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CAREER STRATEGIES OF HOTEL MANAGERS IN CANADA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore career strategies used by hotel managers in Canada. An online survey was conducted of 60 hotel general managers across Canada, including 30 male and 30 female respondents. The results indicated that gaining experience and mentoring are the main strategies used for career advancement for men and women. Gaining experience was obtained by asking for challenging projects and moving properties. Some personality factors were identified as "willingness to learn" and "determination". This study allows a better understanding of how men and women develop their careers in the Canadian hotel industry, an important one consisting of over 8,000 properties and generating revenues of $16.7 billion in 2013 (PKF, 2014). The Canadian hotel industry has little scholarly research. Further research into how work experience can be leveraged more efficiently into career building strategies and how personality factors impact career development is required.

JEL: M12, M50, M51

KEYWORDS: Hotel Managers, Career Strategies, Management Development, Canadian Hotel Industry

INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry in Canada is an important part of the economy. It consists of over 8,000 properties and 440,123 rooms, generated revenues of over $16.7 billion in 2013, and employed 287,000 people directly (PKF, 2014). The properties included in this inventory are over 30 rooms in size and are open on an annual basis. Only 53% of the hotel rooms in Canada are branded which indicates a large number of managers do not have the support or resources of a large hotel company. The hotel industry places great demands on its general managers due to the nature of the work. It is a 24 hour, 365 days a year enterprise, requiring a high level of personal interaction with staff and customers. Hotel managers are required to make fast decisions especially in today's competitive business atmosphere. Christine Maassen, senior vice-president of Human Resources at SilverBirch Hotels and Resorts, based out of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada describes the industry as such: "Think about it," she says, "the hotel industry is all about human interaction and that translates into a daily parade of unpredictability" (Pratt 2012, 23). Hotel properties are high cost real estate and must generate corresponding high revenues to be financially viable. In this complex work environment the hotel general manager (GM) is critical to the success of the business as he/she holds the key executive position (O'Leary and Deegan 2005).

Regardless of the high stress and long working hours in the hotel industry, people still strive to achieve the executive position of hotel general manager. Mkono (2010) found the attractiveness of this position and the industry was due to pleasant environment, challenging work, networking with various types of people, and the glamour/prestige of the position and industry. The global nature and dynamic and exciting characteristics of the industry can be a lure to those who crave stimulating working

environments. If one wishes to reach a certain level of management in a specific professional environment it is important that they become familiar with the appropriate career progression strategies. To enhance and advocate attractive careers, hotel organizations need to create clear career sightlines to the key executive positions. The hotel industry is very traditional in its career progression, demanding entry level experience and slow movement up the corporate ladder. Research on hotel managers in Korea found "The average length of time it took to become a super deluxe hotel GM was 18.4 years after starting a hotel career" (Kim, Chun, and Petrick 2009). The hotel industry is global. Many Canadian managers gain international experience as they develop the competencies required. Therefore, it is important to examine hotel management capabilities and career paths in a global context even thought this study is focused on Canada. There is a large gap in research on the hotel industry in Canada. In a search using a Canadian university library database, only six scholarly articles were found on the Canadian hotel industry. In a wider search using Google Scholar only nine scholarly articles were directly related to the Canadian hotel industry. This study explored how hotel general managers in Canada acquire the knowledge and skills required to manage successfully in such a complex and demanding business. Does success depend primarily on education and experience, or are other factors involved? The paper is organized as follows. The next section is the literature review and is followed by the data and methodology that was used in the research. The results are presented next with a discussion and then concluding comments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Career progression in the hotel industry usually followed a traditional path based on linear progression usually in one or two companies. However, recently there is research that indicates a more flexible career path may be evolving that includes mobility between organizations, and even mobility between industries. This is referred to as 'boundaryless' careers (Ayres 2006). This 'boundaryless' may be due to the volatile nature of the industry and one can no longer expect to spend a full lifetime with one organization. Careers can now take different forms rather than be bounded by one organization. Regardless of how one pursues their career, management development occurs as one progresses through different career stages. There are many definitions of management development (aka capability acquisition) (Cullen & Turnbull 2005). As described by O'Connor and Mangan (2004 as cited by Cullen and Turnbull 2005) management development:

...includes both the personal and career development of an individual manager (i.e. attendance at formal development programmes, seminars, conferences and also informal learning through methods such as coaching and mentoring, etc.). It also includes management education, which is achieved through formal undergraduate/postgraduate qualifications (339).

