Talent Management in the Thai Hotel Industry

การบริหารคนเก่งในธุรกิจโรงแรมในประเทศไทย

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Abstract

Talent management is critical in the hotel industry, where human capital is one of the key success factors to having a competitive advantage in the business. This study explored the meaning of talent, talent management strategies, and its implementation challenges in multinational hotel companies, with focus on the subsidiaries in Thailand. Face–to–face interviews were conducted with regional representatives from multinational hotel companies. Based on an in–depth analysis of the interviews and past literature, we proposed the Meaning of Talent Model, with nine elements that a talented person should possess, introduced strategies in three stages of hotel talent management (talent recruitment, talent development, and talent retention), and pointed out the challenges faced in talent management implementation. This study expands the existing knowledge of talent management in the Southeast Asian context, and the findings can be used for future studies to better understand talents, and effectively facilitate talent management.

Keywords : meaning of talent, talent recruitment, talent development, talent retention, hotel management, strategic human resource management

บทคัดย่อ

ทรัพยากรมนุษย์เป็นหนึ่งปัจจัยหลักของความสำเร็จในธุรกิจโรงแรม และการบริหารคนเก่งนั้น เป็นสิ่งที่สำคัญเพื่อที่จะได้เปรียบทางการแข่งขันด้านธุรกิจ งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้สำรวจความหมายของคำว่า คนเก่ง กลยุทธ์การบริหารและความท้าทายในการบริหารคนเก่งในโรงแรมบรรษัทข้ามชาติในประเทศไทย โดยสัมภาษณ์ตัวต่อตัวกับผู้เข้าร่วมผู้ซึ่งเป็นผู้ดูแลส่วนภูมิภาค หรือตัวแทนกลุ่มจากโรงแรมบรรษัท ข้ามชาติ จากข้อมูลเชิงลึกและการศึกษาเรื่องการบริหารจัดการคนเก่งที่ผ่านมา การศึกษานี้นำเสนอโมเดล ความหมาย ของคนเก่งซึ่งมีเก้าองค์ประกอบที่คนเก่งควรจะมี แนะนำกลยุทธ์สามขั้นตอนของการจัดการ คนเก่งในธุรกิจ โรงแรม (การสรรหาคนเก่ง การพัฒนาคนเก่ง และการรักษาไว้ซึ่งคนเก่ง) และระบุถึง ความท้าทายที่โรงแรม บรรษัทข้ามชาติในประเทศไทยได้เผชิญ บทความวิจัยนี้ได้เพิ่มความรู้ที่มีอยู่เกี่ยวกับ การบริหารคนเก่งในโซน เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ และสามารถนำเอาความรู้นั้นไปใช้ในการศึกษาในอนาคต เพื่อทำความเข้าใจคนเก่ง และเพิ่มประสิทธิภาพในการจัดการคนเหล่านี้ต่อไป

คำสำคัญ : ความหมายของคำว่าคนเก่ง การสรรหาคนเก่ง การพัฒนาคนเก่ง การรักษาไว้ซึ่งคนเก่ง การบริหารธุรกิจโรงแรม การจัดการทรัพยากรมนุษย์เชิงยุทธศาสตร์

Introduction

Since the phrase "War for Talent" by a management consulting firm, McKinsey & Company, in 1997, the term "Talent Management" (TM) has received an exceptional degree of interest by both academics and practitioners (Berry, 2007; Birschel, 2006; DeKrey and Griffin, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; DeKrey, 2010; Piansoongnern & Anurit, 2010). It refers to an increasingly competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees (Michaels, Handfield–Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). McKinsey & Company soon realized that they had named a phenomenon that many had been experiencing, but have not really been captured. In 2000, they completed another research to update their initial findings, and concluded that the war for talent is a business reality and will persist for at least the next two decades. The world's progression from the Industrial Age to the Information Age have caused the value of a company's hard assets to decline in relative to intangible assets such as propriety intellectual capital, winning brands, and innovative ideas.

