Year
VP	Vice President

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DECLARATION

This PhD thesis is presented in accordance with the regulations set by the University of Warwick for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I declare that this thesis is my original research work. In addition, the inclusion of other authors' works in this thesis were cited and referenced appropriately. This work has been written by the author under the supervision of Professor Alan Brown and Dr Clare Lyonette. In the process of completing this thesis, parts of the research were presented and shared in the following academic platforms while the remaining are unpublished until the date of submission.

Conference Presentation:

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ABSTRACT

The career pathways and aspirations of the next generation of hotel managers have not been previously documented or studied thoroughly, primarily because the majority of available studies have focused on the success stories of current hotel general managers. Many career-related studies have highlighted the importance of career development, and the purpose of this study was to address this gap in the research in the hotel industry by exploring the career pathways of middle managers through the understanding of their educational and training background, career experiences, factors that contribute and opportunities available for them.

A qualitative study, using interviews and narrative analysis, was conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with 14 current hotel middle managers (the heads of hotel departments), 11 former middle managers and three hotel general managers. Participants were contacted via the professional social media platform, LinkedIn. Using Career Construction Theory (Savickas (2005) and its three components of vocational personality, life theme and career adaptability as the meta-theory, this research examined the career experiences of participants to understand middle managers' career pathways and aspirations from their own career stories or narratives. Each interview was recorded and transcribed and the responses were then coded by using the Atlas.ti™ software.

The findings were used to discuss and address the research questions set for this research. The results were also linked to the managers' career development opportunity structures, which may have influenced their decision to stay, progress or leave the industry.

Several contributions were highlighted which include the importance of education and training, the personal narratives of each manager on their work experiences, the varied extent of the available opportunities, and the

skills development of the middle managers in this research. Overall, it can be concluded that the middle managers' career aspirations were individually constructed, contextualised by the opportunities available to them, continuous learning experiences, skills development, changes in their life stages, support that they received and the extent to which they were successful in adapting the challenges involved in their career transitions.

Keywords: Career development, hotel middle managers, career experiences, narrative analysis

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Research

The hotel industry is known as an employee-driven industry, in which employees play a key role in delivering products and services to their guests (Babakus, Yavas, & Karatepe, 2008). Employees are the core element in the industry, thus, they represent the mission and vision of the organisation. In order to develop their careers, employees seek to develop their knowledge, vocational skills and soft skills through training and exposure to challenging experiences throughout their career.

Whilst there are existing studies on issues of hotel employees' career development and early careers, the career development of middle managers has not been examined thoroughly (Ahmad & Zainol, 2011; Akrivos, Ladkin, & Reklitis, 2007). What motivates hotel middle managers to decide on their career path is not fully documented (Wang & Tsai, 2012; Wood, 2006). This is because most career-related studies for hotel middle managers focus on the high job turnover rate of hotel employees and other occupational issues (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010; Buick & Thomas, 2001; Burke, Koyuncu, & Fiksenbaum, 2008), and less focus is given to their motivations and decision-making processes. In addition, research on career development has largely focused on opportunities for new employees or for hotel managers who are already at the top of the career ladder (Brownell, 1994b; Carbery, Garavan, O'Brien, & McDonnell, 2003a; Cheung, Law, & He, 2010).

Past research has shown several trends in the direction of career development and career pathways in the hotel industry and in general, including the impact of motivation, career orientation and aspirations (see Babakus et al., 2008; Biemann, Zacher, & Feldman, 2012; Cochran, 1983; Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004). These studies identify the need to understand how managers respond to career opportunities at certain points in their career, with regard to their career aspirations, work experiences and education level (Choi & Kim, 2013; Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008; Ladkin, 2002).

Career development in the hotel industry is very demanding because hotels' operations are constantly evolving, and new innovative operation styles emerge quickly. For example, individual hotel operations require managers to anticipate their potential clientele groups (independent travellers, groups and conventions), seasons, demand and sales fluctuations, and operational costs (including food and turnover costs) on a daily basis, therefore requiring managers with exceptional knowledge and experience (Blayney & Blotnick, 2010). It is important to recognise that middle managers learn through their everyday experiences of dealing with customers (Wang & Tsai, 2012).

Different cohorts of hotel middle managers in Malaysia have followed varied vocational training pathways or have progressed without any formal education. The differences in initial skills formation have resulted in two

distinct groups of middle managers, one with sector-specific initial education and training and experience (the newer generation), and one with experience only (the older generation). On the global stage, the nature of employment in the hotel industry is also split, with some following organisational careers, while others follow boundaryless careers where they move across the boundaries of separate employers (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Yamashita & Uenoyama, 2006).

Despite the perceived glamour of being in the *front of the house*, many hotel middle managers are searching for the right opportunity to advance (Harper, Brown, & Irvine, 2005), be it in the present organisation, a different hotel or another service organisation altogether. Evidence has emerged that hotels are experiencing problems retaining the newer generation of middle managers (Carbery et al., 2003a; Chen, Friedman, & Simons, 2014; Cho, 2002). Middle managers in Malaysia face the varied challenges of being a role model to new employees, while often continuing to work for an expatriate manager or general manager (Brien, Ratna, & Boddington, 2012; Brown, 2008; Deery & Jago, 2001), even though in the current hotel business environment they are qualified to take on this role themselves.

As described by Baum (2012), hotel employee and middle manager shortages are caused by the 'mobile global community' which corresponds with the worldwide mobility trend in hotels, including in developing countries such as Malaysia (p.5). High turnover among hotel management and

operational employees across the globe has been shown to be influenced by a search for job satisfaction, the organizational culture, experience of burn out, job competency and the leadership styles of managers (Boonyachai, 2011; Buick & Thomas, 2001; Burgess, 2013; Malan, Cobanoglu, Waldo, & Yang, 2014).

In the effort to reduce and subsequently eliminate major shortages of qualified staff in the hotel industry and the service industry in general, the Malaysian government has implemented a series of new programmes. For example, the government launched the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) in 2010, aiming to reduce or eliminate inequalities in employment opportunities across race, gender, age, and skill levels of Malaysians. It also aims to increase career advancement opportunities in developing human capital, especially in the service sector which includes the hotel industry. Part of the ETP programme was to enhance the development of local talent through initiatives created within the programme called Strategic Reform Initiatives (SRI). Malaysia's services sector is heavily dependent on skilled workers, who currently represent 35% of the business services workforce. The SRI therefore recommended an increase in the pool of skilled labour to 46% of Malaysia's workforce by 2020 in order to support skills demand from the services sector (Prime Minister's Department Malaysia, 2012). In order to excel, hotel employees should first be equipped with sufficient knowledge, skills and experiences. The existing hotel higher and vocational education structure demonstrates that this is achievable. The

social and cultural differences among the three main ethnic groups of people in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) provide a unique case for this research. The multi-racial hotel employees highlight the Malaysian culture and upbringing, including the influence of family in their life and career. Work-family related issues in the hotel industry have been explored by researchers from different parts of the world (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008; Mulvaney, O'Neill, Cleveland, & Crouter, 2007; Punyasiri, 2006; Qu & O'Neill, 2010).

This study explores the career development of hotel middle managers based on their narratives of their work experience, education and training and the opportunity structures through which they hope to move for future career advancement in the Malaysian hotel industry. The central focus of the study is upon the changes and differences in middle managers' career aspirations, motivations and factors surrounding their decisions to work in the industry, leave or change status after a period of time (at least five years working in the industry as a middle manager). The knowledge and experiences of middle managers are examined for their influence on career decisions and their future pathways.

This study also examines the perspectives of hotel general managers and former hotel middle managers. The hotel general managers were included because they have different perspectives on middle managers' potential and opportunity structures. As for the former middle managers, their inclusion highlights the challenges and barriers faced as a middle manager and how

these may contribute to decisions to leave the industry. The additional empirical data collected from these two groups of participants therefore provides a broader understanding of the whole scenario related to career development, opportunities and barriers than data which relies solely on the perspectives and narratives of current middle managers.

The world of work is changing as are people's perceptions of their careers, so people need to construct their own meaning of working, as they seek to navigate increasingly complex and challenging paths across their career. Career construction theory has served as a useful meta-theoretical perspective for explaining dynamics in vocational behaviour across the life course (Savickas, 1996, 2002, 2013). This thesis has been informed by the intention to understand the dynamics of the vocational behaviour of middle managers working in the hotel industry in Malaysia. The investigation of the key influences on their career dynamics were framed by the following research questions:

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of the study are linked to middle managers' perceptions of:

1. How did different patterns of education, training and learning influence local middle managers' career aspirations?
2. How did different patterns of work experience affect local middle managers' career development?

3. Which additional factors influenced local middle managers' career development?
4. How do local middle managers perceive the career opportunities open to them in the Malaysian hotel industry?

Research question 1 (RQ1) sets out to understand how the recent hotel education and training systems in the country, the middle managers' educational background and their continuous learning might influence their career aspirations. By examining the hotel education and training systems in Malaysia, it will provide a clear view on the educational pathways for hotel graduates and how current middle managers set out on their initial career. It also examines the managers' use of knowledge and skills in their work and in their career development. The acquisition of knowledge through formal education and training can provide a strong foundation for the middle managers to embark on their hotel career and facilitate their career progress.

Research question 2 (RQ2) explores the middle managers' career experiences which includes their initial career formation, their career pathways and progression up to their current career. This was to understand the reasons why the middle managers move from one job to another and how these moves might influence their career development in the long run. It includes mobility within the same hotel chains or different brands, the location of new hotels (either local or international hotels abroad), and duration for

each job posting. Individualised pathways of hotel career progression based on various factors will be analysed in the later chapters.

Research question 3 (RQ3) examines the occupational factors and other factors that influence career development. This includes factors that have significant impact on their initial career formation, the work environment that motivated their mobility within the industry, and the challenges of working in the hotel industry. In addition, support from their employers, family members and co-workers may have contributed to their career progress.

Research question 4 (RQ4) sets out to understand how middle managers perceive the opportunity structures within which they seek to develop their careers. It involves identifying the available career development opportunities provided by employers or the hotel chain, the role of employers in providing the avenues for middle managers to enhance their career, and the emerging trends in hotels that have contributed to their career development. Empirical data provided by the hotel general managers (Chapter 5) offers a clear understanding of the opportunities from the employers' point of view. The emerging themes may be internal and external changes and approaches that can either serve as catalysts or barriers for their career advancement. This research question explores how middle managers view the opportunities available to them and how they plan to use them to their advantage. Again, the role of career challenges and barriers might restrict middle managers' intention to progress. To further address this question, empirical data

provided by the former middle managers (Chapter 8) was useful in getting an alternative perspective on the challenges and barriers faced by middle managers in relation to career advancement. Former middle managers have already experienced these challenges and barriers which may have contributed to their decision to leave the hotel industry.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Outcomes from this study will provide a coherent understanding of the career development of hotel middle managers within the Malaysian hotel industry. Having explored their career experiences, aspirations, and educational background, this study will also provide information from former hotel general managers on the requirements of middle managers for their future career development programmes and initiatives to promote their career development. The research described here aims to extend and contribute to the study of career development, particularly within the hotel industry, and to provide rich evidence for future related research.

For hospitality industry academics and vocational higher education institutions (HEIs), this study will assist in developing hotel management programmes with an emphasis on sustaining local talent and human capital development, as envisaged by the Malaysian government through the establishment of the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) in 2010 (Prime Minister's Department Malaysia, 2011). One of the main objectives of this programme was to develop human capital within the service industries

(including the hotel industry) in order to enhance the skilled workforce in the country.

1.4 Notes on Terminology

1.4.1 Career development

The term career development is commonly referred to as ‘for most people a lifelong process of getting ready to choose, choosing, and typically continuing to make choices from among the many occupations available in our society’ (Brown & Brooks, 1990: xvii). Although the concept of career development surfaced from the earlier work on occupational choice by Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, and Herma (1951), many other researchers have realigned its focus to other paradigms and roles in life, as thoroughly described and reviewed by Patton and McMahon (2006). Research on career related topics vary in their focus from career planning and career direction, to career building, which work towards the same goal of providing insight upon processes of changing one’s working life. These differences ‘encompass the individual, the environment, interaction and change, as representing the key elements of a definition of career development’ (Patton & McMahon, 2006: 7).

Career development in relation to this study focuses on the narratives of middle managers and their aspirations for career success, how they seek career advancement opportunities and their career development plans.

Career development for hotel middle managers is still relatively uncharted, although it is diverse (Ladkin & Riley, 1996; Riley, 1990), often boundaryless

(Yamashita & Uenoyama, 2006), and unique yet multi-faceted (Mura, 2015). Middle managers may still need to be committed to their jobs because they believe that the ideal career advancement opportunity is out there waiting for them (Walsh & Taylor, 2007).

1.4.2 Hotel middle manager

The term hotel middle manager raises several questions, particularly for those who are not familiar with the hotel industry and its operation. In relation to job position, researchers used the term middle manager to refer to a lower management position than the senior manager or hotel general manager (Klagge, 1998; Ponton, 2010; Wood, 2006), such as frontline managers or department heads (Buick & Thomas, 2001; Kara, 2012). However, middle managers can also be compared to those in other industries based on their work environment and specific working conditions, for example, they experience longer working hours with lower remuneration (Kuruuzum, Anafarta, & Irmak, 2008).

The reason for using the term middle manager throughout this study is that it is widely recognised and accepted in the hotel organisational structure in reference to, for example, the manager of one department (Housekeeping, Front Office or Food & Beverage department) or a combination of a few small units/departments (for example, a Room Division Manager who is responsible for Front Office, Concierge and Room Revenue departments).

1.5 Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 introduces the global hotel industry, the Malaysian hotel industry, the hotel education system and structure, and the hotel labour market. First, it refers to the current context of the global hotel industry including its classifications, sizes, number of hotels, number of rooms, and major brands in the world. Secondly, it introduces the Malaysian hotel industry and its contribution to the country's economic growth, as well as government initiatives to boost the hospitality industry further by creating campaigns and events to promote the country. Thirdly, this chapter also describes the higher education system and structures in Malaysia and how hotel programmes were established within higher education institutions (HEIs). Lastly, based on the data provided by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the hotel labour market reviews are added to justify the impact on the industry in terms of its size, contribution to the nation's economy, human resource supply, and opportunities.

Chapter 3 explains the social theories and approaches relating to career and career development. This chapter then examines the relevant perspectives of career development that underpin this study. Various approaches are introduced and considered, particularly the one that most closely matches the understanding of hotel middle managers' career development in Malaysia. Existing research on the career pathways of hotel employees are then described, which discuss the need for career development, and link them

with available opportunities at organisational and individual level, consequently highlighting the gap in this research field.

Chapter 4 outlines and explains the research design and methodological approach of the study, which include the interpretivist approach and qualitative research methods. The reviews of social career theories outlined earlier provide the basis for the research paradigm. Next, the choices of research design and data collection methods were reviewed and considered for use, with particular attention on meeting the needs and aims of the current study.

Chapters 5 presents the empirical data gathered from hotel general managers, focusing on their perceptions and opinions of middle managers' career development, expatriate managers and local managers, career development programmes, and significant changes within the hotel industry relating to the current study. The general managers' points of view are important in understanding the career pathways and advancement opportunities for hotel middle managers.

Chapters 6 and 7 present the findings from the interviews with middle managers. Chapter 6 discusses the career paths of the middle managers which include initial career formation, job roles and responsibilities, and work experiences. Similarities and differences in the patterns of work, education cohorts and tenure of employment are analysed to enhance understanding of

the choices made and how these will influence future decision-making.

Chapter 7 analyses the career aspirations of middle managers which include the importance of career planning, and career opportunity structures available for the middle managers.

Chapter 8, on the other hand, provides insights from former middle managers on their career construction and decision-making. Their perspectives on previous work experiences, opportunity structures for middle managers in the hotel industry, their career decision to leave the hotel industry and how they have managed to adapt to their new careers were addressed, providing a more coherent understanding of existing middle managers' career development.

Chapter 9 and 10 provide a discussion on the findings of the research, addressing the research questions, synthesising the findings and their relation to current literature, drawing conclusions and implications, limitations and recommendations for future research based on the output of this study. Personal reflection and concluding remarks summarise the purpose of this research and consider more questions and further opportunities to enrich this field of study.

CHAPTER 2: THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

2.1 Introduction

This research focuses on middle or line managers in the hotel industry in Malaysia. It is important to understand the nature of the industry and its operation and development. Therefore, this chapter reviews the global hotel industry, the industry in Malaysia, the hotel education system and its labour market in order to provide a basic underpinning to the whole field of study.

2.2 Overview of the hotel industry

People often conceive of the hotel industry in terms of accommodation and restaurant facilities, but in reality, it goes far beyond that. The word "hotel" arose in the 18th century¹. Hospitality was first offered by the Sumerians (in Iraq) in about 4,500 years B.C.E. (Walker, 2014) and the industry then grew and now operates in various types and segments of size, location, price, star rating and type of services offered. The classification of hotels comes in several forms. Hotels in the U.S. refer to American Automobile Association's (AAA) classification of diamond award - whereas in Britain and other countries including Malaysia, star ratings are still being used. Star rating is based on the type of facilities and level of services offered. For example, in this research, the types of hotels involved were 4 and 5 star rated hotel in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

¹ It came from French term *hotel*; a large house, and originated in the Latin roots *hospitium* or *hospes* as described by Vallen and Vallen (2005).

Table 2.1: The largest hotel chains in terms of number of rooms, countries, and total hotels.

Hotel Company/Group	Number of Guest Rooms	Number of Countries	Total Hotels
InterContinental Hotels Group InterContinental Hotels & Resorts, Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts, Hotel Indigo, Holiday Inn Hotels & Resorts, Holiday Inn Express, Staybridge Suites, Candlewood Suites	646,679	100	4,400
Wyndham Worldwide Super 8, Days Inn, Ramada, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, Baymont Inn & Suites, Wingate Inn, Travelodge, Howard Johnson, AmeriHost Inn, Knights Inn, Villager Lodge, Hawthorn Suites, Microtel Inns and Suites	597,674	66	7,160
Marriot International Marriott Hotels & Resorts, JW Marriott Hotels & Resorts, Renaissance Hotels & Resorts, Courtyard, Residence Inn, Fairfield Inn, Marriott Conference Centers, TownePlace Suites, SpringHill Suites, Ritz-Carlton	595,461	70	3,500
Hilton Hotels Corporation Conrad, Double Tree, Embassy Suites, Hampton Hotels, Hilton, Hilton Garden Inn, Homewood Suites, Scandic, Waldorf Astoria Collection	585,060	81	3,600
Choice Hotels International Comfort Inn, Comfort Suites, Quality, Sleep Inn, Clarion, Cambria Suites, MainStay Suites, Econo Lodge, Rodeway Inn, Suburban Extended Stay Hotel, Ascend	487,410	35	6,000
Accor Sofitel, Red Roof Inn, Motel 6, Studio 6, Novotel, Suitehotel, Ibis, Etap, Formule 1, Orbis, Pullman, M Gallery, All Seasons Hotels	475,433	90	4,000
Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide St.Regis, The Luxury Collection, Sheraton, Westin, Four Points by Sheraton, Element, Le Meridien, W Hotels, Aloft	346,599	100	1,200
Best Western International	308,447	80	4,000
Carlson Hospitality Worldwide Regent Hotels & Resorts, Radisson Hotels & Resorts, Park Plaza Hotels & Resorts, Country Inns & Suites by Carlson, Park Inn Hotels	159,129	77	938
Global Hyatt Corporation Hyatt Hotels & Resorts, Hyatt Place, Hyatt Summerfield Suites, Park Hyatt, Grand Hyatt, Hyatt Regency	134,296	45	434

Source: Walker (2014)

According to Walker (2014), hotels can be classified into several types of accommodation including city, resort, airport, serviced-apartment, boutique, and bed and breakfast, to name a few. The hotel industry also operates a variety of non-stop customer service activities or service orientation. Hotels around the world are growing each year with different market segments and attempt to differentiate their approaches to customer service within their global brand (see Table 2.1). International hotel chains such as the Intercontinental Hotel Group (e.g. Holiday Inn), Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons, Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide, Accor (e.g. Ibis, Novotel), Starwood Hotels & Resorts, Wyndham Hotel Group, Hyatt Hotels, and Choice Hotels International are at the forefront of today's accommodation market, offering a diverse range of accommodation products and services.

The diversity of the industry is also significant in its operations, human resource management, management style and branding (Baum, 2012). As Baum further elaborates 'the hospitality industry represents highly labour-intensive sectors and, numerically, a significant source of employment' (p.8). Besides providing employment opportunities, the hotel sector also contributes to the enhancement of surrounding businesses by providing accommodation and meeting facilities for business people. Hotels ease the process of business development by collaborating its services with other service sectors, including transportation companies, banks, and other service companies (Baum, 2012). The International Labour Organization [ILO] (2010) stated that the hospitality and tourism sector 'in 1950 received 25 million

international tourists, followed by 277 million in 1980, 438 million in 1990, 684 million in 2000, 904 million in 2007 and 922 million in 2008' (p. 5). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) forecasts that tourist arrivals will continue to grow at the rate of 4 per cent per year for the next 13 years (ILO, 2010). This trend indicates that the hospitality and tourism industries are expanding on a global scale.

2.3 The Malaysian hotel industry

Malaysia achieved its independence in 1957 from British rule and as a post-colonial country, most of the social and infrastructure development including the hotel industry were a continuance from the previous era. Despite that, the Malaysian hotel industry has been among the important contributors to the development and growth of the service sector in Malaysia since 1970. With a country population of 30.3 million (Department of Statistics, 2015), the hotel industry grew at the rate of 5.9% in the first half of 2014 (compared with 5.7% in the same period in 2013) and contributed 2.5% out of the overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth (Ministry of Finance [M.O.F.], 2014). The hospitality and tourism sector are predicted to remain strong owing to the growing numbers of tourist arrivals in the country each year. Malaysia is in its fourth year of its 'Visit Malaysia Year' (VMY) campaign with 2014's theme of "Celebrating 1Malaysia Truly Asia" and the government is now looking to promote the heritage and cultural uniqueness of the country (Ministry of Finance [M.O.F.], 2014).

Based on the Tourism Malaysia's 2014 report, the total number of tourists visiting the country in 2013 amounted to 25.72 million, with total tourism receipts of RM65.44 billion (Ringgit Malaysia), or £11.69 billion (Tourism Malaysia, 2014b). This consistent growth shows that the industry is continuously paving the way for further development and maintaining its position as one of the largest revenue-generating sectors in the country, ever since the Hilton Kuala Lumpur, - the first international 5-star hotel, opened its doors in 1972. Kuala Lumpur is the capital city of Malaysia and has the highest number of five-star rated hotels (24) in the country (Malaysian Association of Hotels [MAH], 2013).

Table 2.2: Hotels & Rooms Supply (2013)

States	No. of Hotels	No. of Rooms
Perlis	38	1,934
Kedah	197	12,950
Pulau Pinang	162	16,137
Perak	253	11,293
Selangor	202	14,830
Kuala Lumpur	226	34,700
Putrajaya	5	1,418
Negeri Sembilan	129	7,993
Melaka	175	11,077
Johor	349	20,537
Pahang	355	26,075
Terengganu	194	8,992
Kelantan	110	4,966
Sarawak	346	16,765
Sabah	313	17,903
Labuan	40	1,957
Total	3,094	209,527

Source: Tourism Malaysia (2014a)

To accommodate the needs of tourists, room supply in the country has risen to 209,527 rooms in 2013, as compared with 195,445 rooms in 2012, based

in 3,094 hotels (Tourism Malaysia, 2014a) (see Table 2.2). The positive momentum of hotel growth in the country has opened up particular avenues of research. In general, research in the hotel industry covers all aspects of its operation including its performance (Ashrafi, Seow, Lee, & Lee, 2013; Sin, Tse, Chan, Heung, & Yim, 2006), characteristics of the diverse hotel market (Chacko, Williams, & Schaffer, 2012; Leslie & Craig, 2000), labour issues including socio- and demographic perspectives (Chiang & Birtch, 2008; Jenkins, 2008; Ozturk & Hancer, 2011; Wong, Siu, & Tsang, 1999), work, training, and occupational issues (Deery & Jago, 2002; Hwang, Lee, Park, Chang, & Kim, 2014; Karatepe & Uludag, 2008), and other related area of studies within the hospitality field.

The findings from these research studies contribute to the development of the hospitality education system and structure over time. In the past two decades, hospitality education has been evolving to stay relevant with the needs of the industry. Historically, hospitality education was set up to develop human capital in the hotel industry (Landmark, 1974; Nelson & Dopson, 2001; Sapienza, 1979; Young, McManus, & Canale, 2005).

2.4 Overview of the Malaysian Hospitality Education System

The constantly changing hotel industry forces higher education institutions (HEIs) to develop programmes to produce hoteliers for the future. While both parties (hotels and HEIs) are involved in educating and providing training, Christou (1999: 685) highlighted that ‘...education is mainly provided by

establishments like universities while training is usually provided by employers (hotel)'.

Hospitality education and training began in Malaysia when Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM) was established by the government in 1967 (Goldsmith & Zahari, 1994) and hotel and catering management, and chef training certificate courses, were among the first programmes within the institute. Part of the government initiative was to develop skilled professionals among Bumiputera (native Malays) while the other two main ethnics groups (Chinese and Indian) were dominant in the mining and tin ore industry, and plantations, respectively. The institute was managed by the Ministry of Rural Development from 1967 until 1976 in its effort to target rural Bumiputera across the country and, in 1976, ITM was officially known as one of the public colleges and later managed by the Ministry of Education after the passing of the ITM Act 1976 (Universiti Teknologi MARA [UiTM], 2015). The institute was later granted full university status by the government in August 1999 and known as Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). ITM was the pioneer public higher education institution that runs hotel management programmes.

In 1987, a privately-owned college, Kolej Damansara Utama (KDU), also started accepting students for its hotel and catering courses. After realising the potential of private HEIs in developing skilled graduates among the non-Malays, the Malaysian government approved several other private colleges and HEIs with the passing of the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act

1996 (also known as Act 555), including Taylor’s College and City & Guilds Malaysia. Public and private HEIs differ in terms of their programme offerings and the pathways that they provide (either a diploma or a higher degree), as well as the duration of study (see Figure 2.1).

Duration				
Number of credits required varies with doctorate type				
3 to 4 years	Doctorate	Doctorate (<i>Research</i>) e.g. PhD, D.Phil.	Doctorate (<i>Research + Course</i>) PhD (90 credits) D.BA (60 credits)	
Entry in Doctorate requires Master degree i.e. at least 36 credits				
1 to 2 years	Master	Master Research (<i>Thesis</i>) e.g. M.Phil., M.Sc.	Master Dissertation (<i>Thesis + Courses</i>) e.g. M.Sc.	Master of Domain (<i>Coursework</i>) e.g. MBA
Entry in Masters require Bachelor degree i.e. at least 100 or 120 credits				
3 to 4 years	Bachelor	Bachelor with Honours	Honours	Advanced Diploma
			Bachelor	Diploma 3 rd year (90 credits)
Admission to higher education				
1 to 2 years	STPM Malaysian School Certificate of Higher Education	A-Level	Matriculation or Foundation	Diploma (first 2 years)
SPM: End of secondary school				




Figure 2.1: Overview of Malaysian higher education system pathways

Source: Malaysia France University Centre [MFUC] (2014)

The Malaysian education system provides school leavers who wish to pursue hospitality and culinary education with a choice of three main educational sectors: skills, vocational and higher education (based on what type of institution and their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian School Certificate of Education) or secondary school exam results which are equivalent to the English GCSE). The three sectors' qualification levels are determined by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) as shown below in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Malaysian Qualification Framework

MQF Levels	Education Sectors		
	Skills	Vocational and Training	Higher Education
8			Doctorate
7			Master's
			Postgraduate Certificate & Diploma
6			Bachelor's
			Graduate Certificate & Diploma
5	Skills Advanced Diploma	Advanced Diploma	Advanced Diploma
4	Skills Diploma	Diploma	Diploma
3	Skills Certificate 3	Vocational & Technical Certificate	Certificate
2	Skills Certificate 2		
1	Skills Certificate 1		

Source: Malaysia Qualification Agency [MQA] (2014)

In 1967, the first diploma programme was introduced by Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM), the Diploma in Hotel and Catering (renamed the Diploma in Hotel Management in 1988). The second programme, Diploma in Chef Training, was introduced in 1975. These two programmes lasted for 3 years and students taking the Diploma in Chef Training carried out internship

training with a hotel for one and a half years (or three semesters). Another three semesters were spent on campus doing coursework. The chef training programme was later re-developed and simplified due to the rising number of private colleges, thus making it more difficult to place students for long internship periods, and in order to be aligned with the MQA's credit loads. In 2000, the newly developed programme, the Diploma in Culinary Arts, was introduced with reduced internship periods and more coursework.

However, both programmes in public universities, such as UiTM, still run on a 3-year basis. On the other hand, private HEIs, such as KDU and Taylor's University College, have already developed more concentrated diploma programmes that incorporate industrial placements and coursework within a 2-year period. These differences will have a significant impact on the quality of the programmes and the time it takes to produce graduates. According to a tracer study report by the Ministry of Education [MOE] (2014), there have been 1,290 graduates from public HEIs, including UiTM for diploma programmes, compared with 3,390 graduates from private HEIs.

Even though private HEIs produce more graduates in hospitality diploma programmes, the number of diploma holders working in the hospitality industry is still relatively small, with only 2,505 graduates in 2013. The rest were reported to be still looking for a job, self-employed, or pursuing a higher degree. Is the hospitality labour market perceived to be unattractive, and the last resort for these graduates? The career aspirations of future hotel

employees rely on the prospects in the hotel labour market itself and how it can be beneficial in career terms.

2.5 The Hotel Industry Labour Market

The hotel labour market has been studied by researchers with a common interest in mind, which is how to retain staff and reduce turnover (Babakus et al., 2008; Davidson, Timo, & Wang, 2010; Kim, Im, & Hwang, 2015). It is important to realise that the imbalanced nature of 'demand and supply' encourages employees to strive for their post of choice (Ladkin, 2014). However, a point often overlooked, despite the constant loss of skilled employees, is the strength of the hotel industry itself in creating vast job opportunities and a pool of new talent in the surrounding area (British Hospitality Association [BHA], 2011).

The hotel industry is undeniably labour intensive, but it is important for hotels to try to retain their existing employees and to attract new employees because relatively high turnover is the norm in the industry and talented skilled employees and managers may seek better opportunities that suit their career development plans. Therefore, understanding the needs of these valuable 'assets' will assist employers in developing a better career development programmes within the company. Research has been conducted to seek the ideal portrait of a hotelier at work (e.g. Beesley & Davidson, 2013; Self & Dewald, 2011), their longevity, and what motivates them to stay, leave or advance in their career through the exploration of their

career experiences and tenure (Altman & Brothers, 1995; Self & Dewald, 2011).

Hotels' service performance is of paramount importance to their employees and the driving force of any hotel operation. However, in some hotels, staff have not been getting what they deserved in terms of recognition, and benefits (Abeysekera, 2006; Ahmad & Scott, 2015; Anastassova & Purcell, 1995; Young-Thelin & Boluk, 2012). The importance of looking after the workforce has consistently been highlighted by researchers (Baum, 2007; Burke et al., 2008; Jithendran & Baum, 2000) and with the constant upward performance of the sector, this is not always easy to accomplish. Despite employing diverse profiles of employees, the industry is still known for its complexity and stressful working conditions. As the ILO (2010) argues, 'the predominance of on-call, casual, temporary, seasonal and part-time employment is related to insecurity, comparatively low pay (frequently below the national average), job instability, limited career opportunity, a high level of subcontracting and outsourcing, and a high turnover rate' (p.14). The availability of jobs in the industry requires prospective employees to have various levels of skills and competencies, depending on the type of job they are looking for (Ladkin, 2014).

Considering these issues, research in Malaysia has also explored the retention of skilled and efficient employees (Chew & Wong, 2008). Other research emphasises the mobility of managers (Bown-Wilson, 2011; Ponton,

2010), the 'glass ceiling' (Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999), and managing one's own careers (Akrivos et al., 2007; Ruddy, 1989; Rutherford & Wiegenstein, 1985). New pay structures and attractive packages for middle managers has not prevented them from moving away and seeking other opportunities, while operational employees are still juggling with an increasing cost of living, low basic wages and point based commissions. Despite the implementation of a minimum wage policy by the government of Malaysia in 2013, the average monthly salaries and wages for the hospitality industry are still low, in comparison with other industries (Department of Statistics, 2014b). In fact, there is an increase level of interest among hotel staff to work in other part time jobs and the pay structure in hotel industry has been shown to be a contributory factor (Warhurst, Lloyd, & Dutton, 2008).

Generally, the low salaries for accommodation or hotel and food and beverage sectors as compared to the size and importance of the industry in terms of its employment volume is still a major issue within the industry. In terms workforce diversity, based on the Labour Force Survey Report Malaysia, a total of 1.01 million people from different ethnic, age and cultural backgrounds were employed in the hospitality industry in the country. It is reported that 491,800 are male and the remaining 542,100 are female (Department of Statistics, 2014a). The data show that Malay or ethnic Bumiputera are now the dominant employees within the hospitality industry in

Malaysia, followed by the ethnic Chinese and non-Malaysian citizens, including expatriates and foreign operational workers (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Employed persons in hospitality industry in Malaysia, 2013

Criteria	Male	Female	TOTAL
Ethnic Group			
Malay / Bumiputera	262,000	332,800	594,800
Chinese	128,400	101,500	229,900
Indians	23,800	14,600	38,400
Others	3,200	4,000	7,200
Non-Malaysian citizens	74,400	71,200	145,600
Age Group			
15-19 years old	35,600	32,000	67,600
20-24 years old	84,100	73,000	157,100
25-29 years old	82,300	69,600	151,900
30-34 years old	68,200	64,400	132,600
35-39 years old	50,900	57,300	108,200
40-44 years old	46,700	72,500	119,200
45-49 years old	44,500	60,100	104,600
50-54 years old	36,000	48,700	84,700
55-59 years old	27,300	32,500	59,800
60-64 years old	16,300	14,100	30,400

Source: Department of Statistics (2014a)

Current development notes the scarce pool of human capital within the hotel workforce and explains the continuing shortage of labour (Poelmans, Chinchilla, & Cardona, 2003; Pratten & O'Leary, 2007). Therefore, it is important to understand the aspirations and career motivations of current hospitality industry employees (in this research, middle managers) and how they plan for their future career pathways.

2.6 Conclusions

This chapter offers an overview of the hotel industry including the nature and classification of hotels, and more specifically the Malaysian hotel industry,

before elaborating further on the Malaysian hotel education system. The chapter also highlighted key information on the hotel education system's framework and pathways, important key figures of the hotel industry labour markets, salaries and wages and employability statistics as the foundation for the study. The next chapter reviews literature on the social theories of career development, the career pathways of hotel employees, including middle managers, and their opportunity structures.

CHAPTER 3: HOTEL CAREER DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will review and elucidate theories and research relating to career development from various perspectives before coming to the focus of this study which is the career development of hotel middle managers. The chapter begins by exploring the early conceptualisation of career development studies and its evolution to current understanding. It also describes the social theories of career development, narrowing down to the constructionist theory of career development by Savickas (2005), which is most helpful in addressing the research questions described in the previous chapter.

Career development theory was identified as the most relevant theory underlying this research on hotel middle managers, thus serving as the theoretical framework and reference to help contextualise the middle managers' career narratives and experiences throughout their working lives. This research draws upon career development and constructions through the frames of aspiration, work experiences, occupational factors and challenges, and opportunity structures available in the Malaysian hotel industry. Following the complexity of hotel career pathways and trajectories, this chapter reviews key elements of career development in relation to the theory selected and provides an understanding of hotel middle managers' narratives in the research.

3.2 The Conceptualisation of Career Development

Definitions of career vary in previous research studies. An established definition of career is the unfolding sequence of a person's work experiences over time (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). The meaning of career depends on the understanding of the individuals which can vary depending on, for example, time, life-stage and context (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Baruch (2004) described career as individually sequential in that it involves the individual's progress and development process at work.

Parsons (1909) made a significant impact to the development of career-related theories when he introduced three important criteria of career selection:

1. 'A clear understanding of yourself, aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources, limitations and other qualities.
2. A knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities and prospect in different lines of work.
3. True reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts (Parsons, 1909; 5)'.

The work of Ginzberg et al. (1951) set a new frontier in the study of career development by claiming that it is a 'lifelong development process' (p.180). John Holland extended understanding of career development by focusing

upon vocational choice in relation to career (Brown, 2002). There have also been some emerging concepts linked to a career, such as 'protean careers' (Arthur et al., 1989; Hall, 2004; Hall & Moss, 1998), as the career gives different meaning to an individual's life and work. Another concept is 'the boundaryless career', where career can now be moved across companies and is not owned by a single company or industry (Arthur et al., 2005; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

In a boundaryless career, individuals are not bound to pursue their career in the existing company; for some it may be a planned adventure (Bujold, 2004), where they are encouraged to explore and construct their own career journey. Career journey and experiences can be studied in the form of a narrative (Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011). One theory that uses narrative as a way of extracting career stories is the theory of career construction (Savickas, 2005). The following sections provide an overview of the development of some key career-related theories, particularly in the study of career development.