To become a proficient manager of a complex business such as a hotel requires competency in a number of areas that Morgan (2002) refers to as Performance Building Blocks as part of the Holistic Career Pyramid Model. These blocks consist of expertise in four areas: technical, aptitude, initiative and relational. As an employee moves from entry-level position to supervisor, management and possibly executive level, these building blocks become developed and lay the foundation for the career. The stronger the blocks' base, the greater the potential becomes for a higher career possibly leading to the key executive level. See Appendix A for a figure of the Holistic Career Pyramid Model. The Holistic Career Pyramid Model can aptly be used to describe the career progression of a hotel manager as shown in Table 1. The entry-level positions include back of house or non-customer contact areas (housekeeping, accounting, and kitchen) and front of house with high customer contact positions (bell, front desk, and concierge). These positions offer education and professional experience as the groundwork. As the technical knowledge is accrued and aptitude and initiative are exhibited by the incumbent, the next step is the supervisor position where aptitude and initiative can be displayed and relationships are built with customer, peers and managers. The Career Building Opportunities stage occurs when one becomes an

assistant manager of a department, and participates in special teams, such as specialized committees of the hotel. Global assignments occur when experience is gained in all other departments through job rotation, which may occur informally or in a formal management training program. The Leadership Proving Ground occurs upon the promotion to full Department Head where leadership is exhibited in functional, procedural and strategic forms. If one is successful at this stage, the next stage is the position of Assistant General Manager, which requires global knowledge and functionality of all of the departments. The next step in the career ladder is Hotel General Manager, which is the Key Executive position.The most significant challenge within these career stages is the change "from technical, functional, and tactical roles in the career-building band to those requiring strategic, leadership, and general management skills in the leadership-proving band of the career pyramid" (Morgan 2002, 42). Morgan also noted that an asset that will distinguish those who reach the executive level is "the constant pursuit of personal growth" (43). This will be influenced by the person's career goals as some will not wish to pursue higher positions and may be content at a lower level position. Mentoring and professional coaching are important tools to continue professional development.

Table 1: Holistic Pyramid Model Compared to Hotel Career Pathway

Holistic Career Pyramid Model Stages	Hotel General Manager Career Stages
Market-entry	Entry level position
Performance Building	First line supervisor
Career-building	Assistant Department Head
Leadership Proving Grounds	Department Head
Senior-leadership Role	Assistant General Manager
Key Executive	Hotel General Manager

This table describes the stages in the Holistic Career Pyramid Model developed by Morgan (2002) and how the career of a hotel general manager follows the same pathway and stages.

In a review of research on strategies used by hotel managers to achieve career success, Akrivos, Ladkin and Reklitis (2007) found the following seven dominant strategies out of a total of 33 identified by 65 hotel managers of deluxe properties in Greece. They included:

Keeping informed of the opportunities in the company
Always trying to improve communication skills and abilities
Acting with enthusiasm and smile.
Being flexible and able to adapt to any changes
Aiming to establish good interpersonal relations with hotel owners and tour operators.
Paying attention to personal image by caring about presentation and speech
The ability to handle diversity effectively (112)

Interestingly in this research, the least used strategies included using contacts in the industry (networking), having a mentor, and membership in professional groups. This does not agree with Bailey & Hubbard's study (2006) on various manager positions in the southeast United States hotel industry where strategies selected affecting career advancement "…included mentoring, networking, and quality of work life factors" (61). Kim, Chuyn and Petrick (2009) found in a study of 34 hotel managers in Korea that being hard-working, honest, and setting long-term career goals, were the main strategies used to reach their positions. Ladkin (2002) in Australia found in a sample of 180 hotel managers that always being prepared to relocate, moving to gain experience, and long-term career goals, were important career strategies. An earlier study of hotel managers in Mauritius (Ladkin and Juwaheer 2000) resulted in the following list of career progression strategies:

Moving around to gain knowledge and experience
Continuing to take courses and improve education and skills
Being prepared to work abroad

Taking opportunities offered by company training schemes
Having clear long-term career goals
Learning a foreign language
Always putting career first
Being prepared to relocate (124).

The frequent mentioning of moving and relocating from the managers in Mauritius may be due to the small hotel industry located on this island, making it necessary for managers to move off of the island into a larger hotel market in order to obtain the required experience. There does not appear to be agreement on career strategies used but some of the common threads in the research include mobility or moving properties to gain experience, mentoring and networking. As the research has been conducted in various countries including Australia, Greece, southeastern United States, Korea and Mauritius, cultural factors could be at play that influence career progression strategies. Research in China found that organizational factors had greater impact on career competencies as opposed to the Western practice of individual factors (Kong, Cheung and Song 2011). Employees in China depend on their organization to advance their career compared to those in the West who tend to be more independent.