Research in TM is specifically important in the hotel industry, because employees are the centric resources in providing its services to customers, and they are the gateway to a hotel company's products. "First–line" employees have to match the customers' needs with their company's service offerings, thereby, directly promoting the company's overall image of products and services (Gounaris, 2008). A company that has the ability to attract, develop, and retain the best talents will have a major competitive advantage far into the future (Michaels et al., 2001), and knowing how to manage talents can contribute to a firm's competitive advantage to be a sustainable one (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Despite strong interests in TM in businesses and consulting firms, TM is an area characterized by

a lack of definitions and theoretical frameworks (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Scullion, Collings, & Caligiuri, 2010), and it is still a new and challenging human resource issue (Piansoongnern & Anurit, 2010).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) forecasted an increase in international arrivals of 3.8% per year between 2010 and 2020 (UNWTO, 2014), the reported demand being strongest in Asia Pacific, especially in the Southeast Asian regions. With the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) economic integration, tourism would be further facilitated, adding pressure to multinational hotel companies operating in the region. Already being an industry known for its high employee turnover rate (Maxwell and MacLean, 2008), these companies would face even more challenges in managing their human capital now than ever before.

The current study examined the meaning of the term talent, the strategies of TM, and challenges in TM implementation in subsidiaries of foreign multinational hotel companies in one of the Southeast Asian countries, Thailand.

Theoretical Background
Meaning of talent
Michaels, Handfield–Jones and Axelrod (2001) defined talents as people having intrinsic abilities. Natural talents are secure and they are the key to effectiveness (Rath and Conchie, 2008). Intuition, which a talent possess, is something that is not instructed, but is a cognitive ability of a mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through experience and the senses (Tansley et al., 2006). Without requisite talent, it is not possible to possess true strength or abilities (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001).

Hatum (2010) referred to talent as the skills or capabilities that allow a person to perform a certain task, and according to Tansley et al. (2006), it can be considered as a complex combination of employees' skills and knowledge. Many researchers agreed to this, including Goffee and Jones (2007), Hatum (2010), Ingham (2007), Michaels, Handfield–Jones and Axelrod (2001), Philips and Roper (2009), Piansoongnern and Anurit (2010) and Ready and Conger (2007). Piansoongnern and Anurit (2010) have observed that skills and knowledge must be obtained through learning and practice. Then, people would later develop their own internal strengths. Likewise, Michaels, Handfield–Jones and Axelrod (2001, p.xii) defined talent as "the sum of a person's abilities – his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character, and drive". Similarly, Philips and Roper (2009) defined talents as technical experts in their field of work. Skills must be carried out and practiced for a person to gain experience and exposure. Previous studies have indicated that talents do not only exist naturally, but must be learnt, practiced, and cultivated by experience.

Talent also includes an ability to learn and grow (Hatum, 2010; Michaels, Handfield–Jones and Axelrod, 2001), such as intellectual capacity, judgment, reasoning, intelligence quotient (IQ), and the ability to quickly familiarize oneself with something or digest information. It also encompasses certain attitudes, characters, and behaviors that are industry specific (Ingham, 2007; Michaels, Handfield–Jones and Axelrod, 2001; Philips and Roper, 2009). Morton (2004) defined talent as an individual who has the capability to make a notable difference to the current and the future of a company. Ingham (2007), Philips and Roper (2009), Ready and Conger (2007) and Tansley et al. (2006) supported this idea. Additionally, Goffee and Jones (2007), related talent ideas, knowledge, and skills to the potential to produce the disproportionate value from the resource they have available for them.

In some organizations, one might have to be at a certain level of management or the organization hierarchy to be considered as desirable talent (Piansoongnern and Anurit, 2010). Ingham (2007) deemed people in key positions, especially team leaders, as talents and as individuals who have specific capabilities to make contributions to an organization. Likewise, Philips and Roper (2009) defined talent as a core group of leaders, technical experts and other key contributors that are quickly becoming an organization's most important asset. Groysberg, Nanda and Nohria (2004) called such talents a star, and outlined them as those who rank one of the best in the industry. On a slightly different note, Ready and Conger (2007) defined talent as a group of employees who have above average knowledge and skills, and are ready to be promoted to executive positions, thus being the best people in an organization. It is in every organization's best interest to make a decision of how and who to label as a high potential or talent (Piansoongnern and Anurit, 2010).

Talent Management

Downs (2012) defined TM as the activities and processes throughout the employee life cycle: recruiting and hiring, on boarding, training, professional development, performance management, workforce planning, leadership development, career development, cross-functional work assignments, succession planning, and employee exit process. Swapna and Raja (2012) agreed that TM is identifying, recruiting, hiring, and developing people with strong potential to succeed in an organization. According to Berger and Berger (2011), TM is a meaningful, shared, conscious, and deliberate approach undertaken to attract, develop, and retain people with the aptitude and abilities to meet the defined current and future organizational needs in terms of capability, behavior, attitude, knowledge, and style.

