



Journal of Hospitality, Leisure,
Sport & Tourism Education

Vol. 8, No. 2.

ISSN: 1473-8376

www.heacademy.ac.uk/johlste

PRACTICE PAPER

Career path profiles of general managers of Korean super deluxe hotels and factors influencing their career development: Vocational insights for HTM students and hotel employees

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DOI:10.3794/johlste.82.212

©Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education

Abstract

This article assesses the detailed career paths of super deluxe hotel GMs working in Korea and their attitudinal views. A secondary objective of the research was to compare Korean GMs with foreign GMs. Results of career paths analyses showed both similarities and differences between Korean GMs and GMs of hotels in other countries assessed in past studies. Findings of this study provide benefits to both incumbent hotel employees and potential employees in the hospitality field related to understanding the job qualifications required and the career promotion system involved in becoming a GM of a super deluxe hotel.

Keywords: career path; general manager (GM); hotel industry; career development

Introduction

It has been argued that the post of general manager (GM) is the most important position in the hotel industry (Li, Tse, & Xie, 2007). A GM is the chief executive officer of a hotel establishment. As such, his or her decision-making has a direct and significant influence at all levels, whether in sectors used directly by customers (i.e., rooms), in restaurants and clubs, or in areas such as financing, accounting, human resources, budgeting, marketing, staffing, training, and legal and environmental concerns (Akrivos, Ladkin, & Reklitis, 2007;

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Kim, 1994). Thus, the position of GM is the top of the hierarchical structure of hotel human resources, and could be compared to the conductor of an orchestra who co-ordinates all the musicians and ensures that they work in harmony.

The role of a GM is significantly different from that of a hotel owner. The post of GM has top management status and carries substantial operational responsibility for all divisions of the company and for strategic decision-making, while the property owner decides on the financial investments for a hotel, organises board meetings and analyses the return on investment. Many hotel employees and students majoring in hotel management therefore aspire to the position of GM. As a result, it is argued, it is worthwhile to investigate the career paths of GMs and their attitudinal features such as their managerial philosophies, the required skills and other factors leading to their success.

Limitations of past studies and study objectives

Schmidt (1961) assessed the career paths of the GMs of 60 midwestern hotels in the US between 1959 and 1960. From the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, Eddystone C. Nebel III and Adele Ladkin further examined the career histories of GMs. Considerable efforts have been invested in dissecting the career paths leading to the position of GM (Anderson, 1991; Arnaldo, 1981; Guerrier, 1987; Kim, 1994; Ladkin, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2002; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Li et al., 2007; Nebel, Lee, & Vidakovic, 1995; Pickworth, 1982; Riley, 1990; Schmidt, 1961; Woods, Rutherford, Schmidgall & Sciarini 1998), the business philosophy of GMs (Getz & Peterson, 2005; Glancey & Pettigrew, 1997; Ladkin, 1999a), the success factors or competency involved (Akrivos et al., 2007; Brownell, 1994; Chung, 2000; Ghei & Nebel, 1994; Ladkin, 2000; Morey & Dittman, 2003; Woods et al., 1998) and the strategies of GMs (Ladkin, 1999a).

However, previous studies have been subject to several limitations. First, they used samples of GMs without distinguishing between the different types of hotels they managed and the factors influencing the hotel business (e.g., international brand vs. local brand, hotel contract types, hotel rating level systems and hotel size). The significance of this limitation is confirmed in the comment by Ladkin (2002) that a career path analysis of top management must “reflect regional labour market conditions and the status of the hospitality industry in an aggregate form” (p. 380). This first limitation, therefore, gives rise to concerns about the ability to generalise from the results found in previous research.

Second, career patterns can vary depending on the individuals concerned, their occupations and the societies they live in (Ladkin, 2000). Unfortunately, most previous studies of GM career paths have not taken into account differences in career path profiles or factors such as nationality or origin that can influence career development. For example, they have not taken fully into consideration the existence of expatriates working in a different cultural context from that of their origin. Further, most previous studies have covered European or American regions, while only three studies have taken up the question of GMs in an Asian context, covering Hong Kong (Ruddy, 1989), Korea (Kim, 1994) and China (Li et al., 2007). These GMs are at the pinnacle of the hospitality organisation pyramid since the Asian hotel working environment is believed to be quite different from that of other regions (Hoare & Butcher, 2007) and the Asian hospitality industry is growing rapidly (Harrison, Chang, Gauthier, Joerchel, Nevarez, & Wang, 2005; Jogaratnam & Tse, 2004; Lee, Khan, & Ko, 2008).

A third limitation is that past studies have not covered some of the personal characteristics of GMs such as their salaries, educational backgrounds and age, nor have they covered critical career features such as previous positions held, how often they have changed companies or the age at which they started working in the hotel industry. In addition, few efforts have been made to integrate an investigation of GMs' career path trajectories and their attitudinal views such as their business philosophy and competencies. Finally, since the hotel business environment is continually changing, the findings of previous studies reflect the state of affairs at earlier times.

In light of the above, this study was designed to highlight the following issues. First, it explores the job-related personal profiles and factors contributing to the job performance of GMs in super deluxe hotels¹ in Korea. To meet this objective, it investigates the GMs of all super deluxe hotels at a nationwide level, including foreign GMs. Second, given the assumption that factors affecting the career history of GMs are likely to reflect differences arising from their nationality, the study attempts to assess the differences between Korean and foreign GMs in the Korean hotel industry. This is done in light of their personal and career-related features, the individual strategies they adopted to become a super deluxe hotel GM, the skills required to become a GM at this level and their personal business philosophies. Finally, the study compares its findings with those of other studies which have assessed the GMs of hotels in other countries.

Literature review

Definition, need and methods of career path analysis

A career can be defined as an individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours related to work experiences and activities over the span of a person's life (Hall, 1976; Hughes, 1958). It can also be defined as a path that explicitly embraces an evolution over time as a series of career moves (Cappellen & Janssens, 2005; Inkson, 2004). Thus, a career path reflects a flexible line of progression through which an individual typically advances or is promoted using qualifications for entry onto certain points of the management career ladder (Harper, Brown, & Irvine, 2005; Kao, Lee, & Kuo., 1997; Ladkin, 2002; Schein, 1996).

One of the most significant contributions to analysing the career history of hotel employees was made by Adele Ladkin (2002), who hoped to tap into the structure and motivations of the career paths of hotel employees by collecting information on an individual's work history throughout their life. In the same vein, Riley (1990) stated that the value of career analysis lies in displaying directions, examining stages of development and indicating timespans. Thus, it has been suggested that a better understanding of the career path of hotel employees can lead to strategies for human resource planning and succession that avoid burnout, reduce managerial turnover and ensure proper preparation for advancement (Harper et al., 2005; Nebel et al., 1994).

There is also a need to consider how career progression can be tracked. Schein (1978) proposed the theory of the career anchor in order to examine a person's career evolution. A career anchor is an occupational self-concept, which helps to explain an individual's increasing career stability. It reflects a person's need for a career, the motives that drive them and the talents of the individual as revealed during their experiences. Career anchor theory has been argued to be a practical vehicle for guiding an individual's career through a greater self-awareness of talents, motives and abilities (Schein, 1996).