Learning from Experience - Challenging Projects and Mobility

Li, Gray, Lockwood and Buhalis (2013) found that hotel general managers learn to manage the hotels mainly through experience. Their experience consisted of four stages: Being Challenged, Information Searching, Information Transformation, and Testing. According to Enos, Kehrhahn and Bell (2003) "…managers consistently reported learning …core managerial skills mostly from informal learning activities" (377). Informal learning as constructed by Dewey (1938) and then later Kolb (1984) included learning from experiences in their daily work. Kolb's work on experiential learning highlights a very important aspect of professional development in the hotel industry as the general manager is involved in many different working environments that demand multiple priorities. Both the amount and variety of experiences in one's career would lead to greater development of skills and contribute to management competency. When researching experiences that create leaders, De Rue and Wellman (2009) listed work characteristics that creates a developmentally challenging work environment as follows: unfamiliar responsibilities, creating change, high levels of responsibility, working across boundaries, and managing diversity. Mobility in the hotel industry that involves frequent relocation, sometimes including international postings, would certainly encompass these characteristics.

Other projects that may incorporate these work characteristics include: repositioning or rebranding a hotel, working under new ownership, overseeing major renovations, or opening a new property. These experiences are all recognized as major developmental assignments in the industry. An interesting find in the DeRue and Wellman (2009) study was that the "...developmental value of a work experience begins to diminish after an optimal amount of developmental challenge is reached" (869) which may be an explanation for "management burnout" situations in which managers become over challenged. The balance of developmental experience and overly stressful experience would depend on the individual as coping mechanisms vary across individuals. In a study of restaurant managers it was found that individuals with higher levels of optimism were better able to cope with stressful situations (Hayes and Weathington, 2007). Offering developmental experiences can be a strong motivator and may also decrease turnover: a serious human resource constraint in the hotel industry. When researching factors that enhance commitment to organizations, Walsh and Taylor (2007), in their research focusing on factors that enhance commitment to organizations, found the number one response was having challenging jobs that allowed growth. Mobility is used by an individual who wishes to reach the positon of hotel manager in two ways. First, the incumbent must ensure their supervisor knows they are willing to move to gain the experience required. This will ensure they are seen to be serious about their careers and identify them as interested in further career opportunities. Second, the mobility itself is accepted as the main learning tool

in the hotel industry as it exposes the individual to new people, new markets and customers, new products, and possibly new cultures.

Mobility as a factor for career development has been researched and found to be used frequently by managers in the tourism industry. Ladkin and Riley (1996) discovered UK hotel managers with seven jobs in their careers, moving every three to four years. Later research found senior managers in tourism with an average of a career mover every three years (Ayres 2006). McCabe (2008) found 45% of individuals working in the convention industry in Australia relocated geographically within Australia and 34% worked in another country. Clearly mobility is seen as a career developer or else the people that work in the industry like to move and visit other areas.

It appears that learning through challenging jobs is very fitting for one who wishes to pursue a career in the hotel industry. High mobility, frequent international movement, and high business volatility can create very challenging situations. Only certain types of individuals would be attracted to this environment. There is little research on personality types in the hotel industry, but an early study found the following traits were identified by hotel general managers as contributing most significantly to their career advancement: hard work, interpersonal skills, determination, fairness, honesty, and integrity (Brownell 1994). Seibert and Kraimer (2001) found extraversion, one five personality dimensions, was related positively to salary level, promotions and career satisfaction in a diverse sample of managers. The other four dimensions of personality are neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Research with international hotel managers identified psychological characteristics of commitment to career and development as important for career advancement (Garavan, O'Brien and O'Hanlon 2006).

Mentoring in the Hotel Industry

"'Sometimes", sighs Trevor Bracher, director of Service Culture for Stamford, Connecticut, US – based Starwood Hotels and Resorts, "running a hospitality business feels like you're trying to change a tire while moving 100 miles an hour" (Pratt 2012). Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, Inc. is one of the largest hotel companies in the world with close to 1,200 properties in 100 countries and 181,400 employees (Starwood 2014). This statement indicates the typical feeling of managing a hotel and how hectic the workday can become. Starwood launched a mentorship program in 2010 to give managers the opportunity to develop necessary skills. High-potential employees are identified and paired with an experienced manager. The mentoring process is described as a relationship between an experienced veteran and one who is interested in progressing in their career. Murphy and Ensher (2001) found mentoring and self-management strategies used together may provide important benefits for employees and entering into a mentoring relationship may be an effective means of taking responsibility for one's own career. Murphy and Ensher (2001) also found positive benefits in that, "Mentoring and self-management strategies each contributed uniquely to satisfaction and perceived career satisfaction" (p. 229). The research on mentoring describes positive outcomes for both sides of the relationship (D'Abate and Eddy 2008; Ayres 2006; Joiner, Bartram, and Garreffa 2004; Gong, Chen and Yang 2014; Murphy and Ensher 2001). Little research can be found on mentoring in the hotel industry, but it is assumed it would have the same benefits. Garavan, O'Brien and O'Hanlon (2006) did find support in their research that hotel managers who networked and had a mentor achieved higher career advancement.