Arguably, Lewis and Heckman (2006) pointed out that it is very difficult to identify a precise meaning of TM, because of its confusion regarding definitions of terms used, and differences in assumptions made by authors who write about the issue. For instance, Lewis and Heckman (2006) noted that the terms talent strategy, succession management, and

human resource planning are often used interchangeably. So, before presenting a definition of TM, it is necessary to first develop an understanding of what TM encompasses by discussing some of the attributes commonly used to characterize it.

Hatum (2010) defined TM as a strategic activity aligned with the firm's business strategy that aims to attract, develop, and retain talented employees at each level of the organization. His definition was adopted in the current study. He expressed the reality that all levels of employees in an organization contribute to its performance. This conformed to Guthridge, Komm and Lawson (2008), who suggested that TM should be targeted at all levels of the organization. From the above discussion, it can be simply concluded that there are three main stages of TM, and they are talent recruitment, talent development, and talent retention. The strategies in TM in these stages will be further explored in the hotel industry in the current study.

Challenges faced in implementing Talent Management

An overview of TM literature by Cappelli and Keller (2014) summarized TM challenges into internal talents and external talents. From the internal talents point of view, there are challenges in identifying the internal talent pool, retaining the talent pool, career management, staffing international subsidiaries, and the development of global leaders. Despite most of the attention of TM challenges in internal talents, Cappelli and Keller (2014) pointed out that there are increasing researches that suggest a growing reliance on external hiring, for example, there are evidences of notable premiums for external recruits as compared to internal recruits (Agrawal et al., 2006; Bidwell, 2011). External hiring is facilitated with simple tools available today such as executive search firms, online job boards, and social media. However, external recruits exhibit lower performance for three years, and are more likely to quit their job or be terminated by the organization (Bidwell, 2011). Key challenges that influence TM in the hospitality and tourism industry were summarized by D'Annunzio–Green, Maxwell and Watson (2008) as having opportunities for talent to develop in all levels of the organization, limited level of commitment of employees and senior management to TM, imprinting a talent mindset and supportive organizational culture, ensuring that internal human resource systems integrate with TM strategies, continuously adapting TM practices to keep changing organizational needs, raising awareness of TM terminology and recognizing the value of TM.

Research Methodology

The research methodology was based on an exploratory qualitative research approach using semi–structured face–to–face interviews. This method was selected because it can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the subject, and it allowed the interviewer to respond to individual comments with extensive probing (Wilson, 2006).

The interview was semi-structured, because a completely unstructured interview had the risk of not eliciting the topics or themes more closely related to the research questions under consideration (Rabionet, 2011).

Purposive sampling was employed due to the particular nature of the targeted respondents, who were regional representatives of multinational hotel companies responsible for managing talents across different hotel brands in Thailand. They were deemed to have the expertise in the areas that were relevant to this research. Emails were sent to various hotels under the management of multinational hotel companies in Thailand, addressing the General Manager or the Human Resources Director, informing them of the intent of this study. For the companies that were willing to participate, the contact details of the regional representatives were given to the researchers. Invitations for participation were then sent to all regional representatives. A few days after the invitation were sent, follow up telephone calls were made to the respondents or their assistants to schedule the interview date, time and location. There were positive responses from five multinational hotel companies, where respondents proved to be appropriate for the research. These representatives hold the responsibility of managing talents totaling 101 hotel properties across Thailand.

Table 1 : Participating Companies and Respondent Details

Company	Headquarters	Respondent's Position
A	United States	Regional Director of Training, Asia Pacific
B	France	Director Brand Academy Asia Pacific
C	United States	Area Director, Human Resources Thailand
D	United Kingdom	Human Resources Business Partner, South East Asia
E	United States	Regional Human Resource Director (Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia)

The locations for conducting the interviews were places that were convenient for the respondents, such as various hotels or the respondents' offices. The interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. With the respondents' consent, all interviews were audio–recorded, and were later transcribed and sent to the participants for their verification to further ensure a mutual understanding of the areas in this study. The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the data. It is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and is a process used for encoding qualitative information where the encoding requires an explicit code. A theme being a pattern uncovered from the information, which, at a minimum, describes and

organizes the observations and, at a maximum, can interpret aspects of phenomena (Boyatzis, 1998). For confidentiality purposes, the respondents and their organizations are coded as Respondent or Company A, B, C, D and E in the findings, and in the subsequent discussions. More information about the interview respondents' positions and companies' headquarters can be seen in Table 1.