Another method that can be applied to an analysis of a hotel manager's career history or career path is the life history method, which was conceptualised in the 1970s by sociologists (e.g., Elder, 1978; Gittens, 1979). This was designed to subjectively examine how people are associated with wider societal events. Life and work history analysis is one form of social science research methodology that has been applied substantially in both a conceptual and methodological context (Ladkin, 1999a). Other methods that have been used to collect life history data include autobiographies, oral histories, in-depth interviews, survey interviews, biographies, biographical reference tools and fictitious biographies (Dex, 1991).

With respect to the hospitality field, Ladkin (1999a) devised a methodology for life and work history analysis to assess the career paths of UK hotel managers. This career analysis was undertaken on the basis of four different components: the length of a career, educational level, career mobility and career ambitions (Ladkin, 2002). The length of a career describes the duration of tenure before each transfer to a position, job, department, division or other

industry, while educational level refers to the educational attainments in regular or irregular educational institutions (Ladkin, 2000; Woods et al., 1998).

Career mobility indicates a functional change in a single organisation or a move to another organisation (Ladkin & Riley, 1996). An internal change of rank, role or position in a single organisation is called a “transition within functional boundaries”, whereas a move from one location to another is called a “lateral move over geographical locations” (Guerrier, 1987). Career ambition refers to the driving force behind personal choice, and the direction of the career path indicates either the factors contributing to success or the individual’s managerial philosophy.

In sum, a career consists of work-related societal events occurring over time and the direction followed in single or multiple organisations. Career path analyses have included three components: demographic information (e.g., gender, age, education), autobiographical work history information (e.g., the length of a career course, transitions to other positions or organisations), and perceptions of managerial success factors (e.g., job competency, ambition and philosophy).

Career path of a hotel GM

Most literature related to hotel human resources has focused on hotel employees’ motivation, job satisfaction, compensation, empowerment, turnover rate and performance. However, efforts to examine a hotel GM’s career have been relatively limited even though the GM is an integral part of a hotel’s vertical human resources pyramid. A review of the previous literature reveals three main empirical research directions: GMs’ demographic characteristics, their career histories and their perceptions of managerial success factors.

Most GM studies have ascertained demographic information on GMs including their age, salary, education and gender. Riley (1990) hypothesised that age is the most influential factor in career advancement and analysed the career movement of UK hotel managers according to age distribution. He found that for hotels with over 200 rooms GMs’ age range was 32 to 45, while GMs of hotels with 200 rooms or below included persons aged 27 to 57. His results indicated that age was not a necessary contributing factor to becoming a GM.

In a case study of the careers of 102 Korean GMs, Kim (1994) reported that the typical GM was a 45-year-old male who had completed a 2 year degree at a junior college. He also found that the higher the level of education of GMs, the higher they rated their job satisfaction. For example, respondents with only a high school education (4.9% satisfied) were less likely to be satisfied than those with college educations (30.4% satisfied).

Other demographic findings include those of Nebel et al. (1995) who found that 114 hotel GMs who were working in mid-range, upscale and luxury hotels in the US had an average age of 43, were male (92.1%), had a bachelor’s degree (46.5%) and had a college major in hospitality (38.7%). Similarly, Woods et al. (1998), in tracking the careers of 77 US GMs working in hotels with 500 rooms or more, reported that 49% of the respondents were aged 41 to 50.

Regarding education, Ladkin (2000) found that the length of time taken to become a GM was not correlated with education level. This suggests that educational level is not a crucial factor in determining the rate of career advancement to the position of GM. This finding is in contrast to those of previous studies which found an effect of educational level on promotion rates (Harper et al., 2005; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Riley, 1990). Ladkin (2002) found that the shortest length of time taken to reach the GM level was by respondents who had followed a master’s-level vocational course. Thus, findings related to the importance of educational advancement have been mixed.

In a study of GMs in Scotland, Harper et al. (2005) found that 76% of respondents had a formal education, while 66% of them had obtained qualifications in the hospitality field and most of these had been gained during a work placement period. The average age of

reaching GM level was 29, and managers without formal qualifications achieved the status of GM at the age of 28. The time taken to promotion to GM revealed a gap between qualified managers and unqualified managers of 3 years and 6 months. The demographic characteristics of GMs reported in these studies demonstrate wide diversity depending on the different destinations and hotel contexts.

A second direction of research is the tracking of the career history leading up to becoming a GM. Career history can be divided into three stages (Guerrier, 1987). The first phase is the training stage that typically begins with receiving hotel and catering education or training in different hotel functions. During this period, the manager takes courses leading to a degree, diploma or qualification associated with hotel management. This period also involves a lengthy apprenticeship in basic hotel operations. During the second phase the employee reaches the rank of assistant manager, and is usually assigned to posts with general responsibility for some functional working areas, mainly in the front office and/or Food & Beverage (F&B) divisions. The third phase is when the employee reaches a GM position, which is characterised as a top management placement. As such, the incumbent will most likely enjoy the benefits of the prestige and multifarious perks that accompany the position, but will also have to carry a heavy burden of responsibility for the success or the failure of all of the business divisions.

In the same US context, Woods et al. (1998) tracked the careers of 77 GMs. They reported an average of 3.1 years in the lodging industry before taking their first management job, an average of 9.3 years from their first management job to becoming a GM, an average of 11.6 years as a GM, an average of 5.8 years in their current GM position and an average salary of US\$118,378. The respondents considered marketing as the most important subject for hospitality management education, followed by management, human resources, finance, accounting, management information systems, law, statistics, food service, economics, and food production. They suggested that on-the-job training and internships as well as human resource management skills should be emphasised in hospitality education programmes at college level.

Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000) examined the career paths of GMs in Mauritius, and revealed that, on average, the length of time taken to reach a GM position was 13.1 years after a career that began at the age of 18. The F&B function was regarded as the most essential division en route to becoming a GM, whereas housekeeping, marketing and financing were not considered to be very useful departments on a GM's career track.

Similarly, Ladkin (2002) found that F&B was the most salient career route required to reach top hotel management. The front office was perceived to be the next most important, whereas housekeeping, accounting, human resources and marketing were perceived to be less important functions in a career history prior to becoming a GM. In addition, internal moves (54.7%) were more frequent than external moves (45.3%) en route to becoming a GM.

Harper et al. (2005) analysed the career routes of 54 GMs in Scottish hotels with 50 rooms or more. They found that all had experience in management roles in the F&B sector. They further reported an average of five career moves within an average of 14 years and 3 months prior to becoming a GM. When compared with the results of previous studies, the length of time needed to become a GM in Scotland was longer than in Mauritius: 13.1 years (Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000); the UK: 11 years (Ladkin, 2000); the US: 8.9 years (Nebel et al., 1995) and 9.3 years (Woods et al., 1998); Australia: 14.3 years (Ladkin, 2002); and Guangdong Province, China: 8.17 years (Li et al., 2007).

