

OUT-OF-COUNTRY TRAINING FOR HOTEL MIDDLE MANAGERS IN JORDAN: SELECTION CRITERIA AND IMPLICATIONS

Mousa Masadeh

Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Jordan.

ABSTRACT: Training in the hotel and tourism industry remains a largely unexplored topic. This article is based on the results of a research investigating companies' decisions to invest in out-of-country training (OCT) for middle managers in international hotel chains (IHCs) in Jordan. Examining the issue of candidate selection offers important insights into upper management decision-making and the links between training and middle managers' career trajectories. In this article, the results of a survey completed by 207 middle managers in Jordan's twenty-nine IHCs are analysed and discussed. The study demonstrates the lack of clear selection criteria for coveted OCT training opportunities. Nevertheless, it reveals that two factors are of great importance: employees who had been in the industry longer and those with longer managerial experience were more likely to have undertaken training abroad. The study confirms the managers' overwhelming support for OCT, and the perceived importance of training for promotion. **Keywords:** international hotel chains, out-of-country training, middle managers, selection, Jordan.

RESUMEN: La formación profesional en la industria hotelera y turística sigue siendo un tema poco trabajado. Este artículo se basa en los resultados de una pesquisa que buscó investigar las decisiones de determinadas empresas en invertir en *out-of-country training* (OCT) (formaciones fuera del país) para gerentes intermedios en cadenas de hoteles internacionales (IHCs) en la Jordania. Una análisis del proceso de selección de candidatos revela importantes conclusiones sobre la tomada de decisiones en puestos de gerencia superiores y las relaciones entre la formación recibida y las escojas profesionales de gerentes intermedios. En este artículo analizamos y discutimos los resultados de una investigación completada por 207 gerentes intermedios en veintinueve IHCs en Jordania. El estudio demuestra la falta de un criterio de selección claro para las oportunidades de OCT más solicitadas. Sin embargo, el estudio revela que existen dos factores de extrema importancia: empleados con más tiempo de trabajo en la industria y con más experiencia de gerencia tienden a haber hecho una formación en el extranjero. El estudio confirma el apoyo incondicional de los gerentes a OCT, ya la obvia importancia de recibir formación con intención de promoción. **Palabras llave:** cadenas de hoteles internacionales, aprendizajes fuera do país, gerentes intermedios, selección, Jordania.

RESUMO: A formação profissional na indústria hoteleira e turística continua a ser um tema pouco explorado. Este artigo baseia-se nos resultados de uma pesquisa que procurou investigar as decisões de determinadas empresas em investir em *out-of-country training* (OCT) (formações fora do país) para gerentes intermédios em cadeias de hotéis internacionais (IHCs) na Jordânia. Uma análise do processo de seleção de candidatos revela conclusões importantes sobre a tomada de decisões em postos de gerência superiores e as relações entre a formação recebida

Mousa Masadeh is an assistant professor in hotel and tourism management at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University in Jordan. His research interests and expertise include: hotel management, human resource management, tourism and hospitality education, leadership development, and gender in tourism. Author's contact: jordantourism@hotmail.com

e as escolhas profissionais dos gerentes intermédios. Neste artigo analisamos e discutimos os resultados de um inquérito completado por 207 gerentes intermédios em vinte e nove IHCs na Jordânia. O estudo demonstra a falta de um critério de seleção claro para as oportunidades de OCT mais solicitadas. Contudo, o estudo revela que existem dois fatores de extrema importância: funcionários com mais tempo de trabalho nesta indústria e com mais experiência de gerência tendem a ter passado por uma formação no estrangeiro. O estudo confirma o apoio incondicional dos gerentes à OCT, e a óbvia importância de se receber formação com vista a uma promoção. **Palavras-chave:** cadeias de hotéis internacionais, estágios fora do país, gerentes intermédios, seleção, Jordânia.

INTRODUCTION

Training in the hotel and tourism industry remains a largely unexplored topic. This article examines the results of research exploring companies' decisions to invest in out-of-country training (OCT) for middle managers in international hotel chains (IHCs) in Jordan. The study investigates the implications of training outside of Jordan, which normally entails travel to Western countries, particularly the USA, where most IHCs are based. It also examines and analyses the attitudes toward OCT, the benefits and usefulness of OCT, barriers to OCT and the decision of IHCs to invest in OCT in Jordan's hotel industry.