Many hotel chains have mentoring programs to assist in the development of their managers. Mentoring can be a very cost-effective method of training. "There are so many cheaper, more cost-effective ways of training staff that you should think of first. For example, one that we recommend very highly is a mentoring scheme" says Jane Sunley, CEO, Learnpurple, a hospitality training firm (Vaughn 2012). The Rezidor Hotel Group has the Mentor Mentee Programme, Carlson Hospitality Worldwide has introduced a national mentoring program called Groundhog Job Shadow Day held every February 2, and The Ritz-

Carlton Hotel Company received an award in 2014 from the National Mentoring Partnership and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) for their mentoring program. However, when one looks closer into the mentoring program of hotels, many are directed to youth and not to current managers within the organization.   Due to the close working relationship characteristics of the hotel industry where team work is very prominent, mentoring is often believed to occur informally. There is little recent research on formal mentoring in the hotel industry. However, Ayres (2006) found in that in Australia's general tourism industry mentoring and mobility were key strategies for career success.

Career Theories

There are many theories that are used to explain how one progresses through their career. 'Boundaryless' careers, coined by Authur & Rousseau (1996), explain how one may opt in and out of organizations and even different industries, linear progression occurs as one climbs the organizational ladder and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) examines the environmental variables and the person's variables and their impact on their career progression. The Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) formulated by Krumblotz (2009) attempts to explain how individuals follow their career paths through life. "HLT posits that human behaviour is the product of countless numbers of learning experiences made available by both planned and unplanned situations in which individuals find themselves" (Krumboltz 2009, 135) . This theory takes into account the myriad of unplanned events that occur in one's career path and that it is important to be able to effectively manage these unplanned events as well as have planned ones. Learning to effectively handle a variety of experiences, including quickly emerging challenging situations, is important for hotel GMs. Hotel managers will face many unplanned events due to the very nature of the industry and those who are best prepared to take these events in stride and to see the opportunities created would be the most successful. Taking advantage of planned and unplanned learning experiences and how to capitalize on the opportunity offered is a key part of this theory. This may explain why much of the research on hotel careers in management indicate that challenging projects and experience are keys to career progression.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The goals of this part of the research were to determine how male and female hotel general managers ranked career development strategies, as well as addressing two key research questions that had been developed from the literature review. These research questions were: What do hotel general managers in Canada identify as the most important factors that contributed to their capability development? Do women and men agree on these factors? A link to an online survey was sent to general managers via email. Data was collected 2012 to 2013. Provincial and territorial hotel association web pages from across Canada were used to develop an email list for hotel managers in Canada. Some hotel associations posted a link to the survey on their websites. In other cases, individual hotel managers were emailed directly to invite them to participate in the survey. Approximately 500 invitations were sent to individual hotel managers. The survey was cleared by the university ethics review board prior to data collection. A total of 60 usable surveys were obtained from the general managers resulting in a balanced gender sample of 30 surveys from men and 30 surveys from women. This was a response rate of 12%, resulting in a sufficient sample for an exploratory analysis of the data and an overall margin of error not exceeding plus/minus 13%, 19 out of 20 times.

The survey contained ranking questions that included career development strategies presented in the literature. First, respondents were asked which of six career development strategies listed they used to develop their current capabilities. The list of strategies was developed from the literature and included: used mentor, moved properties/locations, asked for challenging projects, maintained memberships in professional associations, completed management training program within the organization and attended classes at an educational institute. Then respondents ranked the strategies in order of importance from 1,

being the most important, to 6, being the least important. Second, respondents were asked what they believed was the most important factor that helped them to develop the skills and knowledge that they have today. The open-ended question format allowed respondents to list anything they felt was relevant. A median test was used to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the ranking of career development strategies by gender. Due to the qualitative analysis of anecdotal responses, significance tests were not conducted to compare the responses of men and women for individual themes. Instead, the analysis was based on a visual comparison of the responses for each of the career progression factors across all respondents and then by comparing the results for male and female respondents.