A third direction of research has been to assess a GM's perception of the competencies or qualifications required to be a successful GM. Kim (1994) analysed the managerial roles of 102 Korean GMs. Respondents indicated that the most important competence for a GM was in guest relations, followed by employee relations, marketing and sales, finance, property

maintenance and paperwork. These results are similar to those of Arnaldo (1981) who assessed 270 GMs in the US.

In a US context, Woods et al. (1998) found that the most important competency required of a GM was to be able to increase profits, followed by appropriate teambuilding, community involvement, empowerment, total quality management, benchmarking, restructuring of management, and the owner's involvement. Interestingly, they found F&B management to be of relatively low importance in becoming a GM. This result is in contrast with those of other studies which have reported the importance of work in the F&B section in a GM's career (Harper et al., 2005; Ladkin, 2000, 2002; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Nebel et al., 1995; Ruddy, 1989).

Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000) found the most important personal strategies used in career development were: "moving around to gain knowledge and experience", "continuing to take courses and improve education and skills" and "being prepared to work abroad". With regard to the importance of skills for career development, "communication skills" were considered to be the most significant, followed by "using initiative skills", "human relations skills", "F&B skills" and "the ability to delegate".

With respect to career ambition or strategies to become a GM, Ladkin (2002) found that "always being prepared to relocate", "moving around to gain knowledge and experience", "having long-term career goals" and "keeping informed and making the most of company opportunities" were important strategies. However, political strategies to advance careers were found to be the least important. In the responses concerning the qualifications needed by a GM, Harper et al. (2005) found that GMs in Scotland showed a higher level of agreement on the need for business skills than operational skills. They also found that time management was the most important qualification, followed by decision-making, communication and formal qualifications.

In sum, the results of previous studies have generated similar results. These include the finding that a GM tends to have accumulated work experience through frequent moves across various hotel divisions. In particular, it has been found that most acquire extensive job experience in the F&B division. In addition, GMs tend to have started their hotel career at a young age (i.e., when they were younger than 20) and show a strong tendency to place more importance on business or strategic management rather than on operations as they move up the career ladder. Finally, they are on the alert for promotion opportunities and know how to make the most of such opportunities.

There were two research questions in this study. The first was whether hotel GMs in Korea differed from those in other countries in previous studies in relation to job-related personal profiles and factors contributing to job performance. The second was whether there were differences between Korean and foreign GMs in terms of job-related personal profiles and the factors contributing to their job performance.

Methods

Structure and content of the questionnaire

Questions were developed through a review of the literature and in-depth interviews with GMs in super deluxe hotels in Seoul. Measurement items for socio-demographic and career variables were extracted from previous literature (Kay & Russette, 2000; Kim, 1994; Ladkin, 2000, 2002; Nebel et al., 1995; Riley, 1990; Ruddy, 1989; Woods et al., 1998). In past research (Harper et al., 2005; Kay and Russette 2000; Kim 1994; Ladkin 2000; Ladkin 2002; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Nebel et al., 1995; Ruddy, 1989; Wood et al., 1998), career path variables included the number of transfers between divisions, starting age in the hotel industry, age when first became a super deluxe hotel GM and number of years taken to reach that position.

Next, items related to individual strategies to become a GM at a super deluxe hotel were developed from a review of the literature (Akrivos et al., 2007; Ladkin, 1999b, 2002; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Ruddy, 1989; Wood et al., 1998), as were those relating to the skills required to be a competent GM of a super deluxe hotel (Baum, 1990; Chung, 2000; Chung-Herrera, Enz, & Lankau, 2003; Harper et al., 2005; Kay & Russette, 2000; Ladkin, 1999b; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Ghei & Nebel, 1994; Wood et al., 1998). The items used to measure business philosophy were also drawn from those used in previous studies (Getz & Peterson, 2005; Glancey & Pettigrew, 1997; Nam, 2002).

In-depth interviews with two Korean and two foreign GMs in super deluxe hotels in Seoul were also conducted to generate items for the questionnaire. In-depth interviews were conducted for this survey owing to the unique nature of the Korean hotel industry environment and because items found in the review of literature might not have been exhaustive. Results of the interviews added some items reflecting the Korean business environment, including "foreign language skills" and "fluency in foreign language". In addition, "keeping in good physical condition", "willingness to relocate" and "computer skills" were included in the measuring skills required to be a competent GM of a super deluxe hotel or the individual strategies to become a GM of a super deluxe hotel.

Constitution of the sample

There were 46 hotels in Korea legally registered as super deluxe hotels in 2005 (Korea Hotel Association, 2007). The population for this study therefore consisted of the GMs in charge of those 46 super deluxe hotels. The first stage was to contact all GMs, and a hotel directory detailing information of all hotels in Korea was used to identify hotel addresses and telephone numbers. The process was conducted by sending a letter, in which the rationale for the study was presented, with an estimate of the time needed to complete the questionnaire and the required return date of the completed questionnaire. This letter was sent to 40 GMs, and phone calls were made to the other six, all of whom were known personally by the paper's authors.

Three weeks after the survey notice letter was sent, a total of 33 GMs expressed their willingness to complete the questionnaire and return it by the deadline. Of these, three were not able to reply either due to overseas trips or time limitations. Finally, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 12 GMs in the hotels in which they were working, and 18 GMs returned completed questionnaires. With the aim of increasing the response rate, the president of the Hospitality, Travel and Tourism Association (SKAL) phoned the GMs individually. The survey was undertaken between 14 February and 12 April 2005. Even though the sample size was small, the respondents represented almost two-thirds (65.2%) of all hotel GMs in the super deluxe hotel category in Korea. This response rate was relatively high in comparison to other similar studies (Ladkin, 2000, 2002; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Riley, 1990; Woods et al., 1998).

Results

Demographic profile of the respondents

Table 1 summarises the demographic profile of the respondents. All were male and the majority (61.7%) were over the age of 51. With regard to income, 29% of the respondents had an annual salary of US\$110,001–150,000, while 17.9% had an annual salary of US\$70,001–90,000. Almost one half (41%) were college graduates and 23.5% also had a master's degree. More than one-third (36%) reported that they had majored in hotel, restaurant and tourism management in college, with the next highest college major being management (32.0%). Regarding nationality, 53% of the respondents were Korean, followed by American (11.8%) and German (8.8%). The average age of beginning work in the hotel industry was 23 years.

Item	%	Item	%
Sex (n = 34)		Major at college or above level (n = 26)	
Male	100	Hotel/restaurant/tourism Management	36.0
Female	0	Management	32.0
Age (n = 34)		Economics	12.0
36 – 40	2.9	Languages	3.0
41 – 45	20.6	Other social sciences	13.0
46 – 50	14.7	Engineering	4.0
51 – 55	38.2	Nationality (n = 34)	
Over 55	23.5	Korean	52.9
Income (n = 27)		USA	11.8
US\$50,000–70,000	14.7	Germany	8.8
US\$70,001–90,000	17.6	Canada	5.9
US\$90,001–110,000	11.8	France	5.9
US\$110,001–150,000	29.4	South Africa	2.9
Over US\$150,000	5.9	New Zealand	5.9
Education level (n = 34)		Switzerland	2.9
High school graduate	14.7	Japan	2.9
Bachelor's degree	41.2	Starting age in the hotel industry (n = 33)	23.73
Master's student Master's degree	14.7		
Master's degree	23.5	The age of becoming GM of super deluxe hotel (n = 33)	43.82
PhD student	2.9		
PhD degree	0.0		

Table 1: Description of survey respondents

Years of working in hotel divisions

As indicated in Table 2, the average length of time taken to become a super deluxe hotel GM was 18.4 years. Respondents reported that they had spent 7.1 years on average in the F&B division, 3.1 years in the sales and marketing division and 2.1 years in the room division. This may imply that hands-on experience in the F&B division was most useful for eventual promotion to the rank of GM, while field experience in the sales and marketing and the room divisions were also very useful. Comparison between the two groups of GMs (the Korean nationals and the expatriates) of the years spent working in different hotel divisions found very similar patterns.