3.2.1 Self-Concept Theory (Life Span, Life Space) - Super

An influential theory on career development was proposed by Donald Super in 1953. Super's theory expands the understanding of career into a life-span perspective by indicating that career development progresses along the individual's life. Super and Jordaan (1973) developed the concept of vocational maturity in order to reflect an individual's ability to adapt to the

changes in their life and make an appropriate decision at a particular stage. The life span concept as explained above provides the understanding of life stages and tasks to accomplish in an individual's life, while the life space concept added a contextual dimension to roles in the time frame (Patton & McMahon, 2006).

Super (1957) proposed five life stages together with its accompanying tasks in an individual's life:

Table 3.1: Super's life stages and tasks

Stages	Tasks
Growth	Developing a self-concept; developing an orientation to the work-world and understanding the meaning of work
Exploration	Implementing a vocational preference; committing provisionally to work
Establishment	Securing a permanent place at work; stabilizing and advancing at work; committing more strongly
Maintenance	Continuing established patterns; preserving achieved status and gains
Decline	Decelerating the work pace; retiring

Source: Super (1957)

Although this research did not test the model proposed by Super, the researcher took note of the various stages in an individual's life that may have significant impact in the research participants' career development and aspirations. This is because in Super's theory, the notion of self-concept and development are helpful in individual's career, but Super's life-span, life

space approach was too linear as he described individual career as open to opportunities throughout their life stages.

In addition, Super (1990) did highlight how career involves individual's life course and changes do occurs at certain stage of their career life such as change of job positions, job tenure and unemployment period, relocations, job progression and continuous learning through furthering education. The stages of career proposed by Super (1990) informs how hotel middle managers make sense of their efforts to climb the career ladder based on years in the work. Therefore, understanding the way individuals respond to the situation within the context of career stages is important. As Barclay, Stoltz, and Chung (2011) described, most individuals will experience a number of career transitions and job changes throughout their career lifetime. These ideas emphasise the importance of the ability to navigate career transitions at every stage and establish appropriate work orientations to stabilise their position in their new roles. Jepsen and Dickson (2003) view the perspective as 'career continuity' which enables individuals to progress as their careers become more stable (p.217).

The life stage hotel middle managers reach at a particular time varies depending on the initial career formation and the transition patterns throughout their career. The sequence of life stages may not be aligned with the ideal typical trajectories associated with the Life-Span, Life Space Theory as hotel middle managers comes from different backgrounds and pursue

different career targets from various age groups. As argued by Jepsen and Dickson (2003), the order of the life stages is not always in line with the theory, it varies depending on the evolution of one's 'biosocial development and life situations' (p.218). The exploration stage involves establishing individual's initial career and meaning of work. Hotel initial careers are commonly linked to unskilled candidates with low pay and work in long hours' shifts (Baum, 1996; Duncan, Scott, & Baum, 2013; Warhurst et al., 2008). Moreover, hotel managers often had their own perception of the competency level of new employees (Tesone & Ricci, 2006).

In the establishment stage, the development of work interest in mastering a vocational trait and building up work experiences are relevant to hotel middle managers job mobility patterns and psychological contract (van Rheede, Tromp, & Blomme, 2009). The psychological contract in this context refers to the commitment of employees to stay loyal and committed to their job and employer or the hotel company and the employer in turn provides support and takes care of employee well-being (Blomme, van Rheede, & Tromp, 2010; Guchait, Cho, & Meurs, 2015; Kang, Gatling, & Kim, 2014). The maintenance stage involves stabilising a career by continuing the pattern and increasing the tenure period for each post held. Generational differences might have a significant impact on how the middle managers value their work and preserving their position (Gursoy, Chi, & Karadag, 2013). The decline stage of life can be demonstrated through the career of middle managers that

remain in the same position and level for several years at a plateau (Heilman, Holt, & Rilovick, 2008; Kline, Adler, Ghiselli, & Huang, 2008; Williams, 2004).

While Super's career stages explain the different phases which individuals need to face, the experiences gained should also be considered. Hence, the next theory explains how learning through career experiences facilitate individuals to make their career decision.

3.2.2 Career Construction Theory - Savickas

In recent years, there have been efforts to develop a more holistic approach to the existing theories which focus on the individual rather than the employer as the most influential factor in career mobility (Patton & McMahon, 2006).

One such theory developed by Savickas (2005) focuses on career construction. According to Savickas (2005; 42), the theory of career construction describes 'the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals impose meaning and direction on their vocational behaviour'. In other words, the theory outlines how the career of an individual can be developed through understanding an individual's story and how this interacts with environmental and career-related factors.

The theory expresses the choices that individuals have, which are based on the actual opportunities that arise in the present moment. It is 'not the sum of work experience but rather the patterning of these experiences into a cohesive whole that produces a meaningful story' (Savickas, 2005; 43).

Career construction theory (CCT) allows employees to decide on their next career-related choice or on the work that best suits them (David, 2012). The work experiences that individuals have been through help in developing and reflecting their views on work, and initiate the construction of the next career journey.

The theory of career construction consists of three main components: vocational personality, career adaptability and life themes. These three components describe the theory's main propositions (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Career Construction Theory propositions

1. A society and its institutions structure an individual's life course through social roles. The life structure of an individual, shaped by social processes such as gendering, consists of core and peripheral roles. Balance among core roles such as work, and family promotes stability whereas imbalances produce strain.
2. Occupations provide a core role and a focus for personality organization for most men and women, although for some individuals this focus is peripheral, incidental, or even non-existent. Then other life roles such as student, parent, homemaker, leisurite, and citizen may be at the core. Personal preferences for life roles are deeply grounded in the social practices that engage individuals and locate them in unequal social positions.
3. An individual's career pattern – that is, the occupational level attained and the sequence, frequency, and duration of jobs – is determined by the parents' socioeconomic level and the person's education, abilities, personality traits, self-concepts, and career adaptability in transaction with the opportunities presented by society.
4. People differ in vocational characteristics such as ability, personality traits, and self-concepts.
5. Each occupation requires a different pattern of vocational characteristics, with tolerances wide enough to allow some variety of individuals in each occupation.

6. Some people are qualified for a variety of occupations because of their vocational characteristics and occupational requirements.
7. Occupational success depends on the extent to which individuals find in their work roles adequate outlets for their prominent vocational characteristics.
8. The degree of satisfaction people attain from work is proportional to the degree to which they are able to implement their vocational self-concepts. Job satisfaction depends on establishment in a type of occupation, a work situation, and a way of life in which people can play the types of roles that growth and exploratory experiences have led them to consider congenial and appropriate.
9. The process of career construction is essentially that of developing and implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles. Self-concepts develop through the interaction of inherited aptitudes, physical make-up, opportunities to observe and play various roles, and evaluations of the extent to which the results of role playing meet with the approval of peers and supervisors. Implementation of vocational self-concepts in work roles involves a synthesis and compromise between individual and social factors. It evolves from role playing and learning from feedback, whether the role is played in fantasy, in the counselling interview, or in real-life activities such as hobbies, classes, clubs, part-time work and entry jobs.
10. Although vocational self-concepts become increasingly stable from late adolescence forward, providing some continuity in choice and adjustment, self-concepts and vocational preferences do change with time and experience as the situations in which people live and work change.
11. The process of vocational change may be characterized by a maxi cycle of career stages characterized as progressing through periods of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement. The five stages are subdivided into periods marked by vocational development tasks that individuals experience as social expectations.
12. A mini cycle of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement occurs during transitions from one career stage to the next as well as each time an individual's career is destabilized by socioeconomic and personal events such as illness and injury, plant closings and company layoffs, and job redesign and automation.
13. Vocational maturity is a psychological construct that denotes an individual's degree of vocational development along the continuum of career stages from growth through disengagement. From a societal perspective, an individual's vocational maturity can be operationally

defined by comparing the developmental tasks being encountered to those expected based on chronological age.

14. Career adaptability is a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks of vocational development. The adaptive fitness of attitudes, beliefs, and competencies – the ABCs of career construction – increase along the developmental lines of concern, control, conception, and confidence.
15. Career construction is prompted by vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas and then produced by responses to these life changes.
16. Career construction, at any given stage, can be fostered by conversations that explain vocational development tasks and occupational transitions, exercises that strengthen adaptive fitness, and activities that clarify and validate vocational self-concepts.

Source: Savickas (2005; 45-46)

According to Patton and McMahon (2006), the first component of this theory, 'vocational personality' is defined as 'an individual's career-related abilities, needs, values and interests' (p.64). Savickas (2005) suggested that where interest is involved, the outcome should be more pointed at the possible choices that emerged instead of trying to anticipate the choices beforehand. On the other hand, 'career adaptability' involves the ability to plan and navigate a career while it is through work that individuals express their 'vocational personality' as their careers develop (Savickas, 2005). This component was defined as 'a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational developmental tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas' (Savickas, 2005; 51). This component is a new construct that is 'more reflective of a knowledge-based society than Super's well known

construct of career maturity' (Patton & McMahon, 2006; 65). Patton and McMahon (2006) explain that the third and last component of CCT, life themes, relates to the underlying reasons for how individuals formed their career stories. According to Savickas (2005), the meaning of career to individuals and its construction is explored through the individuals' own voices as they describe the impact of previous experiences that shaped what it is today and provides a platform for future endeavours along the career timeline. Patton and McMahon (2006) highlight the power of these narratives,

'Through stories, individuals express their uniqueness and contextualise themselves in terms of time, place, and role' (p. 65).

This theory focused on the development of self-identity of the individuals in selecting the career of choice (David, 2012; Savickas, 2005). The narratives of individuals display their view of work experiences and how they perceive the world around them (David, 2012). The concept of career adaptability underlines how individuals accommodate to new work environments based on their own sets of qualities and abilities (Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2006; Savickas, 2005). New career experiences add to the existing stories of career histories and experiences (Elley-Brown, 2011; Savickas, 2005; Savickas & Porfeli, 2011).

Rationale for selecting Career Construction Theory to guide this research

The inclusion of other theories as described in the previous sections provided a clear view on the differences of career development related theories. As the focus of Career Construction Theory facilitates an understanding of the

pattern of career experiences of the managers, it will be used as a guide to this research. Elaborating the career experiences of the managers into meaningful career stories to assess their career aspirations requires researchers to understand the process of building the story. The individual narratives of the middle managers in this research helps to uncover their career aspirations and facilitates the development of their careers, which is a similar approach with Career Construction Theory. According to Savickas (2005) and Del Corso and Rehfuss (2011), through the power of narrative, the CCT can provide answers on what, how, and why individuals construct their careers in the form of personal stories and transform them into reality, through their work roles.

In this research, CCT helps conceptualise the narrative through what (vocational personality) the hotel middle managers do which is related to their (why) life themes and (how) their career adaptabilities (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011). To understand the career experiences of the middle managers, and former middle managers, using personal narratives or self-narratives as suggested in the CCT is the most appropriate approach. Del Corso and Rehfuss (2011) added that,

'self-narratives are not factual accounts of an individual's past, but are interpretations and recollections of their experiences' (p.335).

Moreover, understanding the 16 propositions of the Career Construction Theory (Table 3.2) and relating them to this research is important to understand the meaning of the middle managers' narratives. In this respect,

CCT acts as a meta-theory for this research. The propositions outline how society helps shape individual roles in society and occupations provide a focus for the societal offer in relation to work. The proposition also highlights the variation in individual career patterns, vocational characteristics, and occupational success, partly based on how they started, their background, personality traits, self-concept and educational level. Every middle manager in this research has her or his own career pattern which started differently. The process of career construction concerns the process of implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles. In the later career stage, the theory's proposition informs the changes which occur as careers become more stable as work experiences is gained. As vocational maturity is achieved within the career growth cycle, individuals need to adapt to changes and career transitions. In this research, there is a sample of managers who have to deal with career and life changes which requires them to keep on learning to adapt to new work environment and roles, in some even after they left the hotel industry. Therefore, it is important for them to learn continuously to adapt to the changes.

Model of Learning for Career and Labour Market Transitions

An extension to the three dimensions of CCT was needed as in this research, middle managers have to adapt and change their career development plan based on the transitions they have made. To understand it further, a model on how learning in career and adapting to occupational transition helps in re-adjusting individual's career in certain stage of their work life was made

available by Brown and Bimrose (2014). In their study on understanding of career transitions and learning, Brown and Bimrose found that 'learning processes in the career and labour market transitions will vary depending on the individual and context' (p.274).

They develop a model that highlights three key representations when thinking about influences on learning processes in career change (Figure 3.1). The first representation views career development as a process of building self-identity. This can be examined through the individual career biographies of the middle managers and other managers in this research. The second representation focuses upon processes of skill development and 'occurs across four domains: relational development, cognitive development, practical development, and emotional development' (p.275).

The third representation highlights how career development takes place in particular opportunity structures, for example, how much learning actually happens depends partly upon the opportunities and challenges at the workplace. This includes the opportunities provided by employers in terms of career pathways, occupational structures and any career support system. In relation to the middle managers in this research, it can be represented through the opportunity structures available for their career development and how former middle managers navigate their career transition and life change when they decided to leave the hotel industry.

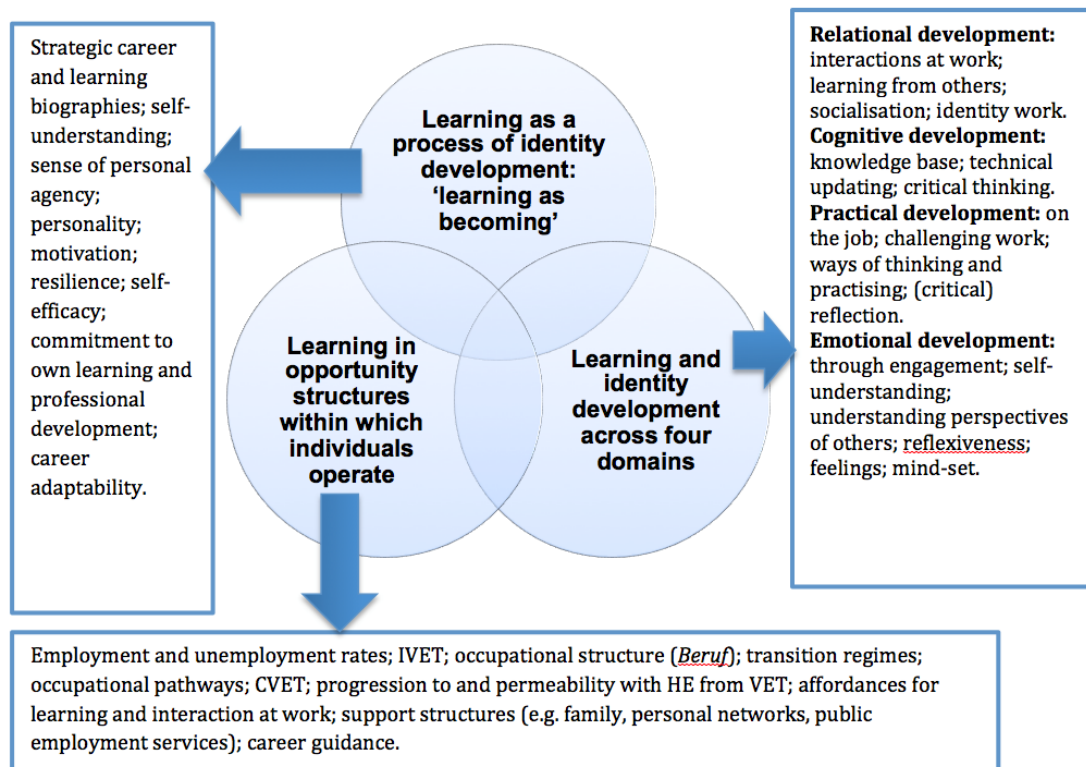


Figure 3.1: Key Factors influencing 'learning for career and labour market transitions'

Source: Brown and Bimrose (2014)

In the previous section, Savickas's CCT was used as the meta-theory guiding the focus on the dynamics of career development, while the Brown and Bimrose (2014) model draws attention to the need to switch this research's perspective between individual narratives; the opportunity structures explored in the Malaysian context; and the skills development of the middle managers. However, rather than taking the existing model as a detailed guide to the data collection phase, the research questions in this study were more broadly framed. This meant that they were able potentially to pick up on a wider range of influences on the local managers' career development. In fact, the findings showed that this did occur, and the range of factors considered by

the managers included, for example, religion/ faith and extended family obligations.

3.3 Understanding Career Development in the Hotel Industry

People's careers are always 'in the process of becoming' as identities change over time and, as such, can never be fully understood, especially as societal expectations of career also develop and change. So people's perceptions towards their lives, including their careers, change over time (David, 2012). The hotel industry is often faced with a shortage of employees with sufficient skills and experience. Although the industry is multifaceted, diverse and labour-intensive, retaining talented, skilled and experienced employees is inevitably challenging. For example, small-scale hotels offer limited advancement and career development opportunities for their employees (Kim et al., 2015) and hence employees are likely to move on.

Numerous studies highlight the main causes of employee turnover (Deery & Shaw, 1997; Stalcup & Pearson, 2001), which include low pay, dissatisfaction with the employer and the industry, seeking better advancement opportunities and organizational culture. Other research suggests approaches to improve employee retention (e.g. Boles, Ross, & Johnson, 1995; Gentry et al., 2007 as cited in Mohsin, Lengler, & Kumar, 2013; Stalcup & Pearson, 2001), including improvements in selection technique, rewarding employees and supervisory support. Others discuss the effects of the surrounding environment on the diverse and demanding

industry (e.g. Enz, 2009; Janta, 2011) as contributing factors to turnover and employee mobility.

Studies have been conducted on hotel employees' career development in various countries (e.g. Batnitzky, McDowell, & Dyer, 2008; Janta, Ladkin, Brown, & Lugosi, 2011; Ladkin, 2002) but limited research focuses on local employees' career development and recruitment structures in South East Asia (e.g. Barber & Pittaway, 2000; Kong, Cheung, & Song, 2011), and particularly in Malaysia (e.g. Ahmad & Zainol, 2011), as compared to studies looking at the recruitment and careers of foreign immigrants and expatriates (Barber & Pittaway, 2000; Causin, 2007a). This gap in the research opens up the opportunity to explore in depth the employment longevity issue, career progression opportunities, and the effects of a diverse workforce on competency and skill development of Malaysian hotel employees.

Employing new staff is often an endless task for managers because of the difficulties in retention (Blomme, Van Rheede, & Tromp, 2009; Duncan et al., 2013). This has contributed to turnover for both operational employees and managers (Dipietro & Condly, 2007; Stalcup & Pearson, 2001) and a corresponding shortage of skilled employees (Ahmad & Zainol, 2011) in the past. Researchers have explored related employment issues such as the effect of workplace stereotyping and how this might have a significant impact on employees' prospects for promotion to managerial positions (Thrane, 2008). Stereotyping might be linked to gender (e.g., more progression opportunities provided to male employees (Kattara, 2005) and the gender

pay gap whereby women earn less (Purcell, 1996), to age or work experience (Kattara, 2005), ethnic background (Purcell, 1996; Sparrowe & Iverson, 1999), and work-family conflict (Kattara, 2005). Furthermore, hotel corporate image, policy and practice that relies on foreign expertise to manage hotels (Barber & Pittaway, 2000), as well as an immigrant workforce, make it more difficult for local employees to advance, although the primary purpose of such practice is to reduce the shortage of skilled employees (Ahmad & Zainol, 2011).

However, not all expatriate managers are successful when working in Malaysian hotels. Several reasons for expatriate failures have emerged from previous studies (e.g. McGrath-Champ and Yang 2002, as cited in Causin, 2007b), such as a failure and an inability to work with local nationals and understand their local cultures, which can have a negative impact on the corporation (Graf & Harland, 2005) and its brand at large.

3.4 Career Development Trends

The responsibility for career development in the hotel industry has shifted from employer to employee (Carbery, Garavan, O'Brien, & McDonnell, 2003b) as several studies highlighted how hotel employees are taking control of their own career to seek career satisfaction (Kong, Cheung, & Song, 2012b; Lee, 2016), pursuing career ambitions by adapting to changes in career needs (Mkono, 2012; Yamashita & Uenoyama, 2006). Previous research has redefined 'turnover' as beneficial for career development

because of the transitory nature of the work involved in the hotel industry (Duncan et al., 2013), and many of today's hotel employees are now actively managing their own career by setting up relevant strategies and controlling their career development route (Hall, 2002). Walsh and Taylor (2007) also mentioned that managers move in between hospitality companies to develop their careers and to have growth opportunities either in the career, job, company and/or the industry as a whole. According to Arthur and Rousseau (1996), in the past, careers had been studied around the organisation and their impact on individual employees, but things have now changed, with employees dictating their own careers. As Ayres (2006a) explained,

'traditionally, career paths emphasised upward movement in an organisation and the basis of much career theory centres on this concept of the bureaucratic career that involves the acceptance of qualifications, regular incremental advancement and a degree of certainty concerning prospects. However, recent trends have seen structures becoming increasingly flat in nature, and have seen organisations becoming more global. Other organisational trends are towards downsizing, restructuring, and reengineering' (p. 114).

In order to plan for their own career, hotel employees and managers have to upgrade their knowledge and skill sets in pursuing senior or middle managerial positions in the hotel labour market, because appointments at the senior managerial level are mostly based on reputations, skills and experiences (Costen & Salazar, 2011; Kyriakidou & Maroudas, 2010; Lashley & Alexander, 2007; Magnini & Honeycutt, 2003). If the required skilled candidates are unavailable, the post will remain vacant or temporarily held by

present employees / managers. Hotels have been providing avenues for employees and middle managers to explore new knowledge and skills training on a part-time basis to enhance their human capital (Wilson-Wünsch, Beusaert, Tempelaar, & Gijsselaers, 2014).

Another career development trend in the hotel industry is increased mentoring and networking. This was recognised as being very helpful in motivating employees in adapting to a new career or thinking of switching to a new working environment (Ayres, 2006a). Professional networks, especially in social media, help in spreading available opportunities across hotels and the broader industry. The use of social media such as LinkedIn as a networking tool facilitate the career development of employees and managers as they can identify potential progression routes (Benson, Morgan, & Filippaios, 2014; Campisi, Folan, Diehl, Kable, & Rademeyer, 2015; Gibbs, MacDonald, & MacKay, 2015). The use of online networking also builds career progression patterns for female employees (Donelan, Herman, Kear, & Kirkup, 2009; Ollington, Gibb, & Harcourt, 2013).

3.5 Career Development Challenges

In the process of developing a career in the hotel industry, several challenges are faced by both the employees and the employers themselves. There are challenges pertaining to issues of change in the work, need for continuous education and training, gender issues, quality graduates entering the industry, need for skilled labour, and employee mobility.

As the hotel industry has progressed, the ability of its employees to adapt to the changing scenario of the industry raises some concerns (Ayres, 2006a). They include the interrelations between educational institutions and the hotel industry in terms of the quality of graduates, soft skills training and internship training. On average, 'graduates left their first job after 13.4 months and their second job after 10.5 months' (McKercher, Williams, & Coghlan, 1995; 543). In order to reduce the high industry dropout rate, educational institutions have been collaborating with the industry to reduce the gap and understand the need to enhance their human capital (Jauhari, Pizam, Okumus, & Hutchinson, 2013; Richardson & Butler, 2012; Tesone & Ricci, 2012).

In the hotel industry, the gender imbalance in terms of advancement opportunities has also been studied by researchers (Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Samkange & Dingani, 2013; Yan, 2006; Zhong, Couch, & Blum, 2013). Women often face many obstacles in advancing their career in the hotel industry. The stereotyping of the male dominated industry (Kensbock, Jennings, Bailey, & Patiar, 2013; Knox, 2008) for example in the kitchen department, often has a negative effect on women who end up in staying in the same job, even though they had the necessary experience and skills to progress. In addition, research often points out how it may give negative impact to the hotel (Farrar, 1996). The experiences of employees themselves have not been given greater emphasis in determining their next move. A study by Ladkin and Riley (1996) revealed that managers are prone to

change job at certain times during their career as their decisions are also influenced by the external labour market (Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000).

A study by Hemdi and Rahim (2011) indicated that job content (challenging, comprehensive, and diverse work) is the major push factor in the mobility of managers across the industry. They also found out that after certain stages within managers' lives, they will change the direction of their career towards settling down, primarily because of age. Life themes across their career will predominantly be related to experiencing changes, including in their career trajectories, because of internal and external factors such as family interventions and occupational factors (Alcorso, 2003; Brownell, 1994b; Burgess, 2013; Hwang et al., 2014; Lee, Moon, Lee, & Kim, 2014; Yu & Huat, 1995).

Researchers suggest that hospitality employment is about interactive service work that requires soft skills such as aesthetic, emotion and authenticity dimensions (Duncan et al., 2013; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Soft skills involve the cultivation of interpersonal skills and the ability to interact in a positive "one-to-one" manner with the customer. Several studies have identified the skills required to achieve success as a hotel manager, such as the need for a hospitality management skills set (e.g. Kay & Moncarz, 2007) and human resources skills (e.g. Tesone, 2004).

However, the diverse nature of the industry opens several gaps in the trained and skilled workforce as each predominant demographic group provides different sets of skills and competencies. According to Gursoy, Rahman, and Swanger (2012) in their research, the four most important subject areas that future hotel managers and professionals should be well versed in are leadership, industry experience, preparation for industry employment and ethics.

In a related study in Malaysia, Ahmad and Zainol (2011) found that work experience and English language proficiency are the criteria that are most needed to be a hotel manager. Moreover, their study concluded that several other traits are also required for managerial posts in Malaysian five-star hotels, including leadership skills, technical knowledge, education, communication skills, interpersonal skills and interest in the job itself. This is backed by the fact that research related to the development of human resources in the industry does not really capture the career experience and issue of the minority group (Farrar, 1996).

3.6 Conclusions

The objective of this chapter was to outline the theories on career, particularly the theoretical foundation of this research which is career construction theory. This facilitates an understanding of the nature of career and career development related to the participants in this research. It also

explores the concept of career development in the hotel industry, career progression trends and challenges.

As this research implemented narrative analysis to identify themes in career development and the aspirations of hotel middle managers at certain stages of their career, the use of career construction theory helps to explain how their vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes contributes to the decision on whether to stay, leave or progress in the present organisation and work environment. The next chapter will outline the methodological aspects of the study.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, the four research questions were developed to facilitate a greater understanding of middle managers' career development narratives in the Malaysian hotel industry related to:

1. How did different patterns of education, training and learning influence local middle managers' career aspirations?
2. How did different patterns of work experience affect local middle managers' career development?
3. Which additional factors influenced local middle managers' career development?
4. How do local middle managers perceive the career opportunities open to them in the Malaysian hotel industry?

In this chapter, the overall research plan and methodology are outlined, including the research paradigm, research sample and design, data collection methods, data analysis plan, ethical considerations, reliability and validity of the instrument used in the fieldwork. The information in this chapter provides an outline of how the data and results of this research were obtained.

4.2 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a sensible belief and practice of predictions, ideas or foundation about our surrounding world and how it works (Cooper & White, 2012). It starts with the type of research selected for this study, which is qualitative. Qualitative methodology was chosen for this research because it allows for the gathering of in-depth information from the research participants (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research explores meaning in the participants' lives, beliefs, experiences, behaviours and actions as they occur in a 'natural setting' as part of a 'naturalistic inquiry' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As this research set out to explore the career development of middle managers through their own career experiences and decisions made along their career timeline, the use of quantitative methods would reduce the richness of data collected (Berg, 2001). As explained by Cooper and White (2012):

'Qualitative researchers believe that the nature of reality is socially constructed, that the relationship between the researcher and participants are not mutually exclusive relationships, and that contextual constraints all help to shape inquiry. They seek to know answers to questions that focus on the social construction of experience and how meaning is created' (p.15).

As Gray (2009) elaborates, 'some of the typical criticisms of quantitative research by qualitative researchers are:

1. Quantitative research can involve little or no contact with people or field settings.
2. Statistical correlations may be based upon 'variables' that are arbitrarily defined themselves.
3. After-the-fact analysis about the meaning of correlations may involve some very common-sense reasoning or even speculation that science claims to avoid.
4. The pursuit of 'measurable' phenomena means that difficult concepts such as 'criminality' or 'intelligence' are treated unproblematically' (p. 165).

Qualitative research can be challenging, in comparison with quantitative research, and a clear and transparent research design, developed according to the epistemological framework chosen for the research, is required to facilitate its successful completion (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative researcher must first gain access to his/her research sample to gather in-depth findings which can be time-consuming and prone to delays. On the other hand, through the use of meticulous and detailed processes, qualitative research is able to gather, analyse, and convey the meaning and representation of participants' voices and perspectives (Creswell, 2007).

4.2.1 Epistemological Views on Career Development Research

The epistemological framework is referred to as the way that knowledge is obtained and how it functions (Snape & Spencer, 2003). As this study aims to gather the perspectives and work-related experiences of hotel employees, an interpretivist standpoint will be the basis of the epistemological framework.

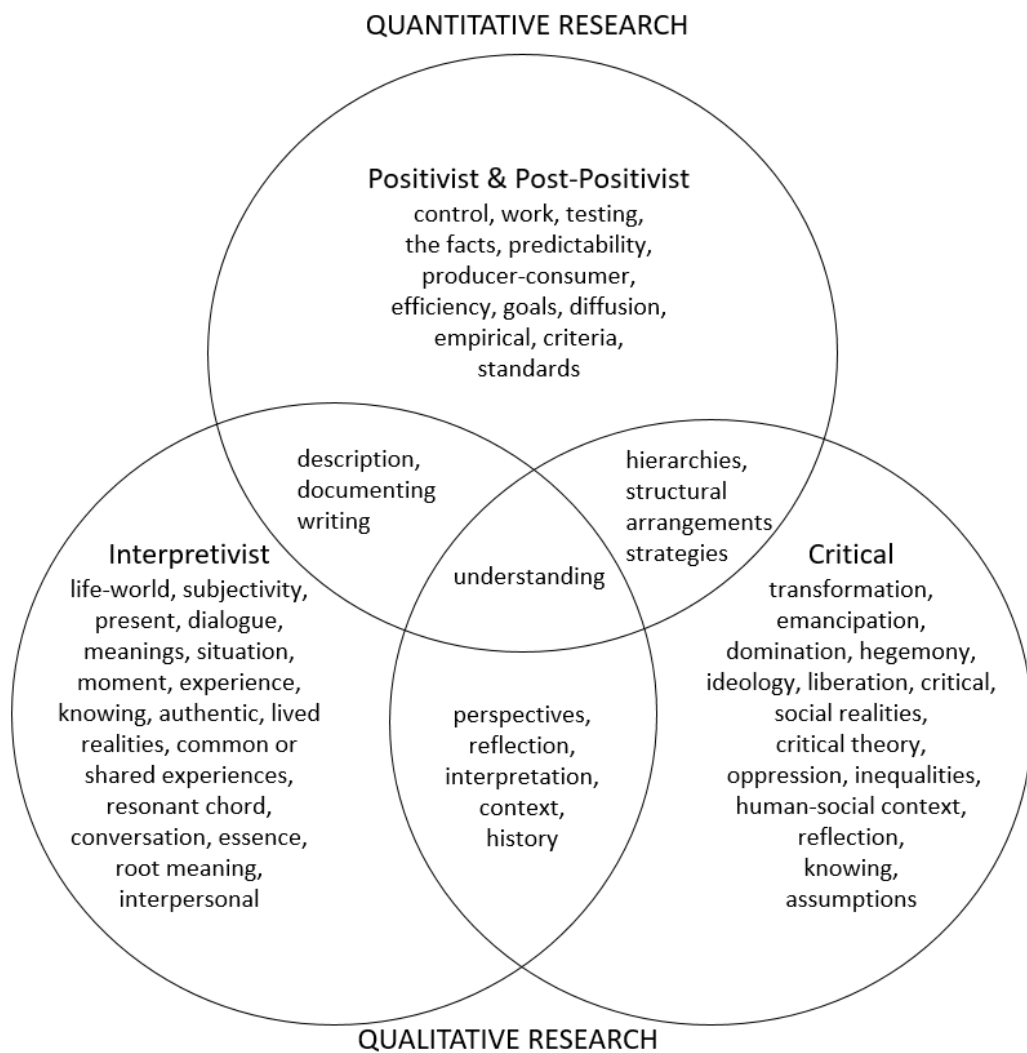


Figure 4.1: Key words and identifiers in paradigms and approaches to research

Source: (Cooper & White, 2012)

An interpretivist position 'assumes that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work by developing subjective meanings of their experiences' (Creswell, 2009: 8). Such an approach works towards the understanding of the whole process in which the social story or experience of reality is constructed and dealt with (Neuman, 2011). In this approach knowledge of social processes are influenced by the research participants' lived experiences, which is a suitable approach for the middle managers identified in this research.

As this research is based on the career construction theory and its constructs, an interpretivist position is the ideal approach to use. Career construction theory suggests that people's career decisions and aspirations are based on their reflections of life experiences (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Savickas, 2005). Hence adopting an interpretivist standpoint fits well with seeking to understand the middle managers' career narratives generated from applying career construction theory.

4.3 Research Design

As explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research comprises three distinctive processes: theory, method, and analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) added that:

'Within these terminologies stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gendered, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective... researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology), that

specifies a set of questions (epistemology), which are then examined (methodology, analysis) in a specific ways.’ (p.11)

Furthermore, Creswell (2007) added the role of values in research (axiology), and the language of the research (rhetoric) to be considered before deciding upon the methods to be used (methodology). Cooper and White (2012) state that ‘ontology refers to what we know to be the nature of reality, while epistemology refers to how we know what we know about that reality and how it is that we represent that reality’ (p. 16). To ensure that the methodology is situated correctly within the paradigm of constructivism, personal or self-reported narratives were employed to uncover the multiple perspectives of the hotel middle managers and the former managers.

4.3.1 Narrative Career Biography

Self-reported narratives or ‘life-stories’ are examples of what sociologists call narrative biography (Denzin, 1989a). Denzin (1989b) further explained that, ‘(it) presents the experiences and definitions held by one person, one group, or one organization as this person, group, or organisation interprets those experiences’ (p. 182). There are different terms for narrative and biographical methods currently in use. When the person or subject of interest gives his or her own self-reported story, it is known as ‘autobiography, life story, or life history’ (Allport, 1942 as cited in Denzin, 1989a). On the other hand, when the researcher collects and documents these stories, it is called biography (Denzin, 1989a).

The different types of biographical studies elucidate the various methods, personal stands, forms and representation of the findings and subjects of the study. This also includes the narrative form of life story told to a narrator (Denzin, 1989b). As Titon (1980) explains, 'A life story is, a person's story of his or her life, or of what he or she thinks is a significant part of that life. It is therefore a personal narrative, a story of personal experience, and as it emerges from conversation, ... is the spoken word, even if the story is transcribed and edited ...' (p.276). However, the 'personal experience narrative' used in this research is the representation of the subjects' own experiences (Czarniawska, 2004). Given these points, Denzin (1989a) relates these 'conventionalized, and narrative expressions of life experiences' as incorporating the truth of the process which include:

1. The existence of others,
2. The influence and importance of gender and class,
3. Family beginnings,
4. Starting points,
5. Known and knowing authors and observers,
6. Objective life markers,
7. Real persons, with real lives,
8. Turning-point experiences, and
9. Truthful statements distinguished from fictions' (p. 17).

Interviews can be categorised into several types depending upon the nature and expectation of the interview contents (Bryman, 2012; 209). According to

Bryman again, the common forms of interviews are structured interview (given the same pre-set questions), semi-structured interview (a mix of pre-set questions and questions based on interviewee responses), and unstructured interview (based on topic or issue and the questions are informally asked to cover the topic or issue). The nature of semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer to move away from the pre-set questions based on the interviewee's responses, thus, engaging in different trajectories of information and deepens the understanding of the issue or topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Qualitative interviews place more emphasis on the interviewee's voice and allow for flexibility of the questions, based on the flow of data given by the interviewee (Bryman, 2012). One approach is to use a semi-structured interview. This method provides questions which act as a guide to cover specific topics; during the interview session, the interviewer is able to ask other unstructured questions based on the response provided by the interviewee (Bryman, 2012). This study therefore uses semi-structured in-depth interviews as the most suitable primary research tool to collect the narrative career biographies of the research participants. When considering the various methodological options for the current study, it became clear that the differences in work profiles and corporate cultures between the hotels in the research presented here would make it difficult to use a detailed structured interview.

