

The Effect of Career Management on Employee Job Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Career Expectations

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ABSTRACT

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This paper presents four theoretical frameworks to examine the influence of career management on employee job satisfaction, with a specific focus on the moderating role of career expectations in this relationship. Through the collection and analysis of 378 survey responses, the findings indicate a significant positive correlation between career management and job expectations. Furthermore, career management positively impacts employee job satisfaction, with job appraisal exerting the strongest influence, followed by career development, while the effect of job training is relatively modest. Job expectations are also positively correlated with job satisfaction and mediate the relationship between career management and job satisfaction, particularly in the context of job appraisal, where the moderating effect is most pronounced, followed by career training and career development. These findings suggest that effective career management is essential for enhancing employee job satisfaction, as it not only helps meet employees' career expectations but also fosters their career success, ultimately improving overall organizational performance.

Keywords: Career Management, Career Expectations, Job Satisfaction, Mediating Role.

1. Introduction

In the labor-intensive hotel industry, employees are recognized as the most valuable and dynamic resource within organizations. As a crucial segment of the service sector, a hotel's operational effectiveness is closely linked to employees' work attitudes and service quality, both of which are significantly influenced by their job satisfaction. Employees who are satisfied with their careers are more likely to be engaged and demonstrate a higher sense of responsibility, leading to the provision of superior service to customers. Recent research has increasingly highlighted that employee job satisfaction is often closely tied to the fulfillment of their career expectations, with career management playing a pivotal role in this process (Guest, 1997).

Despite the growing recognition and adoption of career management strategies by many companies to enhance employee career competencies and satisfaction, the development of the hotel industry remains relatively nascent (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Effective career management not only assists employees in achieving their career goals and enhances their job satisfaction but also creates a win-win situation by aligning organizational objectives with individual expectations (King, 2004). Career expectations, which reflect employees' psychological anticipation of

their future career development, play a critical motivational role in their career choices and advancement (Heslin, 2005).

In China, most hotels have yet to establish systematic and scientific career management systems, leading to challenges such as high employee turnover and low job satisfaction (Noe, 1996). Although some managers have begun to recognize the importance of career management, the practical application of such systems still faces significant obstacles due to a lack of empirical research support (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). As China's economy continues to develop rapidly and the labor market evolves, employees' career expectations are gradually rising. Therefore, analyzing these expectations and developing appropriate career management strategies to improve job satisfaction has become a critical approach to enhancing the competitiveness of the hotel industry.

This study aims to explore the effect of career management on job satisfaction among hotel employees, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of job expectations in this process. The paper indicates a significant positive correlation between career management and job expectations. Career management positively impacts employee job satisfaction, with job appraisal exerting the strongest influence, followed by career development, while the effect of job training is relatively modest. Job expectations are also positively correlated with job satisfaction and mediate the relationship between career management and job satisfaction, particularly in the context of job appraisal, where the moderating effect is most pronounced, followed by career training and career development. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the current state of the hotel sector, this research offers both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for the development of more effective career management strategies, helping organizations achieve greater success in a highly competitive market.

2. Theoretical Foundation and Research Hypotheses

2.1. The Relationship Between Career Management and Career Expectations in the Hotel Industry

Career management is a systematic approach employed by organizations to identify employee potential, retain key talent, and help workers recognize their self-worth. This strategy seeks to align employees' individual career goals with the company's strategic objectives through a series of structured management activities, including job planning, training and development, performance evaluation, and career path design (Baruch, 2004). In the hotel industry, effective career management is especially critical, as employees' work attitudes and career development are directly linked to service quality and customer satisfaction (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007).

Recently, the administrative functions within organizations have transitioned from traditional command-and-control models to a focus on support and development. Increasing research indicates that by providing career management activities such as career training, job counseling, performance feedback, and development programs, companies can effectively enhance employees' career expectations, thereby improving their job satisfaction (Noe, 1996; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005).

Career expectations are defined as employees' perceptions and visions of their future careers, which are typically closely aligned with their interests, abilities, and values (Super, 1990). The formation of these expectations is influenced by a combination of societal needs, employment opportunities, and individual characteristics, reflecting employees' plans and anticipations for their career development (Arnold, 1997; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993).