Division	All GMs (n = 33)		Korean GMs (n = 18)		Foreign GMs (n = 15)	
	Mean (SD)	Rank	Mean (SD)	Rank	Mean (SD)	Rank
Room	2.15 (3.18)	3	2.11 (3.55)	4	2.15 (3.18)	3
F&B	7.09 (8.62)	1	6.78 (10.28)	1	7.09 (8.62)	1
Kitchen	2.03 (4.98)	5	1.56 (5.13)	5	2.03 (4.98)	5
Sales and Marketing	3.12 (4.96)	2	3.00 (4.28)	3	3.12 (4.96)	2
Finance and Accounting	0.79 (2.12)	6	0.72 (1.74)	7	0.79 (2.12)	6
Human Resources	0.67 (2.64)	7	1.11 (3.53)	6	0.67 (2.64)	7
Reservations	0.18 (0.88)	9	0.28 (1.18)	8	0.18 (0.88)	9
Housekeeping	0.30 (0.73)	8	0.28 (0.83)	8	0.30 (0.73)	8
Security	0.06 (0.24)	10	0.06 (0.24)	10	0.06 (0.24)	10
Other divisions or a GM in another hotel	2.09 (3.34)	4	3.11 (4.17)	2	2.09 (3.34)	4

Table 2: Years of working in hotel divisions before becoming GM of a super deluxe hotel

The first and the last working divisions

As displayed in Table 3, respondents most often first started working in the hotel industry in the F&B division, followed by the room division and the kitchen division. Comparisons of Korean and foreign GMs concerning the division in which they were first employed revealed some differences. For example, for Korean GMs, the third most common division in which they were first employed was the finance and accounting division, whereas for foreign GMs it was the kitchen division. As Table 3 shows, a question about the division where a respondent had last worked before becoming a GM revealed that it was most frequently the sales and marketing division, followed by the room and F&B divisions.

Division	The first division where respondents started work in the hotel industry			The last division where respondents worked before becoming GM of a super deluxe hotel		
	All (n = 29)	Korean GMs (n = 14)	Foreign GMs (n = 15)	All (n = 32)	Korean GMs (n = 17)	Foreign GMs (n=15)
Room	7	3	4	7	1	6
F&B	13	7	6	6	5	1
Kitchen	3	0	3	2	1	1
Sales and Marketing	2	1	1	8	5	3
Finance and Accounting	2	2	0	0	0	0
Human Resources	0	0	0	2	2	0
Reservations	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housekeeping	0	0	0	0	0	0
Security	1	1	0	0	0	0
Other divisions	1	0	1	6	2	4
GM in another hotel	0	0	0	1	1	0

Table 3: The first and last hotel working divisions

However, a comparison of the patterns for the two groups regarding the division in which they had last worked before becoming a GM showed some dissimilarity. For example, 59% of the Korean respondents reported that their last placement before becoming a GM was in the F&B division and the sales and marketing division, whereas 40% of the foreign GM respondents reported that the room division was the last place they had worked.

Career-related factors

A series of chi-square tests was conducted to examine whether there were statistically significant levels of association between the two groups and selected career-related variables. No significance ($p > 0.05$) was found for annual salary and age. However, significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were identified between the two groups regarding educational level and college major. Concerning educational level, the foreign GM group was more likely than the Korean GM group to have a lower educational level (high school graduate and college graduate). However, compared to the foreign GM group, the Korean GM group reported a higher percentage of master's students and master's degrees. With regard to college majors, the Korean GMs indicated a higher percentage of majors in business, and social sciences or languages than the foreign GMs. In addition, there were a higher percentage of economics graduates in the foreign GM group compared to the Korean GM group.

A series of *t*-tests was conducted to investigate mean differences between the Korean GMs and foreign GMs with respect to career-related variables including number of transfers between working divisions, age of entry into the hotel industry, age at which they first became GM of a super deluxe hotel, and length of time taken to achieve that position. It has been suggested that when the combined sample size of two cells is greater than 30, results

of *t*-tests for independent samples are reasonably accurate even for moderate skewness in the two populations (Ott, 1993). Thus, the small sample size here might not be a concern.

The number of transfers between working divisions showed an average of 5.2. There was no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) in the number of division transfers between Korean GMs (4.9) and foreign GMs (5.5). However, significant differences between the two groups were observed relating to the age of entry into the hotel industry ($p < 0.001$) and the age at which they became a GM ($p < 0.01$). The average entry age for Korean GMs was 27, while for foreign GMs it was 19. For the Korean GM group the age at which they became GMs of super deluxe hotels was 47, whereas for the foreign GM group it was 39.

Individual strategies to become GM of a super deluxe hotel

The most important individual strategies to achieve the position of GM of a super deluxe hotel included “being hard-working for a hotel” (mean = 6.47), “honesty” (mean = 6.26), “setting up long-term career goals” (mean = 6.18) and “aptitude for the hotel industry” (mean = 6.18). On the other hand, items such as “playing internal politics for promotion” (mean = 2.79), “utilising personal networks” (mean = 4.03) and “having chances and luck” (mean = 4.38) were among the individual strategies considered to be less important.

Independent sample *t*-tests were employed to examine differences in the mean scores of items relating to individual strategies between the Korean and foreign GMs. Significant differences were found for “utilising personal networks” ($p < 0.001$), “attending continuing education courses to improve skills” ($p < 0.05$), “fluency in foreign languages” ($p < 0.05$) and “social skills” ($p < 0.05$). The foreign GM group gave more importance to individual strategies concerning “utilising personal networks” and “social skills” than the Korean GM group. Interestingly, the Korean GMs gave more importance than foreign GMs to “attending continuing education courses to improve skills” and “fluency in foreign languages”. Results are shown in Table 4.