As outlined, narrative career biography focuses on life stories and work experiences and encourages the use of open-ended and semi-structured

interview questions (Czarniawska, 2004), allowing follow-up with relevant questions in response to earlier feedback given by participants. Semi-structured interviews help the researcher to understand participants' personal perspectives on their career development, aspirations, and opportunities through their own 'voices,' interpreting them as accurately as possible (Denzin, 1989b).

4.3.2 Research Participants

The study was carried out in the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. This metropolitan city offers the largest number of hotel middle managers in Malaysia, based on the number of hotels within the region. The main focus of the research are on middle managers, who are also known as Heads of Department in the hotel industry, former middle managers and hotel general managers. Considering the aim of the study is to understand the issues pertaining to middle managers' career development, a number of former hotel middle managers who had resigned and left the industry were interviewed, as well as those still in post. Examining the perspectives of former hotel middle managers when describing their career turning points and the motivations behind their decisions to quit the hotel, and then linking these to mobility trends within and across the hotel and other service industries, was considered vital for the current research.

A small sample of general managers was also included in the study. In addition to the middle managers' own career experiences, the data collection

process involved getting feedback from general managers on their own individual career histories and their perspectives on the career development of current middle managers. Furthermore, participation from these three different groups was intended to achieve greater variety in certain characteristics and work-related features such as work tenure, job positions, impact of education, seniority, ethnic background, age and gender.

4.3.3 Sampling Technique

A sampling technique should be chosen which is based on the main objectives of the research. Deciding on which type of sampling technique to use, Braun and Clarke (2013; 56) highlight the 'inclusion and exclusion criteria of the sample'. The researcher should decide on those participants best suited to the research and which specific demographic variables need to be included. In this research, the key participants were identified as hotel middle managers. In addition, it was decided that these managers should be Malaysian, with at least five years of work experience in the post (middle manager or director of frontline departments including food and beverage, front office, sales and marketing, housekeeping, and room division department). The reason for choosing middle managers with at least five years of work experience is because it was important that the participants had had a range of experiences upon which to reflect as they outlined their career narratives.

Purposive sampling or criterion-based sampling was selected based on the characteristics of the respondents mentioned in the previous paragraph. Purposive sampling is one of the most commonly used sampling techniques because its main objective is to gather depth of information and evidence (Patton, 2002). A snowballing sampling technique can be used to ensure a sufficient number of participants during the process of the fieldwork. Snowball sampling uses the recommendations of existing participants for the researcher to contact and obtain new participants (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). Participants' vast networks and work-related groups within different hotel chains, job trade associations and different informal networks were useful for this process. Snowball sampling was used after the earlier selected purposive sample. Working from the recommendation of existing participants, new potential participants were identified and contacted. After the initial interviews it was felt appropriate to include more women and non-Malay ethnic groups. The sample was not seeking to be representative, rather it was felt that it would be useful to seek a greater range of participants' voices and perspectives among the middle managers in Kuala Lumpur's hotels. As such, additional steps were taken to increase the number of women and Indian middle managers in the sample (see also Section 4.5). Hence a snowball sampling technique with a purposive sample was used.

In relation to the study sample, the participants were shortlisted according to their current job positions and years of working experiences within the post. They were not in any way selected based on their ethnicity, gender or age

although in the second phase, women and ethnic minorities were over-sampled to get a balanced number of respondents. As a result, and displayed in Table 4.1, the characteristics of participants involved in this research were varied and diverse. However, the researcher made all efforts to ensure that any particular bias in selecting the sample was avoided, although the use of LinkedIn limits the participation of some managers (assuming that not all managers use the social media app). Therefore, the possibility of bias towards junior/younger employees who were comfortable with IT applications was acknowledged. In addition, those who were inactive LinkedIn users may have been less likely to participate, as they were less likely to respond swiftly to the researcher's request for an interview. The details of active LinkedIn users who responded and agreed to be interviewed are described in Section 4.5.

4.3.4 Access to Research Participants

A pilot study was carried out in July 2013, involving three interview sessions with representatives from the hotel industry in the UK to examine the issues presented in this study. Accessing hotel employees in the UK for the interviews proved to be a difficult process and resulted in several disappointments. This limitation was a crucial factor in organising the fieldwork that was conducted from July 2014. For the fieldwork in Malaysia, access to the research participants initially posed a major problem too, as

most hotel middle managers could not be reached through the formal hotel channel (the human resources department) or the 'gatekeeper'. The researcher also tried to use the hotel employees' association network to gain access, with little success. Finally, a direct approach through establishing contact on LinkedIn professional social media network was used.

LinkedIn provides an important platform for its users to display their work resumes online. However, this study used LinkedIn just to gain direct access to hotel middle managers. Participants' self-representation (Chiang & Suen, 2015) on LinkedIn enabled researchers to reach potential participants before an invitation to participate was sent, thus reducing the time taken to prepare for the fieldwork. The rest of the process involved making direct contact with potential participants until the end of the fieldwork stage, as explained in the following paragraphs.

Table 4.1: Profiles of the middle managers involved in this research

No.	Name (Pseudo-donyms)	Type of Manager	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Language in Interview	Post / Department
1	Ahmad	Middle Manager	37	Malay	Male	Malay	Sous Chef
2	Baharom	Middle Manager	41	Malay	Male	Malay/English	Sous Chef
3	Zainudin	Middle Manager	42	Malay	Male	Malay	Executive Chef
4	Davidson	Middle Manager	38	Indian	Male	English	Director of Food & Beverage
5	Shaari	Middle Manager	45	Malay	Male	English	Human Resource Manager

6	Khairil	Middle Manager	33	Malay	Male	Malay/English	Food & Beverage Manager
7	Fendi	Middle Manager	40	Malay	Male	English	Food & Beverage Manager
8	Jeff	Middle Manager	43	Malay	Male	English	Banquet Operations Manager
9	Leena	Middle Manager	33	Malay	Female	Malay/English	Conference Sales Manager
10	Kamal	Middle Manager	37	Malay	Male	English	Director of Sales & Marketing
11	Ruben	Middle Manager	34	Indian	Male	English	Food & Beverage Manager
12	Halimah	Middle Manager	28	Malay	Female	Malay/English	Revenue Manager
13	Naelah	Middle Manager	33	Malay	Female	English	Director of Human Resource
14	Anisa	Middle Manager	28	Malay	Female	Malay/English	Training Manager
15	Irfan	Former Middle Manager	41	Malay	Male	Malay/English	HR Manager (Club)
16	Jamil	Former Middle Manager	37	Malay	Male	Malay	Airline F&B Manager
17	Salleh	Former Middle Manager	36	Malay	Male	Malay/English	Culinary Instructor
18	Kadir	Former Middle Manager	41	Malay	Male	Malay	Food Entrepreneur
19	Azman	Former Middle Manager	32	Malay	Male	Malay	Restauranteur
20	Nazri	Former Middle Manager	47	Malay	Male	English	Hospital F&B Manager
21	Zahid	Former Middle Manager	29	Malay	Male	English	HR Director (Retail)
22	Zamani	Former Middle Manager	40	Malay	Male	English	GM (Convention Centre)
23	Hashim	Former Middle Manager	44	Malay	Male	English	Hotel Consultant

24	Julie	Former Middle Manager	44	Malay	Female	English	Director of HR (Manufacturing)
25	Hazel	Former Middle Manager	42	Malay	Female	Malay/English	Executive Director (Event Management)
26	Gafar	Hotel General Manager	46	Malay	Male	English	General Manager
27	Ralph	Hotel General Manager	55	Swiss	Male	English	General Manager
28	Harun	Hotel General Manager	39	Malay	Male	English	Hotel Manager

4.4 Pilot Study Interviews & Findings

In order to get a clearer understanding of the main issues to be examined in the study and to understand the work environment of the hotel industry more broadly, initial pilot interviews were conducted with current hotel employees, a hotel manager, a hotel school vice principal and a hotel management student in the UK. Although the pilot study was carried out in a different country, high employee turnover and difficulties in retaining skilled and knowledgeable employees are global issues (e.g. Ladkin & Riley, 1996; McGinley, 2012; Simms, 1987; Stalcup & Pearson, 2001). In addition, the difference in social skills of UK hotel managers and Asian managers, including Malaysia, was frequently highlighted in the interviews. By acquiring management and social skills, hotel middle managers are able to develop their career and move into senior managerial levels. Therefore, the learning gained from the UK experience on this and other key issues provided a greater understanding of the broader issues faced by hotels worldwide and

how these differ from, or are similar to, the Malaysian situation. They also helped in constructing suitable research questions and mapping out the main study framework. For the pilot interviews, questions were based on employment and understanding of work, skills training, career pathways and career development.

The interviews with employees and the hotel management student took place on 23rd July 2013 in the hotel meeting lounge and meeting room at a hotel school in England. For the hotel manager and hotel school vice-principal, the interviews were conducted in their respective offices on the same day. Each interview took 30-45 minutes with 5 minutes intervals between each.

Choosing these different work/study backgrounds of respondents was intended to achieve detailed insights from different people in the same industry about their career aspirations. Access to the participants from the hotel was obtained via the hotel manager and access to the student via the school's Vice Principal. The following section provides a summary of these interviews.

1) The hotel career structure in the UK

All the participants reported that the hotel career structure in the UK is based on a bottom-up approach in a pyramid-style of progression within the organization. They added that turnover or mobility of employees within the industry is inevitable because the industry comprises an array of hotel classifications, including city hotels, country houses and boutique hotels, and

people move from one hotel to another to build their career credentials and develop their skills. However, some do not advance due to family commitments. The hotel manager also stressed the need for expatriate managers in countries like Malaysia, because he felt that locals may be lacking in certain social skills and international experience. International hotels look for international exposure and experience in a manager because they will be primarily dealing with an international clientele. Managers also seek opportunities in knowledge transfer and the achievement of job satisfaction when working abroad.

2) Employee competence and skill gaps

Hotel employees mentioned skill shortages, especially management skills. Although there is an opportunity to progress by learning the basic skills of each department, managerial skills are still required. For example, even experienced managers need to understand and work with their employees who may be from very different backgrounds. Participants agreed that diversity in the workforce helps to fill the vacancies left by locals, especially for operational-level jobs. One of the participants highlighted the apprenticeship system he had undergone in Germany before coming to the UK and how this had a positive impact on his career in the UK.

3) Employment practices and career advancement opportunities

Participants considered that gender stereotyping in relation to role allocation was still common in the UK hotel industry. They further added that the nature

of the work itself differentiated interest in particular jobs by gender. They claimed that it is how employees define themselves in doing the job which is what really matters (in terms of work roles and responsibilities). They also highlighted the impact of the media in promoting the industry through reality shows and believed that this helped in recognising female talent and creating opportunities for different approaches to management.

As a whole, the industry is still poorly paid, although working conditions have improved, with no more split shifts. A better recognition and standardisation mechanism from the government is needed to change the pay structure in relation to the living wage as it is currently based on location and demand. For example, in cities such as London, a hotel supervisor's wage may be more than that of a department manager in a hotel based in a rural area.

The results of this pilot study suggested that further exploration was needed, through the narratives of Malaysian hotel middle managers themselves, as several of the points highlighted in the interview topic guide were not significant issues in the UK. Coupled with the evidence from this pilot study, and the four research questions developed for the study as a whole, a list of information needed for the main fieldwork was constructed.

4.5 Data Collection Method - Fieldwork Interviews

For this research, connections were initiated via LinkedIn from May 15th 2013, and within a year, 467 connections (hoteliers and academicians) were

established. A total of 200 connections were directly contacted and asked to participate in this study. Others were excluded after screening for their location (e.g., participants needed to be within the vicinity of the capital city of Kuala Lumpur) and demographic profiles (e.g., middle managers, former middle managers, and hotel/general managers). Invitational messages and emails were sent to all those on the LinkedIn shortlist of 200, 40 of whom agreed to participate in the main fieldwork phase which was planned from 16th July to 23rd August 2014. Follow-up calls and confirmation of interview details were made two weeks before the fieldwork commenced. In the end, 22 participants were available to be interviewed. The remaining participants were unable to be interviewed because of work commitments and last-minute changes.

After examining the characteristics of the interviewees, it was decided that some follow-up fieldwork should be undertaken. This was based on the first phase which highlighted the low number of female middle managers. Therefore, the need to recruit more women middle managers, as well as some managers from different ethnic backgrounds, were considered and undertaken. The second fieldwork phase was conducted from 15th June to 26th June 2015, involving an additional seven managers. These included four middle managers, two former middle managers and an industry advisory board representative. Overall, 29 participants were involved in the two interview phases. Table 4.1 highlights the details of the 14 middle managers involved in this research. The remaining 15 participants (3 hotel general

managers and 12 former middle managers) are highlighted in Chapter 5 and Chapter 8, respectively.

For the middle managers' interviews, there were 14 participants (10 males and four females) from four different departments within the hotel organisation (kitchen, sales and marketing, human resource and training, and food & beverage). They were all aged from 25 to 45 years old.

Included in this group were 12 Malay middle managers and two Indian middle managers. The researcher was unable to interview Chinese middle managers due to unforeseen circumstances resulting in the cancellation of appointments.

In the main fieldwork phase, the researcher met with the participants (hotel middle managers, former hotel middle managers and hotel/general managers) at their workplace or in a public place which depended on their individual preferences. Some preferred the hotel lobby, others their own office or a restaurant or coffee house. All participants were shown the ethical approval form and the informed consent form to read and sign if they agreed to participate in the interview and the research. The participant's consent form explained how the interview would be conducted, its objectives and the confidentiality of the responses given to the researcher. It also provided an opportunity for the participants to withdraw from the session.

The researcher then explained about the confidentiality of the research and, if the participant was willing, placed a voice recorder in front of the participants to record the interviews. Each group of participants had a different set of interview questions to explore the perspectives from different positions in their career. The first part of the interview schedule consisted of demographic questions meant to cross-check and verify information displayed in participants' LinkedIn profile pages. Section 4.3.4 described how LinkedIn was only used to gain access to the managers in this research. Therefore, additional measures were taken, as described earlier, to ensure the legitimacy of the work information posted by the managers on their LinkedIn account profiles.

The interview schedule was developed from the research questions, the structure of the research methodology and the literature review, derived from the pilot study, which also included questions that were adapted and modified from Savickas's career construction instrument (Savickas, 2005) (see Appendix H). The key components of the interview schedules are outlined in the following table.

Table 4.1: Key points in the Interview Schedule

Interview Questions Key Point	Scope of questions
Questions for Middle Managers	
Initial career formation/ Education system	The scope of questions here was about the starting phase of the middle managers' career in the hotel industry including their interest and career choice at

	that stage. In addition, the impact of their educational background, skills, and training in starting their career were assessed. Questions on the importance of education and experience in their career in the hotel industry were also included.
Work experiences	In this section, questions were constructed around the scope of work tenure either in the same hotel or in different hotels in the past. It also contained questions about previous work roles and responsibilities, including the challenges that they faced. Questions were also provided to assess the middle managers' work relationships with their staff, co-workers and superior officer or employer. This section also included questions on middle managers' work achievements.
Career aspirations	This section involved questions that assessed the middle managers' career path and aspirations. There were also questions about the current job and future plans. Questions also included the changes in the hotel industry in the country that might have an impact on the middle managers' career path and aspirations.
Opportunity structures	In this section, questions were asked about availability of career development training programmes in their hotel, the career progression opportunities provided by the hotel/hotel chain, their career decision challenges, and their strengths and weaknesses.
Questions for Hotel/General Managers	
Hotel/General managers' work	Questions were set to assess how the general managers reached their current post, their previous appointments, their work tenure as GM and their achievements, the education and training that they had, their roles and responsibilities, and their views on overseas work experiences.
Perspectives on middle managers' opportunity structures	In this section, questions were asked about the GM's views on the potential and opportunities of the current middle managers in the industry to advance in their career. It also included questions on middle managers' capabilities and strengths, their work culture, the challenges in managing hotels in

	Malaysia, and the career development programmes that are provided for middle managers.
Questions for Former Middle Managers	
Previous hotel work experience	Questions focused on their previous work and tenure in the hotel, the types of hotels they have worked in and previous achievements in the hotel. Questions also asked for comparisons between their current and previous work responsibilities and work environment, and how they managed the transition process (from hotel to another industry).
Career decision/ leaving the industry	This section included questions on the former middle managers' decision to leave the hotel industry, the difficulties that followed, their happiness with the decision, factors that would change their decision to leave the hotel industry, and the possibility of returning to the hotel industry in the future.

Data provided by the hotel general managers (Chapter 5) provided insights from their perspective on the opportunities for the middle managers and what else that they needed to do to develop their career. In addition, empirical data provided by the former middle managers in Chapter 8 provide an understanding of what is needed to advance in a middle manager's career, common problems and issues that lead to managers leaving hotels, and managing work relationships with their colleagues, senior managers or hotel general managers. Indeed, the data provided by former middle managers are actually a reflection of what middle managers may well encounter in the later stage of their career if they continue in their current position.

4.6 Plan for Data Analysis

As a qualitative research method was used in this research, interpretive or narrative analysis was used for data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013;

Czarniawska, 2004). Creswell (2007) suggested that the data analysis process should start with transcribing the interview, assigning codes to each point highlighted, then establishing themes for each set of codes, and explaining the results or reporting the findings. In the process of analysing the interviews, Atlas.ti™ qualitative data analysis software was employed to facilitate the process of establishing and organising the themes.

During the whole interview process, the researcher was able to record and take notes of the interview sessions using a voice recorder and field notes. All the interview recordings were then transcribed individually and transcribed verbatim. Prior to the transcribing process, all interviews which were done in Malay or a mixture between English and Malay (refer to Table 4.1) were translated entirely into English. Every interview was narratively coded and validated by cross-checking against existing interview notes and voice recordings from the fieldwork. They were then verified and tallied with the initial narrative coding written down alongside each interview transcript.

A total of 13 out of the 29 transcripts were initially translated from Malay to English before they were transcribed and coded. The other 16 transcripts were directly transcribed and coded without translation as most of the interviews were conducted in English. In the interviews which involved both English and Malay language, some participants provided data which include terms that is hard to find their similar English meaning. Therefore, the researcher has to re-word them. However, most of the interview sessions

were fully conducted in English language and the researcher were able to quote verbatim and transcribed the actual language used by the participants. The researcher continuously referring to the voice recordings and notes taken during the fieldwork process.

The interview transcripts from the three groups of participants were analysed separately including the coding, developing of themes and career patterns, analysing the data, validating the findings and writing up. Identifying patterns within the data (from the interview transcripts) enabled the researcher to link the codes and develop themes. Individual career stories were also highlighted in Chapter 6 and 7 as these were important both individually and within the overall context of the study.

4.7 Validity, Reliability & Trustworthiness

The findings from this research study are not generalisable to all hotel middle managers due to the approach taken and the sample of participants.

However, they are able to provide narrative depth and rich data on the personal experiences of the managers included here.

As Lewis and Ritchie (2003) explain, *'tests or measures of reliability and validity, ... are wholly inappropriate for qualitative investigation...'* (p.270). In a quantitative research paradigm, the criteria used to measure the worth and soundness of the research would be, among others, through the assessment

of the study's internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

With qualitative research, Braun and Clarke (2013) note that:

'A first requirement is to have a clear understanding of what features of qualitative data might be expected to be consistent, dependable or replicable... a secondary consideration is whether the constructions placed on the data by the researcher have been consistently and rigorously derived' (p.271).

Perakyla (2011) similarly states that 'the validity of research concerns the interpretation of observations: whether or not the inferences that the researcher makes are supported by the data, and sensible in relation to earlier research' (p.265). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) described 'width' and 'coherence' as the criteria to evaluate the worth of a piece of qualitative research. Width refers to the consistency of the findings gathered in the interviews. On the other hand, coherence is reached when the narratives are aligned with the research and correlate with previous work on the same topic or area. For width, they suggested that direct quotations from the interviews and brief descriptions of the narratives or data should be included. In the later chapters of this research, a large number of direct quotations from the interviews of the middle managers, former middle managers and hotel general middle managers have been included. Several case studies, which include narratives from various participants, were briefly described earlier.

Qualitative research must also be able to demonstrate its advance in scientific understanding. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), completely valid research is virtually unheard of and, as a result, validity cannot be completely assured. However, validity can be managed through the gathering of honest data and the elimination of bias. Cohen et al. (2007) further added that the issues relating to validity in qualitative research can be reduced by taking the following steps:

1. Choosing an appropriate time scale.
2. Ensuring that there are adequate resources for the required research to be undertaken.
3. Selecting an appropriate methodology for answering the research questions.
4. Selecting appropriate instrumentation for gathering the type of data required.
5. Using an appropriate sample
6. Demonstrating internal, external, content, concurrent and construct validity and 'operationalizing' the construct fairly.
7. Ensuring reliability in terms of stability
8. Selecting appropriate foci to answer the research questions.
9. Devising and use appropriate instruments.
10. Avoiding a biased choice of researcher or research team (p.144).

Some of the steps were implemented in this research. For example, the time scale used, the use of semi-structured interviews to explore the narrative biographies of the managers in order to answer the research questions,

testing the instrument in the UK (pilot study), and using a purposive sampling approach to specifically target the middle managers, former middle managers and hotel general managers as the samples in this research. However, the nature of qualitative research, and this research in particular, has also invoked the need for a trustworthy measure. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in a naturalistic setting, the validity and reliability of the research depends on the trustworthiness of the work. They demonstrate by saying, 'How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account for?' (p.290). In light of that, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a set of criteria that would lead to a sound qualitative or non-experimental research study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research.

4.7.1 Credibility

The credibility criteria refer to how the interpretations of the information provided by the participants actually represent their own voices, similar to internal validity in quantitative studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) ascertain that, in a naturalist environment, the following five main activities would strengthen and present a credible output:

'...activities that make it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced (prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation); an activity that provides an external check on the inquiry process (peer debriefing); an activity aimed at refining working hypotheses as more and more information becomes available (negative case analysis); an activity that makes possible checking preliminary findings and interpretations against archived "raw

data” (referential adequacy); and an activity providing for the direct test of findings and interpretations with the human sources from which they have come – the constructors of the multiple realities being studied (member checking)’ (p.301).

To ensure that the participants’ voices were represented responsibly in this research, the researcher collaborated and worked with the participants (middle managers, former middle managers and hotel general managers) throughout the fieldwork process (prolonged engagement), including the initial process of reaching the participants through LinkedIn. In the initial phase of the fieldwork, the researcher used the period to contact, establish connections and relay information about the focus of the research to the participants. This was followed by the gathering of responses through interviews (transcripts), reviewing, coding, and establishing themes for the findings. In the later phase, some of the participants provided clarification on certain points mentioned in the interviews which were not clear during the transcribing process.

4.7.2 Transferability

On the researcher’s part, transferability requires a clear overview of the research setting. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain, ‘...the conventionalist expects (and is expected) to make relatively precise statements about external validity (expressed, for example, in the form of statistical confidence limits), the naturalist can only set out working hypotheses together with a description of the time and context in which they were found to hold’ (p.316).

They further suggest that the qualitative researcher could only provide comprehensive information and rich data as 'to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated [...] (p.316). In the context of this study, the researcher provides rich data which emerged from the direct experiences of the participants, allowing the output to be transferable to other similar settings such as studies relating to the management of career for hotel employees in other countries in Asia.

4.7.3 Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a few techniques to enhance the dependability of qualitative research. They include demonstrating validity, "overlap methods", "stepwise replication", and inquiry audit. These techniques are intended to strengthen the reliability claims for naturalist research and require researchers to keep detailed records of every process in the research. Because each participant's experiences and narratives are unique, it is therefore important that the analysis is recorded and documented. In this research, all interviews were clearly recorded and documented, using voice recorder and field notes. The translation and transcribing of the transcripts were done in detail and verbatim to ensure that all information was included. Most of the interview was set at the participants' work premises and several other interviews were done elsewhere as suggested by the middle managers.

4.7.4 Confirmability

The main technique to ensure confirmability of research is by conducting a confirmability audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dick (2005) refers to this as providing the right connection between the fieldwork data and the research analysis, with the researcher's clear interpretation of the participants' experiences. This research provides clear details of the data collection and interpretation process through the interview transcripts, email correspondence, voice recordings, data coding and analysis.

It is hoped that the four criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are able to enhance the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of this research through the steps and techniques outlined above. Other than complying with these standards, there are particular ethical issues while conducting qualitative fieldwork, particularly when this involves interactions between the researcher and the study participant. These are highlighted in the next section.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Research often involves interactions between the researcher and the participants, either directly or indirectly, and thus ethical issues need to be considered in the negotiation of the research relationship (Lewis, 2003). In this study, the researcher only proceeded after obtaining participants' informed consent via an information letter, LinkedIn message or email. This contained details of the study including the study purpose, information about

the researcher and his university department, and the use of the data.

Participation in the study was voluntary, hence participants could withdraw at any time if they so wished. Cautionary steps were taken to ensure the rights of participants, including the use of pseudonyms for the individuals and their workplaces.

The researcher ensured that feedback from the participants was confidential and was not divulged to their hotel/general managers. Handling of the data after the fieldwork process was also crucial. Participants were informed and assured that their responses would only be used by the researcher, supervisors and examiners in the department. They were also assured that any outcomes and reports after the data analysis process would be fully anonymised and would only be disseminated within the academic community, including academic journals.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methodology that was used for the research on the career development of hotel middle managers in Malaysia. The selected research design was based on the objectives of the research, aiming to deliver the most suitable methodology, and in line with the researcher's perspective. The collection of data took cognisance of the type of study, development of the fieldwork instrument(s), sample selection, sampling technique, anticipation of any issues that might arise and the plan for data analysis.

The use of LinkedIn social media profiles to establish initial contact, thus connecting the researcher to potential interview participants, proved to be easier than dealing with hotel human resource departments. Each manager who was approached had responded positively to participating in the research. However, validating their work profiles was required to ensure the credibility of the information supplied in the interviews. Although it was suitable and appropriate for this research, the qualitative research design selected for the study presented several challenges. Setting up the interviews proved to be a difficult process because of the distance involved and changes of appointment dates. The use of semi-structured interviews also required the researcher to control the direction of the conversation and avoid misleading questions.

The initial fieldwork phase managed to gather responses from a large number of participants. However, due to insufficient numbers of women and imbalance in the overall ethnic representation in the first phase, a second phase of fieldwork was conducted in June 2015 which involved additional participants. The findings from both fieldwork phases were analysed and described.

In summary, the research design presents a new approach in reaching the research participants. With the advancement of social media, the use of LinkedIn professional network by-passed the problems of gaining access to

hotel employees for this research and opens up new opportunities to use the platform in future research. The preparation for the main data collection took into consideration the approach taken and the instrument tested earlier in the UK. This was important as it further clarified the research questions and the interview questions. The empirical data from the three groups of participants were important in this study, providing different perspectives on the careers of middle managers, and they are explained individually in the following Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.

CHAPTER 5: HOTEL GENERAL MANAGERS' VIEWS ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Introduction

Before we look into the findings from the main participants in this research (the middle managers), it is important to understand the opportunity structures within which the middle managers operated. In Chapter 2, several important perspectives in the Malaysian hotel industry were described, including current scenarios (linked to the labour market, role of expatriate managers, turnover, and employment rates) and opportunities for career advancement despite the typical constraints (e.g. gender stereotyping, long hours, low pay etc.) surrounding career development in the industry. It was envisaged that hotel general managers would be able to provide insight on these matters as they are the ones dealing with middle managers and managing the hotel.

The insights would provide a preliminary context to this research as their voices represent the employer or the hotel. Their comments could include their management experiences, challenges, and their roles in providing career development programmes for the middle managers. They also provide their views on the capabilities and potential of the current middle managers to succeed them. Therefore, in this chapter, perspectives and insights from hotel/general managers were gathered in relation to their own management experiences and middle managers' career development. These insights were

based on their experiences in managing and working with middle managers throughout their careers. Findings from the hotel general managers include their perspectives on the potential of local managers to succeed existing expatriate managers, the career development programmes provided by their hotel or chain, and the changes or evolution in managing a hotel property in the country.

5.2 Expatriate vs. Local Managers

Hotel general managers also outlined their views on expatriate and local Malaysian managers. Expatriates are employed by international hotels from the host country, primarily because of the company philosophy and vision. Moreover, their presence facilitates the training of potential successors among local candidates with similar qualities. Comparing expatriate and local managers highlights several differences. Among these are competency level, commitment, work experiences and social skills. For example, in previous work, Kim, Chun, and Patrick (2009) highlighted several limitations in comparing general managers, including the inability to 'distinguish between the different types of hotels they managed and the factors influencing the hotel business' (p.98). Despite these limitations, the explanations provided by the GMs in this research suggest that there is more to be done by local Malaysian managers to fully compete with expatriate managers. For example, in this research, one of the GMs pointed out some of the key qualities which he felt were lacking in local Malaysian managers:

“...if you compare Malaysian and non-Malaysian, commitment level is different and then their exposure is different... because these expatriates... they move around [work in different hotels] ... so they have better exposure. Knowledge could be the same but exposure... when it comes to creativity, is different.”

[Gafar, male, general manager]

However, general manager Ralph questioned the necessity of hiring expatriates in Malaysia, as he felt that local middle managers are capable of doing the job as well as expatriates. He felt that local managers' potential should also be considered. His argument was based on his previous experience of working with local middle managers.

“...but the issue always remains the same [hiring expatriates], why should Malaysian owner take manager from overseas... [from] Australia or whatever it is. Where else a local who has [the experiences and capabilities] ... always aimed for 10-15 years for much lesser [positions].”

[Ralph, male, general manager]

In the process of adapting to the local work culture, including in Asia, expatriate GMs often face difficulties which, in several cases, result in failure (Barber & Pittaway, 2000; Feng & Pearson, 1999). Therefore, hotel corporations have implemented preventative measures including cross-cultural training to avoid further issues (Dewald & Self, 2008; Magnini, 2009a). Barber and Pittaway (2000) previously highlighted the opportunity for local managers to take advantage of the expatriates' skills and knowledge to prepare themselves for senior roles. In addition, the attitudes of local managers towards expatriate managers was earlier analysed and documented by Yu and Pine (1994). Their research indicated that the attitude

of local managers in Hong Kong opened up more opportunities for expatriate managers to 'seek more important roles in the industry' (p.186).

In relation to the type and characteristics of expatriates who are selected, there are no regulations on the nationality or ethnic origin of expatriates. The main concern about this type of recruitment is the cost. Hiring an expatriate in Malaysia involves a more comprehensive package as compared to locals. It includes their children's international school fees, family relocation cost and traveling expenses. In fact, the expatriate's salary is being paid in US dollars which is a lot more than local managers' local rate. There may be reasons linked to hotel image not just perceptions of differing skill set in decisions to recruit expatriates.

"No... we don't look at nationality and all that [when selecting new employees] ... but if you are talking about Malaysian and non-Malaysian... The cost of hiring non-Malaysian is very high... if you are hiring a foreigner as a department head, the cost is very high that you have to bear... but if the company can afford to pay, that's what some of the hotel is doing."

[Ralph, male, general manager]

The following narrative is a part of Ralph's interview session which highlighted his experiences as a hotel general manager and his overall views on local middle managers' careers and advancement opportunities.

Illustrative box 1: Perspective of a GM: Ralph

Through his many years working in Malaysia, he understands his employees' attitude on future career pathways. Ralph is clearly disappointed by the attitude of local Malaysians that he believes do not see the opportunity to advance in their career.

Interviewer: So you've worked with many local middle managers... do you see among them that they have certain aspirations and ambitions to be General Manager or at least Hotel Manager?

Ralph: They just work... all because they need to earn a living... a lot of them. I always have to like when I'm the F&B manager or EAM [...] but the tendency of the local always is do your job, get paid. [...] they are not so much focused on career building and getting up. What we have today mainly is waiters just finished their school... not university graduates or anything... to earn a living.

Ralph did identify the lack of graduates in the hotel industry as the impact of higher education on fulfilling the employment gap in the hotel seems to be questionable. He did mention about certain criteria of an ideal middle manager or head of department. Ralph thinks that future managers should be doing a lot more than what the current middle manager is doing.

Interviewer: What do you look for in your department heads?

Ralph: What I'm looking for or used to look for is I want to have a person who is... a) proactive... b) who has a mind-set of what he wants to do 5 years from now... and has so to speak his career path laid out... who is a people person... we do not need people sitting in the office all day long. [...rather people] who are willing to learn and not just coming to work.

Ralph also gave his insight on the current scenario in the hotel labour market. It is interesting to note how he highlighted the technological advances such as the internet and gadgets may have significant influence on the reluctance of the new generation of employees to work in the hotel. He did not deny the value of international working experience; however, he is more interested in the interpersonal skills and enthusiasm of these potential general managers to hold the post.

Interviewer: How do you see the changes in the industry?

Ralph: I mean... the difference here is the previous, the older generation, they are very much hands-on... and whereas today's generation... they would like to stay in the office. They are fantastic when it comes to computers, smartphones and so on. [...] they are excellent on that. But they are not ready to roll up their sleeves and dig into manual work.

Interviewer: Do you think that they need international experience to manage a hotel?

Ralph: Let me put it this way... it would be an added plus. Not everyone gets the opportunity to go out. Most important he is the person that people

trust... able to communicate and understand the needs of a customer. There's no point being a GM and sitting in the office [...]

When talking about reasons to hire expatriate general managers, Ralph reiterated that the reason behind the choice is because of image and selling the brand of the hotel. He agrees that the hotel companies are now concentrating on China and the Middle Eastern market. It is not surprising that most hotels in Kuala Lumpur are introducing new products and services tailored to these markets.

Interviewer: Why do you think that international chain hotels are still relying on expatriates?

Ralph: They do recognise local talents... but then again very often for them... it is the image... but this image is also created by the locals, "...I want to go to this hotel, I want to have my event there because they are the experts... they can give a certain assurance quality and service". [...] They do help promote locals... but not so much in prime locations... more in secondary cities. [...] Although the new generation have the theoretical knowledge, they still need the practical knowledge.

Interviewer: Do you think that the trend of attracting tourists from the Middle East and China will influence who will be the GM?

Ralph: Yes... you see already now since the Middle Easterns come in big numbers to Malaysia... Kuala Lumpur... every international hotel, even to the extent of the locals, they have concierge, front office, guest relations with Arabic speaking employees... trends are changing... you try to deal with the market... the Chinese market is not an issue because here in Malaysia we do have Malaysian Chinese... that is all okay... the Indian market is okay... the Middle East has transformed the hotel to a different market segment. Traditionally they used to go to Turkey, to Lebanon, to Egypt... but those countries now have their own social problems. At this moment, they like to come here... they go to Indonesia. [...] The Wessim is the only hotel that has an expat GM from the Middle East.

Interviewer: We hardly see many American GMs in Malaysia today... is there any reason for that?

Ralph: If I'm looking back to the late 80's and now... it's not only here in Malaysia. This is a common phenomenon because of the cost of living and the salary expat people demand. We have less... also the government has to look into it. Malaysian people are supposed to have the job first. For example, the financial crisis in 1988, here at this hotel, the GM, Resident, front office, chef, sous chef, pastry chef... all were expatriates. After the financial crisis, all are gone except the GM... if you look here today, you have a chef, GM and the no.2 are expatriates. If there is a need... the

reputation or the figures go down... go and hire them back. That has always been an issue here... but generally speaking, we have all over Asia less expatriates because of the salary. If you are an expat GM, you have a family, I give you schooling for your children... we pay you and your family once a year air tickets back home... you have 5-6 weeks' holiday and so to hold them is impossible. We have today more Australian GMs... we do have Middle Eastern... for a simple reason... less costly. Today we don't pay for the school anymore... you are here on a single contract and so on. This has scaled down in any hotel because of the cost of living.

Ralph did elaborate on the uniqueness of local middle managers which relates to their ability to converse in different languages. He sees that as an advantage to working in a diverse workforce. Ralph added on the opportunity structures for local middle managers provided by international and local owned hotels in the country. He argued that there are mismatches between the type training provided with the required training for career advancement and the development plan of the hotel itself. Waiting in line for so long could lead to potential candidates for the GM post to leave the hotel and get the same job elsewhere. Therefore, the career development programmes should be tailored to meet the demand of the company and the labour market as a whole.

Interviewer: What are the strengths of the local middle managers?

Ralph: One of their strengths is they are multilingual. Work culture... they can fit in anywhere and able to do the job... willing to do so.

Interviewer: Does your hotel provide career building opportunities?

Ralph: The international hotels, yes... they have that more... if they see they have a bright staff and do their career building with them... promising they can advance... and they even sent them for courses overseas... within company [...] that goes back to the recommendation of the department to the Human Resource... and still depend on the General Manager to proceed on. Yes, there is a lot of government sponsored training programs... and not very often focusing... looking at the strength of the staff... their future [...].