Results

Meaning of Talent

All respondents viewed a talented individual as people who have a natural ability. Having innate abilities, being service–minded, and passionate were frequently mentioned by the respondents, as natural domains for talents in the hotel industry. For example, Respondent A suggested that, "*talent equates passion, which is stronger than attitude*", it is so natural that, "*if you love the job you do, you will never work a day in your life*".

The majority of the respondents believed that there are industry–specific skills and knowledge that are required for a person to be considered a talent. Apart from being naturally gifted in service, talents have to work hard on their skills to become an expert in what they do as well. An example of such a skill was communication skills, which "*are essential regardless of the position. You need to be able to work and communicate with others… whether you are front–of–house or back of house, it doesn't matter*" (Respondent B).

Most of the respondents viewed practice and experience as requirements to be considered as a talent. Technical experience had been mentioned by many respondents, and a naturally talented person had to gain job related experience, go through certain stages of their job, before reaching a point of being what multinational hotel companies would consider as talents.

The next aspects that were looked out for in talents were the intelligence and a person's ability to learn. A few respondents emphasized the importance of continuous learning by bringing up the examples of their leaders as continuous learners. An example given was critical thinking, which allows a talented person to bring change and innovation to the organization. "*It doesn't mean that whatever the hotel industry have been doing for the last twenty years is right for today. It may not be right for your hotel and your customers. So do you have the critical thinking to change to suit?*" said Respondent E.

Talents have to possess industry specific attitudes, characters, and behaviors. Hotel talents have a humbled approach, a global mindset, and a service attitude. They are people who are hungry to improve, open-minded, trustworthy, motivated, inspired, customer–focused, acceptable to feedback, and are able to work in a team. In addition to this, talents "*will not look at a problem as a problem, but [they] will look at it as a challenge for [their] personal growth*" (Respondent A).

Majority of the respondents also believed that talents should have the potential to produce a notable difference in their workplace. They should be people who have the ability to do more than what they are currently doing, truly deliver the organizational brand, and are able to be the future of the company. Moreover, talents should meet and deliver specific needs of the organization over the changes in time, "*meaning that not one talent fits all*" (Respondent E).

Only Respondent B considered people in key positions or leaders as a talent, where the classification into the talent criteria "*depends on the position*". However, the other respondents have not mentioned that talents should be of certain positions in the organization.
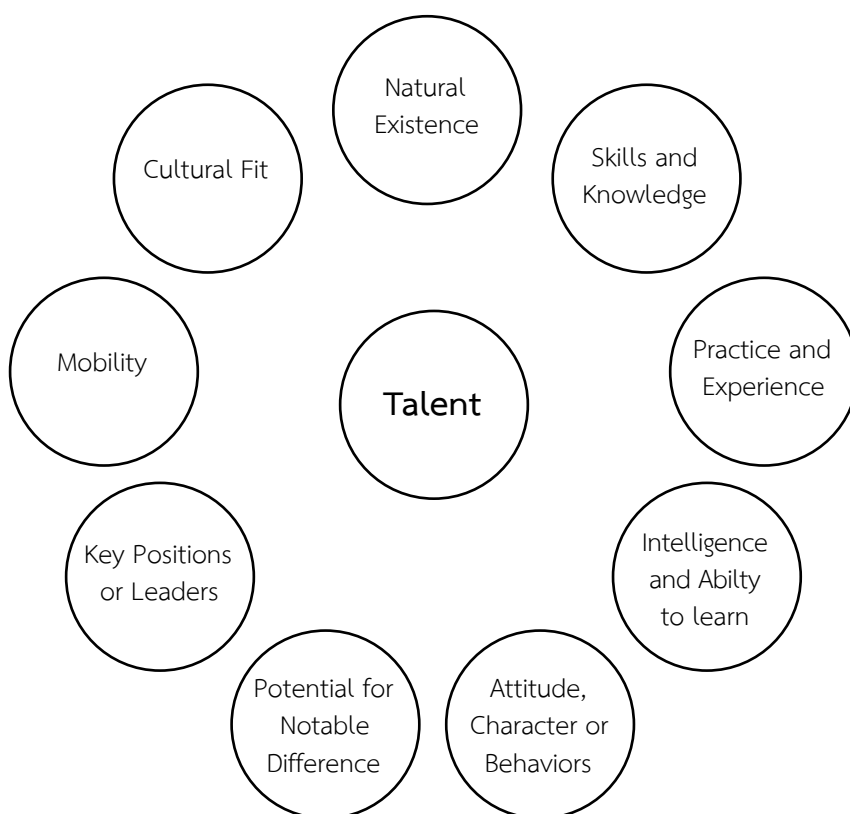

Figure 1 : The Meaning of Talent.