Demographic data was collected to obtain a general description of the sample. The strategy ranking question was analyzed to find the median of the rankings for the career development strategies. Content analysis, using qualitative analysis software, was used to examine the statements from the question regarding important factors in capability development. Content analysis is used frequently in the analysis of text from interviews or open ended questions. It is defined as "a systematic analysis of texts (which may be printed or visual) to determine the presence, association, and meaning of images, works, phrases, concepts, and/or themes" (Bryman, Bell, Mills, and Yue 2011, 375). The content analysis resulted in a set of thematic statement groupings. Statements that contained more than one theme were coded more than once, allowing for an increased number of codes. This provided a more comprehensive theme count. The anecdotal responses were coded by two researchers to ensure consistency of the coding. Disagreements between coders were resolved through discussion resulting in consensus on the coding of each theme. The coding was complete when all of the themes were analyzed and consistently coded. .

RESULTS

The demographic profile of the respondents appears in Table 2. There were an equal number of men and women and the average age was 45.7 years (SD = 8.09). The educational level of the overall sample was 37.3% with a college education, 25.4% with a university undergraduate degree and 20.3 % with high school. This indicates that respondents had invested in education. Salary levels ranged from $30,000 to $50,000 to over $170,000 with the majority (24.6%) earning in the $71,000 to $90,000 range. The mean number of years in the position of general manager was 8.53 years (SD = 6.42) and the mean for years in management was 19.28 (SD = 8.91), indicating a fairly high tenure rate. Mobility had a mean of 3.7 (SD = 2.99) moves. The size of the hotel properties mainly fell into the under 250 room category with only 17.3% having over 250 rooms.

The results of the career strategy rankings are shown in Table 3. The most important factor that helped to develop current skills and knowledge that was stated most frequently was "experience", followed by "mentoring" and "training". There were no significant differences between the median rankings of men and women on these factors. Table 4 contains the themes from the open-ended question indicating the most important factor that contributed to their skills and knowledge. Comparing the ranking list in Table 3 to the open-ended statement list in Table 4 indicates a fairly high level of agreement. "Asking for challenging projects" and "moved properties/locations" are the two highest ranked items, agreeing with "gaining experience," the number one theme identified as a means of developing their skills and knowledge. "Asking for challenging projects" and "moved properties/location" are recognized by managers as the main methods used to gain the required experience. Mentoring is also agreed upon as a major strategy followed by training and education. The main difference between the two lists is "mobility." This factor was not mentioned as often in the anecdotal responses, but it was ranked third out of the six career strategy items. This could be due to the respondents assuming that experience is gained by working in various departments within a hotel property as well as by moving properties with possible international relocations.

Table 2: Demographics of Respondents

Variable		%	Mean (Std Dev)
Gender (n=60)	Male	50	
	Female	50	
Education (n=59)	High school	19	
	College (2 year)	37	
	University degree	27	
	Post graduate study	10	
	Other	7	
Salary (n=60) (CD$)	$30,000-$50,000	5	
	$51,000-$70,000	18	
	$71,000-$90,000	25	
	$91,000-$110,000	23	
	$111,000-$130,000	7	
	$131,000-$150,000	4	
	$151,000-$170,000	4	
	Over $170,000	16	
Regions (n=56)	Alberta	36	
	Nova Scotia	29	
	British Columbia	16	
	Ontario	13	
	Newfoundland	5	
	Saskatchewan	2	
Size of property	30-125 rooms	43	
(n=58)	126-250 rooms	40	
	251-475 rooms	12	
	Over 475 rooms	5	
Age (n=58)			45.74 (8.09)
Number of years in current position of general manager (n=57)			8.53 (6.43)
Years in management (n=57)			19.28 (8.91)
Number of positions prior to this one (n=54)			6.43 (3.89)
Number of moves to obtain a higher position or promotion (n=57)			3.7 (2.99)

The table contains the demographic information on the respondents, gender, education, salary, geographic location, size of property, mean age, years in management, position and number of moves.

Table 3: Ranking of Strategies to Acquire Capabilities

Capability	Median Rank	Sum of Scaled Ratings
Asked for challenging projects	2.00	127
Moved properties/locations	2.00	130
Used mentor	2.00	147
Management training or organizations	3.00	189
Classes in educational institute	4.00	200
Membership in professional associations	5.00	212

This table shows how the general managers ranked the list of strategies provided in the survey.
There are three strategies that are equally ranked the highest. They are "Asked for challenging projects",
"Moved properties/locations", and "Used mentor".

Table 4: Important Themes Identified to Develop Skills and Knowledge

Factor Identified	Total Number	Women	Men
Gaining experience	24	13	11
Mentoring	11	5	6
Training	7	3	4
Education	6	3	3
Mobility	6	2	4

This table identified the major themes from the open-ended question, "What do you believe is the most important factor that helped you to develop the skills and knowledge that you have today?" The major theme was "gaining experience" which both men and women agreed upon followed by "Mentoring".