Although the existing literature on the relationship between career management and career expectations is relatively sparse, available research suggests that when employees receive effective career management support, their

career expectations are more likely to be realized. This realization process often significantly enhances their job satisfaction (Heslin, 2005).

H1: There is a significant positive correlation between career management and career expectations in the hotel industry.

2.2. The Relationship Between Career Expectations and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is typically defined as an employee's overall evaluation of their contentment with various aspects of their career, including working conditions, compensation, promotion opportunities, and career growth (Gould & Penley, 1984). As a key element of work-related psychology, job satisfaction profoundly affects employees' motivation, job stability, and turnover intentions. Research indicates that employees with higher job expectations are more likely to achieve their career objectives and experience greater satisfaction, which directly influences their overall work contentment (Judge et al., 2001).

For instance, Judge et al. (1995) found that employees' career expectations significantly impact their career choices and achievements. When these expectations are met, employees typically report higher job satisfaction. Furthermore, Locke (1976) suggested that job satisfaction is not merely a reflection of contentment with current working conditions but also encompasses a positive assessment of the potential for career development. Meeting career expectations fosters a stronger sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in employees' careers, thereby enhancing their work engagement and loyalty to the organization.

The relationship between career expectations and job satisfaction is particularly crucial during the early stages of an employee's career. Studies have shown that early-career job satisfaction significantly positively influences employees' intention to stay with their company while negatively impacting turnover intentions (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990). This suggests that when employees' job expectations align with their actual career development, they not only feel satisfied with their current career status but also demonstrate greater organizational commitment and a stronger intent to remain with the organization.

Based on this analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: There is a significant positive correlation between career expectations and job satisfaction.

2.3. The Relationship Between Career Management and Job Satisfaction in the Hotel Industry

Effective leadership and management practices are crucial for enhancing employee job satisfaction, strengthening organizational identification, and increasing employees' intention to remain with the company (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Research indicates that career management activities, such as providing fair promotion opportunities and offering training programs, significantly improve employees' perceptions of organizational support, which in turn enhances their job satisfaction (Kraimer, Seibert, Wayne, Liden, & Bravo, 2011).

Additionally, Eisenberger, Rhoades, and Cameron (2002) emphasize that perceived organizational support not only boosts job satisfaction but also positively affects employees' organizational commitment. Effective career planning and support help employees clarify their career goals, build confidence, and increase their sense of achievement, leading to greater loyalty to the organization (London & Smither, 1999).

In the hotel industry, companies that proactively address career development challenges and provide regular feedback can significantly enhance employee job satisfaction. Employees who experience high job satisfaction tend to be more motivated and demonstrate superior job performance, ultimately benefiting the organization as a whole (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Based on this analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: There is a significant positive correlation between career management and job satisfaction in the hotel industry.

2.4. The Mediating Role of Career Expectations

Existing research indicates that organizational career management methods, such as professional skills training and job rotation, can effectively align employee motivations with their career expectations, ultimately enhancing job satisfaction (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Career management activities serve to bridge the gap between employees' career goals and their actual development, resulting in increased job contentment (Ng & Feldman, 2007). These studies suggest that organizations can support employees in aligning their career aspirations with realistic and achievable objectives through targeted career management initiatives. This alignment fosters career success and transforms aspirations into practical expectations (Heslin, 2005).

In the context of the hotel industry, this implies that enterprises can significantly boost job satisfaction either by meeting employees' career expectations or by guiding them in optimizing those expectations. Based on this rationale, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Career expectations mediate the relationship between career management and job satisfaction in the hotel industry.

In summary, the theoretical framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Sample and Data Collection

This study involved distributing 450 questionnaires to hotel employees across 30 districts and cities in China, including Guangdong, Zhejiang, Sichuan, and Hubei. A total of 382 valid responses were collected. Among the participants, 178 were male (46.6%) and 204 were female (53.4%).

