



Hotel managers' career strategies for success

Career strategies
for success

Christos Akrivos

*Department of Tourism Management, Greek Open University, and
Department of Business Administration, Athens Technological Institution,
Athens, Greece*

Adele Ladkin

*ICTHR, School of Services Management, Bournemouth University,
Poole, UK, and*

Panayiotis Reklitis

*Department of Business Administration, Patras Technological Institution,
Patras, Greece*

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore career strategies used by Greek hotel managers in order to advance their careers successfully.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a case study sample of 65 hotel general managers working in deluxe hotels in Greece, data on career strategies were collected using a postal questionnaire.

Findings – It is revealed that the managers use a range of different strategies in order to advance their careers. The most commonly used are in relation to career opportunities, skills, mobility, interpersonal relations and handling diverse situations. The least commonly used ones relate to family contacts, job search techniques and pay.

Practical implications – The strategies are discussed in terms of recruitment, training and retention of managers in the hotel industry.

Originality/value – This paper builds on the knowledge of careers strategies used for career success.

Keywords Careers, Career development, Hotels, Managers, Greece

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Career success can be viewed as a means to fulfill a person's needs and desires through achievements, accomplishment and power acquisition (Lau and Shaffer, 1999). Career success and career strategies are elements within the broad tradition of career theory (Riley and Ladkin, 1994). An understanding of the strategies used in order to develop a successful career can help individuals choose the best way to achieve promotion to the top of a company's hierarchy (Aryee *et al.*, 1994). Within a specific professional environment, it is useful for career development to identify the specific individual or environmental characteristics and requirements that lead different people to career success in different industries or organizational structures (Reklitis and Trivelas, 2002). The practical meaning of this knowledge or information is important for both companies and individuals as it enables companies to have the ability to plan more



effectively the systems of staff training and development, and individuals can develop career strategies that will offer them greater career success in terms of job position, satisfaction and salary (Ellis and Heneman, 1990).

This research aims to discover which career strategies have lead to career success for managers in the Greek hotel industry. The rationale for undertaking this research is to highlight elements of managerial career strategies both in general terms and in relation to careers of hotel managers. Despite the wealth of research into the careers of hotel managers, no research to date has been undertaken in the Greek context. The value of exploring the Greek situation is that as a developed international tourist destination, it has an established infrastructure (hotels, travel agencies etc.) and approximately 25 percent of its population is employed directly or indirectly in the tourism sector (Pavlopoulos, 1999). Moreover, the human resource asset employed in this industry is supported by a continuous increasing number of tourism schools which offer a variety of studies at all levels.

Previous research has explored profiles and general characteristics of hotel managers, much including a discussion of career strategies. For example, in the UK (Corcoran and Johnson, 1976; Ladkin and Riley, 1996); the USA (Nebel *et al.* 1995); Greece (Akrivos, 2004); Korea (Kim, 1994); Croatia (Sehanovic *et al.*, 2000); Mauritius (Ladkin and Juwaheer, 2000); and in Egypt (Hannan *et al.*, 2003). The present research integrates the previous studies, including the prevailing theories in general on leadership characteristics. Importantly, the above research findings are tested in Greece, which is a major employer.

In order to achieve its aims, the paper is organized in the following way. First, a discussion of career success and career strategies in relation to chief executive officers (CEOs) is presented as a background to the present research, as there are parallels in the roles and responsibilities between these occupations. Career success and strategies specific to hotel managers are then outlined. The research methodology for the research is explained, followed by a presentation on the results of the survey. Results are provided in the areas of career strategies used by the hotel managers, and conclusions outlining the relevance of the findings for industry are discussed.