To further explore the theme of "gaining experience", samples of the anecdotal responses within this code are provided below. The statements relate to different locations and exposure to different departments as part of the required experience as well as the need to work hard to and to embrace learning experiences.

> *"Working in different locations for various size of hotel and brand"*

> *"Years of experience in the business, working closely with some influential mentors"*

> *"Experience in as many departments as possible. Willingness and enthusiasm to learn new tasks and skills. Must show initiative and at times making personal sacrifice"*

> *"The multitude of jobs and the variety of skills gained in many different divisions and environment."*

> *"Working my way through the ranks learning multiple positions gaining knowledge and skill in each area"*

> *"Worked hard, watched and learned from those who performed well, developed an excellent work ethic, always applied for advancements"*

The following are examples of statements under "mentoring". Most of the respondents did not reference formal company mentoring programs, instead relating to the mentoring process as more of an informal experience.

> *"Working with great General Managers that were before me"*

> *"Years of experience in the business, working closely with some influential mentors"*

> *"Gaining different experiences from different operations and different mentors/bosses"*

> *"Be exposed to great leaders that inspired me at being the best"*

> *"On the job training, completing workshops with IHG, learning from mentor"*

> *"Chose properties with excellent leaders"*

> *"I was fortunate to work with great people in a brand that believed in developing and nurturing its colleagues"*

A number of the anecdotal responses also contained indicators of "willingness to learn" and "determination". These are commonly heard traits required in such a dynamic industry as the hotel

industry and it agrees with previous research by Brownell (1994). Below are examples of the statements related to these strategies.

> "*Willing to work and learn on own time. Chose properties with excellent leaders*"

> "*Consistently put myself in position to grow personally. Do not allow fear to stop from moving out of comfort zone. Experience and learn at every opportunity*"

> "*Search for new ideas, concepts. Be curious, visit high end hotels when traveling. Network, be known. Adaptability and flexibility. Willing to move to key properties around the world*"
> "*Having a goal and not accepting that this goal couldn't be reached. I moved internationally also and gained further global knowledge and training which has definitely assisted me. I trained in 4 & 5 star hotels in Europe and focused my career in this hotel sector. Learning each position thoroughly and understanding all roles has given me a better understanding from now GM and I am very hands on*"

> "*Type of personality I am. You can learn all you like but if you are not a natural leader, have an engaging personality and enjoy an ever changing environment, you'll find it really hard. Let us not forget luck, being in the right place at the right time!!!*"

> "*Not being afraid to ask questions. Not being afraid to take risks and to put myself out there*"

> "*Experience in as many departments as possible. Willingness and enthusiasm to learn new tasks and skills. Must show initiative and at times making personal sacrifice.*"

DISCUSSION

The key research questions for this study were: What do hotel general managers in Canada identify as the most important factors that contributed to their capability development? Do women and men agree on these factors? In response to the first question, the findings indicate that the main factors used by hotel managers for capability development are asking for challenging projects, moving properties, gaining experience and mentoring. In order to gain the highly valued experience in which to learn, working in various departments and in various hotels is key. This explains why opening new properties and mobility is so important in the hotel industry in Canada. These two strategies are perceived as a way of obtaining the required competencies to be a successful hotel manager. Greater experience and in varied situations usually creates greater capabilities. Li, Gray, Lockwood and Buhalis (2013) found the learning process involves being challenged, information searching, information transformation and testing. When general managers are in a situation they have not experienced before, they feel challenged and this initiates the search process. Different channels may be used to find the information required such as approaching their corporate resources, colleagues or experts. This learning process is very much noted in the quotes from this research of willingness to learn. It appears that one must have the desire to learn and enjoy the process for it to be effective.

These findings agree with Li, Gray, Lockwood and Buhalis (2013) and Enos, Kehrhahn and Bell (2003) indicating that hotel managers learn from experience rather than from formal education or training. This is interesting considering that this group of respondents has invested in education. Eighty percent of respondents had a college education, a university degree, or postgraduate study. Burgess (2010) states from her study with hotel financial controllers that "…the move towards being more professional seems to be driven by the desires of the individual rather than by their organizations or their professional association, despite the demands of the stakeholder" (691). Clearly there is an opportunity for hotel organizations to bridge this gap and build on the desire and outcomes of experience. In response to the

second research question there were no apparent differences regarding the factors leading to capability development between men and women. Lyness and Thompson (2000) in their research on multinational financial companies found that female executives had fewer developmental assignments and less mobility than their male counterparts. Later research on the careers of professionals in the United States who made $100,000 or more in annual personal income found a high degree of similarity between men and women in their career path characteristics (Burke and Attridge 2011). The career strategies of men and women in the hotel industry require further research.