5.3 Career Development Programmes

In relation to the discussion and insights on expatriate managers, the hotel/general managers were also asked about the career development opportunities of their middle managers and new employees in the hotel. One

GM explained about the quality of work from the locals that limit their opportunities to progress in their career.

“They have knowledge but in terms of practicality... [but] they don't like to practise... knowledge because... some of our chefs have worked with expatriate chefs. So, they have the knowledge... they also have the exposure on that... but when it comes to the actual work that we work, the quality is still not there.”

[Gafar, male, general manager]

Hotel/general managers agreed that current work opportunities, initially intended for local Malaysians, are currently being filled by foreign contract workers, especially in operational positions. They assumed that this was because of their stronger commitment and willingness to work hard for a basic salary, unlike Malaysians.

“The present trend that we have to hire foreign labour for basic jobs. This is in the service, in the kitchen... back of the house... cleaning the room. I think that we continue because we don't have enough locals willing to do that.”

[Ralph, male, general manager]

Although hotels focus more on work experience, there is still room for the career advancement of employees and middle managers with higher degrees, as long as they can perform well.

“...because there are not many people who finish their degree, master's, and entering the hotel industry. We still don't have department heads who have this education [qualifications] ... we still have a number of people who are working from the bottom and move up [without formal education qualifications] ... but these people, at a certain level they cannot think further.”

[Gafar, male, general manager]

According to Gafar, one of the main ways of doing so would be to further their education:

“I take my master’s degree when I was promoted to this position... but at the same time when I took my master’s, the first day I attended the class, they gave me a new horizon on how to manage. I took my master’s by coursework and not by research because I wanted to attend more classes. So, have more knowledge... so that is when it gave me a new horizon in managing.”

[Gafar, male, general manager]

The role of the employer in providing career development programmes for their employees was questioned by one of the hotel GMs who identified the current trend of minimising training related to career development, in order to reduce employee turnover or ‘job-hopping’.

“What’s the point of me training someone and for RM50 or RM100 more, [then] they go to other company... job hopping. This is very common [...].”

[Ralph, male, general manager]

Ralph described the career development opportunities provided by international chain hotels to be adequate and available to local employees. Others described the more limited career development opportunities in the local hotel market. Young qualified employees or middle managers often choose to work overseas because of the limited opportunities available domestically or the time it takes for them to progress. Working overseas offers good exposure and experience of working with different groups of employees from various cultures and with different skills.

“There are always pros and cons but it is not easy in the local market... there’s many more hotels to come and obviously not getting enough... because the good qualified people... they will go abroad... you cannot blame them.”

[Ralph, male, general manager]

Another manager described how his experiences working abroad and his dedication to the job had given him the opportunity to develop his capability and opens up more opportunity in his career.

“I've worked with them for two years when I was in Glasgow... and I'm happy to say that they were impressed with what I have done. What I'm capable of doing... to the extent that they offered me a job there. I mean it's not that impossible... Malaysians just need to be given the opportunity.”

[Harun, male, hotel manager]

Some of the middle managers in this research worked abroad in order to gain experience and to prepare themselves when coming back to work in Malaysia. However, if the existing 5-star international hotels in Malaysia, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, continue to prefer expatriates, this will defeat the purpose of working overseas and may discourage future Malaysians from seeking opportunities abroad. The hotel/general managers explained that their hotels did have career development and succession planning programmes for in-house employees and locals to grow within the brand. However, they claimed that locals were not interested in continuing to serve the company afterwards. Instead, they took it as a stepping stone to promote their capability and enhance their resumé.

“We did our succession planning but it is not that successful to be honest... because the turnover is so fast... because they all resigned... even to develop their own career.... Like when we promote one chef to become Executive Sous Chef, it lasts 6 six months only... he got another job and he moved on... because we promote him, he got a new job.”

[Gafar, male, general manager]

On the other hand, Harun explained the criteria needed by Malaysians to manage his company's range of hotels.

"...for the Malaysian properties, they prefer it to be Malaysian. What they require is only one... they don't say it outright that having hotel experience is a pre-requisite. What they want, they want you to be able to do is manage the revenue... manage operations... do sales and marketing... manage finances... costs and all that... and to be able to train and educate staff... develop career and all that. Other than that, I mean if you fulfil all these things... able to multi task at all these things as a hotel manager, then you can qualify."

[Harun, male, hotel manager]

It seems that the quality and capability needed to run a hotel demands not only the ability to master the knowledge and skills of work, but also human relations skills, including the ability to train and educate employees.

Managers are required to be multi-skilled and adapt to the changes in the hotel industry in terms of managing a hotel.

5.4 Changes in Managing Hotels

Hotel/general managers in this study were also asked about the changes in the hotel industry, particularly in the facilities, hotel performance, operations and procedures. Hotels operate in different classifications, based on the missions of their owners to serve specific types of customers (Yang & Cai, 2016). New types of hotel accommodation and stayover facilities, including those that were publicised through social media such as 'AirBnb', make it more challenging for hotel managers to maintain their performance and competitiveness. Hotel customers have an abundance of choices and channels to choose where to stay, as well as the price range. The large

emerging accommodation market changes how the hotel operates and draws attention to detail, apart from providing simple hotel facilities and services. As one of the hotel general managers quoted:

“We go from hotels with all these added on facilities... restaurants and so on. It changes more to simple things... hotel rooms, have one restaurant... all day dining. No more Chinese, Indian or Italian restaurants like it used to be because it's a matter of staffing, cost and profitability... and you have hundreds of restaurants around you. There's no point in providing these facilities because your hotel guest will not make use of it.”

[Ralph, male, general manager]

The management team and style has also evolved. Hotels are no longer run by hotel-educated managers. More corporate marketing teams are employed to synergise the performance of hotels, including budget themed hotels.

“... Tango hotels was run by a lot of people in the corporate office who were not from the hotel background.”

[Harun, male, hotel manager]

Apart from the operation, hotel/general managers also described how they try to control the turnover rates of employees in the hotel. It is clear that by increasing the pay of employees, as compared to nearby hotels, managers are able to retain their employees, thus enhancing organisational commitment and loyalty.

“When I was in KK (city of Kota Kinabalu), I had the lowest turnover of all the properties in Malaysia because of the pay. Compared to anywhere else in KK, it was the highest. And then the benefits and all and I took care of the team. Being a leader and manager, you are not just the boss... you lead the team and you serve your staff as well.”

[Harun, male, hotel manager]

One of the hotel GMs expressed his thoughts on the future of Malaysian hotels by comparing the average occupancy rate of major hotels in the region. He believed that Malaysian hotels will continue to perform in terms of providing the best service at reasonable rates.

“If we go back in the 80's... the average occupancy [rate] was in the lower 60%... today we are in the 70% line. Kuala Lumpur is the second lowest hotel rates [room rates] in Asia in terms of capital cities. If you go to Singapore, you can't find any 5 star hotels for less than RM500 night. The lowest is Hanoi in Vietnam.”

[Ralph, male, general manager]

The other significant changes that were highlighted by the hotel/general managers were the impact of the internet and information technology applications such as social media apps on customer ratings. As Bilgihan, Okumus, “Khal” Nusair, and Joon-Wuk Kwun (2011) explained that the availability of wireless internet networks throughout the hotel and positive customer reviews on social media are frequently taken into consideration when choosing a hotel.

In addition, any negative reviews from unsatisfied customers force the hotel manager to provide a reasonable explanation and recovery actions, as these attempts can either cause further damage or entice positive acceptance.

“One... with the advances of technology... especially social media... complaints [posted online by customers] ... that was very painful. Before, in those days, complaints were just on a piece of paper and within the 4 walls of the hotel. Now it goes viral very fast... damaging... and most of the time it is blown out of proportion.”

[Harun, male, hotel manager]

The hotel industry has evolved and proliferated over the years from a traditional service-oriented business to an online customer-rating type of business that has direct effects on service performance and image. The use of emails and internet recruitment, online assessment of employees' yearly performance and other paperless applications means fewer interactions between employees and managers.

Working in the hotel industry constantly requires keeping up with new trends and innovations, either in the physical aspects of the job, the requirements, employee relations and technological advancements, or in the style of management. These trends could provide opportunities to enhance employees' skills, capabilities and self-identity across the industry. One of the most talked-about issues in the hotel industry was constant mobility and the high turnover of employees.

However bad the situation is, employees - including middle managers - view mobility as an opportunity for them to 'add colour' to their career histories. The mobility of employees is taken into consideration in different contexts across generations. The older generation of employees (mostly senior employees and managers) were regarded as hardworking and loyal. They are most likely to stay and continue building their career which could span from 10 to more than 20 years of service. The older employees could only offer 'accumulated lived experience of a lifetime of work' (Canning, 2011;

667), whereas the new generation (described as generation Y) are more mobile and flexible in charting their careers.

Leaving their jobs to search for a better opportunity is often not thought out carefully. It is merely a split-second decision because of the abundance of opportunities elsewhere. The new generation of employees are more likely to demand these positions after a certain period of service because of their educational qualifications. In the Malaysian context, local employees, including middle managers, still have the upper hand in securing better positions in the industry, provided that they are willing to work hard and learn to adapt to new changes and trends.

The wide use of the internet in seeking new jobs has been a growing trend, compared to a more traditional approach, especially social media such as LinkedIn (Ollington et al., 2013), although it is initially used as a back-up rather than changing the previous approach altogether (Zide, Elman, & Shahani-Denning, 2014). In addition to that, the availability of various social network sites allows employees, including middle managers, to enhance their career networks outside of the hotel.

5.5 Additional insights from an industry advisory board representative

In this research fieldwork phase, the researcher was also able to gain insights from the representative of the Malaysian employers' advisory board,

Mr Shariff. When asked about the mobility trends of hotel employees, he said;

“Talking about mobility in the industry... the hotel industry itself depends on long hours of commitment... and sometimes they work irregularly. And because of the policy of Duty Manager, it means that he or she can be there for 24 hours. That I think is where people are thinking about whether they have quality life or not within the industry itself... and that I think is one of the major reasons why some of the local employees especially are not able to really stay put.”

In order to retain employees, several measures have been taken by hotel management, as described earlier in the chapter. Shariff agreed with the current issue of retaining local employees and believed that hotel management need to step up to attract more locals into the industry without compromising its service quality.

“Yes... attracting people and retaining them is always a challenge... that's why we had always heard from hotel players that they don't have enough people... which is quite true. That is why if you see in hotel functions, events or banquets, they tend to use the service of part time employees... school students to actually serve and work as waiters.”

With regards to workplace diversity in the hotel industry, he maintained the fact that some of the 5-star international hotels in Malaysia still did not understand the culture of the local people, although others have already changed their approach and are trying hard to provide the necessary needs for each ethnic group.

“I think issues regarding ethnic diversity, especially when you are a Muslim and you are working in the hotel industry, the culture is quite different. You will be involved in the preparation of alcoholic beverages and things like that. I think this is still happening... but most of the

hotels now understand the needs of every ethnic [group] in Malaysia... providing prayer rooms for Muslims and giving holiday breaks for other ethnic groups on their festive occasions.”

However, from an overall perspective, Shariff believed that hotel management are doing their best to nurture the diversity culture in order to enhance better teamwork:

“...as I understand it, the diversity in the workplace as Malaysian is still strong and acceptable. Maybe there are isolated cases of domination and favouritism but it has never been brought up to our attention... I believe the hotel managers managed to settle the issue and create a better work environment.”

In terms of hiring expatriates and the capability of local managers, he explained that these decisions are made by the management contract team and not the hotel owners. Generally speaking, he believed that the locals can perform at the same level as expatriates, if given the opportunity. He also suggested that local hotels should promote their brand globally, especially in the age of social media.

“Unfortunately, in this industry... although the owner may be local, the one that runs the hotel is under management agreement or international chain... and they set the terms... not the owners. The owners just take the fee from the management. I think we have enough expertise locally to run hotels... we should create our own branding for example... I'm glad that we have home grown brands that went international like Hunters Vale... and if our local brands can be accepted overseas, why can't we create our own local brands even locally?”

Shariff assumed that the use of expatriates in large international hotels in the country is merely for branding and promotion purposes to attract more international and local customers.

“I think it is just purely for branding purposes especially it is an international chain hotel... they would like to have expatriates to lead the hotel... and in some cases even for local hotel when they establish their kitchen, they would want to have an expatriate or foreign Executive Chef. That I would say is part of branding... part of policy of the organisation to actually make sure that international tourists and guests [their needs and requests] are being taken care of by these people.”

On the growth of Malaysian hotel industry, he was confident about the future of the industry and added that there should also be efforts from the hotels themselves to promote Malaysian culture and offerings, rather than relying on international products and concepts.

“I think now if we look at the way Malaysian hotels are being established, physically there are lot of improvements... Malaysian hotels are known to be good and they are cheap too... compared to our neighbouring countries. Obsession to have international hotels within our set-up may not necessarily be right... because the tourist is not excited about their own culture here [hotel theme and image] ... they are here to have a taste of Malaysian culture.”

Finally, Shariff was also asked about the relevance of the Malaysian education system in supporting the industry, especially in soft skills training.

“It doesn't help at all [current hotel education system] ... because now language is the major issue. In hotels, they are required to speak English and all that... our education policy doesn't produce people that can speak English very well... say for example if you want to be the waiter, you need to understand a bit of English... at the end of the day it's difficult. Like it or not, our own people don't want to try.”

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the career development of middle managers from the hotel general managers' point of view. Hotel general managers added their

insights on career development programmes that were made available for the local Malaysian middle managers. Equally important, they described their experiences in managing their own hotels and how this has changed throughout the years. This includes the new employment trends and impact of social media and the internet. The GMs further added the differences across generations of employees and their efforts to deal with this.

The input provided by the hotel general managers has provided a sound platform for this research to understand the findings and voices of the middle managers and former middle managers. We will be able to understand the career paths and aspirations of the middle managers and the career decisions made by the former middle managers based on the experiences shared by the hotel general managers in this chapter. The hotel general managers described their observations and experiences in managing the middle managers which include identifying the capabilities, opportunities and attitudes of their potential successors. As the industry evolves, the general managers described their experience in coping with the challenges of the new IT age and the need for continuous education and training.

Based on the data provided by the hotel general managers, it can be understood that from their perspective the future careers of middle managers in the Malaysian hotels are still individually motivated, although senior management believed they had provided sufficient channels and opportunities for the middle managers to advance. Historically, the middle

managers' positions in the early years of the hotel industry in the country were dominated by expatriates. As the country's economy flourished in the 1990s and until today, the transformation of the hotel labour market had become more apparent with the development of a range of hotel education and training pathways. Hotels no longer employ expatriates for the middle managers' level positions except for Executive Chefs. Local Malaysians were given more opportunities to lead the departments. In addition, local Malaysian middle managers have been proactive in seeking more challenging work experiences, including in some cases international working experience, and engaging with continuing education and training opportunities.

The new technological changes such as the influence of the internet in daily hotel operations made the middle managers aware of the need to update their knowledge to be relevant with the changes. However, the current situation showed that according to the general managers local middle managers were often seen to be unwilling to compete for senior managerial jobs. Evidence provided by the hotel general managers indicated that the opportunity for middle managers to become a general manager has always been there, however, some hotel brands still look up to expatriate candidates and local candidates mostly did not present themselves as ready and capable to take on the job. Further exploration and understanding from the middle managers' own perspectives is required.

Hence, the next two chapters will examine findings from hotel middle managers on their career paths and aspirations which include their initial career formation, job roles and responsibilities, work environment and challenges, patterns of work experiences, career planning, and opportunity structures. Then, the following chapter will examine insights from former middle managers to understand the reason for leaving the hotel, career barriers, conflicts, and other factors that limited their advancement opportunities in the hotel industry.

CHAPTER 6: CAREER PATHS OF HOTEL MIDDLE MANAGERS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the career paths of hotel middle managers from several perspectives based on their interview narratives, related to previous work experiences, current job and future career planning. In addition, this chapter will review the issues related to the career pathways of the middle managers. As indicated in Chapter 3, career development of hotel employees, including middle managers, is not easily defined as they are moulded from a variety of circumstances. These circumstances include the knowledge and skills that they have, their training and development, workplace relationships and occupational socialisation, years of working experiences, employment trends in the industry and their own career aspirations. Furthermore, the interviews explored the extent to which family commitment and responsibilities, as well as opportunity structures, influence their future career plans. The decision to advance in their career entails a number of issues that will be discussed and elucidated in this chapter through the managers' own narratives and supporting literature.

This research primarily set out to explore the career development of hotel middle managers through their own accounts and sharing of work experiences throughout their career timeline. Therefore, these findings focus on the career building of the hotel middle managers through in-depth semi-

structured interviews. The objectives of this exercise are to seek coherent understanding of their career patterns, experiences, career development issues and opportunities, and career development.

To begin with, this chapter aims to explain the decision taken by the participants in starting their career in the hotel. In addition, their initial education and training, interests and motivations, decisions and life events that led them to start their career in the industry are also explored. The participants' selected narratives in this study provide an understanding of their initial career formation and decision-making. In addition, the chapter explains how these decisions have contributed to their current career. Moreover, the findings from participants' narratives link the building of their hotel career paths with their patterns of career changes, tenure and years of experience, and the career development opportunities and choices which are summarized in Table 6.4 at the end of this chapter.

6.2 Initial Hotel Career Formation

As indicated in Chapter 3, developing a career in the hotel industry may not always be reliant upon specific hotel skills and knowledge. As the hotel comprises various departments and job functions, hotel employees may come from hotel management, accounting, sales, engineering or property management backgrounds and have prior training in different disciplines of the hotel operations. As previous studies indicated, most hotel employees described here started their career with different qualifications and

experiences (e.g. Kong, Cheung, & Song, 2012a). However, they took different routes in navigating their career progressions, which was highlighted in previous studies. Other research explained that employees were initially hired into low-skilled jobs and gradually obtained their career advancement and better pay grades after gaining sufficient experience and work skills (e.g. Josiam, Reynolds, Thozhur, Crutsinger, Baum, & Devine, 2008; Norris, Williams, & Adam-Smith, 2003).

Initial career formation involves the preparation and motivations that push hotel employees into starting their career in the hotel. As for the findings in this research, the participants reported diverse experiences and career encounters prior to their first hotel job. Three of the respondents joined the hotel industry with different skills sets and expertise compared to hotel service skills. Among these were engineering, IT and accounting. Interestingly, their initial part-time jobs in the hotel sparked their interest to continue building their career in the hotel industry. Although the three respondents could still utilise their knowledge and skills from their early education into their work in the hotel, especially in the engineering and finance departments, they eventually chose a different direction and department.

“I started with a bachelor’s degree in engineering. [...] I moved to Talent Instrument as technician [...] After that my wife was offered again to do her PhD... in England. Two weeks after we arrived there, I saw an advertisement at the university [...] a hotel needs a Night Auditor. I applied and got the job... first I worked as the Night Auditor... then to Reception... Night Audit Team Leader... and my last post was as the Duty Manager. I spent 5 years there.”

[Shaari, male, human resource manager]

Cultural diversity in the hotel industry demands managers who are able to work in multi-cultural work teams. Hence, working abroad may provide them with the knowledge, adjustment experiences and competencies required (Dewald & Self, 2008; Jassawalla, Truglia, & Garvey, 2004; Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009). In this research, almost all of the respondents in this study developed their initial career in the local hotel industry, whereas one of the respondents started his hotel career overseas. When he left his job in restaurant and catering, he planned to equip himself with the necessary knowledge and experiences needed to work overseas. He therefore decided to do further study and obtained a Bachelor's degree before embarking on an international career.

“The actual plan was to further study and work overseas because it is difficult to find work with my bachelor degree. You won't be able to negotiate a good post. Most chefs that interviewed me said that they can't offer me the job because I'm over qualified.”

[Baharom, male, sous chef]

Ambitious and courageous in trying a new working environment, one of the middle managers in this research, Baharom, ventured abroad and worked in Hong Kong to expand his experiences and skills. He believed that having a Bachelor's degree, it would be good for his resume and that he would certainly be regarded as a professional employee rather than as a hard labourer (as hotel operational employees are often referred to in the industry). Although most research has demonstrated that working abroad is a positive decision in career-building (Causin & Ayoun, 2011; Ozdemir & Cizel,

2007; Silvanto, Ryan, & McNulty, 2015), there is also evidence that working abroad, especially in certain countries with language and cultural differences, can prove to be a challenge (Choi & Kim, 2013; Feng & Pearson, 1999; Magnini & Honeycutt, 2003; Selmer, 2007; Wang, 2009) .

6.2.1 *New careers in the hotel industry*

Employees' ability to adapt to new work has been the focus of research in the past (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroeck, & van Vianen, 2009) and had been linked to career success (Zacher, 2014) and better retention (Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015). There are doubtless challenges in having to get used to a new working environment, co-workers, and tasks within the organisational context but an ability to adapt and learn is a definite advantage. In this research, some of the respondents highlighted they had displayed the courage to start learning from their work experiences and co-workers to establish their career in the hotel industry.

“Knocking on every hotel in KL (Kuala Lumpur) asking for a job... but the one hotel that I was afraid to be in was the one that I stayed for 7 years... because I had a friend telling me that he can't cope working in that hotel and quit after only 6 days of working. [...] They asked me whether I know any cold kitchen products. I answered no... zero knowledge. [...] I stayed there for 7 years. My last appointment there was Garde Manger Chef (Cold Kitchen).”

[Zainudin, male, executive chef]

The ability of Zainudin to adapt and learn helped him to develop his interest and passion in his work and he was able to advance in his career because he had sought help from his superiors and regarded them as mentors.

Zainudin took time to learn every new piece of knowledge in the kitchen that

would help him in the future. Starting by reading newspapers to help him learn English, he later read cooking textbooks used in culinary schools to enhance his knowledge. This motivated learning process, as demonstrated by Zainudin in his career building, had prepared him to manage his current roles and responsibilities. His determination and commitment demonstrated his perseverance to lead the department, and it is clear that he deserved to become the Executive Chef.

6.2.2 Factors influencing early career decisions

Making decisions about a career or a career change occurs in between job, learning and other life events and the right decision impacts on an individual's economic and social change (Amundson, 1995). According to Amundson, 'persons with high levels of self-awareness and personal agency are in a better position to respond proactively to external circumstances and exert more control over long-term effects' (p. 12). Family influence and interventions have frequently emerged in previous studies relating to female employees or managers across all types of employment (Day & Chamberlain, 2006; Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009; Karatepe & Bektashi, 2008). In the formation of early careers, influences from immediate family members were also common in providing first impressions to the participants in this study.

"I started... actually my sister was a hotelier... so looking at my sister, I want to work in the hotel. So since high school, I already set my target to work in the hotel."

[Anisa, female, training manager]

Anisa believed that her sister was her biggest influence in pursuing her career in the hotel industry. Taking her sister as a role model, she emphasised that the type of work and character that her sister possessed were developed within the hotel and this eventually strengthened her intention to join the industry herself. However, previous research has also indicated the role of family in influencing career decision-making difficulties although these varied across cultures and regions (Fan, Cheung, Leong, & Cheung, 2014; Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008).

In a different context, there were several objectives of these participants to join the hotel industry. Previous work has shown that employment uncertainty and determination to secure a better career may lead employees to accept any relevant jobs available as long as they are aware and 'mindful' of the opportunities (Jacobs & Blustein, 2008). Participants in this research who had clear career pathways and educational backgrounds were working in the industry as expected, whereas others chose the hotel for a different reason.

“Joining the hotel mainly because of security purpose for my family. Honestly speaking, in a free-standing restaurant... the service is much better... but there is no security. That is why I joined the hotel.”

[Ruben, male, food & beverage manager]

Ruben believed that his future would be better and more secure if he joined the hotel industry, although he felt that the demand for service was not as high as the restaurant industry. Most respondents had a positive view of their futures within the hotel industry because they had dedicated their lives to building their career in the industry. Several admitted that their family played

an important role in supporting their careers. With long hours and shift work, the understanding of family members helped them focus and perform when needed.

“My wife understands [my job in the hotel] ... my wife was a waiter before. Working in the same hotel with me... when I was the supervisor.”

[Khairil, male, food & beverage manager]

“Family is fine [with my decision to work in the hotel] ... My family is very supportive.”

[Kamal, male, sales & marketing director]

“It was also because of my husband... he worked in Hallam hotel with me in the earlier stage. He encouraged me to work in the sales and revenue department.”

[Halimah, female, revenue manager]

The following narrative describes the determination of a middle manager (Davidson) to start his career in the hotel industry, particularly in the food and beverage department. His effort to enrich his knowledge and skills through hospitality study while working on a part-time basis showed his perseverance and motivation to succeed in his hotel career.

Illustrative box 2: Perspective of a middle manager: Davidson (male, director of food & beverage)

His initial career in the hotel industry was as a bartender in a resort. He described how he managed to convince the then food & beverage manager to take him in:

“I start work in a hotel in Genting Highland. I met a nice F & B Manager... his name is Suhairy... a Singaporean Malay. A very good guy... fantastic in speaking English... he asked me whether I'm interested to go to

another department. I said yes... he knows I'm zero about the hotel... but he wanted to know how I'm interested. The interview was 5.00 pm... he was about to leave his office when he saw me... then he offered me my first job in the bar.”

After he finished high school, he went on to study for a diploma majoring in hotel and catering management while working part-time to finance his study:

“I did it at Kota College... it's a UK program... hotel and catering. I have to sit for UK based paper. While doing my diploma, I worked as a part time in Hallim Vila in Subang... as a Senior Banquet. After that semester break... I become a full-time employee after finishing my diploma. After that I went for training in Sazzali hotel Kuala Lumpur... after 6 months, I become permanent staff. Working in the club house... then coffee house... my new experience... I learned a lot there.”

In his pursuit to establish his career, Davidson continued to further his study and obtained a bachelor's degree:

“...my strength was on operation. So from Grandi I moved to... that's the point where I realise that I can't go further without a bachelor's degree. So what I did, I did my degree in Pergas, under Hully Group... it was sponsored by the embassy. In Pergas it was 9 to 5 class... so what I did, I request for evening shift when I was in Grandi... but the management won't let me do it. So I resigned and work as a pub manager.”

His determination to grow in the industry and his education secured him the post of director and a master's degree after almost 16 years since he first started his career:

“I came here as the Director of F & B and was then promoted as the Director of F & B and Kitchen... now I've just finished my MBA... from Australia.”

6.2.3 *The impact of hospitality education on career*

Education plays a significant role in preparing for a career. Hospitality education, designed to train skilled employees and new managers, began in the 1960s and is still flourishing (Lashley, 2015). However, more hotels have recently started their own training and development plans from within. Hotels have previously collaborated with private colleges and other vocational

institutions to provide short courses for their employees and managers. In addition, the Malaysian Association of Hotels' (MAH) own college, known as Malaysian Association of Hotels Training and Education Centre (MAHTEC), has continuously provided training for hotel employees. Despite that, more than half of the participants in this study had a formal educational experience, specifically a diploma before joining the hotel industry (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Educational background of participants

Level of Education	Middle managers	Former middle managers	Hotel/General managers	Total
High School	1	0	0	1
Certificate	1	0	0	1
Diploma	9	7	1	17
Bachelor's	2	2	1	5
Master's	1	2	1	4

Having a diploma allows managers to start their career, but it also gives them the opportunity to have both short and long-term goals to reach a higher post on their career ladder. Previous research has shown that both theoretical and practical knowledge obtained through the years in colleges and vocational schools are important in assisting new employees when they start their career (DiMicelli, 1998; Ruhanen, 2005; Stierand & Zizka, 2015). This was supported from findings in the study reported here:

"I started by doing my diploma in 1999 [...] Then I continue with my Bachelor's degree in 2002 and graduated in 2004. After that I was unemployed for 6 months before my first job... then only I managed to get a job in the hotel industry."

[Leena, female, conference sales manager]

Studies have explored the impact of relevant hospitality educational background on the initial career formation of hotel employees and found that the knowledge and competencies that they possessed were beneficial in their career-building (see Gilmore & Gregoire, 2001; Gruman, Barrows, & Reavley, 2009; Ross, 1997; Teng, 2013). However, based on the findings in this research, hotel management education is not the only 'ingredient' in the initial career stage of a manager: having the opportunity to undergo an internship programme in the hotel helped in encouraging interest in the industry:

"I went to Hallam hotel because I went for my internship there... so it is easy for me to join later after my diploma... I worked there as reservationist for a year...and then I went to Melaka and worked in Nyonya hotel and they offered me the position of Assistant Sales Manager."

[Halimah, female, revenue manager]

Having known the system and having familiarised herself with the organisation, Halimah used her early career experience in a five-star rated hotel in Kuala Lumpur to work in Melaka after her first year and was appointed as Assistant Sales Manager there. She believed that the brand of the first hotel she had worked in had a huge influence in getting the job in Melaka. In the hotel industry, the middle managers' pattern of work experiences from various types and classifications of hotels provided them with added advantages because they had the required knowledge and skills by the new employer. Therefore, it is important for them to be constantly learning and enriching their work knowledge and skills for their future needs.

It is undeniable that knowledge plays an important role in the career development of the hotel middle managers in this research. Be it formally or informally, the impact of education and the learning process throughout their careers helped them in dealing with everyday issues and challenges with customers, employees and management. Evidence from this research indicated that the importance attributed to the knowledge and skills possessed by middle managers may differ based on the type of responsibility they carry. The knowledge that they gained was also important in further developing their career path. For some of the participants, education also initiated their interest to work as a hotelier.

“My interest started from my education. I saw the potential of being a hotelier might suit me.”

[Leena, female, conference & sales manager]

As the hotel industry is known to be a skilled service industry, prior knowledge or a generic educational background in hospitality helps to fill the demand for skilled staff (Nolan, Conway, Farrell, & Monks, 2010). The technical skills of a Food and Beverage Manager would be different from those of an Executive Housekeeper because of the different work procedures and processes between them. For example, the Food and Beverage Manager is more capable of managing the day-to-day operations of the coffee house such as taking orders, and elaborating upon the menu to guests as compared to the Housekeeper who is expert in making up rooms, cleaning procedures and chemicals, and laundry. However, both were similarly trained to provide the best service for hotel customers. As for the findings in this

research, Ahmad added that his education and knowledge made it easy to be recognised and appreciated in the workplace. Less supervision by his superiors has made him more independent in his work.

“At that time, they appreciate my knowledge really... you know when you have basic knowledge... so it's easy to work in the kitchen when you know the basics.”

[Ahmad, male, sous chef]

Not all of the participating middle managers had sufficient hospitality qualifications before they were appointed to their current posts. For example, Baharom, after realising that he did not have the right qualification and skills set to be a department manager, set out to continue pursuing a higher education degree that would enable him to have more opportunities to grow in the industry. He believed that formal education is vital if he wants to become a manager.

“But the problem is at that time I don't have a diploma, only a certificate and I am not good in English either. For example, whenever there is a complaint from a guest, I usually pass it to my colleague to handle on my behalf. I lose out on my own opportunity to grow [by demonstrating my capability to solve the complaint]. Most of my friends were offered to advance far earlier than me... Then only I realised what I was missing.”

[Baharom, male, sous chef]

Hospitality education is a combination of theoretical understanding of the job, artisan skills and a professional approach to consumer experience that were developed to meet the demands of the industry (Christou, 1999; Kamari, 2003). The U.K. and U.S.A were said to be the early pioneers of hospitality study which starts from the tertiary level (Kamari, 2003) and management

education was first developed from the actual work training and experiential learning of hotel employees and managers (Medlik & Airey, 1972).

As described in Chapter 2, the hospitality education system in Malaysia has evolved through several cohorts since it was introduced in 1967. Training for the first cohort which started in the 1970s emphasised more the practical skills, with less time on campus, while the newer training programme focuses more on soft skills and the programme itself has also been shortened to two years. The findings in this research highlighted the point made by one of the middle managers, Anisa, who realised that the training for the new cohort (the two-year programme) had a huge impact on the new generation of students. Because of the short study duration, she questioned the students' ability to cope in the future as she believed that they were insufficiently prepared.

"I'm from the previous cohort... there are employees from the new cohort... sometimes I even question them how do they learn in such a short period and can they actually cope with all the knowledge and skills at the same time? To me it's not sufficient if you shorten the period of study because you want to learn everything from the lobby to the back of the house [departments that are not dealing directly with customers] ... at least you need three years for that."

[Anisa, female, training manager]

Apart from acquiring educational qualifications, continuing to learn is also important throughout the middle managers' career timeline. Davidson, for example, chose to work in the industry, even though he was struggling to study on a part time basis because his family could not afford to pay for his studies in his early years. Continuous learning to improve and update current

knowledge and skills relating to hotel jobs is seen as a trend (Kim, Erdem, Byun, & Jeong, 2011; Nicely, Palakurthi, & Gooden, 2011) especially for the older generation of managers to stay relevant with the advancement of knowledge and technology.

Another middle manager, Jeff, pointed out the significant contribution of continuing to learn while at work. Knowledge that he gained from everyday work allowed him to learn from experience and thereby update his management skills and capability. Updating knowledge has become a trend in the hotel industry, as mentioned earlier. The industry is constantly evolving, and innovative approaches will be introduced to keep up the competitive working environment between hotels. The following example below highlights the importance of updating new trends and continuing to gain new knowledge in the industry to ensure competitiveness.

“As I told you, as a sales person... it's very important for you to update your knowledge... based on the current trends.”

[Kamal, male, sales & marketing director]

According to Gjelsvik (2002), “hotels are viewed as *knowledge-enabling organisations* where managers and employees share information and experiences to create new insights and skills” (p.33). Kay and Moncarz (2004) previously examined the impact of knowledge, skills and abilities of lodging managers as they reviewed 35 previous studies and shortlisted four knowledge domains (human resource management, financial management,

information technology, and marketing). They later found that knowledge in financial management has a huge impact on managers' career advancement. However, high rates of turnover and a competitive work environment mean it is not always a good investment for hotels to support managers to seek and provide new knowledge (Gjelsvik, 2002) as they can easily leave if they receive a better offer elsewhere.

In this research, data showed that managers like to challenge themselves and test their ability to adapt to new knowledge, as described by Naelah. A higher educational qualification would not only provide the opportunity to grow within the hotel industry, but would also be relevant to other service related industries. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the importance of continuous learning as it may be the reason for the managers' survival in the industry.

“Just like taking on the master programme... I like to challenge myself [in acquiring new knowledge and obtaining higher education degree that can contribute to my work]. The challenge right now is to maintain my grade. I am always questioning my ability [...]. The other aim is if I finish my masters.”

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

6.3 Current Job Roles and Responsibilities

Previous work indicated that the primary role of a middle manager in a hotel is to manage his/her subordinates and ensure that they are performing well in meeting the expectations of the hotel manager or senior manager (Ponton,

2010). As a source of knowledge and guidance in their current job roles, the impact of formal hospitality education in utilising managerial skills has been widely discussed and evaluated by researchers. This includes assessing the skills and competency levels (Burgermeister, 1983), as well as the pathways of hotel middle managers (Nebel, Braunlich, & Zhang, 1994), assessing the link between hospitality education and industry requirements (Tsai, 2004), and the work learning associated with hotel managers (Nicely et al., 2011). In addition to their responsibility to senior management, middle managers are often required to connect with their subordinates, including shaping their commitments to the organisation. Therefore, knowledge and skills play a significant role in doing so. Most of the middle managers in this research were initially trained through the formal hospitality education system in Malaysia, although a few had education and training experiences abroad.

6.3.1 Knowledge sharing and skills utilisation

Most of the middle managers in this study reported that they shared their knowledge and skills and utilised their expertise, suggesting that they were being put to good use and contributing further to the hotel community. For example, in recognition of his work and educational achievements, Davidson currently served as a hotel school verifier. Recognition by an education institution is evidence of a wider trust in their skills and knowledge.

“Now I'm one of the hotel school verifiers certified by Kota College. If whenever there's an exam whether in Malaysia or Asia, I'm one of the verifiers... they looked up to me.”

[Davidson, male, food & beverage director]

Davidson hopes that the contributions that he had made will be used by other hotel employees or students who will eventually enter the industry. He is keen on developing and encouraging more talent, using his own experience as an example.

Although some of these skills and knowledge are important for the work done by middle managers, particular skills were meant to be used to understand the local culture and to develop foreign employees through the application of soft skills. Managing a multicultural workforce is indeed a growing trend in the hotel industry. Differences in culture and how this affects the manager-employee relationship have previously been examined (e.g. Testa, 2007), and results from other research showed that motivating and inspiring multicultural employees proved to be a challenge for most managers. Testa (2007) also examined employees' reactions to managers from different cultures and how this would have a significant impact on employees' work performance.

A middle manager in this study, Anisa, commented that instilling the Malaysian culture is still a huge challenge, especially for the local employees. She was keen to bring back the Malaysian culture of being courteous to their hotel guests. Cross cultural training in the hotel has its own challenges and impact. Dewald and Self (2008) highlight how cross-cultural training is often undervalued by hotels although they believe that it has significant impact on hotel teamwork and work relationships.