Career success and strategies of CEOs

Because of the perceived and actual importance of a CEO's job, there is a wealth of research that has explored career success and career strategies that can help to achieve success for CEOs. At the individual level career success is related to acquisition of wealth and power along with personal satisfaction (Gattiker and Larwood, 1990, 1988, Judge *et al.*, 1995; Poole *et al.*, 1993). The knowledge of what someone has to do in order to achieve career success assists individuals to follow the appropriate career strategies during their career development (Aryee *et al.*, 1994, Ellis and Heneman, 1990). The study of the career path in a contingency model (Reklitis and Trivelas, 2002) identifies which parameters influence career success of people with different demographical characteristics in different organizational contexts. This is useful for both individuals and organizations as organizations have the ability to design more effective staff development systems, and individuals have the possibility to develop these career strategies that would make them successful in their career in terms of job position,

satisfaction and salary (Ellis and Heneman, 1990). Contented managers are instrumental in the success of an organization.

The nomination of a person as a CEO of an organization is one of the most important decisions an organization must take, and is crucial to the success of an organization. The CEO is the person that is exclusively responsible for the company's decisions about strategy formulation, planning, performance design and its environment. The CEO is legally responsible for the company, has the final responsibility for any action the company undertakes and holds the highest position in the organizational structure (Vancil, 1987; Dalton and Kesner, 1983). The role of a CEO is determinant in the company's decision centers, in the control and direction of the company towards goal achievement (Brady and Helmich, 1984 cited in Ashcraft, 1999), and it is the CEO who defines the core concept of an organization (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996). This decision influences all the members of the organization and forms the organizational culture (Hambric *et al.*, 1998).

Previous research into career success of managers has identified a number of different themes. For example, the ability to match appropriately the opportunities and threats of the firm's environment by Olsen *et al.* (1994). Personality traits, as they relate to career success is another common theme. Howard and Bray (1988) designed a mechanism which attempted to relate personality characteristics to career success. In the tourism industry, the study of the personality characteristics that make a successful manager have been identified by Wilson (1998) and Worsfold (1989a, b). Attitudes and predispositions of a person as determinants of career success have been discussed by Lent *et al.* (1994). In studying the attitudes and predispositions of a person, much research explores the specific person as a critical parameter to his/her career success (Finn and Rock, 1997; Winfield, 1991 cited in Perrone, 2001; Wang and Gordon, 1994 cited in Perrone, 2001; Samuel *et al.*, 1994). Finally, specific career success strategies have been considered in previous research. Berenbeim (1995) highlights the characteristics of the CEOs of a number of companies located in five different countries. Orpen (1994) and Hall (1990) from a psychological point of view have identified specific strategies that lead to career success. Strategies followed by CEOs in order to develop their career reflect their personality characteristics, their abilities, their knowledge and their education (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1994). The right strategies and tactics will promote individuals to the top of a company's hierarchy. CEO career success depends on the consistency and the stability of the performance of a person. In other words success is associated with a person's passion with his/her vision and his/her ability to go a step further from all his/her competitors (Sarros and Santora, 1994). The person must have the ability to match appropriately the opportunities and threats of the firm's environment (Olsen *et al.*, 1994). Personality traits affect also dramatically the career success according to Howard and Bray's (1988), who have designed a mechanism through which it is attempted to relate the personality characteristics with the career success.

Career strategies for success in hotels

As with CEOs, the job of an hotel general manager is seen as an important one, and one that is crucial to the success of the hotel organization. Previous research indicates that the characteristics that make a successful manager include some personality

characteristics such as dynamism, commitment and an immaculate appearance, especially for females (Wilson, 1998). Additionally, in order for someone to reach the top management of a tourism company, Wilson (1998) identifies that he/she needs to be innovative, aware of the company's politics, have good relations with consultants, be able to negotiate especially with public fiscal authorities, to be informed about organizational dynamics, and to be a workaholic.

A definition of the abilities and characteristics that a person must have in order to become a successful hotel general manager has been explored by Worsfold (1989a, b), who has discriminated these requirements into people handling, spirituality and physical stamina, self motivation, personality characteristics such as personal style, natural talent, tolerance, willingness to undertake risks and the need for sentimental stability and intelligence where common sense and strong memory are included.