To ensure that experience is appropriate for management development, hotel companies need to track informal learning and create supportive structures to enhance experiential learning. Human resource managers also need to ensure that individuals are not deployed into overwhelming situations where the learning will become diminished or burn-out will occur. Moving managers too quickly into various challenging situations may not allow the time required for reflection, or discussion with others, about their learning experiences. Human resource practices that can facilitate learning from experience may include: initiating projects and encouraging managers to take leadership roles; use of technology to allow sharing of information and possible chat lines for just in time information; and offering a safe arena where testing of new information or new practices could be encouraged. Mistakes need to be made for learning to occur and organizations should "…emphasize that mistakes are an expected and acceptable part of the development process and that individuals should view their mistakes as cues of learning and development" (De-Rue and Wellman 2009, 871). Traditional management development consultant courses can still be valuable but hotel organizations need to be aware that most learning does occur through experience. A manager who has evidence on their resume of experiences in developmental projects such as hotel openings, rebranding of hotels, working with new owners or even the closing of a hotel will have a competitive edge over other candidates.

From analysis of the responses from the open ended question "What is the most important factor that helped you to develop the skills and knowledge that you have today?" three themes emerged: "gaining experience" such as working in different locations, "mentoring" such as "being exposed to great leaders", and the" willingness to learn" and "determination". These responses support the ranking of the strategies. Mentoring was rated third on both the ranking list and in the frequency in the statements from the open ended question in this study. In the hotel industry mentoring programs may not be as prevalent as they could be. One reason for the lack of mentoring programs could be time constraints, as time commitment is required to build the relationship. Another reason may be personality-related, as managers lean towards self-learning actions and do not want to be viewed as needing assistance. Also, there are those who believe the mentoring relationship should be a natural one, and not forced by company policy. With time constraints being so prevalent for those working in the hotel industry, it is not surprising that many relationships suitable for mentoring do not occur naturally. However, some respondents indicated that mentors played an important role in career development and mentoring fits easily within other opportunities for growth. Relocating to learn new opportunities, or working hard to show engagement and responsibility, are excellent opportunities for potential mentors to share their knowledge and experience while also providing guidance and developing in-house managerial talent.

The personality characteristics found in this study were interesting and expected. If experience is the method of choice to learn the skills required to progress, then it would be logical that a person would need to self-direct this activity. This would include applying for various positions both in and out of the current property, often including international postings. This requires a personality characteristic that was described by Brownell (1994) as determination. The statements in this research from the open-ended anecdotal question contained many referrals to this characteristic such as: "Do not allow fear to stop from moving out of comfort zone'; "having a goal and not accepting this goal could not be reached"; "not being afraid to take risks and put myself out there"; taking on extra challenges whenever there was an opportunity"; "willingness to take on bigger projects". This agrees with the scant research on personality

characteristics of hotel managers (Brownell, 1994; Garavan, O'Brien and O'Hanlon 2006; Seibert & Kramer 2001).

Happenstance Theory was not adequately addressed in the research, or in the literature concerning human resource management in the hotel industry. However, the factors expressed as important by hotel managers could fit well within the Happenstance Theory. Both planned and unplanned experiences helped to shape the capabilities of general managers in the sample. For example, a manager may request an international posting to learn more about the industry and to move up the corporate ladder with the expectation than unplanned experiences in a foreign property will better qualify them to manage a property in a volatile and challenging industry. From this perspective, Happenstance Theory may help to define what helps to create a well-qualified hotel general manager. The career advancement strategies embraced by the men and women in the sample demonstrate that they not only anticipate Happenstance, but that they make conscious decisions to embrace it and to use it as a developmental tool as noted by these statements from the respondents: "Search for new ideas, concepts. Be curious, visit high end hotels when traveling. Network, be known. Adaptability and flexibility. Willing to move to key properties around the world."

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The key research questions focused on what are the most important factors that contribute to the capability development of general managers in Canada and did they differ by gender. Using an online survey researchers determined that the main factors for capability development were asking for challenging projects, moving properties, gaining experience and mentoring. Opened ended feedback indicated that three key themes for acquiring knowledge and skills included "gaining experience", "mentoring" and "willingness and determination to learn".