Jordan offers a unique and fertile context for investigation, not only because of the importance of tourism for the local economy but also because of the sentiment, widely echoed by respondents in this study, that training in Western countries offered significant advantages compared to training in the Middle East region. This is especially pertinent given the unique nature of customer service in the hotel business, where cultural sensitivity and open-mindedness are paramount in gaining and retaining the loyalty of a diverse international clientele. Thus, as the present study found, training abroad was highly valued by managers who overwhelmingly associated it with organizational benefits like increased productivity and employee loyalty—along with improved career prospects for trainees.

Among the key deterrents to companies' decision to invest in OCT, not surprisingly, financial concerns were felt to be paramount. Given the high cost associated with sending employees abroad on training programs, combined with managers' typical eagerness to participate, one of the key concerns that arose was how the ideal candidates for OCT shall be selected. Examining the issue of candidate selection in greater depth offers important insights into upper management decision-making. Because there is so little current research on the subject of training and hotel middle management, it also provides a starting point to further understand this demographic which plays a key organisational role mediating between front-line customer service staff and upper management.

The present study was originally conducted as part of the author's Ph.D thesis project, using quantitative analysis of survey results. The

setting for this study was international hotel chains (IHCs) in Jordan's four main tourist cities (Amman, Aqaba, Petra, and Dead Sea), which include all of the country's IHCs. This environment was ideal since sending managers abroad is an established practice in IHCs all over the world. Their financial resources and access to a worldwide network of hotels in the same chain allow them to carry out OCT with relative ease. Moreover, because IHCs are associated with the most advanced industry practices, policies and technologies, these hotels have both the need and the capacity to implement effective international training programs for managers in developing countries.

Training in the Hotel Industry – Literature Review

Although there are a number of studies investigating training practices in various industries, there is presently little research devoted specifically to the hospitality sector. Data on human resources in the hotel industry is difficult to come by (Litteljohn, 1997; International Labour Organization, 2001; Magablih, 2006) and in Jordan such data was and is still almost entirely non-existent (Alwahidi, 1990; Magablih, 2006). As McGunnigle and Jameson (2000) argue, further research is needed at all levels of management in order to better understand hotel management practices. Given that management and professional positions involve specialised training requirements, the need for middle management training programmes in chain hotels—to respond to future needs and personnel potential—is high (Garavan, 1997. Boella and Goss-Turner, 2005). Ramos, Rey-Maqueira and Tugores (2004) and Kuruüzüm, Anafarta and Irmak (2008), for instance, report a high demand for middle management training in high-quality hotels. According to Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000), IHCs would benefit from training a larger number of their middle managers abroad as such training exposes managers from developing countries to the latest industry techniques and 'best practices' which can then be passed on to subordinates through daily interaction or through in-house training programmes.

Out-of-country training also enhances managers' career potential within an organisation. Generally it would be expected that, having undertaken training abroad, the newly-trained manager would be welcomed and eventually be promoted to the top level of the hierarchy (Rowley and Purcell, 2001). Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000) have a similar view, and state that working abroad is very important for career advancement in the hotel industry.

Furthermore, it has been stated that out-of-country training helps managers to learn about other cultures (McCarthy, 1990). Analoui (1999) considered that training abroad can serve as a motivator that often leads managers to be more effective in their work.

The possibility of taking OCT is particularly important in developing countries since they lack the infrastructure to conduct local training for hotel staff (Baines, 1998). This view is supported by E. Jones (personal communication, May 11, 2007) who explained that out-of-country training can be a feasible approach to train middle managers since in-country training may not be a viable option. Moreover, Tert-erov (2004: 130) indicated that there is a 'real value' in training outside of the local environment of developing countries.

One major study investigating training abroad and foreign replacements conducted by the German Federal Institute for Vocational Training (Study highlights benefits of foreign placements for young trainees, 2003) found that training abroad is beneficial for trainees as well as for their employees. In the study, when trainees were asked about the major obstacles encountered in connection with training and working abroad, the following were the most prevalent: lack of money, lack of adequate language skills as well as lack of appropriate contacts. When companies were asked the same question, they cited financial costs as the key obstacle to training staff abroad.

Unsurprisingly, the study of the German Federal Institute for Vocational Training revealed that men appear to have a significantly higher proportion of opportunities to get training and work abroad (65 per cent) as opposed to women (35 per cent).