Research undertaken in the UK (Ladkin and Riley, 1996) examined the career strategies of UK hotel managers. A total of 24 career strategies that theoretically could have helped managers to develop their career in the hotel industry were explored. Furthermore, profiles and general characteristics in relation to hotel managers have been explored. For example, in the UK with Corcoran and Johnson (1976) and Harper *et al.* (2005), in the USA with Nebel *et al.* (1995), in Greece with Akrivos (2004), in Korea with Kim (1994), in Croatia with Sehanovic *et al.* (2000), in Mauritius with Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000), in Australia with Ladkin (2002) and in Egypt with Hannan *et al.* (2003). The case of Greek hotel managers presented here builds on this research by adding new variables for testing and combining general management theory with specific to the industry research findings. While previous research in the industry examined the profile of the hotel general managers mainly from the demographical viewpoint, this research examines mainly leadership characteristics.

Research methodology

The value of using a case study approach in research is well documented (Yin, 1993; Cohen and Manion, 1995; Blaxter *et al.*, 2001). The present research is based on a sample of 65 Greek deluxe hotel's general managers who were not owners or members of the family who owned the hotel. The deluxe category was chosen as the majority of the deluxe hotels in Greece are managed by professionals while the majority (97.5 per cent) of lower class hotels are managed by members of the owner's family (Papanikos, 2000, p. 52). As Schein (1996) mentioned the study of career development must focus on individuals who after a range of promotions reached the top of the corporate hierarchy. The explanation of his statement is based on the fact that hotel owners display a high level of diversity and would be very difficult to conclude in scientifically accepted results. The owners who are managers could be the subject of future research. Career histories were gained from the managers using a postal questionnaire. Within the questionnaire, managers were asked to indicate career strategies they had used in order to be successful in their careers. It is assumed that as all sample hold general managers positions, they have been successful in their careers. The sample represented the 85 percent of the population of this hotel category in Greece. The respondents were presented with a list of 33 career strategies and were asked to indicate whether they had used them in pursuing their careers. The response scale was anchored with "not at all" and "to a very great extent" for all items. The strategies were adapted from Ladkin

and Riley (1996). The selected strategies are not only those which were tested in the industry from previous research but also those which are valued by the management theory to be most important in all industries. This research aims to classify and evaluate the importance of the strategies in the tourism industry and use them as a tool of leadership development for the hotel managers. The career strategies presented are listed in Table I.

Research findings

The research findings are in the areas of career strategies used by the hotel managers in four categories, starting with the most frequently used. The rating scale was from one to five, with one being the least important strategy and five the most important. They are grouped into four categories, the dominant strategies, the less dominant strategies, those of limited use and the least used. This categorization was undertaken

Number	Strategy
1	Always going for the higher salary
2	Always putting my career first
3	Always taking opportunities offered by company training schemes
4	Always trying to improve my communication skills and abilities
5	Become member of professional and other social unions to support my career
6	Being prepared to make financial sacrifices to learn
7	Consider my job mainly as recreation and less as labour
8	Continuing to take courses and improve my education and skills
9	Having a mentor
10	Having clear long-term career goals
11	Helping my superiors to achieve their personal objectives even though not the same with my personal objectives
12	I had internal <i>locus</i> of control
13	I had internal <i>locus</i> of control
14	Acting with enthusiasm and smile
15	Aiming to establish good interpersonal relations with hotel owners and tour operators
16	Being flexible and able to adapt to any changes
17	Identifying my personal goals with those of the organization
18	Keeping up to date in my professional skills
19	Paying attention to my personal image by caring about my presentation and speech
20	Being prepared to relocate
21	Keeping informed of the opportunities in the company
22	Keeping up a record of useful contacts
23	Learning a foreign language
24	My performance was not influenced from stress or other negative environmental factors
25	Not waiting to be told about promotions prospects
26	Regular scanning job adverts and circulation of my CV
27	Trusting my employer that if I do a good job I will get promoted
28	Trying to acquire power and to be able to influence other people
29	Trying to do my best as an employee without paying attention to the comments of my colleagues and superiors
30	Trying to improve my negotiation skills
31	Using an entrepreneurial point of view of my career
32	Using contacts in the industry to get on
33	Using my family contacts in the industry

Table I.
Potential career strategies

in order to show the most important strategies for the industry and to define those which are less important for those who want to develop their career in the hotel industry. The practical implication from this categorization is that professionals can see those that have been most used, and what they could avoid.