Addition to the seven dimensions suggested from past literature (i.e., natural existence, skills and knowledge, practice and experience, intelligence and ability to learn, attitude, character or behaviors, potential for notable difference, and key positions or leaders), a person's mobility and their cultural fit were suggested as factors to be included in the meaning of talents by Respondent B. Overall, the findings from this study revealed that there are a total of nine dimensions to the meaning of talent (Figure 1).

Talent Management

Three common strategies were identified in each of the TM stages. In the recruitment stage, the multinational hotel companies' strategies were employer and hotel branding, behavioral and situation interviews, and internal recruitments. In the development stage, the strategies were coaching/mentoring, job rotation, and the freedom to learn via e–learning. Finally, in the retention stage, the strategies were providing non–financial compensation, support from the top, and organizational culture.

Talent Recruitment

Majority of the respondents considered their employer brand and hotel brands as a form of marketing tool for attracting talents. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), an employer brand is the company's image as seen by the employees, built with the power to attract and retain the best employees of the organization. Apart from having an employer brand, multinational hotel companies have individual hotel brands, which not only appeals to the hotel guests, but to potential and existing employees as well. "*It is how we create, innovate and present these brands that appeal to these applicants. Some applicants are very specific about the brand they would want to work in, nothing else,*" said Respondent E. Similarly, Respondent A shared that, "*certain people cannot associate with some brands...[as it is not] linked to their behavior, attitude, and personal lifestyle*".

The companies used behavioral and situational interviewing techniques in the talent recruitment stage. Behavioral interviews focus on behaviors by asking candidates to describe what they did in the past, whereas in situational interviews, future hypothetical situations are proposed, and the candidates are asked what they would do in that situation (Barclay, 2001). During behavioral interviews, "*I would ask them about their experience in the past, like what did you do, what happened between you and your friends, how did you handle that,*" mentioned Respondent C. An example of a situational interview question by Respondent A was, "*if a subsidiary in your department has not enough staff and ask for your help, are you ready even if it is your holiday?*"

Most companies preferred to recruit for talent within their own organization. For example, Respondent B stated that, "once they are with us, that's when we can truly identify the talent, because we have systems and processes in place". The companies mutually agreed that people with potential to grow are looked out for, because these people can be developed in the way that the organization would like them to. Respondent A added that there are still people who have natural talents, and if the organization were able to pinpoint those talents early, it will be a competitive advantage for the company.

Talent Development

The respondents mentioned coaching and mentoring interchangeably. All respondents referred to coaches/mentors as people who have a higher position, and are deemed to be able to guide the talent in his or her development. For example, a coach/mentor to a hotel General Manager would be the Regional General Manager, or the Area Vice President of the multinational hotel company. Usually, a talent would be partnered with one coach/mentor. All the respondents agreed that coaching/mentoring programs are important in the talent development process. Coaches/mentors have to know the difference in guiding the different generations, for example, Respondent A pointed out that, *"generation X likes to be coached step by step, however, Generation Y and Z do not".* The development processes are also different in each region *"because each country have a different level of maturity,"* said Respondent B.

At the stage of talent development, all the multinational hotel companies believed that job rotation is an important strategy. Campion et al. (1994) suggested two beneficial explanations to job rotation. The first being that it stimulates employee learning and increases human capital accumulation, and the second being that job rotation reduces boredom and keeps employees motivated in their job. Apart from the *"learning aspect in technical skills, they are cross–exposed internally or externally to other sister hotels in the company,"* mentioned Respondent B.

All the respondents also agreed that talents should have the freedom to learn and develop as per their own personal needs at their convenient speed. This is achieved through self–paced e–learning, available in all multinational hotel companies through the company's intranet website. Some of the companies partner with Cornell University in New York for their talents to take developmental programs via e–Cornell. The whole development process *"is about being yourself within your job and enjoying things that you do, and if you have a particular interest, you bring it to the attention of your leader and see if you can develop that within the property,"* said Respondent D.