An alternative approach to training hotel staff abroad is the view that expatriate managers endowed with western management are necessary for training indigenous staff (Littrell, 2002), as it has been stated that the training programmes carried out by expatriate trainers are profitable and work to the hotel's advantage (Huyton and Ingold, 1999). However, training techniques and methodological and pedagogical models brought along and conveyed especially by expatriates coming from western countries do not always fit in well with employees in developing countries (Huyton and Ingold, 1999; Magnini and Ford, 2004). For instance, under no circumstances can the training methods and educational systems of Jordan be equated to those of Britain or the USA. For example, Galagan (1983) noted that training abroad is practical for those who would learn from developed countries, and she argues that transferring training methods from developed countries to less developed countries would not succeed, recommending instead that the best way to learn about training methods is by going abroad.

METHODOLOGY

Nine middle managers from each of Jordan's twenty-nine IHCs were targeted as respondents, a total of 261 middle managers. In order to improve the response rate associated with the research, the study

sample comprised all department heads in key function departments, such as human resources, food and beverages, accounting and finance, front office, housekeeping, sales and marketing, purchasing, engineering, banqueting and others, in all IHCs listed by the Jordan Hotel Association. Accordingly, between 23 May and 28 July 2007, a total of 261 questionnaires were distributed in person by the researcher via human resources/ personnel managers to all managers in IHCs in Jordan. Follow-up reminders by telephone to human resources/personnel managers and to the middle managers were done to increase the response rate. Moreover, an entry in a prize draw for a digital camera was offered as an effective motivator. At the end, 207 questionnaires were completed and then analyzed. This response rate is considered satisfactory for a distributed questionnaire when the sample of a study is not randomly selected (Carbery et al., 2003).

The survey was conducted using a questionnaire that included both closed and open-ended questions, in order to allow managers to expand on their views. The 10-page questionnaire consisted of 8 sections. A summary of all sections of the questionnaire follows.

Section 1: The questionnaire starts with general questions: respondents were asked whether they had ever worked abroad, whether they had undertaken OCT, what they think of OCT, and whether they would take this type of training—and, if so, where and how long they would like it to be, regionally or internationally, as well as the nature of OCT which they would prefer.

Section 2: This section was developed from responses obtained in a focus group research that preceded the study. In this section, the target managers were asked to show the extent of their agreement or disagreement with a number of related variables regarding their attitude toward OCT, as well as management and company attitudes, with three responses—‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘I don’t know’—to the named items.

Section 3: In order to examine and elicit the ‘main’ barriers to taking OCT, as perceived by managers, respondents were asked in the third section to rate each hypothetical barrier through a total of 10 established closed-ended questions. These were the perceived barriers which prevented them or their companies from adopting OCT. At the end of this section, the respondents had an opportunity to add any comments about additional barriers that they considered important.

Section 4-6: The following three sections were each named in relation to the ‘stage’ of OCT, namely the before- (fourth section), the during- (fifth) and the after- (sixth) training period. In these three sections of the questionnaire, a six-point scale was used (1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= partially disagree; 4= partially agree; 5= agree; 6= strongly agree) to measure respondents’ opinion of (4) the selection criteria of candidates for OCT, (5) the preferred nature of OCT, and

(6) the projected benefits and long term effects of OCT. The later one was followed by an open-ended question to add any other comments regarding further benefits. For the purpose of this paper, the most important part is section 4, which sheds the most light on the perceived characteristics and other factors that might play a role in selecting candidates for OCT. The respondents had to rate open-mindedness, reliability, strength of personality, ambition and language knowledge in terms of importance for the company when choosing candidates for OCT (scale 1 to 6), and gender, experience, qualifications, age and work department as additional factors on the same scale (1 to 6).

Section 7: The seventh section had an open-ended question, to allow managers to expand on their views as well as to allow the opportunity to share any other unexpected, insightful and valuable comments or suggestions they might have about OCT which may not have been captured by the response categories because they had been overlooked by the participants in the focus groups and/or the author of this research.

Section 8: The final section of the survey measured the demographic variables such as age, gender, education, work-department, length of experience in management, length of service in the current hotel as well as the length of service in the hotel industry. In order to avoid any apprehensions on the part of respondents with regards to personal questions, and thus put them at ease in terms of answering the questions as well as promote interest in responding to the earlier sections, these demographic variables were left until the end of the questionnaire.