“...I know soft skill is very important... at least I can contribute to the people. Even though most of the contract workers are foreigners, but they took part to understand the local culture and customs.”

[Anisa, female, training manager]

Having had sufficient knowledge and experiences in the industry has enabled most of the middle managers to build their self-identity and create their own personality, related to the level of skills that they possessed. Some found themselves committed to their job and at times could be seen as ‘bragging’ about their skills and capabilities:

“I’m used to fast pace kind of job in previous hotels... but here it’s a bit slow. Never before in my career I only have to prepare [cook] western set [menu] for 50 guests. The previous hotels I’ve worked I have to prepare more than that... a lot more.”

[Ahmad, male, sous chef]

“I’m an aggressive manager. I want my staff to be positive and work together with me. That’s why I can work well with the older staff... the older generation because I let them give their opinion and consider their ideas. I like to give more space to my team to be creative.”

[Jeff, male, banquet operation manager]

In related developments, Baum (2002) explained that in hospitality work, skills are shaped by the range of tasks within different hospitality sectors such as the different scales of hotels, location, classifications, and brand. Baum (2002) further addressed the four key theme areas of skills development in the industry: “the nature of work and skills in hospitality, de-skilling within the hospitality workplace, the technical/generic skills debate within hospitality, and skills and the education/training process in hospitality” (p.345). However, skills may not be limited to work-related or technical skills.

They may vary and they may also be subjective (Riley, Robinson, & Davison, 2011).

For example, in the research presented here, Zainudin uses his human relations skills to gain his subordinates' trust, which he considers to be his strength. He argues that his ability to persuade his staff to work with him according to his style has helped him succeed in managing and building talent within the hotel.

"... when you work in a new environment, look at the weaknesses of others... not their strengths. Polish their weaknesses and gain their trust... that's how I work... work as honest as possible, I consider my strengths."

[Zainudin, male, executive chef]

Training employees will always be the main focus of middle managers as they have the relevant ability and skills to pass on knowledge. These include training for general employees, fellow managers and sharing knowledge with senior managers. Below are several comments from the middle managers who shared their experiences of training and developing their employees, with varying outcomes.

"Here, I'm handling training for all the staff including contract workers. Most hotels won't bother about contract workers... but I told my boss that the contract workers too need to understand our brand and our culture."

[Anisa, female, training manager]

"I still have the challenge of training the locals... for me they are my next generation. [...] I have trained interns and college students to groom them... I want them to love the industry and have the desire to

work and contribute to the industry later on... they should be bringing in the Malaysian culture back to the hotel scene.”

[Anisa, female, training manager]

“I tried to train my staff here to be better... but they are not up to the challenge... after two months, they quit.”

[Khairil, male, food & beverage manager]

Success in their careers means that middle managers have developed a deep passion built around their skills. Middle managers in this study demonstrated their own set of required targets and acknowledged their previous achievements as drivers of their career advancement.

“I was the winner... 'Worldwide Sales Incentive Award'... got the Starlight Incentive Trip to Hawaii for 14 days in 2005. In order to achieve that, you have to achieve 130% above your targeted revenue and hotel as a whole has to achieve the same 130% above the whole hotel revenue.”

[Kamal, male, sales & marketing director]

In relation to skills set and personality, one middle manager, Baharom, reported that he was selected by the hotel management to showcase his culinary knowledge and skills to the hotel customers.

“At this hotel, there is a level or floor which the most expensive rooms are located... If you stay at that floor, they will serve weekly snacks for you. Selected chefs have to produce 2 or 3 items for the snack... I am one of the chefs selected for that one...”

[Baharom, male, sous chef]

One middle manager, Zainudin, was chosen to lead the development of their unit and selected to make a difference to the hotel by introducing new concepts. Zainudin was once appointed as Chef de Tournant, or special task chef, in charge of remodelling and renovation of the restaurant and kitchen

design and concept within his hotel chain. This requires a highly skilled and experienced manager.

“...at that resort I was involved in the renovation... started to change the restaurant concept... and they called it 'peace village' and it follows throughout their chain. From there they saw me [my capability] ... the owner... they gave me the task of Chef de Tournant (special task chef).”

[Zainudin, male, executive chef]

In addition, the impact of knowledge sharing can bring changes to the work environment, stimulate new ideas and promote positive work cultures. New ideas about the job itself or work setting can encourage change in the new workplace and motivates existing employees to perform better in their jobs.

“I would like to bring in changes in this hotel especially my department... challenge myself to produce new product and menu items, new concept because now we are still using equipment and utensils from the previous owner.”

[Ahmad, male, sous chef]

Another middle manager, Jeff, highlighted how he recognised the needs of his employees in terms of new skills, and updating existing knowledge and skills. Middle managers are also the trainers for the hotel. They are required to train their own employees formally or informally and sometimes give training to other hotel employees from the same brand.

“I also often request the hotel to offer more personal development-related training programmes. I will list them down and let them know that these are the training that I need and my staff should be attending.”

[Jeff, male, banquet operation manager]

6.4 Middle Managers' Work Environment and Its Challenges

Despite the immediate challenges of working in the hotel industry, employees will sooner or later give serious consideration to their own career and most are likely to put their career future over the interests of the hotel (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2010). These career concerns subsequently are one of the reasons for the high turnover rate and mobility of skilled employees as the findings in this research revealed:

Interviewer: *“Is there any specific reason for you to move from one hotel to another and in a different segment?”*

Middle manager: *“First because of the position... despite my previous appointment as Junior Sous Chef, previous employer was not keen to promote me as their Sous Chef and they are looking for other candidate... and at the same time I got an offer from this hotel for the Sous Chef in Western Banquet... and I just grab it.” (Ahmad, Sous Chef)*

The above example came from a chef's own experience, but understanding the occupational culture of chefs is under-researched (Cameron, 2001). In addition, Cameron (2001) explained that, “existing research evidence demonstrates several points of agreement about the occupational culture of chefs. Chefs through their craft and tradition tend to possess a strong self-identity” (p.104). Findings in this research demonstrated how these particular middle managers (chefs who are the head of the department) used their occupational identity to their own advantage in navigating their career. The individual skills and identity possessed by the chefs helped their career progression by providing options both to them and to their employer on the type of chef that they wanted.

6.4.1 Gender issues

One of the continuing occupational challenges for middle managers is stereotyping within the industry. Hotel jobs were said to be 'gendered-specific' because of the number of either men or women dominating particular posts and the specific responsibilities that they carry (Campos-Soria, Marchante-Mera, & Ropero-García, 2011). Although most of the (male) middle managers claimed that stereotyping in the hotel industry was no longer an issue in the hotel industry in Malaysia, despite the overwhelming evidence from previous studies (e.g. Guerrier, 1986; Kara, Uysal, & Magnini, 2012; Kayem, 1976; Lagasi & Buba, 2016; Mooney, 2007; Sparrowe & Iverson, 1999), responses from female respondents in this research suggest the opposite.

Although the female participants in this research had managed to succeed in their career, they still believed that gender discrimination and inequality exists within the industry. Recent research in various countries also illustrated similar findings (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010; Fischer, 2013; Jeou-Shyan, Hsuan, Chih-Hsing, Lin, & Chang-Yen, 2011). In some countries, especially Muslim countries, the segregation of women into 'office hour' jobs is due to 'cultural constraints and religious constraints' (Sobaih, 2015; 236).

Similarly, Campos-Soria et al. (2011) found that female hotel employees were given less responsible types of work, when compared with male

employees. In most hotels, the type of work stereotypically suited to women would be in human resources, sales and marketing, the corporate office, and in the pastry kitchen. This is due to the working hours of these jobs, allowing them to work like any other office worker, and to women's so-called craft-related skills in certain types of jobs.

Based on the findings in this research, female managers were still subjected to discriminatory treatment by their colleagues and employers, primarily because of traditional views in the industry that women's roles will change as they marry and that family commitments will limit their mobility. As a result, certain hotels will not offer women a full range of jobs. Knox (2008) examined the impact of gender segregation in luxury hotels in Australia and explained that the gender-based job structure which are mostly found in hotels is the reason why women did not get their fair share of more rewarding roles at work. Wider cultural attitudes could also impinge on possibilities for women to develop their careers:

"In hotel, no... but in doing my job in online marketing, yes... I was once denied a job in an online hotel marketing company because I'm married because the job requires me to travel."

[Halimah, female, revenue manager]

Nevertheless, there has been a growing trend of recognising the role and contribution of female managers. There are hotel chains that emphasise the placing of female GMs in their five-star hotels in this region, as explained by a female middle manager, Naelah. This development gives female middle

managers equal opportunities to fully develop their careers and prove their capabilities in senior positions.

“Douglas hotel group have an aim to increase women in leadership... because they did their gender diversity study... and they found out that there's only 30% of their senior level which is GM and the Directors level is very limited with females [worldwide]. In South East Asia at the moment, we only have 7 GM... the rest are all male GM... in Asia Pacific alone the percentage of female GM is only 3%... so they wanted to increase that... their aim is to get 20% by 2017 [in the Asia Pacific].”

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

6.4.2 Workforce diversity

A positive relationship between employees and managers promotes good quality of work life and loyalty (Smith, Gregory, & Cannon, 1996). Working with co-workers with different expertise and skills sets confirms the transient nature of the hotel work environment. Employees and managers from different countries and with varied backgrounds are indicative of the hotel industry's multicultural nature and a diverse workforce helps managers to cater for different segments of hotel customers. It also justifies why frontline employees, especially in the Front Office department, come from various ethnic backgrounds and have different language proficiencies. The intersection of cultures in the hotel industry draws the attention of customers toward their international service. Devine, Baum, Hearn, and Devine (2007) previously argued that cultural diversity is a necessity in the current hotel business due to the frequent mobility of hotel employees across borders and brands.

In particular areas or departments of Malaysian hotels, certain ethnic groups predominate. This is explained by local managers in terms of culture and ethnic group preferences:

“Ethnic balance... although we mix them but you can see a lot more specialisation in certain fields of the hotel... it's not that we fix it but it's more on their own preferences... and also language proficiency.”

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

“...but in terms of preferences, there are a bit of trend... if Chinese, they all want to work in Sales and Marketing department. If Malays, mostly kitchen and F&B and for Indians, mostly in F&B.”

[Anisa, female, training manager]

In spite of these so-called ‘preferences’, Costen, Cliath, and Woods (2002) explored the existence of underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in hotel management and concluded that “ethnic minorities had the least representation in positions that are critical in hotel operations” (p.1). They also found evidence that ethnic minorities were purposely moved into ‘less significant’ management posts.

As for this research, encouraging multi-ethnic employees to work together as a team requires understanding and trust. Middle manager Halimah described how she managed to work in a group of predominantly Chinese colleagues and was still able to progress without having to face discrimination and favouritism issues. Below is a comment from Halimah on how she was eventually able to gain trust from her manager and colleagues.

“...because I'm the only Malay manager there and the rest are Chinese... the treatment is different [...] The thing about working with

Chinese colleagues is all about trust. It's hard to get their trust... they rely more on their own people... but once you have gained their trust, you will be fine."

[Halimah, female, revenue manager]

Despite the ethnic differences, the hotel industry in the country has also been affected by the influx of foreign immigrants. The industry is now employing significant numbers of migrants in operational positions such as cleaners, chambermaids and kitchen stewards. More foreign contract workers were brought in from neighbouring Asian countries to fill vacancies because the locals did not want to take up these jobs and demanded higher salaries compared to the foreign workers. Human resource manager Shaari expressed the dilemma that the hotels are facing at this moment.

"That's why we open up to foreign employees for the operational side... who's hungry for a job. If you offer a local with RM1,500 rate to clean 30 rooms in a shift... no one will survive. They will definitely quit... foreign workers were employed on a contract basis... they will do the job."

[Shaari, male, human resource manager]

6.4.3 Workplace conflict

Reflecting on the challenges of working in what is often a stressful environment also highlighted problems with relationships and conflict at work. Positive or negative work relationships can sometimes affect the work environment in the hotel. Working in a stressful environment has previously been demonstrated to lead to excessive turnover (Deery & Shaw, 1999) and reduced organisational commitment (Janssen, 2004). Tepper, Carr, Breaux, Geider, Hu, and Hua (2009) highlighted abusive supervision as a form of

conflict at the workplace, involving the negative behaviours of superiors, including “withholding information, humiliating, scapegoating and giving them the silent treatment” (Lyu, Zhu, Zhong, & Hu, 2016; 69).

In this research, sous chef Baharom explained how his relationship with his superior turned sour because of a misunderstanding with his team members which resulted in them losing trust in him. In the end, he decided to resign.

“At first there was no intention to leave. [...] had a conflict with the Pastry Chef. I handed over my resignation letter to the Executive Chef... he didn't talk much. He was expecting it actually because my relationship with the other kitchen teams was getting worse. They even met my team members behind my back... I didn't feel comfortable with it to be honest. You have to leave when there is no trust anymore.”

[Baharom, male, sous chef]

In the following quotation, Naelah described how she was being isolated and information withheld from her by her boss because of her vocal attitude at work. Feeling insecure and experiencing ‘the silent treatment’ was the reason why she had left her previous company and moved to Kuala Lumpur.

“Then after two years, I actually left [...] it's just that conflicts between myself and my boss... I think it's more on insecurity... he was about to retire... I think he feels so insecure. [...] I don't know what happened because we're kind of not talking... a lot of information was withheld by him... I don't know anything.”

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

Apart from conflict and disagreement at work, broken promises could also be a push factor for middle managers to be mobile in their career. Halimah was promised a promotion if she achieved a certain level of sales, but this proved

to be an empty promise which clearly affected her performance and trust towards the employer.

“...during the interview, they told me that if I perform well, I will be promoted as Revenue Manager. So, I worked so hard to prove myself... achieved highest revenue never achieved before... [...] in terms of revenue wise, I gave them 150% additional from what they have achieved last year... that means I performed well... but they still didn't honour their promise. So, I was a bit frustrated... then I tendered my resignation and joined Peach.”

[Halimah, female, revenue manager]

The following is a case study of Zainudin, an Executive Chef who worked his way up from having very little knowledge about the hotel industry and no prior hospitality education background.

Illustrative box 3: Perspective of a middle manager: Zainudin (male, executive chef)

Zainudin was a hard-working person. He started his hotel career as a kitchen cook in 1995. Without any formal hospitality education background, he continued his career and stayed at the hotel for seven years. In between his years there, he had two mentors, Chef Tam and Chef Rosli. Both his mentors recognised his capability and encouraged him to learn. They started helping him learn and bought him a cookery book for guidance. Other than that, his knowledge and skills were based on his own observations and through experiences of working with senior chefs.

His career progress seems to be quite structured as he was appointed as 1st commis cook in his first year of working in the hotel. Two years later (1997) he was appointed as Chef de Partie before he became Senior Chef de Partie in 1999. He was appointed as Junior Sous Chef in 2000 and two months later he was given the responsibility to lead the Garde Manger kitchen as its Sous Chef. What made him persevere and continue pursuing his career is his role model: Chef Zakaria (Corporate Chef of a renowned cruise ship).

Although without paper qualifications, Zainudin proved that he can succeed as a chef and although he was given several opportunities to become the head of the kitchen operation, he declined. This was due to his belief that

he still needed to learn and there were other chefs who he thought were more capable and qualified. After turning down the offer, Zainudin finally accepted the job as senior chef or Executive Sous Chef in 2007. During this time, he had the opportunity to work in Brunei for three years, Singapore and finally back to Malaysia in 2010. He was sent to Perak to lead a resort's kitchen operation and this opportunity revealed his true talent and skills, at which point he was asked to be involved in the renovation of its restaurants and kitchen. He was appointed by the Vice President himself as a Chef de Tournant (special task chef) when he arrived at the resort.

Starting from there he continued his passion in hotel kitchen design and layout before he was appointed as the Executive Chef of the brand's new restaurant in Kuala Lumpur. Because of his outstanding performance at the restaurant, he was offered the position of Executive Chef in the brand's newest hotel in the city, which is his current position. His years of working in the hotel had certainly affected his family life, however, and Zainudin did not have the ambition to strive further in his career within the hotel.

Upon reflection, Zainudin had responded to opportunities offered to him although he took some time before accepting any offers. In fact, several offers were turned down because he was not ready to take the responsibility. To date, Zainudin has remained loyal to this brand as he is comfortable with the relationship that he has with the Vice President. He is willing to continue working for this brand as long as the VP needs him.

6.5 Patterns of Work Experiences

The middle managers in this research acknowledged the significant contribution of previous work experience in building their career in the hotel industry and highlighting career pathways within and across the service industries. Anisa argued that education is not the major factor in the career development of a hotel employee. Instead, it is experience that has taught them to be knowledgeable and able to solve work-related problems and

challenges. Initial formal hotel education was just a foundation to the skill development and knowledge prior to entering the industry as an employee.

“Experience... because when you come in with a degree, if you are not an experienced hotelier, you will still rely on those who are in the industry longer than you. [...] because in a hotel, you will not always encounter a routine work situation... it's usually a new challenge every single day... they don't teach you that in college... you have to earn the experience to know the right way of handling it. You can also develop your skills and new knowledge through experience... by experiencing the moment.”

[Anisa, female, training manager]

In this research, six middle managers had 16 to 20 years of working experience (Table 6.2). Another six of them had six to ten years of working experience and the remaining two had 11 to 15 years of working experience.

Table 6.2: Participants' work experience (years in range)

Years of Work Experiences	No. of Middle managers
6 – 10 years	5
11 – 15 years	2
16 – 20 years	6
20 years & above	0

Middle manager Anisa highlighted that her senior management team had learned through their work experience and hard work. As the older generation who started their career during the period in which industry-related educational qualifications were not available in Malaysia, they started their hotel careers with minimal or even without any formal hospitality education and worked their way up through work and experiential learning.

“Senior management I can say none [with formal education background] ... they all start from zero... learning from experience... not to say that they are not great people, they are very knowledgeable... even though they don't have diplomas, but their experiences taught them a very good lesson throughout their career... that is why they are at the top now.”

[Anisa, female, training manager]

Several middle managers used their work experience to get promoted and selected to be a department head. Based on these narratives, experience was vitally important in developing their careers.

“I went to an interview as the Assistant HR Manager in Vimalan hotel... at that time the hotel was not even there yet... still in construction phase. After 3 months, my GM called me and offered me to be HR Manager. The advantage was I have prior experience in the Front Office department.”

[Shaari, male, human resource manager]

Kamal agreed and stressed that his current employer hand-picked him among other candidates based on his rapport, achievements and experience in the field. He often regarded himself as fortunate to be given the role and still believed that it was because of a recommendation forwarded by his former employer. It is evident that employers contribute to the development of local middle managers who have sufficient knowledge and work experience.

“They acknowledged our talent and value our contributions... pretty much similar to Singapore. One thing that's good was I don't ask for the job. I was hand-picked by the management to run all these places. That was through past experiences and good relationships that I have with the management.”

[Kamal, male, sales & marketing director]

6.5.1 Types of organisation

Most of the managers who participated in this research had worked in several hotels and organisations within the service industry before. Their struggle and ability to cope with the transition from one company to another with different concepts, standards, market segments, and responsibilities were reported. Some of them had also worked in a different capacity before. For example, Shaari was trying his best to deliver in his current position as he was facing multiple and expanding responsibilities as compared to his previous appointment.

“The difference was... first Vimalan hotel was a 4-star hotel and Passion is a 5-star. In Vimalan I started from zero... built up the hotel, documentations, SOPs, hotel logo [...] the experience is totally different. In Vimalan the workforce was about 100 staff and here there are about 500 staff that I have to take care of.”

[Shaari, male, human resource manager]

Table 6.3: Types of hotel worked

Types of hotel	No. of Middle managers
Same hotel chain	4
Different hotel chains	10

In this research, a total of 10 middle managers had worked in different hotel chains before while the remaining four remained loyal to the same hotel chains (Table 6.3).

Some middle managers had been relocated to different departments from their previous post. It proved to be difficult to some of these managers to

adapt, including Leena, although eventually she managed to overcome this difficulty and become more confident in her new role.

“Can you imagine that I went in with zero knowledge... knowing nothing about sales and just sitting there in my office for weeks. Some of my colleagues helped me by explaining and teaching me how to do the quotations, meeting clients who wanted to have their functions there, and in those days, I was a bit reserved. [...] It's quite a struggle for me... but later on I managed to change myself and built my confidence level. [...] the important part is that we need to adapt and learn from others.”

[Leena, female, conference & sales manager]

In addition, there were managers who had to cope with a different role within the same department.

“The transition is different... I found out that training is more about interaction... interaction with employees is much friendlier... not to say that HR is not friendly... the deal is different as HRM. My communication is mostly my HOD level and I find it quite hard doing the process of... disciplinary things like that... not that I can't make decisions, but it takes time... I find it uneasy for me.”

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

Although Naelah found it difficult to comprehend because she was used to a different work environment, the transition (or career upgrade) had given her more opportunities to work together with new team within the department.

6.5.2 Career transition patterns

A smooth transition into a new role suggests that participants were capable and competent enough to hold responsibility. Previous studies have shown interest in the movement of career or transition from various different perspectives, including the new generation of employees, by gender

(Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2014), choice (McQuarrie & Jackson, 2002), and work status (Sheridan, 2008).

In the research reported here, Fendi was able to advance in his career by taking the risk of accepting a bigger role and responsibility, although he was relatively new in the organisation and the salary was not attractive. Fendi reported that the offer was more of a recognition of his skills set and ability to deliver. He had high hopes of becoming a middle manager and that transition helped him achieve his goal. Most importantly, upgrading or advancing on the career ladder needs a new set of skills, including management skills in managing various departments and employees if they want to become a senior manager, maturity, and the ability to adapt to the transition (Brown & Bimrose, 2014; Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven, & Prosser, 2004).

“I was the youngest assistant manager being promoted in Corra hotel. I was 23 years old then. My friends said it was not the right decision to accept the post... being an assistant manager with the salary of RM1,600 only. I said to them, I don't go for the pay, I go for the post.”
[Fendi, male, food & beverage manager]

Working in the hotel industry usually involves several job changes and high mobility, which is often regarded as part of a typical career pattern. As indicated in other research, at a certain stage of their careers, middle managers may seek to find a balance between their age, experience, and favourable career match (Kovalenko & Mortelmans, 2014). Managers in this research may have hopes for further career development and middle manager Khairil was advancing while learning, and this ongoing process prepared him to lead the department. While waiting for the required position

to be vacant, managers could use the opportunity to explore new work-related skills such as communication skills and management skills and also to upgrade their work performances.

“Start from zero... in this industry, it is more on experience. I started as busboy, wiping cutleries for six months... then increased as a waiter... I learned... step-by-step. Then I aim to achieve the next position... as the captain... when I'm ready I will try for that... still learning. I observe how the captain does his job... from there I prepare myself for the position. Asking my seniors... take notes.”

[Khairil, male, food & beverage manager]

The data revealed how managers set their own time frame for their career plan. Zainudin added that his career pattern was partly structured as he anticipated what he wanted to achieve in the span of one to two years in each job post before moving up to a higher one.

“I started in June 1995... in February 1996 I was promoted to 2nd Commis. In November the same year I was promoted to 1st Commis, in August 1997 I was appointed as the CDP (Chef de Partie). It took me a bit longer to become Senior CDP... it was in 1999... two years later. Then I was appointed as Junior Sous Chef in 2000 and six months later I was promoted as Sous Chef Garde Manger.”

[Zainudin, male, executive chef]

Another example of a structured career advancement pattern came from Jeff who was able to commit to job transition to move up the career ladder. Managers should be able to take on new job responsibilities if they want to grow in their career. This included the sacrifice of having to be far from family and being relocated to another district, state or country.

“I started working in the hotel industry in 1992... here and there... mostly part time jobs. In 1996 I started to get permanent job [...] It was only for about a year... then I was promoted as banquet captain in 1997 until 2004. It was a good training ground for me. Then I moved to

Hudson KL as assistant banquet manager [...] Then promoted again in 2009 as the senior assistant banquet manager. In 2010 [...] I was appointed as its manager for about a year before I moved to Hudson PJ... as the banquet operation manager.”

[Jeff, male, banquet operation manager]

Khairil also planned his career, climbing one step after another within the time frame that he had set himself.

“I don't feel differently when moving up the ladder [adapting to new and bigger role] ... because I've already planned for it. When I was the busboy, I already plan and aim to become a waiter. Put a target... within 6 months or 1 year, and so on. That's why I always said to my staff... although you are the manager, 10% of your work is still doing a waiter's job.”

[Khairil, male, food & beverage manager]

Others were fortunate as their previous positions and responsibilities enabled them to be offered new roles. Middle manager Halimah was trained in sales before and her commitment to the organisation and her work were rewarded after three years of service in the hotel. She was keen to achieve the highest results possible to prove her ability to deliver. Her achievements once again can be seen as an important indicator that the new generation of middle managers were capable of doing the job and handling bigger responsibilities and workloads.

“Because of my sales background, the GM re-designated me to become the reservation supervisor... then I was promoted to Gordys Serviced Residence as Assistant Sales Manager. After a year there, they promoted me again as the Assistant Revenue Manager. I was promoted three times within 3 years in Dorrays group.”

[Halimah, female, revenue manager]

From being a follower to becoming the decision maker, new roles and responsibilities are essential to a middle manager, as Naelah described her own transition:

“I took up this offer... once again different role... transition from being second person and now the first person to make decision is different... and again the role is not so much on the operation side... I can feel that [the new responsibility].”

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

6.6 Conclusions

This chapter has presented descriptions of the initial career formation of middle managers in the Malaysian hotel industry. Their decisions to start a career in the industry were primarily based on their desire to start a career in the field which they had been trained for, although some of them had adapted to working in the hotel industry from different backgrounds. Their different preparations, education and training, and early career encounters were dealt with differently based on their own individual understanding, motivations and interest to work in the hotel industry. In examining their early career decisions, they suggested that family support and a secure career path were important.

This chapter has described the roles and responsibilities of the middle managers from their own perspectives. It also highlights the extent to which formal hospitality education can have a major impact on the career paths of middle managers. Evidence and narratives from the middle managers


allowed the researcher to understand the struggles and often difficult processes that they had to go through in pursuing their hospitality education. Most of the middle managers realised the value of such education although a few managed to succeed without it. Challenges that the middle managers had to face within the work environment and workplace relationships between the managers and employees showed that the hotel industry is multicultural, diverse and transient in nature. Middle managers believed that the knowledge and skills that they possessed provided a competitive advantage among co-workers and even when compared to their managers. In addition, the types of hotel that these middle managers worked in and any international working exposure could help to give them better career choices in the future. For example, having international work experience appeared to yield better career prospects and working conditions in their next career endeavours. However, not all managers were in a position to work overseas and some managers were for a variety of reasons still unable or unwilling to move to more senior managerial positions even with international work experience.

A few of the middle managers reported that workplace conflict, especially with supervisors, could disrupt their career progress. They also reported that the high turnover and career transitions of other staff could present them with challenges in their own roles. How they perceived these setbacks and responded to them accordingly showed the maturity in their decision-making. The conflicts and changes of career certainly affected their career

progression as in one case, the middle manager was still unable to progress and faced with difficulties after a conflict which resulted in resignation. This raises more questions about the managers' career aspirations, which will be discussed and explored in the next chapter.

As described in the early part of the chapter, the following table explains the middle managers' career pathways starting from their initial career (either in a hotel or not), and the development of their career until their present job position in the hotel. It provides an overview of the career change patterns of the middle managers throughout their career and how these managers responded to opportunities provided to them at every stage of the career.

Table 6.4: *Career pathways of the middle managers*

Participant / Education Background	Career pathways 		
	Initial Career	Career Progress	Present Career
Ahmad (Diploma)	1 st Commis	Junior Chef de Partie, Demi Chef, Chef de Partie, Junior Sous Chef	Sous Chef
Baharom (Diploma, Bachelor Degree)	1 st Commis	Head Chef, Demi Chef	Sous Chef
Zainudin (School Certificate)	3 rd Commis	2 nd Commis, 1 st Commis, Chef de Partie, Senior Chef de Partie, Junior Sous Chef, Sous Chef, Executive Sous Chef, Chef de Tournant	Executive Chef

Davidson (Diploma, Bachelor Degree, MBA – after reaching F&B Manager)	Bartender	Waiter, Senior Bartender, Pub Manager, Food & Beverage Manager, Director of Food & Beverage	Director of Food & Beverage and Kitchen
Shaari (Bachelor Degree – Engineering)	Plant Operator	Technician, Assistant Human Resource Manager, Record Assistant, Team Leader,	Human Resource Manager
Khairil (Diploma – Accountancy)	Waiter	Room Service Supervisor, Assistant Banquet Manager, Banquet Manager, Assistant Restaurant Manager,	Food & Beverage Manager
Fendi (Diploma)	Waiter	Supervisor, Restaurant & Bar Manager, Café Guest Service Manager, Assistant Food & Beverage Manager, Operations Manager – Restaurant F&B Operations Manager	Food & Beverage Manager
Jeff (Diploma)	Banquet Waiter	Banquet Captain, Assistant Banquet Manager, Senior Assistant Banquet Manager, Banquet Operation Manager	Food & Beverage Manager
Leena (Diploma, Bachelor Degree)	Sales Coordinator	Event Service Executive, Business Development Manager, Catering & Convention Sales Manager, Business Development Manager, Conference & Catering Manager	Sales Manager
Kamal (Certificate, Diploma)	Sales Executive	Revenue Manager, Sales Manager, Senior Sales Manager	Director of Sales & Marketing

Ruben (Diploma – IT)	Waiter	Supervisor, Head Supervisor, Assistant Manager, Restaurant Manager	Banquet Manager
Halimah (Diploma)	Reservation Agent	Assistant Sales Manager, Assistant Manager - Revenue, E-Commerce Manager	Revenue Manager
Naelah (Certificate, Diploma)	Airline Crew	Waiter, Human Resource Training Officer, Human Resource Executive, Assistant Human Resource Manager, Training Manager, Human Resource Manager, Assistant Director of Human Resource	Director of Human Resource
Anisa (Diploma)	Management Trainee	Airline Crew, Assistant Guest Relation Manager, Guest Relation Officer, Area Restaurant Manager	Training Manager (HR)

CHAPTER 7: HOTEL MIDDLE MANAGERS' CAREER ASPIRATIONS

7.1 Introduction

After examining the career pathways of middle managers in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on their aspirations and challenges, based on their own experiences. In addition, this chapter includes inputs from the hotel general managers, in particular their descriptions of the availability of advancement opportunities and perspectives on the role of their hotel and the industry as a whole in shaping the career development structure for middle managers. Although a scale to assess career aspiration was made available by O'Brien (1996), this research is particularly interested in examining the middle managers' own narratives relating to their career-building aspirations.

7.2 Career Planning

Career aspirations involve the career ambitions and targets of an individual (Holland & Lutz, 1967) and are used to facilitate future career decisions or pathways. Managers in this research expressed their clear career aspirations and future targets, which demonstrate the managers' determination and perseverance to succeed in their careers and also the positive supports available around them.

"My target is to be the director of F&B... my highest target in my life is to become a general manager... regardless whether the hotel is 3-star or 4-star hotels. As long as general manager. So far anywhere I've

worked... I was the youngest guy in the rank. Like here, I am the youngest HOD (head of department)."

[Khairil, male, food & beverage manager]

"I want to be the youngest VP or the youngest GM. Currently I think I'm the youngest Revenue Manager in Kuala Lumpur... and I achieved that within 6 years of my career in the industry. And I am also looking for a five-figure salary in the next 3 years... at least when I'm 30, I want to have a five-figure salary... that is why I'm willing to work hard for it."

[Halimah, female, revenue manager]

"To me, since my career growth was in sales and marketing, ultimately my ambition would be to become the vice president of sales and marketing for a chain of hotel... usually that's the arrangement."

[Kamal, male, sales & marketing director]

"I've aimed for Director of HR. I was offered the position... I want to go but I'm still new here. You have to walk the talk... I will leave after 2 years."

[Shaari, male, human resource manager]

DiRenzo, Weer, and Linnehan (2013) suggested that career aspirations can be enhanced through continuous help from career guidance and also via the mentoring process. The middle managers in this research were asked about their life theme and role models in building their own career. It was evident that most of them were highly focused in choosing their career in alignment with their life themes. The impact of role models in the careers of some middle managers in this research were reported to be significant in expressing their interest and motivation to build a career in the hotel industry.

7.2.1 Career role models and mentors

A common understanding of work within the hotel industry is that it involves routine work, day in and day out, throughout the year. The middle managers in this research set themselves a high standard of work which served as their targets in life, keeping on top of their heavy workloads and responsibilities. The middle managers frequently expressed their gratitude to their role models, with some role models helping them to prioritise their career plans and work towards achieving them. In this study, the purpose was to understand the influence of a role model in the construction of middle managers' career paths. The following middle manager demonstrated that his career motivation was based on his role model.

“What made me eagerly want to work in a hotel was because of Chef Jidin... he was the only Malay chef appointed as the Corporate Chef of the KZ cruise ships... with his famous book, it really motivates me.”

[Zainudin, male, executive chef]

Another important catalyst in middle managers' careers was mentoring support. Carraher, Sullivan, and Crocitto (2008), in their research on the impact of mentors on expatriate careers, found that it had helped them in learning about their organization, performance, knowledge and promotional opportunities.

By having a mentor or guide, hotel middle managers will learn more about the appropriate skills and knowledge that they should be focusing on.

Mentors also guide middle managers in deciding on the most suitable career options for them, as expressed in the following quotations:

“Chef Tam whom I regarded as my mentor asked me to read English newspaper... every day... [because he wanted me to improve my English].”

[Zainudin, male, executive chef]

7.2.2 Family commitment and support

Studies have examined the relationship between work and family commitment in the hotel industry from different perspectives, including views from women managers, hotel general managers and middle managers (Mulvaney et al., 2007; Punyasiri, 2006; Qu & O'Neill, 2010; Zhao, Qu, & Ghiselli, 2011). These studies highlighted the struggles of balancing both roles and setting career priorities. It is undeniable that in the Malaysian culture, taking care of parents and family bonding are common and there are middle managers in the research outlined here who put their family as one of their main priorities before deciding on their future career.

The middle managers occasionally reported that the salary and exposure that they get overseas would be career-enhancing but that the package being offered was not inclusive enough. Without their family in the package, it is hard for the managers to leave home and work abroad. Only those who were willing to leave their family behind would consider the move.

According to Karatepe (2016), employees feel deep attachment to their job if their family and colleagues support their career choice. In this case, support from family and a sense of responsibility to look after family members made the middle managers reconsider job offers that involved relocation. In spite of

having a high commitment to their work, family commitments are equally strong, if not stronger.

The following case of Ruben describes an example of how family commitment and responsibility limited his career advancement options.

Illustrative box 4: Perspective of a middle manager: Ruben (male, food and beverage manager)

Ruben's career in the hotel industry was initiated after he had worked in an independent restaurant in Kuala Lumpur. His progression was through managing restaurants in the hotel and that decision was based on his aspiration to be close to his family.

“Joining the hotel mainly because of security purpose for my family. Honestly speaking, in free standing restaurant... the service is much better... but there is no security. That is why I joined hotel. In Victoria hotel, Hashim only offered me Assistant Manager... he said because the standard is higher. If you are from free standing restaurant and moved in to hotel, you will achieve more because restaurant is tough.”

Although he had limited his progression, he still has an ambition to work abroad to learn and understand different cultures and service contexts. He was able to continue pursuing his career in the hotel because of the support that he receives from his family.

“I'm a family man and I have turned down several offers to work abroad especially those which are far away from here. I work for my family and I want to be close to them... even if there is an offer abroad, I will consider China, Cambodia or nearby countries. I want to understand what kind of people are they... I want to see is there any difference compared to us.”

“My wife is also a hotelier before... she worked in the Front Office department of the Coolie hotel... but now she works at one of the audit firms... I asked her to move out and find a stable working hour job... that was when we were expecting our first baby. Her last post was as the Assistant Manager. So, basically my wife is very understanding... she knows what I'm doing at work and so on.”

7.3 Career Opportunity Structures

The following section explores opportunity structures, as viewed by the middle managers from inside the industry. The hotel industry has been lacking in providing progression opportunities for employees, including middle managers (Lashley, 2009). The participants in this research were asked about their career development opportunities and the role of their organisation in providing them with these opportunities. Some agreed that their hotel provided the opportunity to grow within the brand, although others claimed that limited and discriminatory advancement policy still exists.

Previous research has argued that commitment and willingness to help middle managers to develop their career from within the organisation should be the priority of the hotel management team (Costen, Johanson, & Poisson, 2010). Although some of the hotel brands, as mentioned by the participants here and in previous research, have made efforts to double their commitment in nurturing their management talents (e.g. Costen et al., 2010; Wilson-Wünsch et al., 2014), the decision to develop the managers from within the brand should be considered in compensating and filling the gap of inadequate managers (Costen et al., 2010). However, the middle managers in this research pointed out that most middle managers would not want to wait for the opportunity to become a GM with their existing employer.