Talent Retention

In order to retain talented employees, *"people will always say money"* (Respondent D). However, most of the respondents viewed that non–financial compensation is the key motivational factor for talents to remain in the organization. Some companies' headquarters take it very seriously and conduct studies on this matter with Aon Hewitt, a human capital consulting services Company, and universities. *"We find that it is not money, but it is career progression and recognition of talent… so we make sure that it's as simple as doing all of the promises that we make,"* indicated Respondent D. Some respondents suggested that financial compensation might be more significant to younger talents, *"because they are the ones who are starting to buy their first car, first house, and building up a family"* (Respondent C).

Having support from the top was emphasized by majority of the respondents as another important strategy in talent retention. To the respondents, it meant receiving supportive or encouraging actions from people with high positions in the companies' headquarters and regional offices. Talents are led to be involved in a part of a big picture (a multinational hotel company managing many hotel brands across the globe), and not in just one hotel alone through their intranet and hotel communities. Talents could seek help from a cross spectrum of expertise and network that the multinational hotel companies have, and this is well communicated on a day–to–day basis. Support from the top is actively expressed, for example, there are Talent Days conducted by Company B, where talents of different hotels in the region come together to be thanked and appreciated by the company's senior management. From the events, talents would feel special, and a mutual understanding of the company's progress would be communicated as well.

Among other strategies that the hotels used to retain talents, organization culture appears to be the most important factor, because it portrays the hotel brand and its promises to employees. Multinational hotel companies manage a variety of hotel brands with the cultures revolving around similar concepts of engagement, family–like atmosphere, learning, developing, acceptable to change, two–way communication, clear values and stretched goals. "*The very simple strategy is that people are the center of our world*," mentioned Respondent D.

Challenges in TM Implementation

There were many challenges in TM that were contributed by the respondents. The most difficult area that the respondents agreed upon is leadership. Although, coaching/ mentoring is critical in talent management, it is not easy to find someone who can be a talent's coach/mentor. These are leaders of a higher position, who are able to guide the talent in his or her development. Usually, all coaches/mentors are heads of departments or managers, who are busy with operating the hotels, and it is a challenge to have time to tailor coach/mentor someone. Additionally, Respondent E pointed out that, "*if they don't know how to do it [coaching/mentoring], it's gone... so the wonderful programs are not working effectively if you have department heads who don't know how to implement, and that is the biggest challenge*".

Mobility is another issue for TM in Thailand. Many talents are unwilling to move away from their region. For example, talents want to be in the cities, such as Bangkok and Chiangmai, and not in hotels in less developed cities, or even in other countries. "*This creates some limitations in terms of advancements*", said Respondent B. Career growth and opportunities are available, but talents do not want to relocate. The situation can be worsened with other hotel companies presenting opportunities in city hotels, and headhunts talents away quickly.

Another significant challenge faced by hotel companies is the talent fit. The multinational hotel companies do not own the hotels that they manage, and therefore, there is always the influence of the hotel owners. An example was that the owners might want their hotel General Manager to speak a particular language aside from English and Thai, or, they might want a General Manager with a lot of experience in sales and marketing. Unfortunately, the multinational hotel company's talents who are ready to take up the role might not fit those needs. Nonetheless, they are people who are able to take the responsibilities and are qualified, but not just what the hotel owners prefer. Thus, the company and the owners are frequently not able to agree upon a talent that fits.

Discussion

Meaning of Talent

The findings correspond to previous studies (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001; Goffee and Jones, 2007; Groysberg, Nanda and Nohria, 2004; Hatum, 2010; Ingham, 2007; Michaels, Handfield–Jones and Axelrod, 2001; Morton, 2004; Philips and Roper, 2009; Piansoongnern and Anurit, 2010; Rath and Conchie, 2008; Ready and Conger, 2007; Tansley et al., 2006). The seven key characteristics of talent identified in previous research (i.e., natural existence, skills and knowledge, practice and experience, intelligence and ability to learn, attitude, character or behaviors, potential for notable difference, and key positions or leaders) have been identified by the respondents to be the characteristics of talents in the hotel industry in Thailand. Addition to these seven dimensions, mobility and cultural fit of a person also plays a part in the meaning of talent. This is because the hotel companies are multinational companies, and a talent should be able to relocate with a global mindset.