The dominant strategies

The strategies of this group were rated over 4.5 on average and are presented below in rank order with the highest ratings first:

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

The implications for the industry of the dominant strategies illustrate which ones are seen as important for people who want to become hotel managers. Additionally, hotels which are offering training programs could include modules that would support the development of these strategies. Furthermore, hotel recruiters could use these results as criteria for selecting the right people for the managerial positions.

Less dominant strategies

The next 13 strategies were rated from 4.5 to 4 and are listed in rank order:

- (1) My performance was not influenced from stress or other negative environmental factors.
- (2) I had an internal *locus* of control.
- (3) Having clear long-term career goals.
- (4) Trying to improve my negotiation skills
- (5) Keeping up to date in my professional skills.
- (6) Always taking opportunities offered by company training schemes.
- (7) Being prepared to make financial sacrifices to learn.
- (8) Identifying my personal goals with those of the organization.
- (9) Continuing to take courses and improve my education and skills.
- (10) Trusting my employer that if I do a good job I will get promoted.
- (11) Using an entrepreneurial point of view of my career.
- (12) Consider my job mainly as recreation and less as labor.
- (13) Learning a foreign language.

As with the dominant strategies, the implications are the same for the individuals, the hotels and the human resource managers of the hotels. Of course these strategies are less important from the previous ones but are still very important for someone who wants to climb the corporate ladder. Looking into the above strategies it is obvious that they reflect the positive and constructive attitude one must have during his/her career development.

Limited strategies

The following strategies scored an average evaluation from 3 to 4 and are listed in rank order:

- (1) Helping my superiors to achieve their personal objectives even though not the same with my personal objectives.
- (2) Trying to do my best as an employee without paying attention to the comments of my colleagues and superiors.
- (3) Keeping up a record of useful contacts
- (4) Always putting my career first.
- (5) Always going for the higher salary.
- (6) Always being ready to relocate.
- (7) Trying to acquire power and to be able to influence other people.
- (8) Not waiting to be told about promotions prospects.

The strategies of this group have an average importance for those who are employed in the hotel industry. The implications are the same as for the previous groups of strategies; however of interest is that an active and energetic attitude goes against career development. This might have a negative implication for the individual as it leads to stressful situations (e.g. trying to acquire power, always ready to relocate, not waiting to be told . . . etc.)

Least used strategies

The last five strategies proved to be less important for the managers as a vehicle for their career success, listed in rank order:

- (1) Using contacts in the industry to get on.
- (2) Having a mentor.
- (3) Become member of professional and other social unions to support my career.
- (4) Regular scanning job adverts and circulation of my CV.
- (5) Using my family contacts in the industry.

These strategies are the least preferred or followed, as the managers of the sample have used their own abilities and strengths to reach at the top. Additionally they want to reflect an image of independence and shelf esteem. Finally as they have not any relation with the ownership of the companies they manage they rarely use their family contacts in the industry.

Although it is not possible to create profiles of the hotel managers from the small sample, what these findings show is a degree of consensus in the career strategies and that certain patterns emerge. Typically, the managers have an internal *locus* of control so as to be able to continuously improve him/her self, are flexible to adapt to the continuous changing internal and external environment, are able to manage diversity, are strategic thinkers and active learners, and finally have good presentation, speech, communication and personal relations skills.

In terms of the least used strategies, the majority of the persons who became general managers did not aim for a higher salary, did not have a mentor or family members to help them succeed in their careers. They did look outwardly for other job opportunities.