“Usually the potential candidate will leave this brand because they were offered better pay by local hotels to become their GM. Mostly won't stay here... so the opportunity is there [to be a GM in local hotels].”

[Jeff, male, banquet operations manager]

Jeff strongly believed that the opportunity to progress exists for local employees like him. However, he also felt that the government should intervene and provide more places for locals if they are really qualified for such senior positions. In other words, the manager argued for a revised policy by the government on employing foreign talent into the hotels.

“I can't accept it if we said that there is no opportunity for us... maybe one day, the government will tighten the terms and conditions of employing expatriates in the hotel industry... so the locals can fill in.”

[Jeff, male, banquet operations manager]

The other middle managers felt that getting themselves equipped with the necessary knowledge and training would also help to open up these opportunities. One example was Kamal, who highlighted his own strategy that enabled him to advance in his career abroad, such as doing professional courses which might provide him with more leverage. The advantages of learning about what is going on in other hotels also provide an incentive for managers to move around within the industry.

In most cases, as described before, international hotels appoint an expatriate hotel/general manager (GM) to manage their property, regardless of their location. A specific emphasis on ethnicity limits the opportunity for Malaysia's three main ethnic groups; Malay, Chinese, and Indian. However, one of the middle managers denied any discrimination based on ethnicity, as described below.

“...and I will never look at which ethnic... I'm a Malaysian... we are the same and we work towards the same goal. We are actually building our own nation... we should be moving forward together.”

[Ruben, male, food & beverage manager]

The additional responsibilities of a GM meant that some managers were reluctant to aspire to this role. For example, in the findings from this research, Naelah did not intend to manage a hotel at some point in the future and was firm that becoming a GM was not her main target.

“...he (GM) asked me... do you see yourself as our General Manager? I said no [...]. I don't think I want to be a GM... I'm just not sure that is what I want to do... because now I'm just concentrating on what I'm doing best... not a GM.”

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

Others did not want to become a GM but instead had plans and aspirations to open their own company related to the service industry. This is an interesting finding as middle manager themselves expressed their intention not to pursue the GM position, despite the available opportunities.

“I have experiences in banqueting... thinking about opening my own catering company. One stop centre for wedding, everything in one... food, make up, wedding cards, props. That's what my family has been planning for the future.”

[Khairil, male, food & beverage manager]

“I give myself a minimum target of 2 years there. If it's good, I will continue... if not I will come back and set up my own catering company. Maybe for a year out of the industry to establish the company. When everything is in order, I will join the industry again.”

[Leena, female, conference sales manager]

Several of the middle managers wanted to explore new, bigger and more challenging work environments with larger-scale companies. Contrary to other managers' perspectives, the decision to leave the hotel in the future showed some degree of doubt and loss of confidence towards a career in the hotel.

"I would like to move out from hotel... because right now from what I see, hotel is very operation and specialised... maybe because I used to discuss with my classmates from different industries. I would like to go out in a bigger company whereby they have another speciality... I can learn more. I really want to do the talent management. In order to do that, I need to go out of the hotel industry... because the hotel is very much kind of micro."

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

However, a stable career is not always permanent and long lasting. At a certain stage in one's career, other factors and issues might arise beyond employees' control such as the inability of the employer to maintain its operation and the descending performance of the hotel. Events such as these forced the middle managers in this research to re-evaluate their future and search for other opportunities elsewhere.

"I worked in an independent restaurant for a year (after graduating with a bachelor degree). Then the owner told me that he couldn't pay my salary anymore... the business was bad, and he wanted to close the restaurant. He asked me to go and find another job elsewhere... I was the Head Chef there although it was just one independent restaurant."

[Baharom, male, sous chef]

The opportunity for the middle managers here to progress and achieve senior managerial positions such as the General Manager does appear to be

available, but depends on individual commitment to take on the responsibility and also how they manage their personal responsibilities.

7.3.1 *Social and career networking*

There are many types of social networks available today based on types of user (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009), but one of the advantages of having or joining a network is that it can open up more opportunity to progress in one's career. This can be achieved through sharing of information and opportunities (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009).

Reliable and accurate reviews from colleagues of various hotels about these vacancies or even the hotel itself provide valuable 'inside help'. For example, the following middle manager had been using social networking groups to expand his career overseas. He found it very useful and the early information that he got from the network maximised his chance of securing a job. He further added that using the network should not be treated as a guarantee, but more of an opportunity to make a move.

"I was informed through social networks. There's a group created for Asian chefs... so they'll share any information about vacancies either in Malaysia or overseas. Mostly this group serves to share the information and not acting as your agent, it is up to you to make your own move."

[Baharom, male, sous chef]

Social and informal network groups pass on information on job vacancies to fellow colleagues from similar positions in other hotels around the world.

Discussions also take place with friends and relatives working in other hotels

regarding job offers in their hotel, type of management, living costs, and so on. This gives prospective employees or managers the opportunity to prepare themselves before applying for, or accepting, a new job. Network groups within the same region are also beneficial in terms of sharing information and technology. Some groups have been created to provide assistance to fellow managers from competing hotels on issues such as manpower, the borrowing of equipment and utensils, and guest information.

“Now we help each other more often than competing and outshining ourselves. In fact, I have my banquet networks here in Kuala Lumpur [sharing information with other hotels’ banquet managers].”

[Jeff, male, banquet operations manager]

Progressing a career has shifted from the traditional process of responding to advertisements to drawing on social network groups and peer recommendations. This was one of the new trends creating a ‘win-win’ situation for both parties.

7.3.2 Demand for expatriate General Managers

The preference for expatriate GMs has already been described in Section 5.2 earlier. However, this section explored the qualities and how local middle managers regard their capabilities. The capability of expatriate GMs was well regarded by the middle managers in this research, based on several qualities that they possessed. The management of 5-star international hotels in Kuala Lumpur and other major cities in the country have traditionally been led by western expatriates. However, current developments have shown that local general managers are also capable of taking over the job. It is just a matter of

image and reputation for most hotels in Malaysia that are still using expatriate general managers.

“Most 5-star hotel in Malaysia are managed by expat GMs... we are still lacking on the trust to manage a hotel. Actually, the locals can deliver but it's rare... to find the best and qualified GM among locals is not that easy.”

[Shaari, male, human resource manager]

Shaari admitted that it is difficult to find a local GM who is capable of running a 5-star hotel in the city centre. Despite that, the number of expatriate managers has actually decreased, as compared to the number in the 1990s. This is because of the cost of hiring expatriates (employers have to bear the cost of their managers' children's school fees, accommodation, travelling benefits, and other allowances) and a new approach by hotels to focus on those coming from other regions such as Australia and the Middle East. However, this can also be seen as employers' readiness to accept other hotel general managers including local Malaysians if they are deemed suitable and qualified. Local middle managers should take this opportunity to upgrade their career and take on the responsibility as a general manager.

“...before this we can see expatriates filling in the position of head of departments in Kuala Lumpur... but now hotels only employed them for the top two positions only. Maybe because of its cost but I believed that it's also because the locals can replace them... will be replacing them one day, I hope so.”

[Jeff, male, banquet operations manager]

The capability and competence of local middle managers were often compared to expatriate GMs, especially their social skills and work commitments. Local middle managers need to learn the social skills and

enhance their organizational commitment if they want to be seen as the perfect candidate for the next general manager.

“The expatriate... their social skills are way better than us... we have to admit that.”

[Kamal, male, sales & marketing director]

“...you got to be brave and just present it. That is what I see from the expatriate GM... although they don't know but they are still striving and doing it... whereas our locals just wait and see whether it is okay for them to try or not. Maybe because they are not confident of what they can do... in our culture itself, we don't really encourage people [to try and show our capability] ... like the expatriate it's different. They actually say you can and always think positive in terms of whatever they do.”

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

Naelah also stressed that assumptions that a hotel should only be run by an expatriate are incorrect. She based this argument on her own experience of being involved in the recruitment process, including the appointment of a hotel general manager within a large hotel chain. Naelah believed that every prospective candidate should be given an equal opportunity to present their skills, knowledge and capability to be employed in a hotel.

“They don't have such a thing that the main leadership should be an expatriate. If that's so, it will be against our employment act... because we are pretty much into equal opportunity for example... our policy is very strong... how you recruit the people.”

[Naelah, female, human resource director]

This section exemplifies that the demand for expatriate GM in the hotels in Malaysia is not universal. Findings from the middle managers indicated how local managers could have the same opportunity to progress to a GM role.

7.3.3 Turnover and career mobility trends

Every month, on average, almost 2% of hotel executives or middle and senior managers leave their jobs in Malaysia (Malaysian Employers Federation [MEF], 2014). As Wang and Tsai (2012) explained, 'career mobility is not company-directed, steady progression within a company, but rather self-directed by individuals who wish to advance to higher positions and must frequently take charge of their own development' (p.162).

With regard to the turnover trend and mobility, middle managers in this research expressed the principles and challenges that made them prone to move from one hotel to another in the country. Middle managers Baharom and Fendi purposely set their own targets to work and serve their employer for a certain period of time before they moved to another hotel. They believed that by doing so, they would open up more opportunities to grow and be more creative:

"This company is a big company and good work culture, but I never stay in one company for long... not more than 2 years. It's just me... because I will get bored doing the same thing at some stage."

[Baharom, male, sous chef]

"I set my benchmark 5 years. Every 5 years [I will move to another hotel] ... so I am at the peak now as the F&B manager. My next aim is to be the director of F&B."

[Fendi, male, food & beverage manager]

Table 7.1: Number of hotels worked before

No. of Hotels worked	No. of Middle Managers
1-5 hotels	8
6 – 10 hotels	5
11 hotels & above	1

Table 7.1 shows that only one middle manager in this research had worked in more than 10 hotels. Another five had worked in 6 to 10 hotels and the remaining eight had worked in one to five hotels prior to this research. The findings suggest that the middle managers were ready at any time to move into another hotel in order to progress in their career. One example, Halimah, needed to move out and find a better match for her skills as she had limited opportunities to advance:

“It's because of the limited advancement opportunity... I have nine senior managers above me... so I thought if I want to grow, I need to move away for a while.”

[Halimah, female, revenue manager]

“One thing about Malaysia. If you stay at one place, it will take you ages to grow... because your senior colleagues are mostly family man and comfortable with their current position... who will never move.”

[Kamal, male, sales & marketing director]

In terms of working in international hotels abroad, out of the 14 middle managers in this research, six had prior experience of working abroad (Table 7.2). This sometimes involved working below their former position and was likely to be on a fixed-term contract. However, that did not deter them from working abroad as long as they got the job role that they wanted and gained international exposure.

Table 7.2: International / overseas work experience

International work experiences	No. of Middle managers
Yes	6
No	8

To retain employees in the hotel industry within the country or abroad is quite a challenge and the middle managers here also faced the issue of turnover among their own employees. Participants expressed their concern about the issue, especially when they had to prepare and provide training, although they knew that not all of their talent would remain loyal to the organisation. Local and several international chain hotels in the country have their own sets of work cultures, advancement opportunities within the chain and personal development plans for their employees in order to try to retain them.

“...you will face high turnover... and every time it happened... you have to train again... it's quite hard to maintain the standard and quality is not easy.”

[Anisa, female, training manager]

The evidence showed that although the hotel provided a conducive and progressive working environment for the middle managers, the possibility of them (and also in many cases their team members) leaving and joining other hotels remains high because of various factors.

7.4 Conclusions

This chapter has shown that while middle managers have their own career goals, a few considerations need to be addressed. Overall, they include a

commitment to work and to family, continuous support, and responding to opportunities whenever possible. This suggests that planning for a hotel career needs careful consideration and responsibility. Furthermore, middle managers should plan their career path based on their own capability and competencies, although most had their own role models throughout their career. This chapter also reported on the work experiences of middle managers as another important factor in their career development. Different career trajectories and patterns of career transitions provide evidence that careers in the hotel industry are not solely dependent on the organisation, as middle managers constructed their own pathways. The personal development gains, such as maturity in career decision-making and recognition from employers, were also mentioned by the middle managers as influences on their career development. In addition, family commitments and support were some of the challenges that middle managers also needed to consider in their career decisions.

One of the main points highlighted in this chapter is the impact of social networking and social media. Based on the idea that the new internet age will simplify their routines, social networking actually helps in strengthening the career-building experiences of middle managers. Another essential point addressed in this chapter was the advancement opportunities available to the middle managers. The government's role in protecting the interests of local employees was also illustrated with the discussion on minimum wage policy and sponsored training programmes.

This chapter also highlights the need for middle managers to keep up to date with new trends in the industry to stay relevant and competitive in the labour market. Evidence from the middle managers highlighted that expatriates are not a negative influence on their career but are seen as a benchmark to their own work performance and career progression. While a few of them realised the potential of progressing to the GM's level, especially in an international hotel brand, others had other plans and were reluctant to pursue the number one post. Therefore, continuous monitoring and a more focused career development programme should be considered by the management.

The issue of turnover and mobility of managers in the industry is still a major concern, with different implications for the middle managers based on their intentions and aspirations for a career change. Some of the narratives showed that career mobility is not always undertaken for career development but can be seen as a temporary solution to current work issues and conflicts.

CHAPTER 8: FORMER MIDDLE MANAGERS' VIEWS ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Introduction

In the process of gathering work perspectives and experiences of middle managers, this research also includes insights and sharing from former hotel middle managers. They were able to be tracked down and contacted based on their mutual LinkedIn connections with the researcher and the other middle managers involved in this research. A total of 11 former hotel middle managers agreed to participate and were interviewed with nine of them male and the other two females (Table 4.1). The former middle managers were approached and selected using a similar process to the middle managers. They were asked questions pertaining to their career development plans, opportunities, issues and challenges, and, most importantly, the decision to leave the industry.

From this group, all of the former middle managers were Malays. The researcher was unable to interview any former middle managers from other ethnic origins including Chinese and Indians: in some cases, requests were declined, although initial contact and appointments were made and agreed upon.

8.2 Previous Job in the Hotel Industry

Most of the former hotel middle managers had worked in the hotel industry from five to 15 years. Their vast work experiences indicate the competence and capability of these individuals, e.g., in allowing them to apply their knowledge and skills in their new job.

“If together with my studies, it's about 15 years... but in the hotel alone is about 12 years. [...] First, I've worked in a hotel in Genting; The Ospring... then later in Wessim, Jupiter, Sunshine... Jupiter was in Middle East but I was there for just a while.”

[Salleh, male, culinary instructor, former sous chef]

Several of the former middle managers had worked in similar service industries before and were well used to the hotel work culture.

“...it's about 10 years... 3 years in airline. The rest in restaurants... and now entrepreneurship. At least I've been through all segments. At the same time, I'm doing my consultation work.”

[Kadir, male, food entrepreneur, former executive chef]

Others had moved their way up from the bottom to their current positions, demonstrating their capability and competence.

“That was in 1989. After high school, I went to ITC [to study] ... I stop after one year... not because I failed or anything. I quit because I wanted to join the industry straight away... start from 1989... I start from the ground. From a busboy, waiter, and then I grow up to my captain level... that was in Penang Massimo Beach Resort.”

[Nazri, male, hospital F&B manager, former F&B manager]

In some cases, their drive to achieve the highest position appeared to have pushed them upward more quickly than other middle managers, and they prepared themselves with specialised knowledge and professional skills.

These attributes served them well in terms of career advancement and the traditional perception of advancement through seniority was no longer relevant in these cases. The following quote described the competitive nature of these former middle managers in their careers.

“To be honest... my career moves very fast... I am 29 years old this year. I become the HR manager when I was 22 years old... at Panji hotel... based on my own career move. Then I translate into my people growth. I always take a shortcut... but you must have the competency to do that... Panji was my first hotel... my first job was a trainer... team leader training... at that time.”

[Zahid, male, HR manager (retail), former HR manager]

Most of these former middle managers emphasised the importance of having the confidence to deliver their tasks and how their ability to perform highlighted their talent to others. There were also former middle managers who had been given more responsibility and a better career role in recognition of their talent and years of working experiences. For example, Zamani in the following quote had been appointed to oversee his department's operations and pre-opening team of other hotels within the chain, as a result of his work experience and the work process knowledge he had developed. These positive outcomes were a justification for the initial career decisions that he had made.

“I took the job for almost 2 years. Starting from there, they are happy with my job ... then I was promoted as assistant F&B manager... taking over the whole F&B operations... 13 outlets. I was given opportunity to do pre-opening of sister hotels in Seremban... for 1 year... then I'm back to Petaling Jaya as the F&B manager.”

[Zamani, male, convention centre GM, former F&B manager]

The findings indicated that most of the former middle managers were doing well following their departure from the hotel industry. They were committed in delivering their roles and responsibilities in their current organisations.

However, in relation to the middle managers in this research, this group of former hotel middle managers saw themselves as possessing skill sets which could be applied in a number of contexts rather than relying on their former employer to promote their career. The former hotel employees could also be seen in career construction terms to be developing their vocational personalities.

8.2.1 Career accomplishments

As well as being given bigger responsibilities because of their work experience, the former middle managers also started to build a record of significant accomplishments in their career. Kadir had been appointed as the hotel's Executive Chef when he was only 27 years old. He believed that this was achieved because of his education background and that his GM had recognised his capability.

“After moving to KLIA, I got an offer from Labuan... working under my former lecturer; Mr Amin Bollah. [...] he offered me the Executive Chef's post... I was only 27 years old... he was the General Manager. In those days, if you have qualification from Awan Institute, you will be recognised... they appreciate your skills and knowledge.”

[Kadir, male, food entrepreneur, former executive chef]

On the other hand, another former middle manager, Zamani, managed to be selected to further his diploma, which was offered by his employer through an internal competition. Although he joined the industry without any formal hotel

education, he managed to get this opportunity. This example illustrates – to some extent – the trust and confidence of his employer, based on his own commitment to the organisation.

“There was an opportunity opened by the hotel to do a diploma for one year... so I take up the challenge... because why... it's a competition. Where you have to write an essay why the company should send me for the course... so wrote the essay... one-page essay... and god bless. Out of all, I got it... so for one year, I do my diploma while working.”

[Zamani, male, convention centre GM, former F&B manager]

His extensive work experience and his hospitality education enabled Zamani to further contribute to the development of hospitality education by becoming an advisor to a local hospitality college. The recognition given by the college suggests that Zamani was seen as an expert in the field. This recognition reflected his expertise and credentials, as well as the need for the college to have a representative who was a highly skilled middle manager in the hotel labour market.

“I was appointed as the technical member of advisory committee of Unitar College... giving advice in terms of their curriculum... and all that... they just approached me I think about 2 months ago... they sent me a letter... once I signed, I have to do some advice for them... for the local curriculum.”

[Zamani, male, convention centre GM, former F&B manager]

Career recognition may not only be received from the employer or the hotel industry as a whole, it may also come from outside the industry. Some former middle managers reported that they had been recognised by their current

employers from outside the industry who had sought out their talent and knowledge.

“They offered me the position of food and beverage manager Malaysian operation... to look after 12 hospitals... to make sure that we carry the same standard. We carry the same quality of food and also the operation. I've been assigned... I've been trusted I would say to look after all the 12 hospitals to make sure that they carry the same way of... running the food and beverage.”

[Nazri, male, hospital F&B manager, former F&B manager]

Career accomplishments are significant in developing careers for hotel middle managers as described by the former middle managers in this subsection. The narratives from former middle managers pointed out the value of their knowledge and skill sets as they were being recognised by the hotel and hospitality education institutions.

8.2.2 Managing hotel employees

Besides managing their departments, these former middle managers were also able to demonstrate their knowledge and experience to their subordinates. Everyone had been given the opportunity to lead a department or a unit within a specific department in their previous hotel jobs. This valuable experience meant that they could share the responsibilities of developing their own careers while also and leading their own staff in the department or unit.

“More or less I'm encouraging them... in looking into enhancing their career... do thing which is more than their capability because sometimes if you want to be better, you will have to challenge yourself... then you'll become better.”

[Irfan, male, club HR manager, former HR manager]

Another former middle manager acknowledged the impact of being a leader in his career. He viewed these experiences as helping to develop the quality and values of hotel work life.

“I don't see that position as a main factor of success... for me success in your career is not defined by your position... but in values. Personally, I find it that way... the values that we gain.”

[Hashim, male, hotel consultant, former F&B manager]

Former middle managers also recognised that the changes in the hotel industry had affected their operations, workforce and employee earnings. One significant change that the former middle managers expressed was the difference between generations of employees in terms of their commitment to the organisation and the job itself. They highlighted that although advancement in technology would provide a better work flow, it had not changed the employee's relationships at the workplace. The narratives from former middle managers raise two points. First, the shift of work commitments from the previous generation to the new generation of employees demands middle managers to adapt to more frequent occurrence of labour mobility, and second, their role as department head or leader are different as compared to the time when they started their career.

8.3 Decision to Leave the Hotel Industry

The main reason for gathering responses from former middle managers in this research was to examine the motivations behind their decisions to leave the hotel industry. Overall, these decisions varied according to their

situations, career objectives, and the opportunities that had been available at the time. The shared narratives by the former middle managers outlined their career formation, accomplishments, work experiences, knowledge and skills set, and management experiences. Despite their extensive contributions, former middle managers' decisions to leave the hotel industry presents a picture of uncertainty, doubt, and an unconvincing future for those seeking to developing a career in the industry, at least through their own lenses.

“The reason why I moved out from hotel is because I need to bring changes... because if you look at the trend now a lot of hoteliers are going to a different hospitality-based industry. [...] So, they are bringing their experience to create hospitality experience in that industry.”

[Irfan, male, club HR manager, former HR manager]

Although these former middle managers had left the hotel industry, they remained in the larger segment of the service or hospitality industry which includes hospitals, clubs, airline catering, restaurants, and hospitality education institutions. One reason for former middle managers in this research to leave the hotel industry was because of the time spent at the hotel (long hours) and in one case, is the employer's reluctance to fulfil their religious requirements. It increases the tension between the nature of work demands in the hotel and compliance to their religious beliefs. All of the 5-star rated hotels in Kuala Lumpur are still unable to fully comply with the religious needs of the majority Malaysian population, due to uniform restrictions (e.g., wearing the hijab in front line jobs) and prayer facilities, including ample prayer breaks. Malaysian Muslims are still required to work

long hours without prayer breaks and given a role in the bar in most hotels in the region. Therefore, some had decided on the next path of their career in order to avoid compromising their religious faith.

“I've seen many people can't sustain in the industry... how long [years] can you sustain? Especially for a Muslim... you can't sustain even if you are the Executive Chef because the commitment and work demand... 60% to 70% of your time will be at the hotel [less time for religious needs]. Some people can't stand it... that's why they are moving out... they are moving out doing consultation, business. If they want to be like me, they need paper qualifications... so they can't enter without it.”

[Salleh, male, culinary instructor, former sous chef]

However, another former middle manager pointed out that his decision to leave the hotel was because of his intention to explore new opportunities. He seemed to have had enough of the typical work issues in the hotel and chose not to get involved anymore.

“I like to try new thing... experiment. I have my own plan... what to achieve... I can't stand working in hotel anymore... have to face guest's complaints.”

[Kadir, male, food entrepreneur, former executive chef]

Not all former middle managers left because they had other plans, however. Some felt they had to leave the hotel because of workplace conflict. They believed that the hotel industry in Malaysia is relatively confined to the same culture and environment and that the only available option was to choose another hospitality or service-related industry such as clubs, hospitals, golf club, and airline catering. In the following quote, although he had achieved

the highest position in his area of expertise, Zahid still believed that the employer was not on his side.

“Honestly, the month I resigned, I was promoted to Area Director of HR for Singapore and Malaysia... but I didn't sign the offer, I resigned 24 hours. Management conflict... I just cannot get along... new management actually. Where they don't really value your opinions and feedbacks. You must value people who have worked long in the industry... although I'm young... but I worked for 9 years... it's not my salary and position my main focus at that time. To me it's how you value your people culture.”

[Zahid, male, HR manager (retail), former HR manager]

Working in a hotel required the former middle managers to look after their teams. This was more apparent when the former middle manager was someone who they looked up to for reference and advice. The following quotes of a former middle manager, Julie, explained her struggles and the difficult decision to leave the industry.

“A lot of people were shocked when I left the industry... because you can imagine that you are always the point of reference... everybody called you for point of reference... especially in regard to IR cases... manpower planning... and then you realised that you end up having nothing you know... you always give but you don't receive... that's why I left.”

[Julie, female, director of HR (manufacturing), former area director of HR]

Equally important, Julie further explained her decision to leave. She believed that she had nothing more to learn and felt that she should have been given a bigger role.

“There was nothing else for me... there was no learning... seriously, there was nothing else to learn. You can imagine, I have a Director of HR for Regional... who even asked me about HR and IR... I have to

give her an advice... all the directors. So, it's like... you have nothing else to learn in hotel? Why asked me? So, I said enough is enough. So, I decided to move, and I did."

[Julie, female, director of HR (manufacturing), former area director of HR]

Every former middle manager interviewed in this research had their own reasons and motivations that led to their decision to leave. The following quote sums up the reasons behind both the decisions to stay and to leave the industry by former middle managers.

"Some people they will stay longer in the organisation because of first, environment... second, the values of the family instilled in them and third, work life balance... but some people they would like to go into an organisation that is highly driven because they want to gain more."

[Irfan, male, club HR manager, former HR manager]

8.3.1 Previous career challenges

This section explores the everyday challenges that the former middle managers faced in the hotel industry before they left. The purpose of these narratives is to understand the difficulty faced by middle managers on daily basis. They also highlighted the sacrifices made by the former middle managers in developing their career in the hotel. These challenges included the demands of working long hours at the hotel. The requirement to be present at the workplace for a long period of time indicates that these former middle managers were important to the hotel and that their knowledge and skills were valued by colleagues. In addition, as leaders, they were also required to achieve the hotel's performance and sales targets:

“I’ve worked in Delicate restaurant group for 3 years... from 30 million turnovers to 60 million turnovers... they have 12 restaurants... I’m the Group Executive Chef. I have to plan budget, menu... when I think about it regardless of where you work in this industry, you will still be the servant of the company... the politics is still there... my successor was only 33 years old... but because he has experience working with Gordon Ramsey, he got the job.”

[Kadir, male, food entrepreneur, former executive chef]

Another former middle manager highlighted the low pay that he received as a middle manager from his previous hotel. In general, the hotel’s salary structure depends on the location of the hotel (city hotel, island resort, beach hotel and other types of hotel locations) and the star ratings (Okumus, Sariisik, & Naipaul, 2010). The former middle manager stated that the earnings were not enough for him and most of his subordinates. He added that it would not be a surprise if more of his subordinates left the hotel to seek better jobs elsewhere.

“Chef de Partie in Hamin... the basic salary was RM550 only... with 1 point... each point is RM1,000... sometimes their end salary can reach RM1,300... but the maximum that they can reach is RM2,000. Have to pay for house mortgage, car and my baby is on the way at that time.”

[Azman, male, restaurateur, former sous chef]

8.3.2 Career advancement barriers

The career advancement barriers for former middle managers are examined in the following section. It was reported from various perspectives by former middle managers that it could be hard to advance your career in the hotel industry:

“Working in the hotel industry is unpromising for your future... it depends of how you play the game... it’s not secure. You have to compete... depends on where you are actually. Like when I’m in

Sunshine Hotel, it's easy for me to shine because I'm working with old timers and I'm the only one in the early 30's. So, any training and other development programmes, they will send me... but when you are in a town hotel, you have to compete, and a lot of issues will arise... politics and you have to be good in that also."

[Salleh, male, culinary instructor, former sous chef]

It was clear from this example that there was stiff competition for a place in the hotel. Other former middle managers questioned the management's trust of local talent in delivering their role. For one former middle manager, this was the reason he left the country in order to seek overseas working experience.

"To be frank with you... the hospitality industry in Malaysia won't recognise local talent... it's true. That's why I went overseas... I have to build up my name. I have to move abroad, they prefer expatriate. But in other countries, especially in the Middle East and Third World Countries, they recognise Malaysia... like when I was in Saudi, they recognise my skills."

[Kadir, male, food entrepreneur, former executive chef]

Another feature of career advancement barriers is the lack of support from top management. Some former middle managers reported that they had issues in their relationship with the GM. One former middle manager, Zahid, described his struggles in defending his team and the lack of support from management that led to his resignation.

"I was fighting for the team... and for the area people... for the other heads of HR but when they [employer] don't listen to us, how much can you do... right. I have my own philosophy... my principle... so I served my notice [resigned], I give money and I go."

[Zahid, male, HR manager (retail), former HR manager]

For other former middle managers, being stagnant in their career or plateauing was another reason to leave. Employees who were not able to advance further in their career because they had achieved everything they could at their current level believed that their career was already in a stagnant state. They may then seek other avenues of career development:

The hotel status and star rating of their previous hotel can also play an important factor as a barrier to career advancement, as experienced by one former middle manager, Julie. She was unable to advance to a higher position in her new hotel because her previous job was from a 'lower tier' hotel which jeopardised her chances. The work demands and responsibilities in the previous hotel might therefore be lower than the current hotel, thus justifying the employer's decision.

Some former hotel managers thought their ethnicity was another barrier to career progression in the hotel industry. Because of the limited number of Asian managers appointed as GMs in Malaysia, Zamani made his move to another service industry.

"...one of the biggest challenge that I faced in Hudson is the opportunities for Asian people to grow higher than F&B manager is very minimal... because they see European more than Asian... that's why in Hudson's chain, how many local Malaysians general managers that really runs the hotel? As far as I can remember was 2 persons... that also because of the push by the owner of the building itself... otherwise none... all managed by Europeans."

[Zamani, male, convention centre GM, former F&B manager]

These examples support the view that career advancement barriers in the hotel industry were seen to be a major issue. The barriers that these former middle managers encountered altered their career aspirations and may to some extent have affected their commitment to the organisation and to the industry. In relation to the middle managers, these narratives give way to the realisation how difficult it will be for the current middle managers to navigate their career journey.

The following interview narrative describes the hotel career journey of Julie and how she managed the transition after leaving the industry.

Illustrative box 5: Perspective of a former middle manager: Julie [female, director of HR (manufacturing), former hotel area director of human resource]

Julie started her hotel career quite early. Before that, she went for her hospitality higher education abroad. Her initial plan was not to enrol in a hospitality programme. But since the university was well-known for its programme, she decided to change once she was there.

“I went to the States when I was 18... I went to Jacob University... I took hotel... I took hospitality management... graduated with degree in hospitality management there... it is a very good hotel school by the way. After that I came back... I can't remember... I think in 1993 or 1994. And after that I was in the hotel until 2012. [...] my career is like this... I came back... I joined food & beverage... which I like very very much... I only left F&B in 1995 and I became an HR... no degree... nothing... I just requested a transfer... I became a personnel officer in Crystal Point Hotel... long time ago. So, I work my way up... from personnel officer all the way up.”

She also explained her career path and accomplishment in the hotel which included her knowledge development, organisational commitment, and mentoring ability.

“It was Area Director of HR when I was in Dorrys that took care of 5 hotels... because I wanted international, that why I jumped to Hudson

hotel... or else I will never be able to get... never... they won't even look at you if you are from a local chain. Because to them Dorrys is Dorrys... they never heard of it. So, I was in Area Director... and then I became the Director of HR in Hudson [...] So the reason why I was very good in what I do is because... I took diploma in IR (Industrial Relations) which is very core industry relation... you know about cases... you know about disciplinary... something that is considered my strength... and then at the same time, I have a lot of networking... and I read a lot. That's very important and a lot of people don't realise that... networking as well as reading is important. When people ask you questions, you are able to answer it... backed with facts. You will realise it when you talk to people from outside the industry or even inside... their knowledge is very sad... even though they are the Director of HR. [...] I interviewed a lot of people... I realised that their knowledge is not there... they just don't have the IR knowledge... they don't have the succession planning knowledge. So, what I realised is that... maybe I'm lucky or it is something that I like to do... I learn a lot and do network... I go for training. Training is important... a lot of people don't realise that. It's not the company training... you should go to conference... don't go to HR conference for hotels only... get new ideas... you go outside... you get to see what the other companies are doing. Don't just look at what Google are doing... but the concept of it, right... concept of succession planning... concept of a lot of other things. You should go outside... look for the training outside... listen to speakers... forums, seminars... you don't have to spend thousands to go for training... you can actually go for free training. The breakfast talk... listen to people who knows about the industry... the one that outside the industry. A lot you can learn from them... and one thing that I think something that people don't realised it is helpful if you become a mentor. Whether that is official or unofficial... I have a few mentor and mentee in my life. Norish is one of them... and I have Suliza who used to be my assistant manager in hotel. So, these are my mentees and I become their mentor. They keep asking me how to do these and how to do that... and at the same time you bond over years... so that helps as well.”

Julie appreciated her work experiences in the hotel and her new role in the manufacturing company needed her hotel-related skills to get the work done.

“I have a lot of achievements because of the hotel industry... whatever that I have done in hotels, I actually implemented them here. At first it was very difficult... because people are very robotic... they don't look at people as human you know... they just think about productivity only.

They even can't go out to have some break with colleagues... like holding sports events... it's no here. So, it's a lot of work to get the mind-set of the managers... because they don't see that triangle. To them it's just spending money and take away the productivity. You imagine in one year during our employee survey... it was minus 17 when I came in... it was that bad... people don't smile; they don't talk to each other... they hate each other. In a year that after I joined... I joined in January... in October we have plus 46... the employee survey... and people changed tremendously. That's because of hotel touch... they smile... we are addressing people by names... making them feel important... no closed doors. It's like that."

When asked about the possibility of returning to the hotel industry, Julie had high hopes of doing so. Initially, she made the decision to leave because she could not wait to progress, and she had a new target in her career as described below:

"Possible... but I'm not willing to wait for another 2 years... because I was in Hudson hotel at that time already 3 years there... in order for me to move up in regional... and I don't want to move up in a smaller hotel company... I want to move up in a big company like Hudson or Sunshine... but they didn't have. In 5 years I want to be a Senior VP... that's a very high aim... in 2 years I want to be a VP and another 3 years to become a SVP. That will make me 49 years old... but if you put that age there... I understand some people they don't want to move or don't want to have more than that because it's very tiring... working in the hotel. But I don't put an age factor. [...] I will return to hotel if there is a regional position... even if it is a local company. But with different perspectives... because I can learn new things, right... then it's okay. In international hotel, it's just like MNC... but if they give an opportunity to be a lot more than just HR... but not GM... more of SVP for example... where I can expand global... then it's different. But yes, I have the intention to go back."

Julie indicated the importance of hospitality education in her career and how this had helped her in both her previous and current job.

"Whatever education that I have done, say industrial relations during my diploma... that is to me in human resources in hotel industry in Malaysia... if you want to survive, you take that... diploma in IR offered by XYZ... because it is really really good. The program is about IR which a lot of people don't know how to do... how to do proper DI (disciplinary inquiry). To me, my education when I was in hotel industry is very helpful. When you are from HR and you are from hotel background, you will know everything here... so you don't tell me you need 45 minutes to clean the

room because based on the size of the room, I know you can do it in 20 minutes for example. This knowledge actually provided here in terms of customer service... what I realised is that they do not know what is internal and external customer... to them it is only external customer. So, the effect is continuous... but I can apply that. Master's is different... be able to think critically and so on."

8.3.3 Reshaping career aspirations

In this section, former hotel middle managers describe their new career aspirations. Most have come to the realisation that they need to contribute and work towards more meaningful goals in their careers.

"I want to achieve the highest level... leave a legacy... and I want to produce a book on F&B operation in hospital... the operation flow... learning the basic skills. It will take some time to achieve that."

[Nazri, male, hospital F&B manager, former F&B manager]

According to Brown (2015b), changes in career can be viewed as 'a process of identity development, as a form of relational, emotional, practical and cognitive development and taking place within particular opportunity structures' (p.278). In this case, career aspirations may come from their target in life and as work-related consequences that led to their current position.

When these former middle managers were asked whether they had the ambition to move up to senior management position when they were still in the hotel industry, they admitted that they had tried. However, their career

aspirations had changed after a certain stage of their career and several factors, including age, had contributed to the decision not to strive further.

“Yes [try for senior management position] ... but it doesn't give me the excitement... to reach that level, I knew for the fact that it requires more maturity and time. I could reach that level yes. I admit that to become the general manager of a 5-star hotel is also a quest... like I said I give 10 years. Whatever position that I held, I need to put a stop to it [after that 10 years] ... and to develop my own business.”

[Hashim, male, hotel consultant, former F&B manager]

In some cases, the career aspirations of the former middle managers had started when they were in college, before starting their hotel career. For example, Julie, because of her deep affection towards working in the hotel, she decided to join the industry after her graduation, although her bachelor's degree was in marketing.