Individual strategies to become GM of a super deluxe hotel	All GMs (n = 33)		Korean GMs (n = 18)		Foreign GMs (n = 15)		t-value	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Keeping informed of promotion opportunities in the company through co-workers or internal sources	4.53	1.60	4.83	1.65	4.19	1.52	1.18	0.25
Setting up long-term career goals	6.18	1.03	5.94	1.16	6.44	0.81	-1.42	0.17
Adopting a successful career path in order to achieve a career goal	5.68	1.10	5.39	1.20	6.00	0.89	-1.67	0.10
Modifying career goals rapidly by adapting to changes in the market environment	5.35	1.37	5.17	1.38	5.56	1.37	-0.84	0.41
Utilising personal networks	4.03	1.68	3.06	1.39	5.13	1.26	-4.53	0.00
Playing internal politics for promotion	2.79	1.51	2.89	1.45	2.69	1.62	0.38	0.71
Social skills	5.44	1.08	5.06	1.11	5.88	0.89	-2.36	0.03
Having effective communication skills	5.88	1.11	5.53	1.23	6.25	0.86	-1.94	0.06
Aptitude for the hotel industry	6.18	0.85	6.06	0.56	6.31	1.08	-0.84	0.41

Individual strategies to become GM of a super deluxe hotel	All GMs (n = 33)		Korean GMs (n = 18)		Foreign GMs (n = 15)		t-value	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Attending continuing education courses to improve skills	6.09	0.95	6.47	0.62	5.69	1.08	2.53	0.02
Fluency in foreign languages	5.70	1.53	6.28	0.58	5.00	2.00	2.39	0.03
Stress management skills	5.47	0.99	5.39	0.92	5.56	1.09	-0.50	0.62
Generating creative ideas	5.97	0.72	5.94	0.54	6.00	0.89	-0.22	0.83
Willingness to relocate	5.82	1.22	5.61	1.38	6.06	0.99	-1.08	0.29
Having an appropriate mentor/guide for work	5.35	1.28	5.06	1.39	5.69	1.08	-1.47	0.15
Having chances and luck	4.38	1.48	4.06	1.31	4.75	1.61	-1.39	0.18
Honesty	6.26	0.89	6.00	0.91	6.56	0.81	-1.89	0.07
Being hard-working for the hotel	6.47	0.71	6.39	0.61	6.56	0.81	-0.71	0.48
Keeping in good physical condition	6.15	0.82	6.33	0.69	5.94	0.93	1.42	0.16

Table 4: Individual strategies to become a GM of a super deluxe hotel (n = 34)

Note: 7-point Likert-type scales were used and given the following corresponding values: least important (1); neutral (4); most important (7)

Skills required to become a competent GM of a super deluxe hotel

The most important skills to equip an individual to become a competent GM of a super deluxe hotel were perceived to be “service quality management” (mean = 6.38), “knowledge of products and facilities” (mean = 6.32), “ability to maintain ethical standards” (mean = 6.26), “ability to care for other employees” (mean = 6.24), “ability to make decisions in uncertainty” (mean = 6.24), and “ability to plan and implement projects with innovative methods” (mean = 6.24). Conversely, two items - “knowledge of environmental factors” (mean = 5.15) and “computer skills” (mean = 5.30) - were evaluated as the least important skills needed to advance to the position of GM of a super deluxe hotel (Table 5).

Significant differences between the two groups were observed on eight items: “self-confidence in your ability” ($p < 0.01$), “ability to clearly communicate with other employees” ($p < 0.01$), “ability to maintain ethical standards” ($p < 0.01$), “ability to care for other employees” ($p < 0.05$), “service quality management” ($p < 0.05$), “foreign languages” ($p < 0.05$), “knowledge of current academic and professional literature” ($p < 0.05$) and “ability to care for other employees” ($p < 0.05$). Foreign GMs gave higher scores for “service quality management”, “self-confidence in your ability”, “ability to clearly communicate with other employees”, “ability to maintain ethical standards” and “ability to care for other employees”. Conversely, Korean GMs rated “foreign language skills” and “knowledge of current academic and professional literature” higher than foreign GMs.

Skills required to be a competent GM of a super deluxe hotel	All GMs (n = 33)		Korean GMs (n = 18)		Foreign GMs (n = 15)		t-value	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Economic-financial management	6.06	0.98	5.89	1.08	6.25	0.86	-1.07	0.29
Market analysis	6.21	0.59	6.17	0.51	6.25	0.68	-0.41	0.69
Service quality management	6.38	0.60	6.17	0.62	6.63	0.50	-2.36	0.03
Risk prevention management	5.91	0.90	6.00	0.77	5.81	1.05	0.59	0.56
Human resources management	6.09	0.75	6.11	0.68	6.06	0.85	0.19	0.85
Ability to extract valuable material from large volumes of information	5.53	0.96	5.67	0.84	5.38	1.09	0.88	0.39
Knowledge of environmental factors (e.g., energy consumption, waste control, pollution)	5.15	0.86	5.00	0.91	5.31	0.79	-1.06	0.30
Computer skills	5.30	0.98	5.12	1.05	5.50	0.89	-1.12	0.27
Foreign language skills	5.62	1.42	6.11	0.76	5.06	1.77	2.20	0.04
Time management skills	5.82	0.83	5.61	0.78	6.06	0.85	-1.61	0.12
Self-confidence in your ability	6.21	0.81	5.83	0.86	6.63	0.50	-3.23	0.00
Knowledge of products and facilities	6.32	0.68	6.22	0.73	6.44	6.29	-0.91	0.37
Ability to solve detected problems	6.18	1.31	6.00	1.61	6.38	0.89	-0.83	0.41
Ability to plan and implement projects with innovative methods	6.24	0.69	6.17	0.62	6.31	0.79	-0.59	0.56
Ability to manage stress	5.79	0.95	5.61	0.78	6.00	1.10	-1.20	0.24
Ability to make decisions in uncertainty	6.24	0.75	6.17	0.71	6.33	0.82	-0.63	0.53
Ability to adapt to new situations	6.09	0.75	5.89	0.58	6.31	0.87	-1.64	0.11
Ability to clearly communicate with other employees	6.18	0.67	5.89	0.58	6.50	0.63	-2.93	0.01
Ability to be creative	5.97	0.67	6.06	0.64	5.83	0.72	0.78	0.44
Ability to forecast future trends	6.06	0.74	6.17	0.71	5.94	0.77	0.90	0.37
Knowledge of current academic and professional literature	5.47	0.93	5.78	0.81	5.13	0.96	2.16	0.04
Understanding of social protocol and etiquette	5.88	0.98	5.94	0.87	5.81	1.11	0.38	0.71
Ability to control emotional situations	6.00	0.92	5.83	0.86	6.19	0.98	-1.12	0.27
Ability to maintain ethical standards	6.26	0.79	5.94	0.80	6.63	0.62	-2.74	0.01
Ability to care for other employees	6.24	0.69	6.00	0.69	6.50	0.63	-2.20	0.04
Keeping in good physical condition	6.03	0.72	6.22	0.65	5.81	0.75	1.71	0.10

Table 5: Skills required to be a competent GM of a super deluxe hotel (n = 34)

Note: 7-point Likert-type scales were used and given the following corresponding values: least important (1); neutral (4); most important (7)

Personal business philosophy

Independent sample *t*-tests were performed to explore the mean differences between the Korean and foreign GMs on the personal business philosophy items (Table 6). An inspection of the mean scores indicated that responses on ten items concerning personal business philosophy were found to be significantly different ($p < 0.05$). Compared to foreign GMs, Korean GMs gave statistically higher scores for "I like to express to employees that the company is more important than my private life" ($p < 0.01$), "I try to run a hotel with risky but profitable strategies" ($p < 0.05$), "I like a hierarchical structure in decision-making" ($p < 0.05$), and "I feel it makes life worth living to work in the hotel industry" ($p < 0.05$).