The research indicates that first; the managers are influenced by the industry culture in terms of the accepted values and norms of the contemporary tourism companies. Second, the findings provide a solid ground for the planning and development of the educational programs offered by the hotels and from the academic institutions specialized in this field. Finally, the strategies illustrate possible ways to encourage or discourage individuals who want to develop their career in tourism taking into consideration their abilities and personality.

Conclusion

This research has outlined career strategies that have been used by Greek deluxe hotel managers in order to achieve success in their careers. The findings are similar to previous research (Ladkin and Riley, 1996; Ladkin, 2002) and indicate that mobility, training and willingness to be adaptable are commonly used strategies. The least used are family contacts and money as a motivating factor in career advancement. The contribution of this study is not only the confirmation of the results of previous researches, but also the ranking of the examined strategies and the integration of the theories in career development.

The implications for the industry are in three main areas. First, in terms of recruitment individuals look internally rather than externally in order to advance their career opportunities. Therefore the organizations internal labor market dominates job-searching activities. The implications for human resource practitioners are that internal promotions are one way of developing the careers of individuals to ensure they are not lost too the external labor market. If individuals have been identified as being of value to an organizational, internal promotion can keep them from moving to another company.

Second, with regard to training it is clear that individuals are constantly striving to improve their skills. Training opportunities may be one way in which organizations can look assist the retention of those developing a managerial career. This is related to the first point, that if opportunities are available within the company, employees will not look elsewhere in the external labor market. Related to the retention of staff, it does not appear that money is a motivating factor in the development of careers. Whilst salaries would be important in attracting staff, they are not the main driver behind career development. The practical implication of this finding is that organizations need to seek ways other than financial rewards if they are to keep key staff.

A final point is that has this research has shown similarities to UK and Australian hotel managers in terms of career strategies used, and there does not appear to be

obvious differences according to country or nationality. The markets globalization is growing rapidly especially in the tourism sector worldwide but even with the global nature of the hotel industry, it appears that individuals who become general managers use similar career strategies for success. Taking this assumption, the practical implication for international companies is that recruitment and retention practices can be standardized at the global level. The results of course reflect part of the long Greek tradition in hospitality especially at the dominant strategies of this study such as the enthusiastic and smiling behavior and the establishment of good personal relations with hotel owners and tour operators.

In terms of further research, it would be useful for human resource practitioners to understand if careers strategies are primarily a function at the individual level of individual personality traits and characteristics, or at the organizational level, organizational structures and opportunities. Attempts to match personality characteristics with available career opportunities could be a way of ensuring satisfactory career development that benefits both the individual and the organization.

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About the authors

Christos Akrivos is a Research Associate at the Department of Business Administration at the Athens Technological Education Institution (TEI). He is also a teacher of Tourism Management

at the Greek Open University and a teacher of Strategic Management at the Greek National School of Public Administration. He has many years professional experience in the hospitality and the tourism industry, and his research interests and publications are in the areas of hospitality management, career planning and development, human resource management and quality assurance and performance measurement of the higher education institutions. He gained his MBA and PhD from the University of Piraeus, Greece. Christos Akrivos is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: akrivos@hol.gr

Adele Ladkin is a Professor of Tourism Employment at the International Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Research, School of Services Management, Bournemouth University, UK. She is Head of the Centre for Event and Sport Research within the School of Services Management. Her research interests and publications are in the areas of tourism education, career analysis and labor mobility in the tourism and hospitality industry and the conference industry. She is Editor in Chief for the *International Journal of Tourism Research*. She gained an MSc in Tourism Management and a PhD from the University of Surrey, UK.

Panayiotis Reklitis is Vice President and Assistant Professor at Patras Technological Institution. His research interests and publications are in the areas of strategic management, innovation management and human resource management. He gained his Bachelor from the University of Piraeus and his PhD from the National Technical University of Athens, Greece.