Importance of OCT

The first objective of this study was to measure the level of perceived importance of out-of-country training by middle managers in IHCs. Table 1 show that, despite hotel managers' willingness to participate in out-of-country training (70.5 per cent affirmed they would absolutely participate) and its perceived importance (56.5 per cent said that OCT is very important and 40.1 per cent said it is important), most of these managers (66.2 per cent) have not taken this training. Respondents from all the age brackets thought that OCT was either important or very important in the hotel industry. 97 per cent of both those who were in the age brackets of 20-29 years and 30-39 years believed that OCT was important or very important, 94 per cent from those in the age bracket of 40-49 years, and 100 per cent in age brackets 50 years and over concurred with this.

Table 1: Participation and willingness to participate in out-of-country training

	N	%
Participation in out-of country training		
Yes	70	33.8
No	137	66.2
Level of importance of taking out-of country training		
Very important	117	56.5
Important	83	40.1
Of minor Importance	3	1.4
Not Important	4	1.9
Willingness to participate in out-of-country training		
Absolutely	146	70.5
Likely	44	21.3
Possibly	16	7.7
Probably Not	1	0.5
Total	207	100.0

Source: survey carried out by author.

In terms of willingness to participate in OCT, younger respondents were more enthusiastic and, in general, preferred longer training compared to older age groups, who felt training should be up to three months only. This could be because older respondents have more responsibilities at home, while younger managers may be more drawn to the excitement of foreign travel and adventure.

Supportive of this study, Kattara (2005) reported that while rank and file employees (61.6 per cent) refused further training, the majority (72.5 per cent) of managers responded favourably.

Male (93 per cent) respondents were more likely to participate in OCT compared to their female (90 per cent) counterparts. This could be explained by cultural gender expectations around childcare and homemaking responsibilities. Females preferred a shorter training period compared to males, and no female respondents wanted training to exceed one year, compared to 10 per cent of male respondents.

As far as the length, venue and nature of training, 56 per cent of respondents said the training should be for a period of less than 4 months. 82.6 per cent thought the venue of the training should be conducted in foreign countries rather than regional Arab countries, which may reflect the importance of cultural and technological exposure offered by training abroad (McCarthy, 1990; Baines, 1998; Agut, Grau and Peiró, 2003; Terterov, 2004). About 50 per cent preferred undergoing training programmes while 45 per cent preferred a combination of training programmes and secondment.

Support for relatively shorter lengths of training abroad is consistent with a study of organisational commitment among expatriate managers in Russia (Harrison, Gowan and Neill, 2004). The results sug-

gested that organisational support was likely to be highest during the first three months of assignment, and hence expatriates were likely to perform most productively during this period. Participants in international training, by analogy with expatriates, may experience similar shifts in organisational commitment, making shorter lengths of stay optimal from the company's perspective.

Respondents of all ages preferred an international venue for training rather than regional. This could be because employees believe international training provides a more enriching experience thanks to factors like more modern facilities, advanced technologies and qualified training providers in developed countries, which are usually the venues for international training.

Company's attitude towards OCT

The second objective of the study was to identify the companies' attitude towards out-of-country training in IHCs in Jordan. The results indicate the managers' overwhelming support for out-of-country training, with only 33.8 per cent of participants having actually participated. This widespread support for OCT among potential trainees, over 95 per cent, bears out the findings of a study (Sofa, 2007) examining the perceptions of managers, technicians and academics who participated in out-of-country training funded by Bhutan's ministry of education. Over 90 per cent of respondents reported that this training would improve job performance and career prospects. Training in general is widely associated with positive outcomes for both managers and companies. A study of human resource management in Indian hotels (Chand and Katou, 2007) found that HRM practices, including training programmes, were correlated with enhanced company performance. Likewise, a study of 46 hotels in San Diego (Chow, Haddad and Singh, 2007) reported that training and development practices contributed to job satisfaction and morale—which, in turn, negatively impacted employees' turnover intentions.

Selection Criteria

The third objective of the research was to identify the selection criteria used by IHCs to choose who will get to go on training abroad. Managers believe there are five important characteristics in choosing candidates for out-of-country training: ambition, open-mindedness, reliability, strength of personality, and language knowledge. The traits of open-mindedness and strength of personality underscore the importance of the cultural exchange necessary for a successful OCT experience, a point widely noted in the literature. A study of expatriate

managers in Chinese hotels (Dewald and Self, 2008) found that, despite the high salary costs associated with these employees, they faced serious cultural difficulties due to the lack of expenditure on cross-cultural training, something often under-valued by companies.