Personal business philosophy	All GMs (N=34)		Korean GMs (N=18)		Foreign GMs (N=16)		<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
I like to express to employees that the company is more important than my private life.	3.88	1.71	4.61	1.46	3.00	1.60	3.02	0.01
I try to carry out my hotel's vision and mission.	6.32	0.77	6.11	0.76	6.56	0.73	-1.77	0.09
I try to run a hotel with risky but profitable strategies.	5.15	1.28	5.56	0.86	4.67	1.54	2.09	0.05
I like to encourage employees to become creative and develop innovative products.	6.15	0.66	6.00	0.59	6.31	0.70	-1.39	0.18
I would rather encourage employees than punish them for failure.	5.94	0.95	5.44	0.92	6.50	0.63	-3.84	0.00
I am concerned about employees' welfare.	6.00	0.78	5.61	0.78	6.44	0.51	-3.70	0.00
I like to encourage employees to participate in the decision-making process.	6.03	0.67	5.78	0.73	6.31	0.48	-2.49	0.02
I evaluate fairly on the basis of the employee's performance.	6.21	0.73	5.83	0.71	6.63	0.50	-3.72	0.00
I communicate frequently with employees and maintain a good relationship with them.	5.94	0.78	5.67	0.84	6.25	0.58	-2.38	0.02
I strive to meet the customer's standard of value.	6.24	0.71	6.06	0.73	6.47	0.64	-1.71	0.10
I personally sacrifice myself for my hotel's benefit.	5.18	1.47	5.22	1.26	5.13	1.73	0.17	0.87
I put more importance on company matters than on my family matters.	4.39	1.58	4.83	1.34	3.87	1.73	1.81	0.08
When acquaintances ask for favors, e.g. free use of hotel facilities or meals (except for promotional reasons), I refuse them.	4.79	1.62	5.00	1.37	4.53	1.89	0.82	0.42
My life is centered on hotel management.	5.39	0.97	5.33	0.91	5.47	1.06	-0.39	0.70
I like a hierarchical structure in decision making.	3.79	1.52	4.33	1.28	3.13	1.55	2.43	0.02

I think dismissal or layoff is possible when a hotel's business is unfavorable (at risk).	5.28	1.28	5.41	1.23	5.13	1.36	0.61	0.55
I am proud of myself as a GM.	6.00	1.62	5.78	1.17	6.27	0.88	-1.33	0.19
I would work for the hotel industry even though companies of other industries offer better benefits.	5.45	1.62	4.94	1.86	6.07	1.03	-2.19	0.04
It makes life worth living to work in the hotel industry.	5.64	1.34	5.83	1.25	5.40	1.45	0.91	0.04
I would prefer not to be relocated to a hotel in a foreign country.	5.00	2.18	5.61	1.65	4.27	2.55	1.76	0.09

Table 6: Personal business philosophy (n = 34)

Note: 7-point Likert-type scales were used and given the following corresponding values: strongly disagree (1); neutral (4); strongly agree (7)

Conclusions and Discussion

Figure 1 shows a snapshot of detailed information related to GMs' careers. The samples used for this study represent 65.2% of all super deluxe hotel GMs in Korea. The representative characteristics of a super deluxe hotel GM included that they were all male. This reflects the difficulty for females to work in this area and be promoted. Respondents were also likely to be college graduates, a similar finding to those of other studies (Nebel et al., 1995; Ruddy, 1989; Woods et al., 1998). Interestingly, most GMs in Korea graduated from college rather than a vocational education background. This result differs from that of Ladkin's (2002) Australian GM study.

Super deluxe hotel GMs' ages ranged from 51 to 55, which was older than the ages found in most other studies (Harper et al., 2005; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Nebel et al., 1995; Ruddy, 1989; Woods et al., 1998), yet similar to Kim's (1994) study that also investigated a Korean GM sample. The reasons why Korean GMs are older than GMs in other countries could include (a) the Korean domestic hotel market is relatively narrow, and (b) multinational chain hotels may hire foreign GMs expatriated by their headquarters. Thus, arguably, it is very competitive to move on to become a GM in Korea.

The average length of time it took to become a super deluxe hotel GM was 18.4 years after starting a hotel career. This was longer than in two US GM studies (9.3 years: Woods et al., 1998; 8.9 years: Nebel et al., 1995), a Mauritius GM study (13.1 years: Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000) and an Australian GM study (14 years: Ladkin, 2002). One of reasons that this study found that it took longer to become a super deluxe hotel GM compared to studies of other countries could be that it is more difficult to become a GM of a super deluxe hotel (the sample for this study) than a GM for a mid or low-level hotel.

Respondents started working in the hotel industry at an average age of 23.7. One of the reasons for this older age for starting a hotel career than in studies of other countries could be attributed to the two- to three-year obligatory military service term served by Korean men. As previously described, the finding that respondents worked longest in F&B in their careers is similar to that of other studies (Harper et al., 2005; Ladkin, 2000, 2002; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Nebel et al., 1995). This study found that the first hotel divisions of a respondent's career were F&B and room, whereas the last divisions included sales and marketing, room and F&B. Thus, it is recommended that incumbent employees or potential students who wish to become a GM should work in the F&B division.

Respondents placed importance on personal strategies to become a super deluxe hotel GM. These included being hard-working, honest, having long-term goals and adapting their aptitude to the hotel industry. These results are similar to those of Akrivos et al. (2007). Similarly, this study reported that utilising others' influence was considered the least important strategy. This result is the same as those of two studies (Akrivos et al., 2007; Ruddy, 1989), which reported family support or using personal networks as the least important factors in career development.