Julie had set a certain target in her career. She emphasised the importance of having adequate working experience and how her age would not have stopped her from reaching her target. This suggests that her determination was her major drive towards reaching her career ambitions.

8.4 Views on Current Middle Managers' Opportunities

When commenting on the opportunity structures within which they worked, some former middle managers in this research agreed that there were opportunities out there for middle managers to advance in their career, as long as they had the right strategy.

“...they can go to the top management post... you need to have your career progression plan. You have to know what a person’s strength is, weakness, what are their gaps and how can you compete [with] them with skills and training.”

[Irfan, male, club HR manager, former HR manager]

As described in Chapter 7, working abroad was another strategy that middle managers could follow to achieve their career goal quicker than others. The exposure and international work experience would add to their credentials and benefit their future prospects in the local labour market. However, overseas work experience does not guarantee a senior management position for the local middle manager. One example, Irfan, who still believed that this requires the whole package, including social skills and being able to manage the workforce.

“Now, those who goes overseas... these are people who want to be fast in their career. [...] But sometimes when you go to this stage, during the interview, people will look at your resilience... your character... your confidence. A lot of these people, they can talk because of their overseas exposure... but when it comes to basic things about work they can't. If you take them as a GM, you can see how huge the gap is will be between the workers and the employer. That's what I see.”

[Irfan, male, club HR manager, former HR manager]

It is not easy for the local middle managers to take on the responsibilities of a GM. As mentioned in the previous chapter, trust from owners towards local managers is not convincing enough at this moment for the former middle managers. There is more to be done by these managers to be seen as a suitable candidate.

Although in the previous chapter, hotel / general managers revealed that the appointment of a GM depends on the management company or host country, one former middle manager experienced a different approach in Japan.

“I think it is the policy of the owner of the hotel... or the owning company... not the chain. In Japan, the owning company can dictate that they want local manager. Why they can do that and why we can't? I worked in Hokiyama Tokyo hotel for a while... their senior chefs are all Japanese... because they dictate... owning company is the reason [that opens up the opportunities for locals].”

[Kadir, male, food entrepreneur, former executive chef]

On the same note, other former middle managers believed that locals should be given the opportunity to manage and they should be ready to take up the responsibility.

“...they have to give the opportunity to the local to manage... and the locals also have to change their attitude. We have a lot of local talent... but you know the locals... shy and not vocal... like to be in the background. We have to eliminate that.”

[Zamani, male, convention centre GM, former F&B manager]

At the same time, Zamani suggested that the Malaysian government should control the number of foreigners in the industry although he still believed mixing nationalities in the workforce will foster more creativity and produce experiences that can be of benefit to the local employees and managers.

“...we want the government to give a stricter term for those who want to bring in expatriate managers... it's not that they can't bring in. We want them to come in but at the top end position... because why?... if we have locals all the way is not good too... these expatriates come in with different exposure, different experiences.”

[Zamani, male, convention centre GM, former F&B manager]

In relation to the diverse workforce that Zamani highlighted earlier, the issue of ethnic bias - especially in certain departments and positions - was also examined and mentioned by other former middle managers. In another quote, Hashim believed that ethnic bias does not really exist in the hotel industry. It is more a question of individual capability to perform.

“To tell you the truth, it's only about the capability... actually the ethnic bias is something that does not quite exist anymore... only 10%... the other 90% is our capability and competency of talent. Our people... that in an organisation rises to their capability to lead. It's just about leading... we just don't have leaders... because no one [capable of being] ... Malaysian leaders.”

[Hashim, male, hotel consultant, former F&B manager]

In order to get the locals ready and sufficiently competent, Julie revealed her own strategy as described in her case study earlier. Initially, her main concern was her knowledge development, without considering ethnic differences. She emphasised the importance of training in building a successful hotel career. Despite the numerous training programmes provided by the hotel, middle managers should be able to be involve in other types of training, including those that would benefit their own personal development. Furthermore, Julie did not blame expatriates or even the system for creating the gap in the workforce and the labour market. She still believed that only competent and capable middle managers could hold the position. Julie reiterated the issue described in the previous section on the different generations of employees. She agreed that new generations are not willing to learn the hotel work culture. New employees' lack of commitment actually creates huge gaps to be filled in the future.

“The people who become the expatriate are the ones who are very very highly driven... you do not become an expatriate if you are not highly driven and able to deliver... the problem with our Malaysian people is they are not highly driven... it makes it worse if you have the gen X and gen Y... our locals are not that ambitious.”

[Julie, female, director of HR (manufacturing), former area director of HR]

8.4.1 Required knowledge and skills set

Preparing for a future career requires a set of skills and adequate knowledge and understanding related to the job. The former middle managers knew the importance of higher education in order to lead, hence some of them left the industry, practising their skills in hospitality and culinary education. The opportunity for them to become an educator was widely available. The hospitality higher education institutions valued the experiences that these former middle managers possessed.

“I want to pursue my master’s degree... teaching allows flexible work hours for me and facilitates my study as well... After this I still have two choices; either going back or stay in the education sector as a lecturer.”

[Salleh, male, culinary instructor, former sous chef]

Kadir on the other hand, believed that his valuable work experience was proof of his competence and it had given him added advantages in pursuing further opportunities, for example, going into consultation work.

“My experience gives me knowledge... that's why I can design a kitchen... based on kitchen operation principles. Every movement counts... they called it productivity time... there's no theory... it's like motion study.”

[Kadir, male, food entrepreneur, former executive chef]

Former middle managers had opportunities to reach their career goals as long as they worked hard, whether or not they came into the industry with formal hotel education:

“Those who succeed in this industry with only high school education are the most hardworking people... because they knew they don't have any qualification. Those with diploma or bachelor's degree will always say; ‘...I have my diploma or degree... why should I work hard... I know when attending interviews, I will be offered at least executive positions’. That perception is wrong... you should have both... education and experience... now the trend in an interview they will ask about your working experience.”

[Nazri, male, hospital F&B manager, former F&B manager]

Skills and knowledge can also be acquired from the job itself. The next example from Zahid suggests that handling employees' cases in human resources department had taught him about what was still needed in terms of new knowledge:

“There are a lot of things to learn in HR... or in any departments... but the thing is you need to know your core skills set... and you need to know what the industry needs for you. Me personally, I always look at people who can speak good English... especially when you work at administrative work... because you can talk. Then you can communicate and convince people... that's the main thing I look for in a candidate.”

[Zahid, male, HR manager (retail), former HR manager]

On the other hand, Julie believed that her hotel knowledge and skills set started developing as part of her early career plan. She had laid out short and long-term plans to reach her career goal. In the process, she saw the need to update her knowledge, so she took the opportunity to get a diploma related to her job role as director of human resources.

Another former middle manager, Hazel, described her decision to quit the industry in the early stage of her career to further her hospitality study. Her work responsibilities made her recognise the need to gain more knowledge and training to be able to deliver.

“Then after I was appointed as executive, I felt that it was not for me yet and I felt I need to develop my knowledge first because I have to attend meetings with top management teams and so on... so I decided to quit and apply for my certificate and diploma.”

[Hazel, female, event management exec director, former sales manager]

8.4.2 Ability to adapt to a new work role

The most important quality in these former middle managers was their ability to adapt to their new career. Before they decided to leave the hotel industry, these former middle managers had to think of the new work environment and anticipate the responsibilities and workloads that they would have. Although most of them were currently engaged in service-oriented jobs, there were a few who went to join a different industry altogether.

Most former middle managers saw the transition as a new learning process, rather than simply an opportunity to offer what they did in their previous jobs. Irfan specifically had been developing work procedures and training modules for his department, based on the training and knowledge that he had previously received in the hotel industry:

“So when I decided to move to the club, I know that I'll let go all of this [hotel work] ... but when I think about it, it actually makes me realise that now when I go to the club. I can see myself bringing that image

along. Set a high standard, very confident... people relying on you... people feel that you are the best person to talk to... because of the way that you reflect yourself as the hospitable person [a hotelier].”

[Irfan, male, club HR manager, former HR manager]

Furthermore, former middle managers compared their current and previous work cultures. The reflection gave them the room to improvise and develop a better work environment and a balanced work life.

“Working in the hotel, you have to maintain the standard every time... everyday always have to face the pressure from our boss... pressure and pressure never stops... but in hospitals it is different. We don't believe in pressuring someone else... we believe in working with them, communicate with them to make sure that we maintain the standard... because we know, health is very important. The moment I put pressure on you, you will be stressed.”

[Nazri, male, hospital F&B manager, former F&B manager]

Zahid, on the other hand, explained his burden in trying to adapt to his new role with multiple work demands and dealing with a lot more responsibilities than before. This required him to utilise his interpersonal skills:

“The difference is the work demand is much greater... because we are looking after almost 5 times more than what Shady group has. In terms of staff strength... and I think the challenge is even greater here because it is a multinational company.”

[Zahid, male, HR manager (retail), former HR manager]

In another example, Julie compared her previous role in the hotel and her current role in the manufacturing company. The different roles required her to adapt swiftly to her new workplace.

“When you are in a hotel, it's all very operational... it's day to day activities... here, whatever I do is strategic based... I plan for 10 years

from now, 5 years from now... but when I was in Hudson it was already like that. Hudson is also having its strategic path. They look at succession planning, how do you capture the knowledge... knowledge management... how training and development affects... how do you get return investment... but there is still operational. Nowadays, I don't... I just do strategic planning.”

[Julie, female, director of HR (manufacturing), former area director of HR]

In comparing the demands and the scenarios of work from previous and current jobs, Hazel highlighted her ability to manage her work in both situations. It was important that these former middle managers control their work demands and pace in order to make a successful career transition, demonstrating their adaptability:

In a related situation, Azman described his struggles in developing his restaurant's work system. The learning process started afresh and multiplied, as he was now on his own and had to continue the knowledge transfer from his previous work role into his current job.

“...the work system... we have to develop on our own... they keep on changing. If in a hotel... large chain... they already have their own work system... if they want to open a new outlet, they'll just have to copy and paste the SOPs, documentation... but in a restaurant, we have to develop on our own.”

[Azman, male, restaurateur, former sous chef]

The decision to switch jobs to other industries involved adapting to a new career role and responsibilities. The former middle managers in this study demonstrated how they managed to cope with their new career role.

Nazri, who had left the hotel industry some time previously, explained the knowledge development that he had acquired in his career and how he now had greater responsibilities. He was given the opportunity to learn a new area of knowledge related to his previous job. He viewed the new knowledge acquisition as part of the company's expansion plan and he was up to it.

"I'm here for almost 6 years now... from 2009 in October until today. I learnt a lot because in hotel I didn't learn so much on safety... kitchen safety... kitchen perspective... but when I joined this hospital, I changed. I introduced a different concept because before this in the hospital chain, food is not that important... food is only to support the clinical."

[Nazri, male, hospital F&B manager, former F&B manager]

Based on their experiences in the hotel industry, some former middle managers were able to provide consultancy on talent management and on managing the physical side of the hotel. This suggests that after many years of service, hotel employees are adaptable enough to carry out other jobs.

"I do talent recruitment... I also do concept and facilitation for new owners... new owners who want to develop a restaurant or purchase and all that. I also do consultancy and troubleshoot for existing business... problematic troubleshooting and inefficiency business... or business that is not profitable... and turn it around. Then do training and development... it's for the industry and for faculty... institutions."

[Hashim, male, hotel consultant, former F&B manager]

For Julie, her new career transformed her from being a typical hotelier to a strategic thinker. Her new role enabled her to learn more and experience another perspective of HR, that is, within the manufacturing industry.

"I'm supposed to be a consultant... and you are not talking about operational anymore... talking about strategic for the future, for example strategic planning, succession planning... talent requisition."

That's what business partner means... you look at the business as HR strategic view... you align it with the business."

[Julie, female, director of HR (manufacturing), former area director of HR]

According to Hazel, her new career role pushed her to work harder as the job required her to secure sales on her own, in comparison with her previous hotel job. The challenge in the new role demonstrated her strong determination to succeed.

"Nowadays it is more difficult compared to before. In the hotel, I just sell what the hotel has and can offer. Now, I'm trying to secure sales and create the whole event from scratch. It's a big challenge to organise my team with the amount of budget that we have through sponsorship. I have to be more creative in working around the budget and honouring the event's requirements at the same time... quite a challenge actually... but I like it."

[Hazel, female, event management exec director, former sales manager]

8.4.3 Importance of career support

As part of the process of adapting to a new career, several former middle managers also highlighted the importance of having a mentor, coach or role model similar to what has been highlighted by the middle managers in previous chapter, especially in guiding them to make the right decision.

"The most important thing... you have to have a coach and a mentor... who is experienced to train you to be in that position... If you don't have a mentor or coach, a person will not be at that position."

[Irfan, male, club HR manager, former HR manager]

Others also identified their own mentors who had helped in their careers, either by providing room for knowledge development or character building.

“I think something that people don't realise it is helpful if you become a mentor. Yes (I have a mentor) ... my mentor is the Executive Director of XYZ; Dato Sharif... when I took my diploma, I admire the guy very much because he can quote cases just like that... he's amazing [...] He is full of knowledge. So, I have asked him to be his mentee and he has taken me under his wing.”

[Julie, female, director of HR (manufacturing), former area director of HR]

In addition, for some former middle managers, their position at certain stages of their career required them to work far away from their home. As described by the middle managers in Chapter 7, former middle managers also acknowledged the support from family and to be important to their career, especially for female managers.

“I go back every weekend. But because I'm a female talent, they are willing to absorb that cost [of traveling back and forth] ... it's expensive anyway. I want to come back because my dad was sick... last year he was in ICU (Intensive care unit) ... even that, from November until now, I haven't heard any good news yet.”

[Julie, female, director of HR (manufacturing), former area director of HR]

A particularly problematic issue for women working in the hotel industry is the expectation that they should give their family priority over their career.

Although this may not affect most operational female employees, it does have a huge impact on female managers who are likely to be assigned to other hotels or to manage overseas chain hotels, as explained by Julie:

“For women there are a lot of issues with this... most women if they are married, they will sacrifice their career for their family. Most companies do not support females after they are married... transfer, to have a child, transition... so it's very different.”

[Julie, female, director of HR (manufacturing), former area director of HR]

Having the support from their spouse is crucial for these managers before they can commit to such jobs. Zamani relates how coping with his demanding daily work schedule required the support of his spouse.

“I’m a workaholic... I don’t mind spending more time here and I have a very understanding wife... now I have to leave house as early as 6.15 in the morning [...] I usually went home around 9.30 p.m.”

[Zamani, male, convention centre GM, former F&B manager]

In the culture of most Malays, it is very difficult to comprehend that in the service industry, some women are going to be far apart from their family and, therefore, considerable support from their spouses is vital.

“I think my husband is very supportive... I think I’m very lucky because of that... because in an Asian community if your husband is not supportive, you will not make it. Imagine I’m in Indonesia five days in a week... and travel a lot. That’s one of the issues that you will have in the Asian community if your husband does not approve, you are not going anywhere.”

[Julie, female, director of HR (manufacturing), former area director of HR]

The next narrative describes Hazel’s career path and her views on career support in the hotel industry. In addition, Hazel explains her career journey and how she ends up doing her own event management business.

Illustrative box 6: Perspective of a former middle manager: Hazel [female, event management exec director, former sales manager]

“I started working in the hotel when I was 20 until 28 years old... but in between I did my certificate and diploma in hotel management. [...] before I even worked in the hotel industry before my study, I had no intention to work in the hotel... actually it was initiated by my uncle who happened to have a good friend in the hotel... a GM... so after leaving high school, he offered me work and straight away I accepted it... after 6

months, I was promoted as executive... but within that six months I worked in various departments... basically doing all the front of house jobs... reception, sales, F&B.”

She describes her experiences in the hotel as the reason she was brave enough to start an event management company with her cousin.

“After I left the hotel industry, I went to Kuala Lumpur... I don't want to work in a hotel anymore... it was fun, but I need to be away from it for a while... then I worked in a telecommunication company as customer service... and also, I have worked in a supermarket as customer service agent. But the satisfaction is not there because I used to work as a sales agent and I get commission. Finally, I was approached by a lady who owns an event management company... but I said to her that I need commission and I can't work with a basic salary... because I know my capability and I assured her that I can deliver. I continue to work with her company until now. Now I have more time to myself and I arrange my own schedule. When you are getting older, you need more time for yourself rather than spending it for other people.”

This was her response when asked about her main reason for leaving the hotel industry.

“Salary... basic salary is low. Of course, we have service points... but it is difficult to secure house mortgage and loans because it is not fixed... I think hotels need to revise their salary structure although now they have already implemented minimum wage policy. The main reason why hotel staff move from one hotel to another is because of the salary... sometimes the difference is just about 100 to 200 ringgits only... but that would make a lot of impact to them... plus new work environment.”

Hazel was also asked if she would consider returning to the hotel industry.

“Yes... only if there is a good offer especially in the sales department. I would like to manage my own resort if possible... no longer working 7 days a week to meet sales target.”

8.5 Conclusions

The experiences of former middle managers in the hotel industry have been presented in this chapter, outlining their previous accomplishments, challenges, barriers that limited their advancement opportunities, and how they viewed the opportunity structures within which current hotel middle managers seek to develop their careers. However, their sharing has emphasised the value of their knowledge and skills which facilitated their career transitions. Several highlighted the key role of knowledge development, including through formal hospitality higher education programmes. However, other former middle managers indicated that the acquisition of knowledge and skills also involved informal learning processes on the job. For example, these former middle managers adapted to their new career roles when they exited the industry, building on the knowledge and skills sets that they had developed. Therefore, it can be said that learning and acquiring new knowledge for the hotel middle managers is an important and a continuing process.

In terms of their opinions on the opportunity structures for current hotel middle managers, they believed that local middle managers were still lacking in certain areas, including career strategy, determination and the need for continuing training. More emphasis should be given on allowing the middle managers to develop their career through professional management courses provided by the hotel or on their own expense. It was also suggested that there was a role for the Malaysian government in reducing the influx of

foreign labour into the industry. The former managers believed the Malaysian government through the Ministry of Tourism should be actively involved in encouraging local hospitality graduates to build their career in the hotel industry by providing attractive incentives such as management trainee opportunities funded by them to reduce the dependence on foreign labour.

In addition, they highlighted the importance of the support systems around them that can have a major influence in the success of their careers so far. Mentoring and career guidance by senior managers and GMs were important: some former managers reported on the difficult relationships that they had with their previous employer or GM which subsequently made them leave the hotel. Fostering a positive work relationship among managers and subordinates in the hotel can be one crucial factor of success in retaining employees and middle managers.

These findings provide a coherent understanding of the ability of former middle managers to adapt in different settings and how they responded to the support received. It could be suggested that the competencies of these former middle managers were unique and that their decisions to leave the hotel industry were based on their individual experiences and challenges. They have shown how actively involved they were in their jobs and the contribution they could make to their previous and current employers. These former middle managers described their career changes as an opportunity to work in a new environment and to have a more balanced work and family life.

Most former middle managers agreed that the new job roles suited them well in terms of work flexibility and pay. Overall, leaving the hotel industry was an idiosyncratic decision by the managers. Although some of them were willing to return to the hotel industry in the future, the narratives suggested that there were several conditions that would need to be met before they could go back.

CHAPTER 9: FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

9.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to present and relate the narrative career stories of the hotel middle managers with existing literature, thus providing a sense of their career development journeys. This research embarked on its journey based on a broad understanding of the research questions, namely examining the patterns of education, training and learning patterns of work experiences, other additional factors, and the available career development opportunities for the middle managers in the Malaysian hotel industry.

In the process of understanding the middle managers' career voices, several narratives stand out and highlight their rich experiences through unique individual career patterns. The narratives bring meaning to their career life, exploring their passion, determination and commitment and at the same time highlighting their career challenges, responsibilities and difficult decisions that they had to make. The career stories of the middle managers were diverse: some were driven by choice and opportunities presented to them and some were because of circumstances that they could not control. Therefore, the findings of this research need to be linked with existing literature based on the framework of the research questions set out in Chapter 1. The following section explains how the research questions were addressed, based on the research findings, and how the findings relate to relevant literature.

9.2 Patterns of education, training and learning and local middle managers' career development

The impact of education in developing a career in the hotel industry has been a concern for previous scholars but the focus has typically been on curriculum structure and efforts made to enhance students' intentions to pursue their career after graduating (Dopson & Nelson, 2003; Kavita & Sharma, 2011; Siu, Cheung, & Law, 2012). In addition, evidence from other research showed that hospitality education was studied from various settings, demographic levels and cultures which consequently have an impact on employees' initial career. Concerning the impact of education on career development decisions and aspirations, the findings demonstrated here show that formal hospitality education and training is crucial, and that initial career formation was shaped by the structured hotel education system available in Malaysia.

This research also endorses previous studies on the importance of hospitality management education to the industry. For example, Connolly and McGing (2006) highlight Ireland's tertiary hospitality education and how their graduates are able to match the industry's requirements. Christou (1999) agrees that hospitality management education is able to produce skilled and competent employees if they meet the needs of the industry through effective learning. Knowledge can be acquired through various means and learning styles. This assumption is supported by several studies which highlight that

learning, with regards to hospitality education, can be enhanced through several forms including experiential learning (Kiser & Partlow, 1999; Maier & Thomas, 2013; Yang & Cheung, 2014), work-based learning (Gruman et al., 2009), and skills training (Annaraud, 2006; Buergermeister, 1983; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006).

It is important to note the importance of skills set in this research and reinforce the idea that skills are a valuable asset to the managers. According to Fournier and Ineson (2010), 'a skill is an ability that can be acquired through training whereas competence is an achievable behaviour' (p.33). With the availability of hotel skill-based programmes (e.g. certificate or diploma level), either through government or private higher learning institutions, prospective hotel employees should be well-equipped with the required initial knowledge and skills. However, this research suggests that some managers succeeded without participating in such programmes, as they entered the industry by switching from other areas of work or by progression from entry level jobs, which were often part-time. In other words, as expected, a background in formal hospitality management education is not the only way to start a career in the hotel industry. Managers started from different backgrounds (Gibbons, Woodside, Hannon, Sweeney, & Davison, 2011) and initial career formations and progressed through different patterns of learning and training. In addition, the research highlighted the different patterns of educational background of the middle managers in the early stage of their career.

Engagement with continuous learning opportunities throughout their career, including via in-house training and development, served as an additional platform for the managers' learning and development. As Brown and Bimrose (2014) described, 'occupational choice and initial vocational education and training can throw up many challenges, but a sense that you will be able to change in ways appropriate to the desired occupational identity can itself facilitate the identity formation process' (p.277). The data provided in this research showed how initial education had prepared participants to advance into higher positions with greater responsibilities, enhancing their self-confidence, self-identity, and giving them a stronger sense of their vocational personality.

A study by Wilson-Wünsch et al. (2014) revealed that knowledge, especially that which underpins the exercise of cognitive skills, is an important contributing factor to the performance of a hotel manager. Different patterns of education and training also supported the development of the Malaysian managers' knowledge base, and the exercise of decision-making and management skills contributed to their career development. In addition, through the narratives of the participants in this research, interest and passion for working in the hotel industry could be initiated through formal and informal development processes, including internships and in-house training programmes. There was also evidence that employees from other fields, e.g., the airline industry and accountancy, are entering the industry, which

illustrates how open the hotel industry is to different groups of employees with different sets of skills, educational background and learning, particularly if the entrants have good customer service and interpersonal skills.

Employees may work in different environments and come from different backgrounds but with the right attitudes and a motivation to learn, multiple opportunities will be available for them (Brown & Bimrose, 2014).

In this industry, a lack of educational attainment can be compensated for by years of working experience (Marchante, Ortega, & Pagan, 2007). Hard work and continuous learning proved beneficial to those in the study who were already 'street smart' to help build their careers in the industry. Such attributes were, however, much more likely to be recognised if they were linked to some formal continuing education and training in the absence of initial higher education qualifications. Earlier studies have also confirmed the need for higher education qualifications in the industry (e.g. Casado, 1992; Christou, 2002).

The findings in this study also showed how some participants were still in the process of attaining higher education degrees on a part-time basis because they recognised the importance of continuous learning and updating their knowledge. This finding is similar with a previous study which placed great priority on continuous learning in order to progress in a career (Ayres, 2006b). Updating knowledge in key areas of work seemed to be the core learning priority in the hotel industry, as shown in the findings described here.

However, in order to lead the organisation, a manager would need to be well-versed and knowledgeable about the operations of every department. Bird (1994) illustrated that careers are not just about the years of working but also involve utilisation of the wealth of knowledge gathered along the way. As indicated in the individual narratives, participants in this research described how their employer provided avenues for them to improve and enhance their skills and knowledge through in-house training and workshops, whereas others used their own initiative to enter professional management courses and seminars to enhance their knowledge at work. Similarly, there are links between knowledge and practice that enhance the skills of hospitality employees and managers through training and skills development courses (Mat Isa, Abdullah, Hamzah, & Arshad, 2008; Wilson-Wünsch et al., 2014).

Enhancement in learning at work which produces innovative skills and capabilities should be an important consideration for an organisation (Brown, 2015a). Middle managers should use the training programmes provided by the hotel to plan and develop their own training schedule to achieve their career goals. The training programmes on offer provided them with a clear route to achieving their target as every programme involved different levels of skills development, from basic to managerial training. This study suggests that knowledge, skills and training acquired by the middle managers enhance career development although it may also limit opportunities for some managers without adequate support (Ayres, 2006b).

To summarise, it can be said that the hotel education does affect the middle managers' career aspirations and development in various aspects although it still depends on the support and opportunities available to them. Although the findings are broadly similar to other research (Nicely & Tang, 2015; Peters & Buhalis, 2004), this research provides an empirical contribution by advancing our understanding of the Malaysian hospitality education structure and background and how it influenced local middle managers' career development. By examining the career journeys of the middle managers with and without formal hotel education, this research further provides empirical evidence of the extrinsic value of education on their career and career prospects.

The exploration of initial career formation of the middle managers, with or without formal hospitality education, adds to the existing knowledge of the value of education in the hotel industry. Knowledge related to the occupation provided by the hotels certainly serves as an added advantage and middle managers utilised this to learn new skills at work and ultimately to try to navigate their career in the long run. In addition, knowledge and skills gained through occupational learning experiences further enhanced their vocational personality and self-identity. The findings also showed that the individual process of equipping themselves with adequate education and training highlights the potential for advancing into senior managerial positions and possibly replacing the existing expatriate hotel general managers in the future, which would demonstrate a significant shift from previous years.

9.3 Patterns of work experience and local middle managers' career development.

Most managers, including former middle managers, had been working in the hotel industry for more than five years prior to the interview session. Some had worked in the industry for more than 10 years and had worked in various contexts, from city to resort hotels. Extensive working experience is also an important indication of knowledge and skills in the hotel industry (Barron, Maxwell, Broadbridge, & Ogden, 2007; Canning, 2011). Years of work experience had provided the knowledge and skills to solve work-related problems and issues. The findings indicated that overseas work experience gained in the past was useful in this respect (Nicely, 2017).

Other research has highlighted how exposure to different working environments and management styles provides new insights into how large international hotels are managed and are often used to gain as much knowledge as possible, including learning a new language (Janta et al., 2011). Therefore, the sought-after opportunity to work abroad was a rewarding experience for many managers in this study which helped them in their current work role. Middle managers in Malaysia were able to redirect their career paths by extending the skills they gained abroad to provide every possible opportunity to grow within the local hotel industry. Similarly, Janta (2009) indicated that in her study, workers treat international work experiences as a valuable commodity for their future career. In addition,

previous research has shown that international management skills are needed to manage a department abroad and this competence will determine their long-term career success back home (Causin & Ayoun, 2011; Cheung et al., 2010; Christou, 2002). Without a standard career ladder, each individual story in this research consisted of unique career experiences, including some with experience of working abroad. Managers valued the exposure and opportunity to work with various nationalities and within different cultures and they regarded themselves as 'self-initiated expatriates' (those who decide to move abroad and seek employment in order to develop her or his career by preparing herself or himself with the relevant knowledge and practice) (Doherty, 2013; Thorn, 2009). There were several examples in this research, although previous studies have shown that self-initiated expatriation was mainly linked to gender discrimination and disadvantage for women in terms of career advancement (Muir, Wallace, & McMurray, 2014; Tharenou, 2009). However, the middle managers' narratives in this study indicated that the main reason was because of limited opportunities to advance in their career in Malaysia, regardless of gender. Some of the managers viewed the current situation as career plateauing (Kline et al., 2008) and, as better overseas offers arose, some took these opportunities to enhance their career experiences.

In the context of this research, to understand the career development of hotel middle managers, they have to be valued for their skills, knowledge and experience which guided them in their career development process.

To be an advantage to the employer, the vast work experience of each middle manager should be utilised in training and development sessions for other employees (Costen & Salazar, 2011; Kyriakidou & Maroudas, 2010). The skills set that they have developed throughout the years from working in different hotels and in different countries can be drawn upon by employers in planning their training modules. They could leverage existing training programmes to develop a new group of managers within the hotel or brand and further enhance the middle managers' career identities. Similarly, career identities emerged from the interaction of individuals with others or colleagues (LaPointe, 2010).

The different patterns of work experience of the middle managers showed their maturity in making career decisions at every stage of their career timeline. On the same note, Savickas, Silling, and Schwartz (1984) predicted that maturity across the duration of a career determines the choices that individuals will make in the future. Middle managers continuously seek new skills through training and development programmes to stay relevant and achieve their life goals. The different patterns of working experiences of the middle managers facilitated the achievement of their career plans and life goals, similar to previous studies (Harris, 2010; Nicely, 2017).

9.4 Factors that influence local middle managers' career development.

There are several factors that influenced middle managers' career development in particular in this research. In the context of the Malaysian hotel industry, four significant factors were highlighted in the findings. These factors were based on the diverse background of the industry itself and Malaysia's own multi-cultural landscape; family influences; and mentoring. This research aligns with the existing knowledge and understanding of factors that support the hotel managers' career growth in the industry (Karatepe, 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Malik, Madappa, & Chitranshi, 2017).

Diverse nature of the workforce

Adapting well to a diverse hotel work environment has been positively linked to satisfaction and a lower possibility of turnover in previous research (Chan & Mai, 2015). The findings in this research indicated that working in a diverse team works best where respondents took the opportunity to view things from different perspectives. These findings demonstrate how diversity in the workforce can be a positive sign of cultural understanding (Christensen-Hughes, 1992). This research outlined the benefits of having a diverse workforce which include knowledge-sharing among employees. Furthermore, the hotel industry has witnessed the influx of employees with varied expertise and skills sets. For example, the industry no longer has managers with only a diploma in hotel management and it is common to have waiters with formal education such as a bachelor's degree. In addition, these findings provide an

empirical contribution by reinforcing the importance of formal education and a higher degree, representing the significant functions and relevance of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) of hotel employees in their job (Solnet, Kralj, Moncarz, & Kay, 2010).

As indicated by Kim (2006), managing diversity in the hotel industry is important to ensure positive growth and better representation and to proactively generate winning ideas from the huge variety of employee backgrounds. This diversity in knowledge, skills sets, languages, and personalities has brought positive energy into the workforce and through specific diversity training, hotel employees are able to encourage empathy for their work relationship (Reynolds, Rahman, & Bradetich, 2014). Most managers believed that their background did not have a large impact on their career in the hotel industry, which adds to the debate in the literature on diversity management in the hotel industry in analysing the influence of diverse backgrounds on the careers of hotel managers (Kim, 2006; Yap & Ineson, 2016).

Family commitment and responsibility

One point that was frequently brought up in the interviews was the participants' responsibility for taking care of their own family and other family members. Most of the middle managers described their family as their main priority, even when they were offered a better job. Embracing the notion that work-family balance is an important consideration to the middle managers, it

also addresses the issue of why hotels still employ expatriate general managers (Avril & Magnini, 2007; Barber & Pittaway, 2000). Many turned down good opportunities to progress because the conditions that they would have to accept would negatively affect other family members. Responsibility for taking care of family, especially one's own parents, is common in the Malaysian culture. The nature of work in the hotel industry has many restrictions: for example, long and atypical working hours restrict the time that managers have for their family, thus increasing the tension and conflict between work and family responsibilities (Magnini, 2009b; Zhao et al., 2011). A study by Brown, Thomas, and Bosselman (2015) on hotel graduates in the U.S. showed that work-family balance is one of the main reasons for their turnover, but the added cultural expectation of taking care of extended family in Malaysia is likely to enhance conflict and affect career decision-making.

In examining the narratives further, it was clear that life changes at certain stages of a career demanded changes in work and career advancement plans. These changes may include getting married and having a family (Daniels, 1989), relocation to other cities, and being given greater job responsibilities (Brown, Bosselman, & Thomas, 2016; Cleveland, O'Neill, Himelright, Harrison, Crouter, & Drago, 2007). Findings highlighted the importance of age in terms of career advancement and this is in line with other studies that link age and career (Milman, 1999; Riley, 1990). For example, older managers put their family as their priority and some would turn down any advancement opportunities if relocation was required. These

changes forced the participants to re-frame their career path (Brown, 2015b) and justify the changes in order to continue their career development. For some, these changes were unplanned and affected their career decision-making perspectives. When managers were unable to adapt to the changes in their life and work, some decided to leave the hotel industry altogether. Several factors were mentioned in the interviews with former middle managers as contributing to these changes, including family commitments and responsibilities (see Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Harris & Giuffre, 2010).

Most research in the service and other industries focuses on the impact of work-family conflict on turnover and work satisfaction (Namasivayam, 2004; Ng, Fosh, & Naylor, 2002; Nikandrou, Panayotopoulou, & Apospori, 2008; Sandhu & Mehta, 2006; Santos & Cabral-Cardoso, 2008; Seto, Morimoto, & Maruyama, 2004). In this research, however, the hotel middle managers were concerned about its effect on their career progression opportunities, especially if they refused to be assigned elsewhere. How the manager handled the work-family relationship influenced their attitudes towards the job and outcomes such as job satisfaction: if they handled it well, they were found to be happier with their job (Zhao et al., 2011). Zhao et al. (2011) suggest that hotel management should play a critical role in creating a positive work culture in order to balance their employees' work and family responsibilities. Therefore, it is important to provide support for hotel employees and create a family-friendly workplace, where possible.

Work relationships

The research findings indicated that feelings of dissatisfaction with their relationships with their superior, and sometimes their co-workers, had led to the decision to leave the hotel industry for some. Similarly, previous evidence showed a significant impact of workplace relationships on the decision to leave or turnover intention among hotel managers (Madera, Dawson, & Neal, 2013). These managers were unable to cope with the pressures of working while unhappy. Carmeli (2005) predicted that an organisational culture that does not suit the employee may be the main influence in a career change.

Mentoring support

Among the support often available and utilised in the hotel industry is mentor support (Ayres, 2006a; Rutherford & Wiegstein, 1985). It was interesting to note in the personal narratives of middle managers in this research that the role of their mentor had an important impact on career development, supporting previous research which has shown that the contribution of mentor support is significant (Chew & Wong, 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Rutherford & Wiegstein, 1985). One of the reasons for this is because mentor support enabled middle managers to shape their career path. According to Tharenou (2005), the mentoring process is perceived differently by men and women and through mentoring, women employees were able to be guided and trained on how to gain promotion in their career. However, in

contrast to the findings above, the research presented here concluded that there were similar career outcomes with either a male or female mentor.

Previous studies have been conducted to examine the effect of mentoring on career development in different sectors, for example, in the fields of science and technology (San Miguel & Kim, 2014), manufacturing (Ramaswami, Huang, & Dreher, 2013), telecommunications (Jyoti & Sharma, 2015), and the hospitality industry (Ayres, 2006a; Kim et al., 2015). Kim et al. (2015) conceptualised mentoring constructs in the hospitality industry to reduce turnover and suggested that the nature of working as a team in the hotel industry encourages mentoring to flourish, and helps in reducing subordinates' ambiguity in working without guidance. By referring to their mentor, they were able to learn new skills and develop their identity at the workplace. Furthermore, the learning experiences that they gained from mentoring enhanced their organisational commitment (Chew & Wong, 2008) as the industry is constantly progressing to meet the demands of customers. Mentored hotel managers have previously reported that they 'spent less time in sub-managerial or training positions than managers without a mentor' (Rutherford & Wiegenstein, 1985; 18), which was also reflected in the Malaysian findings described here.

9.5 Understanding career opportunities of middle managers in the Malaysian hotel industry.

The research findings indicated significant changes in the hotel industry in Malaysia. From the physical appearance of hotels to the advances in operations, the changes had forced the industry to learn and adapt. One of the obvious changes is the reliance on foreign workers. In order to attract hotel customers from all over the world, hotels have been employing foreign workers extensively, which creates diversity in the workforce but limits opportunities for the locals (Ravichandran, Israeli, Sethna, Bolden, & Ghosh, 2017).