As Katz and Seifer (1996) note, several studies have highlighted the importance of selection as a key element in the success of managers on foreign assignment. The importance of expatriate socialisation stressed by the authors—including selection, pre-departure training and on-site socialisation—is analogous in many ways with the experience of international trainees. In terms of selection, the author describes in particular the importance of personality characteristics such as willingness to communicate and ability to adapt to new physical and social environments, along with empathy in order to relate to and respect local work ethics and lifestyles. Interestingly, in terms of language knowledge, the study also suggests that expatriates' overall willingness to communicate in a foreign language, including confidence level and usage of local idioms, is more important than their level of language proficiency in terms of helping expatriates adjust to the new locale.

Results indicated that the most important selection criteria considered by the company were qualifications, experience and department worked in, while gender and age are not significant. However, most *female* respondents were convinced that gender was an important factor in selecting OCT candidates, with 28 per cent strongly agreeing that gender is a significant factor and only 19 per cent strongly disagreeing. As discussed below, male and female respondents had participated in OCT in roughly equal proportions.

Younger respondents were more likely to believe that age should not be a factor in choosing candidates for training. 43 per cent from 20-29 and 48 per cent from 30-39 years of age, and 31 per cent from the 40-49 age bracket, disagreed that age was considered an important factor.

Managers had varying opinions on the ideal nature and venue of OCT. Managers were divided as to the best venue: some said it should be conducted in the company hotel while others said it should be carried out in other venues. Likewise, opinions were split as to whether training should be generic or job specific. Opinions on the topic varied widely and were distributed fairly evenly between the various options, no doubt due to a combination of respondents' differing career paths, departmental priorities, or subjective experiences of past training programs and locales.

Major barriers to OCT included company financial constraints, costs of training, nepotism and favouritism, and the financial situation of employees. Other factors such as family reasons and visa procedures also partly figure as barriers. By far the biggest impediment to company investment in OCT, according to managers, was monetary—bear-

ing out the results of previous studies concerning training in hotels. In a study by the German Federal Institute for Vocational Training (Study highlights benefits of foreign placements for young trainees, 2003), cost was cited as the number one obstacle to overseas training programmes by both trainees and companies. A related difficulty is the notorious problem, cited by scholars and practitioners in the field, of the lack of rigorous measures to account for return on investment in hotel training programmes (Kline and Harris, 2008; Farrell, 2005).

Analysis of demographic factors in relation to whether respondents had experienced OCT or not

As table 2 illustrates, almost the same percentage of male (34 per cent) and female (31 per cent) respondents were sent on OCT. Thus gender may not be a deterrent to OCT, although the number of male respondents was much higher (84 per cent) than the female respondents (16 per cent). In the German Federal Institute for Vocational Training study, men were found to have significantly greater opportunities for overseas training (Study highlights benefits of foreign placements for young trainees, 2003). Again, most of the female respondents were convinced that gender is a factor.

Table 2: Respondents who have taken OCT, according to gender

Gender	OCT taken?		Total	Sent on OCT, %
	Yes	No		
Female	10	22	32	31
Male	60	114	174	34
Total	70	136	206	

Source: survey carried out by author.

Respondents who had diplomas (43 per cent) were selected most often, followed by those with bachelor's degrees (37 per cent), master's degrees (31 per cent), and finally, those with secondary education (23 per cent). This demonstrates the importance of education as a qualifying factor in the selection process, and supports previous research connecting higher levels of education and training with higher positions in an organisation's hierarchy (Ramos, Rey-Maqueira, and Tugores, 2004). As Magablih (2005) has observed, there has been a steady rise over the past ten years of hospitality studies in educational institutions in Jordan, pointing to the increasing importance of formal education in the local hotel industry. This development reflects a departure from the past, contrasting with early research suggesting that, for instance, personal characteristics like leadership and motivation tend to outweigh formal education and training as factors contributing to

success in the service sector (Ruddy, 1989); a study of hotels in Ireland from the same period found that a majority of managers (60 per cent) lacked formal business training (Baum, 1989).

Most managers sent on OCT were from the sales and marketing department (56 per cent), followed by food and beverage (42 per cent), then purchasing (35 per cent), human resources management (34 per cent), engineering (33 per cent), front office (30 per cent), housekeeping (27 per cent), finance and accounting (23 per cent), and banquet (20 per cent). The functional role of the manager is thus an important factor in being selected for OCT. Staff in sales and marketing departments, for instance, might be more likely to be selected because of their role as public representatives in the company. A study of career development in hotel management in China (Li, Ching-Yick Tse, and Xie, 2007) found that general managers tended to have more experience in marketing and sales and human resources prior to promotion to the GM position, suggesting a correlation between department of work and overall career trajectory.