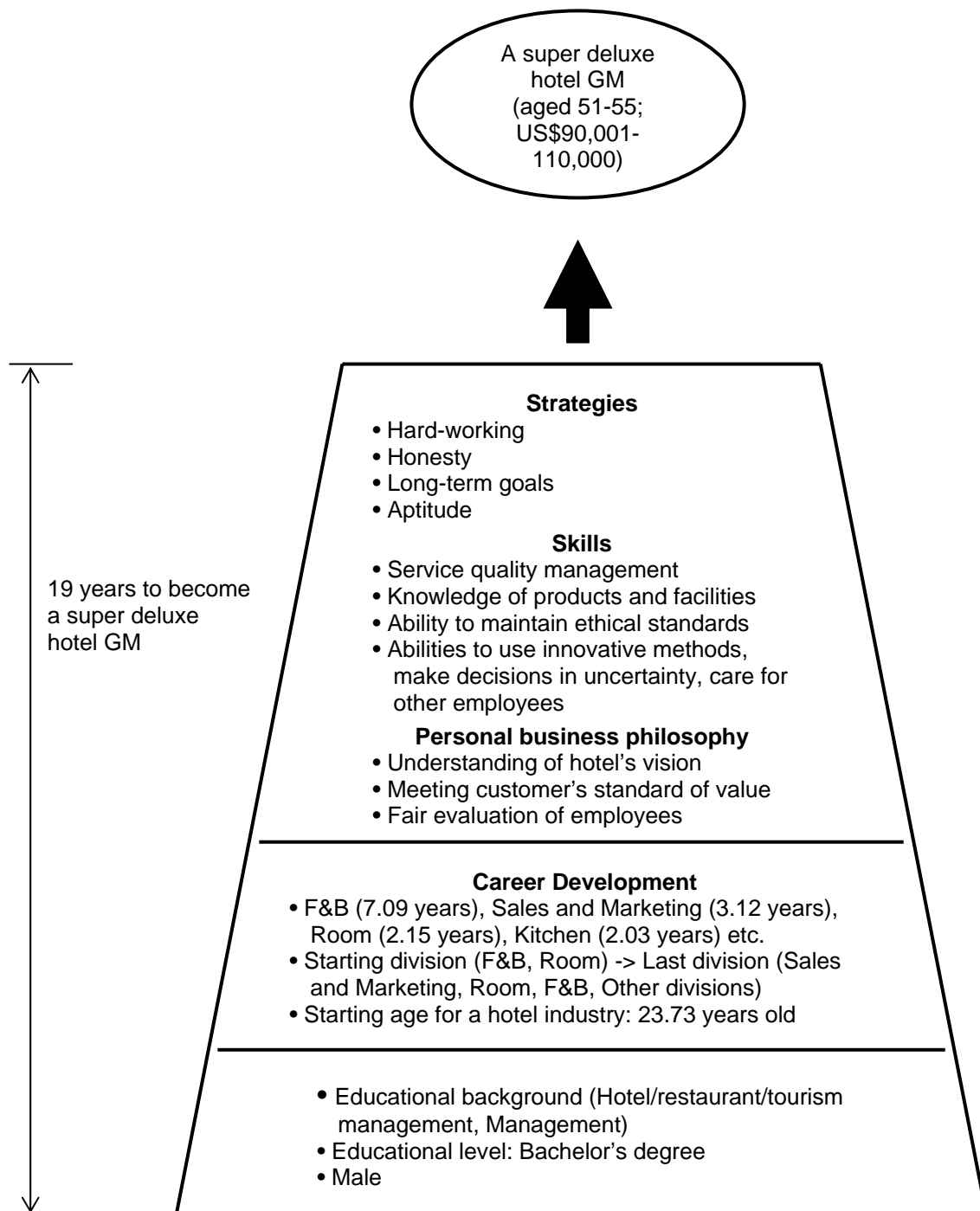


Figure 1: Career path of a super deluxe hotel GM

The findings of this study revealed that the most important aspects of being a competent GM were understanding hotel products or services, maintaining ethical standards and using employee-centred leadership. These results are similar to those of Kay and Russette (2000) who investigated US GMs' hospitality management competencies. Understanding a

particular hotel's vision, satisfying customers' expectations and evaluating employees fairly were regarded as the most important personal business philosophies. These factors lucidly indicate that the hotel industry is featured as a service-oriented and customer-centred business, and reveals the significance of managing human resources.

In comparing career paths between Korean GMs and foreign GMs, it was found that Korean GMs' main educational background was most likely to be in management, while foreign GMs' education was most likely to be based on hospitality or economics (Figures 2 and 3). In terms of educational level, Korean GMs were more likely to graduate with a bachelor's or master's degree, whereas most foreign GMs had only a bachelor's degree. In addition, the average starting age in the hotel industry showed a wide gap between Korean (27.2) and foreign GMs (20.0). This could be attributed to social culture differences: as Korean males serve in the military for two to three years, their advancement to GM is likely to be relatively late compared to foreign GMs.

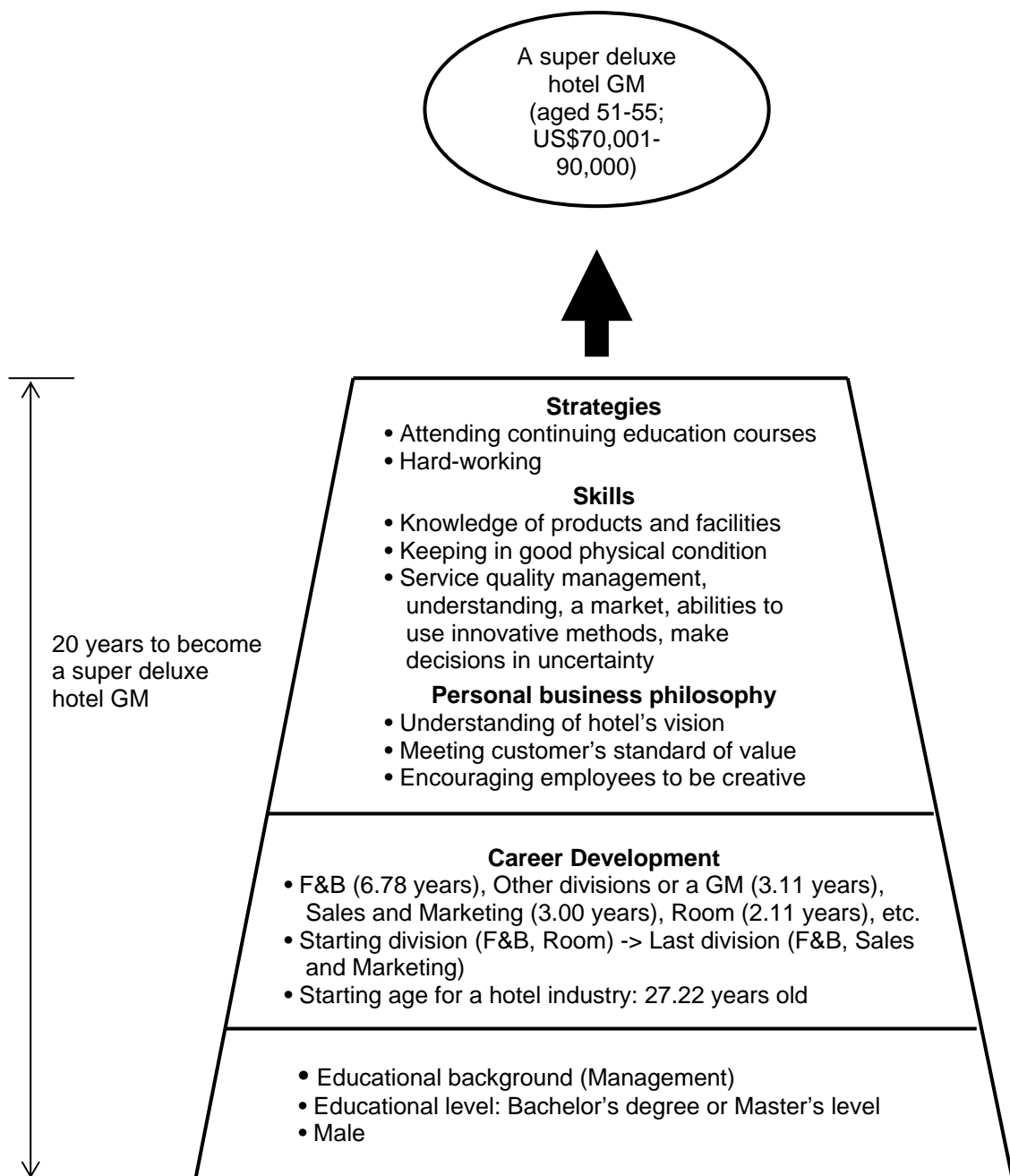


Figure 2: Career path of a super deluxe hotel GM (Korean GM)