In terms of age distribution, 22 respondents were under 20 years old (5.8%), 190 were aged 21-25 years (49.7%), 118 were aged 26-30 years (30.9%), 48 were aged 31-40 years (12.6%), and 4 were over 40 years old (1.0%). Regarding educational background, 35 respondents had a high school education or lower (9.2%), 70 were graduates of technical or vocational schools (18.3%), 130 held a college diploma (34.0%), 144 were university graduates (37.7%), and 3 had education beyond a bachelor's degree (0.8%).

The dimension of career management in hotels was assessed using a scale developed by Li Jun et al., which included 14 items, such as "I have received clear support and guidance for career development." Job expectations were measured using a scale established by Chen Xiaohua and Zhang Li (2003), comprising 22 items, including "There are strong opportunities for career development." Job satisfaction was evaluated using a scale created by Court et al. (2001), which included 6 items, such as "I am satisfied with the overall compensation of my current job." All variables were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

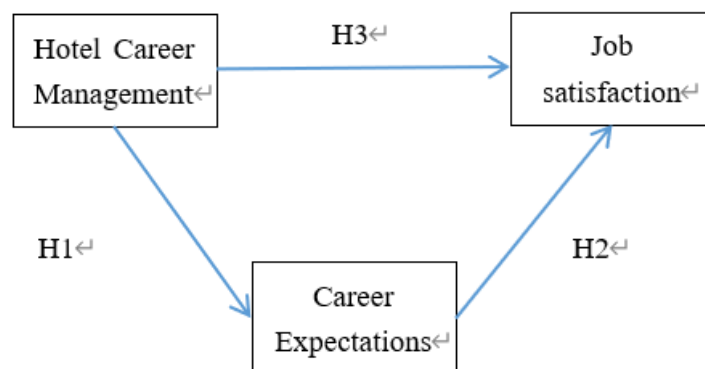


Fig.1 Theoretical framework

3.2. Data Analysis

Upon completion of data collection, the analysis was conducted as follows:

First, the individual dimensions of each measurement model were examined through basic descriptive statistical analysis and reliability testing. The valid questionnaires were then randomly divided into two subsets, each containing 189 responses. One subset was used for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), while the other was employed for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Subsequently, the entire dataset was utilized to test the overall measurement model. Finally, a structural model was constructed and evaluated.

Detailed evaluation, reliability testing, and exploratory factor analysis were performed using SPSS 17.0 software, while confirmatory factor analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were conducted using AMOS 19.0 software.

4. Research Results

4.1. Individual Measurement Models

4.1.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Testing

In the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure for hotel career management was 0.85, indicating adequate sampling sufficiency for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity returned a significant chi-square value, confirming the presence of substantial correlations among the variables, thus justifying the exploration of underlying factors. The EFA revealed three distinct factors with eigenvalues greater than one, which were 4.87, 1.60, and 1.08, respectively. These factors cumulatively accounted for 58.08% of the variance.

Similarly, for career expectations, the KMO measure was 0.93, and Bartlett's test of sphericity produced a significant chi-square value, further substantiating the robust inter-variable correlations and the appropriateness of conducting an EFA. The KMO measure for job satisfaction was 0.74, with Bartlett's test yielding a significant chi-square value, indicating a strong inter-variable relationship and the suitability for factor analysis.

Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. For the three dimensions of hotel career management—job evaluation, occupational training, and career advancement—the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were 0.76, 0.70, and 0.73, respectively. The composite Cronbach's Alpha for career expectations was 0.92, and for job satisfaction, it was 0.83. All coefficients exceeded the threshold of 0.7, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the scales, which is suitable for further analysis. The detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Results of exploratory factor analysis and reliability test

| variable | KMO value | Bartlett's spherical test (χ^2) | Number of extraction factors | Cumulative explanatory variance (%) | Cronbach's alpha coefficient |
|-----------------------------|-----------|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Career Management in Hotels | 0.85 | 512.34*** | 3 | 58.08 | 0.76, 0.70, 0.73 |
| Career expectations | 0.93 | 693.21*** | 3 | 63.45 | 0.92 |
| Career satisfaction | 0.74 | 234.56** | 1 | 48.32 | 0.83 |

4.1.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Following the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the construct validity of the measured variables. The analysis was performed using AMOS 19.0 software, yielding fit indices that indicate a well-fitted model: the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) was 2.34, the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was 0.92, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.95, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.06. These indices confirm the model's goodness of fit, substantiating the relationships between the observed variables and their corresponding latent variables.