Talent Management

Overall, the findings pointed out that there are three different stages of TM in the hotel industry: talent recruitment, talent development and talent retention. The strategies in the recruitment stage were employer and hotel branding, behavioral and situation interviews, and internal recruitments. In the development stage, the strategies were coaching/mentoring, job rotation, and the freedom to learn via e–learning. In the retention stage, the strategies were providing non–financial compensation, support from the top, and organizational culture.

Talent Recruitment

There exist strong marketing efforts to recruit both external and internal talents via the employer brand and hotel brands, with focus on the match between the companies' hotel brands and the candidate's identity association and personal lifestyle. Behavioral interviews and situational interviews are widely used in talent recruitment by practitioners to analyze what candidates have done (past) and what they would do (future). The findings

indicated clear preferences for talent recruitment within the company, as there are systems in place to observe the background of the talents, but there was also the belief in external talent recruitment, suggesting that there is not enough talents growth within the multinational hotel companies to meet to the demands of the subsidiaries in Thailand.

Talent Development

In talent development, the findings demonstrated that coaches/mentors style their coaching/mentoring according to individual talent needs, generational needs, and the maturity of the country. On–the–job trainings are used to develop talents by rotating them to work in different departments within their working hotels, to sister hotels in Thailand or other countries subsidiaries. Apart from on–the–job trainings, e–learning platforms are made available to talents to customize their own learning phase, and allow room to explore their own interests.

Talent Retention

The findings of the current study revealed that efforts are geared towards non–financial compensations in talent retention, as it is believed to be more important than financial compensations. Nevertheless, the situation might be different for the younger generations. Moreover, each of the hotel companies made efforts in constantly reminding their talents on a day–to–day basis regarding their role in the bigger picture, to emphasize that there is always support from the top, in the form of helpful networks and global communities. Similar organizational cultures were also found to play important roles in retaining talents in the hotel industry in Thailand.

Challenges in TM Implementation

TM is a challenging issue in the hotel industry today. Leadership, mobility and talent fit are key issues faced by the multinational hotel companies in Thailand. The challenge of leadership not having the skills and the time to tailor coach/mentor talented individuals corresponds to the concluding commentary by D'Annunzio–Green, Maxwell and Watson (2008), that there is a limited level of commitment of senior management towards TM. In our findings, there was a primary focus on the challenges of TM in internal talents, and not external talents. Mobility and talent fit are consistent with the study done by Cappelli and Keller (2014), where mobility is one of the challenges in talent pool retention, and talent fit is one of the challenges in filling strategic subsidiary positions internationally.

Contributions of the Study and Managerial Implications

This research expands the existing knowledge of TM by studying the hotel industry in Thailand. To the authors' knowledge, few research studies have been conducted to investigate TM in the hotel industry, and most TM researches are Western–based, Chinese–based, or Middle Eastern–based, without direct implications to talents in the

Southeast Asian context. The findings of this study can be used as a stepping–stone for future studies to better understand talents, and effectively facilitate TM in Southeast Asia and in the hotel industry.

The study has shown that there are substantial interests in TM by hotel practitioners. However, there is no formal framework in the meaning of talent. This leads to confusion and subjectivity in talent identification and recruitment, and eventually leads to ineffective TM. This study thus provides the model that managers can use to identify talent in their divisions prior to implementing the three stages of TM (talent recruitment, talent development, and talent retention).

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study is limited to the views of regional or cluster representatives of multinational hotel companies' subsidiaries in Thailand. The results can neither generalize the meaning of talent, strategies in TM, and the challenges in implementing TM in other industries, nor other region. The topic under discussion is considered as one of the key success factors in the hospitality industry today. Some detailed information and organizational strategies are confidential to the hotel companies, and are not able to be discussed by the respondents or included as a published research. This study also presents TM strategies and challenges faced; however, there is no measure of success in executing the strategies and no remedies for the challenges discussed.

Conclusion

Talented individuals have to be managed differently so that they are developed to their fullest potential. Otherwise, they may lose the potential to excel in their strengths, and may find the opportunity to excel elsewhere. Keeping in mind that human capital is one of the key success factors to having a competitive edge in hotel business, the views of experts from multinational hotel companies were studied, and this study proposed the Meaning of Talent Model, with nine elements of talent, discussed strategies in TM (talent recruitment, talent development, and talent retention), and pointed out the challenges faced in TM implementation. Without the proper TM strategies and practices to handle employees' talents, hotel companies will continue to experience a high turnover rate, no matter how many talented employees they have in their company's talent pool.

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