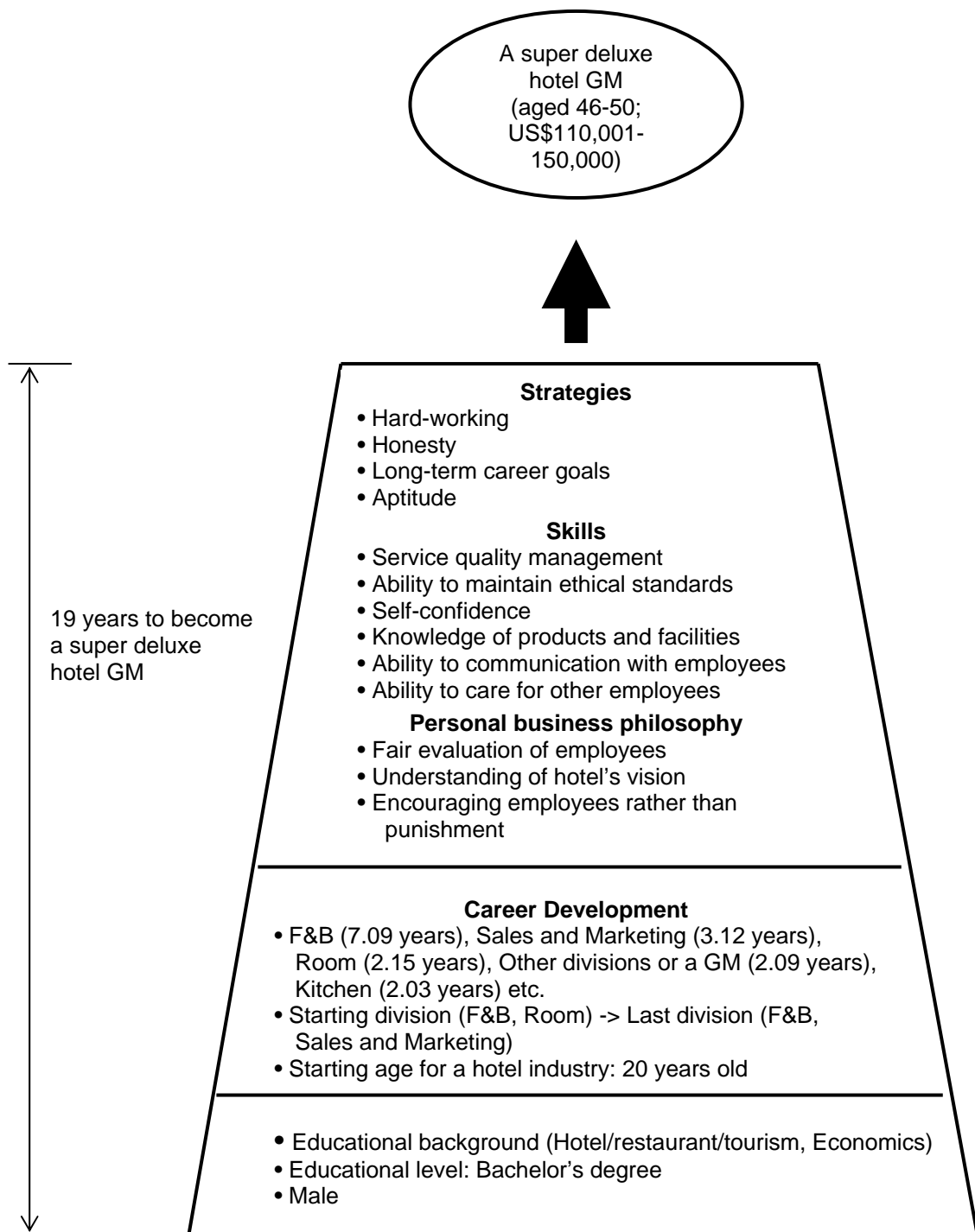


Figure 3: Career path of a super deluxe hotel GM (Foreign GM)

Foreign GMs (aged 46–50) tended to become super deluxe hotel GMs at younger ages than Korean GMs (aged 51–55). A potential reason is that all of the GMs positioned in multinational brand companies such as the Intercontinental Hotel, Walkerhill Hotel and Hilton Hotel were expatriates who were dispatched from headquarters. It is understandable that they are younger than Korean GMs who most likely moved slowly through fierce competition in the Korean domestic hotel industry environment.

A salary gap between the two groups was also discovered to be significant. Foreign GMs' salaries (US\$110,001–150,000) were higher than those of Korean GMs (US\$70,001–90,000). A possible reason for this is that foreign GMs might receive more benefits for staying in a foreign country. A point of similarity between the two groups was that the

majority went through the F&B division on their career track towards being a super deluxe hotel GM. These results correspond to those of other studies indicating the importance of F&B experience in a GM's career (Harper et al., 2005; Ladkin, 2000, 2002; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Nebel et al., 1995). However, Korean GMs indicated that F&B was the last division they experienced before becoming a super deluxe GM, whereas foreign GMs reported that they tended to be promoted to a super deluxe hotel GM from room division.

In a comparison of individual strategies to become a super deluxe hotel GM, hard work was something both groups had in common. Interestingly, Korean GMs placed emphasis on maintaining physical health and continuing educational opportunities, while foreign GMs placed emphasis on honesty and aptitude for the hospitality industry. Both groups commonly indicated that understanding of products and facilities and service quality management were important skills in being a super deluxe hotel GM. On the other hand, Korean GMs showed a greater tendency towards stressing the importance of maintaining good health, whereas foreign GMs indicated self-confidence as a necessary skill. Concerning personal business philosophy, an understanding of a hotel's vision was commonly considered important.

This study has some limitations. First, it was based on a sample of super deluxe hotel GMs, thus the population was small. Second, the size of the sample of super deluxe hotel GMs was so small that it was difficult to use multivariate analysis methods. However, this study represents a Korean case study, while most previous studies have been conducted in Europe or the US. Its results therefore fill a void in Asian studies through understanding Korean GMs' career paths. Yet it might not be realistic to compare the results of this study with those of previous studies due to differences in GM samples according to the year studied, hotel level, country level and location level.

This study, which was based on a sample of super deluxe hotel GMs in Korea, offers potentially useful insights in understanding a Korean GM. Its findings could assist incumbent hotel employees to understand their qualifications for the job and the essence of the career promotion system. Results could also be helpful to potential employees such as students who major in hospitality and tourism management through enabling them to know whether or not the major fits well with their aptitude.

Endnote

¹ The Korean hotel rank system consists of five levels determined by service quality, number of restaurants, scale of room, etc., with a super deluxe hotel being the highest level hotel. There were 46 Korean super deluxe hotels in 2005 (Korea Hotel Association, 2007).

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Submitted 7 August 2008. Final Version 30 October 2008. Accepted 18 February 2009.