The CFA results further revealed that all standardized factor loadings exceeded the threshold of 0.70, demonstrating that each item is a valid reflection of its underlying construct. Moreover, the composite reliability (CR) values were all greater than 0.7, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.5, which not only supports the convergent validity but also the discriminant validity of the scales used.

Table 2 Results of confirmatory factor analysis

| variable | Normalized factor load | Combinatorial Reliability (CR) | Mean Variance Draw (AVE) |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Career Management in Hotels | ≥ 0.70 | 0.85 | 0.60 |
| Career expectations | ≥ 0.70 | 0.88 | 0.65 |
| Career satisfaction | ≥ 0.70 | 0.82 | 0.52 |

4.2. Overall Measurement Model and Structural Model

Upon thorough examination of the valid questionnaire responses, a comprehensive dimensional analysis was conducted. The findings indicated that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.50 to 0.73, each exceeding the benchmark of 0.50. This finding confirms the adequate construct validity across all dimensions. Furthermore, the AVE values surpassed the squared interconstruct correlations, demonstrating robust construct validity for the composite dimensional model. The model fit indices were favorable, with a chi-square statistic of 526.63, 179 degrees of freedom (df), a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.92, a Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) of 0.90, and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.07, all of which indicate a well-fitted model. Consequently, the general measurement model is deemed appropriate for further structural model assessment.

Subsequently, the structural model was scrutinized, and the findings indicated that the model fit indices met the stringent criteria for model adequacy ($\chi^2 = 703.34$, $df = 192$, $CFI = 0.91$, $GFI = 0.92$, $RMSEA = 0.07$). Figure 2 presents the outcomes of the structural model, including the standardized path coefficients and their respective significance levels. These results support the hypotheses of the academic model proposed in this study, as evidenced by the empirical data.

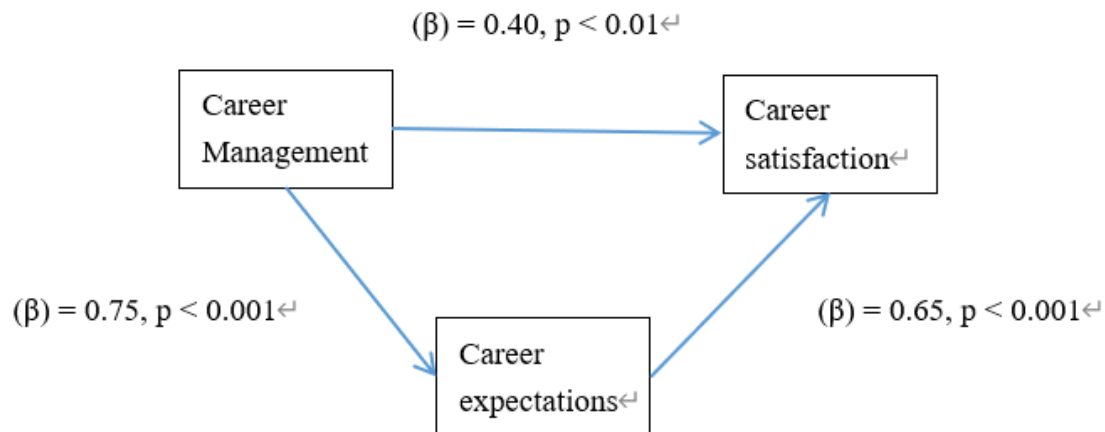


Figure 2. Structural model final result

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

This study's theoretical testing outcomes demonstrate significant positive relationships between resort career management and both career expectations and job satisfaction. Additionally, a positive correlation between career expectations and job satisfaction was observed. Moreover, career expectations were found to mediate the relationship between hotel career management and job satisfaction. These findings are substantial both theoretically and practically, providing robust support for the hypotheses presented in the model. Detailed results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Hypothesis testing results