The findings also revealed the significant impact of career networking in the industry. Durbin and Tomlinson (2011) have argued that having networks helps individuals in terms of career growth and progress, for example, establishing and making themselves known within network groups through informal meetings and gatherings. According to Perriton (2006), career networking can be from within the company or the hotel chain and at the same time it can be between hotels or inter-hotel networking. Networking helped the managers in this study to stay up to date with current trends and assisted them in seeking better opportunities when they arose (Campisi et al., 2015). It was highlighted that informal networking groups facilitate their work and career choices where they would share information about job openings, recommendations and referrals. There is supporting evidence that social media has become the preferred choice for communication,

recruitment information sharing and advertisement (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2015; Manroop & Richardson, 2013). In this research, the findings present an empirical contribution on effective networking at work by highlighting how managers actually had more choices in choosing their career and at the same time, provided with better career development opportunities within their networks.

Working in the hotel industry requires managers to exercise flexibility and creativity in guiding their career direction. The nature of work in the industry involves long hours and odd shifts which can affect work motivation. A number of studies in the past have outlined similar effects of hotel job demands towards employees' work motivation (Babakus et al., 2008; Karatepe & Uludag, 2007). However, organisational commitment was also fundamental in charting their career and there was a sense that one had to demonstrate commitment to one's current hotel before moving on to the next. In return, employers should be supporting employees by providing a conducive work environment and taking care of their well-being. Previous studies have emphasised the importance of organisational commitment in the hotel industry (Iun & Huang, 2007; Jung & Yoon, 2016). As indicated in the personal narratives in this research, the minimum period of working before moving to another hotel for a better opportunity would often be at least two to three years. Therefore, if managers intend to develop their career further, they need to plan for the next move.

The key to success for these managers was their ability to plan for their own future career direction and to plot the best time to make decisions. Previous work has demonstrated that managers will involve themselves in seeking new career opportunities once they have realised the availability of advancement opportunities (Sugalski & Greenhaus, 1986). For the Malaysian managers, progressing in the current organisation may sometimes take longer than expected, as they have to wait for a vacant position. This was why the findings showed that most managers moved out and worked with another organisation, especially if they were offered a position that they wanted.

9.6 Conclusions

This chapter has provided a synthesis of the research findings and how they relate and add to the existing body of knowledge concerning areas of hotel education and training, work experiences, and other factors influencing career development opportunities of the middle managers in hotel industry. It presented the links and interrelationship of those elements in advancing new understanding of career development and aspirations as described in their individual narratives.

The findings relating to the role and impact of these dimensions extend existing knowledge related to the career development in the hotel industry by providing different perspectives in the Malaysian context which include the importance of informal learning, support systems, and cultural influences. In

addition, the findings may partly be explained by the use of Career Construction Theory (CCT) as the meta-theoretical perspective in this research and the results can be observed in relation to individual life theme, vocational personality and career adaptability.

This chapter also examined the meaning of career development to the middle managers by understanding their different education and training patterns, initial career formation, roles and responsibilities beyond work, and their career advancement plan. Contrary to the traditional understanding of career which is structured and linear, the results of this research extend our understanding as the careers of these middle managers were found to be individually constructed, unstructured and partly influenced by factors such as tradition, cultures and support systems.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

10.1 Introduction

The findings presented here were intended to aid the understanding of the career development journeys of middle managers through their own perspectives and other managers' point of view. Discussions on the implications of the research which include the contributions of this research to knowledge and practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research, are explained.

10.2 Research Contributions

There is scarce information about the career development of hotel middle managers in the Malaysian context. This is in spite of the fact that the Malaysian hotel industry is growing fast and contributed 2.5% out of the overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in 2014 (Ministry of Finance [M.O.F.], 2014). In this respect, the findings add to the growing interest of researchers in the field of career development in the hotel industry more widely, particularly understanding the career movement and aspirations of managers. There are several contributions that can be identified from the findings of this research in relation to the constructs identified in the research questions.

10.2.1 Empirical Contributions

The first contribution relates to the role to the existing literature is in understanding how different patterns of education, learning and training influence middle managers' initial career aspirations in Malaysia. Older managers were less likely to have undertaken formal higher education-based education and training, as hospitality education programmes were only introduced in 1967 with the establishment of The MARA Institute of Technology. In addition, the graduate programmes were only introduced in the early 2000 and expanded since then, which means that the older managers were less likely to have had much opportunity to start their own higher education and training in the early years of their career. The development of HE-based hospitality programmes also meant that younger managers also saw themselves as possessing broader skill sets and hence having a wider range of career options than managers who relied mainly upon the possession of skills developed almost exclusively through the experience of work. However, some older managers recognised these limitations and had engaged in continuing education and training as a means of updating their skills, knowledge and understanding.

The next contribution relates to the impact of work experience on middle managers' career development and pathways. The concept of structured career progression within organisations seems to be less relevant to middle managers' career routes than it was for previous generations working in hotels, especially the large chains. The hotels still offer some career

development pathways, but the managers themselves are increasingly likely to view their careers as possibly going beyond the boundaries of the hotel chain, without necessarily becoming fully boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). The managers' careers are becoming more individually constructed and the lens of career constructionism (Savickas, 2005) seems an appropriate tool with which to view their career development. However, although there were factors which could facilitate career change and aspects of work they did not like, the managers move around. Vast working experience could sometimes act more as an anchor constraining their readiness to look beyond their current industrial context. Their work identity could be one where they saw themselves as hotel managers, even if their prospects of further advancement were circumscribed.

The third contribution concerns the range of factors that surround middle managers' career development. While Brown and Bimrose (2014) highlighted some generic factors influencing career development of mid-career individuals in Europe, this research focuses more narrowly upon the drivers of career development in a particular country and industrial context. The specific factors in play in the context of career development of middle managers working in the Malaysian hotel industry include and extends workforce diversity, faith/religion, family commitments, social networking and mentoring. For example, social networking has given new meaning to some of the middle managers because they can easily get connected with colleagues from different hotels nearby and share information on career

opportunities. In terms of culture, local middle managers take into consideration their responsibility towards their immediate family members before they make any career decisions. These factors affect career development by exposing the actual situations faced by the middle managers and broadening their views on their career pathways.

The final contribution relates to the middle managers' perceptions of the career development opportunities available to them. The findings in this research support existing knowledge concerning high levels of mobility and job-hopping in the hotel industry. Middle managers perceived their career development opportunities as flexible, open and multidirectional. In the past, reaching higher positions was not possible for local middle managers as expatriates were more preferred by hotel owners. However, in today's situation and as viewed by the former middle managers, local middle managers are less willing to put themselves forward for senior level positions including the GM until they have demonstrated their competence in a full range of skills, attitudes and behaviours.

10.2.2 Theoretical Contributions

This research complements the CCT theory developed by Savickas (2005). In particular, it applies the concepts of career constructionism to a Malaysian context, a setting where local hotel middle managers have experienced considerable changes in their lifetime in relation to ideas about careers and how these develop. The hotel industry was a particularly apposite setting to

look at these ideas, because of the presence a generation ago of two very different career tracks for locals and expatriates and the explicit policy intention by the government to address the issue. The interviews with hotel middle managers, former middle managers and hotel general managers demonstrated that the three domains of the theory (vocational personality, career adaptability, and life theme) could be used as a means to understand the vocational behaviour of the middle managers through narrative perspectives. As Del Corso and Rehfuss (2011) explain, '...the three domains of CCT can be conceptualized from a narrative perspective by viewing vocational personality as personal myth and storied self; career adaptability as how the protagonist addresses obstacles within their life story; and life themes as a reflection of the spirit that animates the movement to become complete in one's life story' (p.335).

Vocational personality in the context of this research is linked to the different knowledge and skill sets which middle managers across various departments develop within the hotel structure. Their vocational personalities developed through very different patterns of education, learning and training as the middle managers took advantage of or were constrained by initial career formation and career development pathways which have undergone considerable change during the last twenty-five years. The middle managers were able to construct personal narratives which gave particular weight to their own development pathways. Hence some managers emphasised the essentially practical nature of hotel management, while others stressed the

need to have mastered a knowledge base and the value of initial skill formation or programmes or continuing professional development and skills updating. The value of continuous learning while on the job for middle managers in pursuing their career was almost universally attested.

The second domain of the theory is the adaptability of the individual in navigating his/her career. This research offers a new understanding of the ability of middle managers to adapt to a new role and transitions at several stages of their career during a time when the broader context in which their careers were developing in Malaysia was undergoing rapid change. The interviewees experienced changing work contexts, but they were able to re-adjust their career aspirations and development plans in ways which demonstrated their passion, commitment, and strategies to move towards a new career direction. Other career development models also highlight career adaptability as a key factor. For example, Brown and Bimrose (2014) developed an overarching model of learning for career and labour market transitions which focused on career biographies of respondents from five countries in Europe. In the development of the model, the element of career adaptability is regarded as one representation of the model – ‘learning as a process of identity development (learning as becoming)’ (p.275).

The research findings provide an extension of the Brown and Bimrose (2014) model by offering an additional perspective from Malaysian hotel middle managers. It also justified how the framework which was derived from

Savickas' theory actually contribute significantly in this research. The research presented here highlighted how in the absence of clear initial vocational education pathways a generation ago, managers had subsequently used a variety of formal and informal learning opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in order to compete with more highly formally qualified younger managers.

The changing context for career development also contributed to the importance of support from others, including mentors, to help the managers make sense of how their careers were developing and how they could develop in future. Brown and Bimrose (2014) signal how local cultural factors could play a role in how careers develop and in the Malaysian context religious beliefs and extensive family responsibilities meant that career decisions were less individualised than they were in many European settings.

Therefore, the contribution of this research not only enhances the understanding of Career Construction Theory (CCT), it also expands and extends the range of factors in play in different contexts in relation to other models of career adaptability (Brown & Bimrose, 2014). The following diagram illustrate the factors involved in the career development of the hotel middle managers in Malaysia as explored in this research.

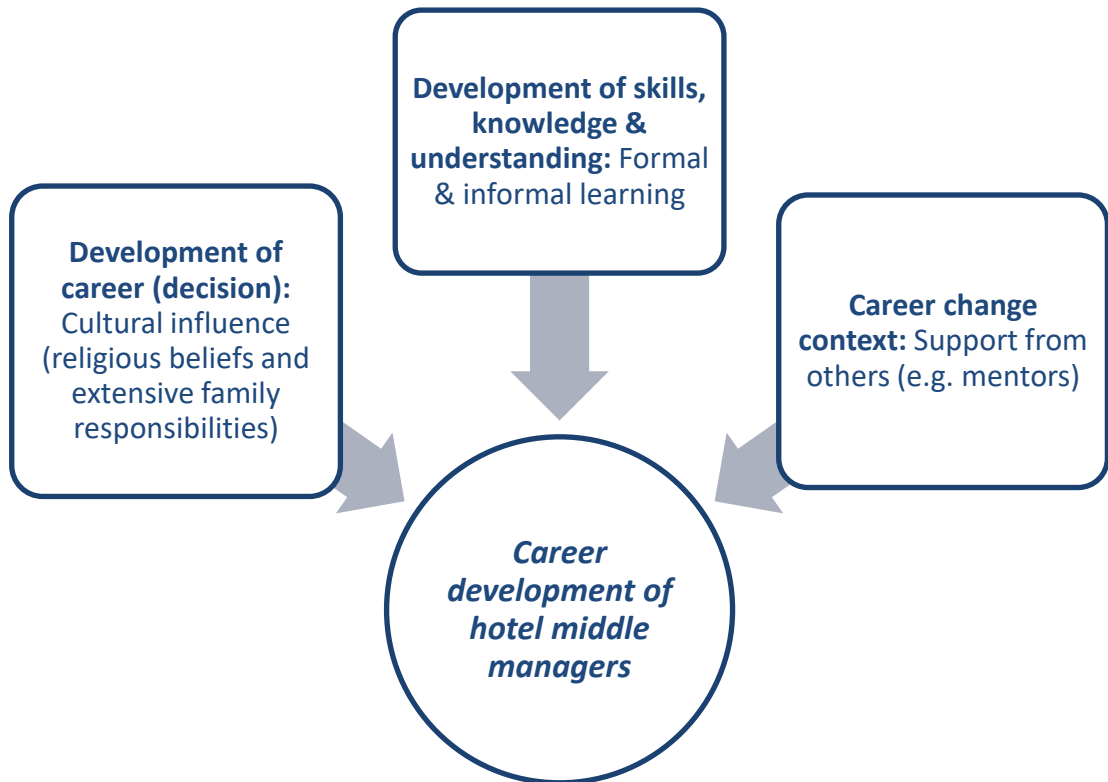


Figure 10.1: Understanding of career development of hotel middle managers in Malaysia

Moreover, the significance of the opportunity structures available to the middle managers in the hotel industry in Malaysia was found to be important in influencing the third domain of the CCT: life themes. In the context of this research, this refers to the various themes that middle managers used in creating meaningful work for themselves. The value of building a bond with a mentor was high as it provided the middle managers with support in constructing their own career development strategy in a context where both the local labour market and possible career pathways were undergoing significant change. Having linked with successful people, it also consolidated

the middle managers' career plans as they became more convinced of their strategy and more motivated to develop.

Based on the findings, how middle managers perceived their career development opportunities in Malaysia this research draws out the elements of culture, ethnic background, gender, industry structure and age, which play out in how they plan for their careers. The willingness to relocate, including for some managers embracing the opportunity to work abroad, and religious beliefs were also among the points highlighted, which indicate how agency can be constrained by structural considerations. This research also reinforces existing knowledge and understanding on the issue of employee turnover in the hotel industry. The mobility trends and career patterns of the middle managers suggest that movement provided them with a broader value of work experiences and career advancement opportunities. Therefore, the findings in this research suggest that middle managers were constantly alert and keen on adapting to new environments when opportunities appear.

10.3 Implications for Practice

The career development of hotel employees, including middle managers, involves both individual development and employer participation. Interaction and partnership between both parties is the driving force in making sure that middle managers are able to anticipate career development opportunities. In order to retain skilful and potential GM successors, hotel employers need to

develop structured and promising career development programmes within the hotel or hotel chain. This research provides evidence that the majority of the middle managers were not sure whether they would have the opportunity to grow or progress in their career within their current hotel. Only a few firmly stated that their employer had promised some advancement opportunities within the company if they completed the required career development programmes. Therefore, a more structured and formal development programme needs to be in place in all hotels to attract and retain their own middle managers and reduce the mobility of managers within the industry.

This research contributes to the development of practice by providing evidence of a clear need for collaboration or in-depth discussion between the hotel management and hospitality higher education institutions. Joint initiatives from the Ministry of Tourism, hospitality higher education institutions such as UiTM and Malaysian Hotels Association may be the key driver in the development of a structured and formal career development programme in all hotels. In addition, this research has indicated that the middle managers act individually, based on their own career plans and the opportunities that they encountered. Further research could be done to evaluate the effectiveness of the present development programmes and in time, propose a more compatible career development programme that can be applied to all types of hotel, regardless of their brand, chain, location or star rating.

The content of the current hospitality higher education curriculum should incorporate the insights and recommendations of local hotel employees, including middle managers. Involvement of hotel managers, employers and former managers should be a standard practice whenever a curriculum review session takes place, and obtaining input from different groups of people in the hotel in this way could shape a holistic curriculum design and structure. In addition, hospitality education institutions should be made aware of the available career opportunities within the Malaysian and global hotel industry to understand the reality of jobs in the industry. The impact of close ties between hotels and higher education institutions is significant as it will fill up vacancies in the industry with quality graduates prepared with the required skills, knowledge and experience.

10.4 Limitations of the Research

This research has presented a narrative perspective of hotel middle managers on their career aspirations and development. As an outcome of this approach, the research faced several limitations which need to be examined for future research. To begin with, this research was based on the researcher's experience and supported by limited contextual data available to the researcher. The researcher was unable to obtain quantitative data on hotel employees in Malaysia including the managers, as originally intended, because such data is not readily made available to researchers or the public.

There were 14 middle managers involved in this research and in this respect, it is acknowledged that the narratives reported were individual cases in particular career stages and that the findings may have differed, even if they had come from a similar group of middle managers in different locations and hotel segments in other parts of the country. However, career narratives are important in their own right as they involve an interpretation of how managers make sense of their world of work.

In addition, there were several logistical limitations faced in this research journey. As the research was about middle managers in Malaysia, the researcher relied heavily on email and LinkedIn communication with potential respondents before the actual fieldwork process took place because of the distance between the researcher and the respondents. Every effort was made to ensure that each selected respondent was able to be interviewed, including follow up emails and text messages prior to the interview date. However, some of the respondents, mostly the female middle managers, could not make it to the interview due to other commitments. At the end of the first fieldwork process, a recommendation was made by my supervisors to try again to increase the representation of female middle managers in the research.

10.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The potential of this research to be expanded was significant as more case studies can be conducted to allow further assessment of middle managers'

career development from different perspectives which were not able to be carried out in this research. Exploring the impact of different cultural backgrounds and diversity of the managers, different types of hotel establishments and work settings, and different career pathways by gender, would provide a new focus for future research. For example, it would be interesting to learn the different career development pathways of managers from different cultural perspectives and how this had influenced their career. Future research can also determine if culture alters middle managers' career aspirations. It may also provide better insights in understanding the diverse nature of the hotel workforce and their career planning strategies which was not explored thoroughly in this research.

Based on the limitations of the study, particularly the distance between researcher and participants, future research may need to explore the effects of different types of hotel establishments and work settings if it was carried out in Malaysia. These differences may have contributed to various possibilities in terms of career development opportunities of middle managers. Work role and responsibilities of a human resource manager, for example, might not be as difficult or tiring as a housekeeper or other operation-based middle manager. Their skills and knowledge may also be utilised in different ways and affect their career development routes.

The existing literature on the issues and debates of women managers in the hotel industry (e.g. Brownell, 1994a; Campos-Soria et al., 2011; Darke &

Gurney, 2000) may explain the need for a study comparing the career pathways of middle managers by gender. Comparing men and women is of special interest because, apart from focusing on wage differences, studies have also pointed out the need to analyse the extent of occupational segregation, which in turn will affect the opportunity structures of female managers. Moreover, the low representation of female middle managers in this research justifies the need for further exploration on the matter. It is difficult to ignore the fact that stereotyping involving female hotel employees, including middle managers, still exists and has been highlighted by scholars in the hospitality field around the world (Blayney & Blotnick, 2010; Dyer, McDowell, & Batnitzky, 2010; García-Pozo, Campos-Soria, Sánchez-Ollero, & Marchante-Lara, 2012; Guimarães & Silva, 2016; Ng & Pine, 2003; Pinar, McCuddy, Birkan, & Kozak, 2011; Yang, 2011). Therefore, future research examining this issue and focusing on female participants could address possible solutions, hopes and expectations of overcoming gender stereotyping in the hotel industry, and especially in Malaysia.

The lack of sufficient contextual data on hotel employees' work profiles and educational background (such as academic qualifications, number of middle managers overall, and other relevant data), which are available to the public, limited the initial plan of this research (examining the impact between different hotel education cohorts on career progression). This limitation should prompt future efforts to encourage hotel associations and the Ministry of Tourism to provide such data, especially for academic research.

10.6 Personal Reflection

This research has been a fruitful learning experience for me. In the beginning of this journey, the choice of topic was based on my personal interest and experience of dealing with hotel managers in placing my students for industrial internship programmes. The challenges that I encountered were when, for example, the manager in charge of internship training repeatedly changed or moved to another hotel. This provided me with the need to understand managers' career aspirations, while at the same time facilitating my job. Although it was a tough and challenging journey, I learned a lot and am thankful for that.

I was blessed when I was able to learn and understand the life and career journeys of the middle managers through their own voices. The power of narrative provided my participants with the ability to express their personal thoughts and emotions. A mixture of achievements, struggles, disappointments, hopes, aspirations and determinations were also observed from the managers in the interviews and their openness to share their experience was impressive. It proved to me that they were waiting to be heard in terms of their own career journeys. The choice of a narrative approach has enabled me to gain more opportunities to understand my research participants. In the process of remaining true to the methodological aspects chosen for this research, the career experiences of the hotel middle

managers, former middle managers and hotel general managers have given me more knowledge of the industry through our interaction along this journey.

I am encouraged by the response that led the research to this point. The stories were varied, and demonstrated the interesting characters of these courageous future hotel managers. My initial interactions with the middle managers were difficult because of 'trust' or a potential psychological barrier in exposing their stories. Their interesting career journeys, and the rich information that they shared, helped answer my curiosity and revise my early assumptions of their career development. I understand their motivation in sharing their stories would be of interest to both the participants and their employers. I have come to believe that hotel middle managers in Malaysia are indeed capable of taking up the responsibilities of managing a hotel and that all they need is a chance to prove their worth.

10.7 Chapter Summary

This research has sought to shed some light on the study of career development, especially concerning hotel middle managers. Education, work experiences, other related factors and opportunity structures were significantly linked with the career development and aspirations of the hotel middle managers and extends our existing understanding of the literature. The findings suggest that middle managers went through different educational and training patterns that influenced their initial career formation and different career patterns. In addition, they were able to navigate their

career transitions in changing work and career contexts by drawing upon their extensive work experiences and with the support of others, especially mentors. In relation to career development plans, middle managers were able to respond according to available opportunities and were influenced by other factors, including religion and extended family obligations.

The expanding knowledge of the concept of the three domains of CCT (vocational personality, career adaptability, and life theme) brings new meaning in the context of hotel research by supporting the domains which are mainly used in career counselling.

This research extends the growing body of research which underlines the extent of the move beyond traditional understandings of career development (which were often seen as linear, utilising clear organisational and occupational pathways, and following particular developmental stages). This research highlights the various responses to less structured career opportunities whereby career development is more individually driven and open. This research also suggests that other contributing factors should not be left behind, and further explorations should be carried out, specifically in relation to different cultural and gender perspectives. The use of personal narratives in obtaining individual career stories was challenging yet rewarding as the approach fosters new insights and provided a broader platform of understanding for the researcher.

Every middle manager's journey in the hotel industry was found to be different but each individual's goals were shaped by interactions between their surrounding internal and external environments, as highlighted in the findings and empirical data. The results of this research will provide hotel employers with the understanding of their middle managers' career development needs and open up avenues for different ways of matching current available opportunities. It will also allow educators to add to the existing body of knowledge on career development and aspirations of hotel middle managers in their effort to respond to the government initiatives described in the early part of the thesis. Future research will have a clear view of the issues raised by the middle managers in this research and an understanding of other variables associated with career development in the hotel industry.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Sample LinkedIn Research Invitation Message for Middle Manager



DEAR MIDDLE MANAGERS

Salam Sejahtera and Greetings from the University of Warwick, UK

Looking at your professional work profile on LinkedIn, I am interested to know more about your career journey in the hotel industry up to your current position for my PhD thesis.

It would be a huge honour if you are willing to share with me your work experiences and career path in the hotel industry (in a 30 – 45 minutes session only). Hopefully your input can be utilised to develop a better understanding of career opportunity in the hotel.

I am planning to travel back to Malaysia this month and hopefully in August I will get the chance to meet you for this purpose either at your place of work or other public places (e.g. café) which ever most convenient to you.

If you agree and willing to be a part of this, please reply this message and I will email you the letter and other relevant documents for the sharing session. I will be contacting you again once I am in Malaysia to reconfirm our appointment.

Thank you and best regards,

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Appendix B: Sample LinkedIn Research Invitation Message for Former Middle Manager



DEAR FORMER MIDDLE MANAGERS

Salam Sejahtera and Greetings from the University of Warwick, UK

Looking at your professional work profile on LinkedIn, I am interested to know more about your previous career journey in the hotel industry up to your current job for my PhD thesis.

It would be great if you are willing to share with me your work experiences and career path (in a 30 – 45 minutes session only). Hopefully your input can be utilised by the future newcomers of the industry in shaping their career.

I am planning to travel back to Malaysia this month and hopefully in August I will get the chance to meet you for this purpose either at your place of work or other public places (e.g. café) which ever most convenient to you.

If you agree and willing to be a part of this, please reply this message and I will email you the letter and other relevant documents for the interview session. I will be contacting you again once I am in Malaysia to reconfirm our appointment.

Thank you and best regards,

Mohd Onn Rashdi, Abd Patah
Doctoral Researcher/PhD Student (Hospitality Human Capital)
Institute for Employment Research (IER)
The University of Warwick
CV4 7AL Coventry
UK
Tel: +447455913761 / +60139342148 (Malaysia)
Email: m.o.r.abd-patah@warwick.ac.uk / onnrashdi@gmail.com
Website: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/people/phdstudents/onn/>

Appendix C: Sample LinkedIn Research Invitation Message for Hotel/General Manager



FOR HOTEL / GENERAL MANAGERS

Greetings from the University of Warwick, UK

Looking at your professional work profile on LinkedIn, I am interested to know more about your career as a hotel/general manager. I would also like to have your perspectives on your middle/line managers' career advancement opportunities for my PhD thesis.

It would be a huge honour if you are willing to share your work experiences and career path in the industry (in a 30 – 45 minutes session only).

I am planning to travel back to Malaysia this month and hopefully in August I will get the chance to meet you for this purpose either at your place of work or other public places (e.g. café) which ever most convenient to you.

If you agree and willing to be a part of this, please reply this message and I will email you the letter and other relevant documents for the sharing session. I will be contacting you again once I am in Malaysia to reconfirm our appointment.

Thank you and best regards,

Mohd Onn Rashdi, Abd Patah
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Email: m.o.r.abd-patah@warwick.ac.uk / onnrashdi@gmail.com
Website: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/people/phdstudents/onn/>

Appendix D: Supervisors' Supporting Letter for Research Fieldwork

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Date: 19 May 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Support for PhD data collection process for Mr Mohd Onn Rashdi Abd Patah (Student ID: 1265015)

Mr Abd Patah is a Doctoral Researcher in the Institute for Employment Research (IER), The University of Warwick, UK. He is doing a research entitled, "Developing a career in the Malaysian hotel industry: A narrative analysis of the career experiences of local middle managers".

His current stage of work is to conduct data collection process or fieldwork. It will involve in-depth interviews with 30 members of the middle management team including you, as well as a small number of general managers and some former middle managers within the Malaysian hotel industry.


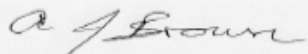
Therefore, we wish to signify our approval and support for Mr Abd Patah in this process which will commence between 15th July 2014 and 24th August 2014 on the above scope of topic.

We would like to thank you for your participation in this study and we assure you that your contribution will be beneficial to this research and the hotel industry in Malaysia.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries about the progress or fieldwork requirements of Mr Abd Patah.

Thank you and best regards,

Yours sincerely,

 
Clare Lyonette and Alan Brown

Warwick Institute
for Employment Research
The University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL
United Kingdom

This research's ethical application for research degree has been reviewed and approved by the institute. If you have any concerns about it, you may contact the Director of IER, Professor Chris Warhurst at Tel: +44 2476 528170, Email: C.Warhurst@warwick.ac.uk.

Dr. Clare Lyonette
Tel: +44 (0) 24 76 151615
Email: C.Lyonette@warwick.ac.uk

**Appendix E: Supervisors' Supporting Letter for Research Fieldwork
(Second Phase)**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Date: 1 June 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Support for PhD data collection process for Mr Mohd Onn Rashdi Abd Patah (Student ID: 1265015)

Mr Abd Patah is a Doctoral Researcher in the Institute for Employment Research (IER), The University of Warwick, UK. He is doing a research entitled, "Developing a career in the Malaysian hotel industry: A narrative analysis of the career experiences of local middle managers".

His current stage of work is to conduct a second phase of data collection process or fieldwork. It will involve in-depth interviews with 10 members of the middle management team including you, as well as a small number of former middle managers within the Malaysian hotel industry.

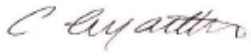
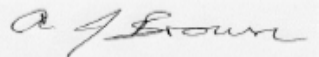
Therefore, we wish to signify our approval and support for Mr Abd Patah in this process which will commence between 18th June 2015 and 26th June 2015 on the above scope of topic.

We would like to thank you for your participation in this study and we assure you that your contribution will be beneficial to this research and the hotel industry in Malaysia.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries about the progress or fieldwork requirements of Mr Abd Patah.

Thank you and best regards,

Yours sincerely,

 
Clare Lyonette and Alan Brown

Warwick Institute
for Employment Research
The University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL
United Kingdom

This research's ethical application for research degree has been reviewed and approved by the institute. If you have any concerns about it, you may contact the Director of IER, Professor Chris Warhurst at Tel: +44 2476 528170, Email: C.Warhurst@warwick.ac.uk.

Dr. Clare Lyonette
Tel: +44 (0) 24 76 151615
Email: C.Lyonette@warwick.ac.uk

Appendix F: Participant Interview Consent Form

Research Ethic: CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Developing a career in the Malaysian hotel industry: A narrative analysis of the career experiences of local middle managers

RESEARCHER: Mohd Onn Rashdi, Abd Patah

ORGANISATION: Institute for Employment Research (IER), University of Warwick, UK

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet containing details for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I agree to take part in the above study and agree that the interview being audio recorded for data analysis purpose.

I understand that my information will be held and processed for the following purposes:

- 1.) To be used anonymously for internal publication for a PhD thesis at The University of Warwick, UK.
- 2.) To be submitted for official assessment and to be drawn on for publication in academic journals or conferences and not be made available to the general public.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and there is no obligation for me to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

Name of Participant

Date: _____

Signature

Mohd Onn Rashdi, Abd Patah (Researcher)

Appendix G: Research Information for Interview Participants

Research Ethic: RESEARCH INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Developing a career in the Malaysian hotel industry: A narrative analysis of the career experiences of local middle managers

RESEARCHER: Mohd Onn Rashdi, Abd Patah

ORGANISATION: Institute for Employment Research (IER), University of Warwick, UK

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a doctoral researcher in the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at the University of Warwick, UK. As part of my PhD thesis requirement, I am conducting research to explore career experiences of local Malaysian middle managers in the hotel industry in the past, present and future context under the supervision of Professor Alan Brown and Dr Clare Lyonette.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study as your input will be significantly relevant. This study will help us understand the occupational issues, identifying gaps and opportunities for a better supply of human capital for the industry.

This research will be a narrative qualitative approach through an interview session involving middle managers in Malaysian hotel industry. Several other participants will need to participate such as former middle managers and industry experts.

The confidentiality of you/your current employer will be respected at all times, and your/their identity will not be revealed in any way to the employer and general public.

The interview session will be approximately between 30 to 45 minutes. All information collected will be anonymous and will be used for academic purposes only.

You will be contacted by the researcher to set up the appointment detail for the interview at a date, time and place most convenient to you.

Terima kasih,

Mohd Onn Rashdi, Abd Patah

Doctoral Researcher (Warwick IER)

M.O.R.Abd-Patah@warwick.ac.uk

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/people/phdstudents/onn/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/pub/mohd-onn-rashdi-abd-patah-mih/71/591/534>

Any questions about this research, please contact the researcher and his supervisors at Institute for Employment Research (IER), The University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL UK, Tel: +44 2476 523284, Email: Alan.Brown@warwick.ac.uk and C.Lyonette@warwick.ac.uk. This research's ethical application for research degree has been reviewed and approved by the institute. If you have any concerns about it, you may contact the Director of IER, Professor Chris Warhurst at Tel: +44 2476 528170, Email: C.Warhurst@warwick.ac.uk.

Appendix H: Interview Schedules

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Schedule 1 – MIDDLE / LINE MANAGER

Interview no:

Date & time of interview:

Length of interview:

Profile of Middle Manager (To be asked at the end of the interview session):

Name:

Age: _____ Gender: Male / Female

Job Title: Executive / Assistant Manager / Manager / Director /

Others.....

Department: Sales / FO / HK / F&B / Kitchen /

Others.....

Entry qualifications:

Interview Questions:

Initial Career Formation/Education System

1. Please describe your initial career in the hotel industry.
2. What was your initial career plan/choice when you started working?
3. What interests you about this job?
4. What made you choose to work here/in the hotel industry?
5. How has your education prepared you for your career?
6. Are work skills and knowledge important to you and your job?
7. Are you being trained to do this job?
8. How would you describe the pace at which you work?
9. Which one is more important in this job? Education or work experience?

Work Experience (Occupational Identity, Organisational Commitment)

1. For how many years have you been in the current hotel?
2. How long have you been working in the same position?
3. Did you work elsewhere before this? Why did you leave your last job? (if relevant)
Was it because the current position was a better job?
Was it because you needed better hours?
Was it because your family commitment/partner moving?
4. Describe the type of hotel you work(ed) in before?
5. Describe a typical work week for you now and before.
6. What are the key responsibilities for a position like yours?
7. Give us an example of your most challenging task so far.
8. Will you be happy to spend the rest of your career here?
9. How well do you get on with people in other departments?
10. What kind of people do you enjoy working with?
11. Have you ever had a conflict with a boss/GM? How was it resolved?
12. Can you give an example of something you have achieved in this hotel?

e.g. Good customer feedback, fast promotion, awards, etc.

13. What would make you stay in this job/hotel?

e.g. better career options, good relationship with staff, location, more training, etc.

Career Aspirations

1. What challenges/achievements are you looking for in this position?
2. Why did you choose this particular career path?
3. What do you want from this job? Was this lacking in your previous job?
4. What are your initial career aspirations? Has it changed? Why?
5. Do you think this industry would sustain your aspirations in the long term? Why?
6. Do you have any intention to pursue your career further here (or from here)? If not, why?
7. Where do you see yourself in the next 5 or 10 years' time? Do you still expect to be here?
8. Do you have specific career plan or you just respond to any available opportunities?
9. What have changed in the industry in Malaysia?
e.g. career opportunities, work responsibility

Opportunity Structures

1. Have you been involved in any work training/ career development programs?
2. What additional training do you feel is required?
3. As an employee, what do you consider your strengths and weaknesses?
4. Are the training programs provided here sufficient for your career development?
5. Explain the career development opportunities in this hotel/chain as told by your GM.
6. Have you experienced any obstacles in your career development? Why?
7. Will you consider any other offer if you find it difficult for you to advance here?
8. What do you find the most difficult career decisions to make?
9. What are you looking for in your next job? What is important to you?
e.g. knowledge, experience, recognition
10. How do you rate your experiences, knowledge, skills and work ethics?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Schedule 2 – FORMER MIDDLE MANAGER

Interview no:

Date & time of interview:

Length of interview:

Profile of Former Middle Manager (To be asked at the end of the interview session):

Name:

Age:

Gender: Male / Female

Job Title:

Industry/Sector:

Entry Qualifications:

Interview Questions:

Previous hotel work experiences

1. How many years have you been working in the hotel industry before?
2. What made you choose to work in the hotel industry?
3. What type of hotels have you worked in before?
4. What have you accomplished (or achievement/recognition) in the hotel industry?
5. What are the key responsibilities for your current position?
6. Describe a typical work week for you now and before.
7. Could you explain the work environment in the hotel and your current job?
8. How well have you managed to integrate yourself in the current work environment?

Career decision / leave the industry

1. Why did you leave your last job in the hotel industry? (if relevant)
2. Was it a difficult decision to make? If yes, why?
e.g. does it affect your family commitment? Relocation?
3. What would change your decision and made you stay then?
4. What do you want from your current job? Was this lacking in your previous job in the hotel industry?
5. What do you want to achieve in the next 5 years? Do you still expect to be here?
6. Will you be happy to spend the rest of your career here?
7. Do you consider any possibilities of returning to the hotel industry? Under what circumstances?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Schedule 3 – HOTEL / GENERAL MANAGER

Interview no:

Date & time of interview:

Length of interview:

Profile of Hotel / General Manager (To be asked at the end of the interview session):

Name:

Age:

Gender: Male / Female

Nationality:

Entry Qualifications:

Interview Questions:

Hotel/General Managers' work

1. How many years have you been a hotel/general manager?
2. Is this your first appointment as hotel/general manager? If not, explain your previous appointment/s?
3. How do you develop your career up until now?
4. How has your education prepared you for your current job as hotel manager?
5. Are you being trained to do this job?
6. What are the key responsibilities for a position like yours?
7. How would you describe the pace at which you work?
8. Which one is more important in this industry/job? Education or work experience?
9. Are you willing to manage a hotel overseas?
10. What are the changes in managing a hotel in Malaysia?
e.g. responsibilities, management style, ownership

Opportunity structures for local middle managers

1. What are the specific characteristics of manager your company prefers?
2. Do you see any potential middle manager/s to succeed you?
3. In terms of advancement opportunities for head of department/departmental manager, is there any different decision made according to whether they are local or foreigner?
4. What are your opinion on local middle managers' capabilities and strengths?
5. How do you see the work culture of the local middle managers?
6. What are the challenges that you have to face in managing this hotel / other hotel in Malaysia?
7. Explain the career development opportunities provided in this hotel / chain.
e.g. career development plan within chain, succession planning, etc.
8. Do you consider international work experience as important to a hotel/general manager?