There were no differences regarding the factors leading to capability development between men and women. Limitations of this research include a small sample and a lack of representation for larger hotel properties. Research on managers of larger properties may lead to identifying different methods of acquiring their competences as well as possibly discovering other unique capabilities required. Further research is required to explore how learning from experience can be leveraged more efficiently in the Canadian hotel industry. Also, personality factors and their impact on career success in the hotel industry require more research. Due to the personality characteristics of individuals working in the fast paced hotel industry, mentoring programs need to be introduced or revised. Other methods of capturing the knowledge and skills from highly experienced upper level managers and transferring it to future general managers requires more exploration. The role of Happenstance Theory also bears further study in future research.

APPENDIX A: Holistic Career Pyramid Model, Source: (Morgan, 2002, P. 40)
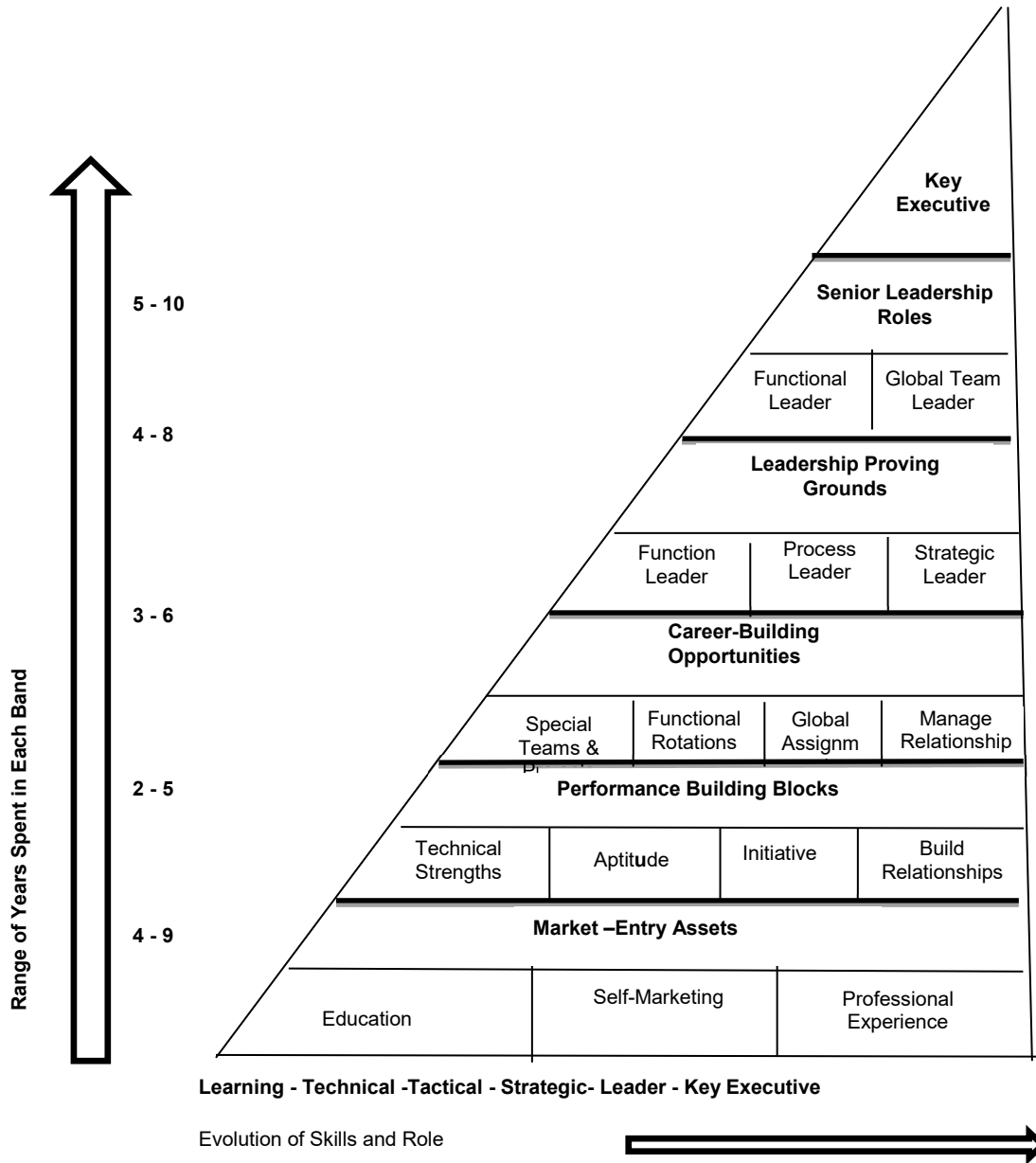
This figure describes the Holistic Career Pyramid Model developed to highlight the six steps of the vertical career climb to the position of key executive. The most significant challenge is the transition from technical and functional roles to strategic and leadership skills.

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