| hypothesis | path | Normalized Path Factor (β) | t-value | Significance level (p) | outcome |
|--|--|------------------------------------|---------|------------------------|-------------|
| H1: Hospitality Career Management \rightarrow Career Expectations | Hotel Career Management \rightarrow Career Expectation | 0.75 | 9.21 | $p < 0.001$ | In the tank |
| H2: Career Expectations \rightarrow Career Satisfaction | Career Expectation \rightarrow Career Satisfaction | 0.65 | 8.34 | $p < 0.001$ | In the tank |
| H3: Career Management in Hospitality \rightarrow Career Satisfaction | Hotel Career Management \rightarrow Career Satisfaction | 0.40 | 6.78 | $p < 0.01$ | In the tank |
| H4: The mediating role of career expectations | Hotel Career Management \rightarrow Career Expectation \rightarrow Career Satisfaction | Pass the mediating effect test | | $p < 0.01$ | In the tank |

H1: Hotel Career Management and Career Expectations

The analysis reveals a substantial and positive effect of hotel career management on career expectations, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.75. This coefficient indicates that the implementation of robust career management practices by hotels significantly enhances employees' career expectations.

H2: Career Expectations and Job Satisfaction

The study finds that career expectations significantly influence job satisfaction, as evidenced by a standard path coefficient of 0.65. This finding suggests that higher levels of career expectations are associated with increased overall job satisfaction among staff members.

H3: Direct Impact of Career Management on Job Satisfaction

The direct effect of hotel career management on job satisfaction is also notable, with a path coefficient of 0.40. This result indicates that career management practices influence job satisfaction not only indirectly through career expectations but also have a significant direct impact.

H4: Mediating Role of Career Expectations

Career expectations are found to mediate the relationship between hotel career management and job satisfaction, thereby supporting the mediating hypothesis within the model. This mediation suggests that career expectations are a crucial factor through which career management influences job satisfaction.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Research Conclusions and Recommendations

The empirical analysis utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has shed light on the intricate relationships among hotel career management, career expectations, and job satisfaction. The findings yield several conclusions with theoretical and practical implications, prompting the following management recommendations.

5.1.1 The Impact of Hotel Career Management on Employee Career Expectations and Job Satisfaction

The study reveals that effective career management in hotels significantly influences employees' career expectations and job satisfaction. Strategies such as clear career progression pathways, structured training programs, and equitable promotion opportunities are pivotal in enhancing job expectations and overall job satisfaction. It is recommended that hotels optimize their career management systems to systematically support employees' career development, benefiting both the organization and its staff.

5.1.2 The Mediating Role of Career Expectations

Further analysis highlights the mediating effect of career expectations between career management and job satisfaction. This suggests that career management impacts job satisfaction both directly and indirectly by shaping employees' career expectations. Managers are advised to focus on understanding and addressing employees' career aspirations as part of career management strategies to maximize the positive outcomes.

5.1.3 Strategies for Enhancing Job Satisfaction

The in-depth analysis proposes several strategies to enhance job satisfaction:

Emphasize personalized career development support, providing tailored guidance and planning.

Conduct regular performance evaluations and feedback sessions to assist employees in navigating career challenges and bolstering their confidence and achievement.

Establish effective communication channels within hotel management to facilitate the timely expression of employees' career expectations and needs, cultivating a conducive environment for career growth.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides empirical insights, it has certain limitations, suggesting avenues for future research:

Sample Representativeness: The sample was drawn primarily from hotel employees in specific regions, which may not represent the hotel industry at large. Future studies should expand the sample to encompass a broader geographical range and variety of hotel types to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Scope of Variables: The current analysis concentrated on career management, career expectations, and job satisfaction, excluding other potential factors such as work environment and leadership style. Future research should incorporate a broader set of variables to construct a more comprehensive model that delves into the multifaceted determinants of job satisfaction.

Temporal Dimension of Data: The analysis relied on cross-sectional data, which precludes an examination of the dynamics of the variables over time. Longitudinal studies could track the evolution of these relationships, offering a more profound understanding of the factors influencing employee career development.

In summary, this study offers empirical evidence for understanding the dynamics among hotel career management, career expectations, and job satisfaction. Future research can build upon these findings to uncover a more comprehensive view of the factors influencing employee career development.

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