Managers between the ages of 40-49 (50 per cent) and 50-59 (50 per cent) were more often sent on OCT compared to others, although the number of managers in younger age groups was much higher. It is not clear, however, when these participants were sent on training—a long time before this survey was conducted, or more recently. Since respondents in the older age groups tend to have had more years in the industry—and since, as discussed below, more experienced participants were also likelier candidates for training abroad—it is not surprising that these participants had more opportunities for OCT over the course of their careers.

On the other hand, some research has indicated that younger workers in general are more likely to have opportunities for training. A study of older workers in the UK labour force (Taylor and Urwin, 2001) found that workers between 40-64 were less likely to be offered vocational training and education compared to their younger counterparts, something the authors attribute to employers' decision-making.

The length of management experience is a significant factor in predicting whether a respondent had been on OCT. Those with more years working as managers had greater chances of being sent abroad for training: more than 15 years (50 per cent), 10-15 years (44 per cent), 6-9 years (41 per cent), 3-5 years (36 per cent), 1-2 years (16 per cent), and less than 1 year (15 per cent). Correspondingly, as Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000) found, training is an essential component of middle managers' career development. As with age and industry experience, more years of management experience aligned with more opportunities for training in general, and OCT in particular.

Despite the apparent importance of both management and industry experience, the number of years with the company, or employee loyalty, is not a factor for most hotel companies in sending managers on OCT. Those with 3-5 years in the same company were most frequently sent (44 per cent), followed by those with less than a year (43 per cent), those with more than 15 years (33 per cent), and those with 1-2 years (31 per cent). The lack of emphasis on company loyalty may be explained by the high turnover of hotel employees at the middle management level relative to other industries (Ingram and Brown, 2000). Tracey and Hinkin (2008), in a study of 33 U.S. hotels, found that the costs associated with staff turnover were highest for high complexity jobs and in larger or higher-occupancy properties. In this light, the potential of OCT for increasing middle management loyalty and reducing turnover in IHCs is particularly significant.

Those who had stayed in the same industry longer had been sent on training abroad more often. 54 per cent of those with over 15 years in the hotel industry had been sent, followed by those with 10-15 years (44 per cent). This could be because such employees are seen as more stable, with higher organisational commitment, and the company has a long-term goal for the growth of those who are chosen. Managerial capability is an important factor in grooming personnel for higher positions, in the service industry especially. Managerial skills are not easily taught nor, usually, acquired through short-term training. They are developed and harnessed over the years and, in the process, managers acquire tacit knowledge that is hard to transfer to others.

DISCUSSION

The five selection criteria identified as important—ambition, open-mindedness, reliability, strength of personality, and language knowledge—reflect the importance of cultural factors in selecting OCT candidates, along with level of education as an important criterion.

While employees who had been in the industry longer and those with more years of experience as managers were more likely to have undertaken training abroad, an employee's loyalty or length of time employed by the company were not factors. This may reflect the reality of relatively high rates of turnover among middle managers in hotels, compared to other service industries (Ingram and Brown, 2000). In a context where management turnover is the norm, and in which managers consider a high level of mobility to be beneficial (Carbery et al., 2003), the most qualified and experienced managers may not be those that have been on staff longest. Moreover, as widely noted in the literature, one major advantage of training programs such as OCT is their role in decreasing turnover and increasing employee loyalty, perhaps explaining the

relative unimportance of employee loyalty as a selection criterion for OCT. The importance of reliability as a personal characteristic, meanwhile, was indicated by respondents, perhaps reflecting the widespread fear, noted in the literature, that employees sent abroad for training may simply never return (Antigua and Barbuda Bureau of Standards, 2008), a particularly acute concern in politically volatile regions.

The issue of gender produced ambiguous results. While gender, along with age, was not cited as a significant factor in selecting candidates for OCT, female respondents (a 16 per cent minority of the sample) were more likely to consider gender an issue, with 28 per cent strongly agreeing that gender is a significant factor and only 19 per cent strongly disagreeing. While the literature does not provide a clear picture of the role of gender in foreign training, there is agreement that, in general, women are underrepresented in the tourism and hospitality industry, and tend to occupy positions on the lower rungs of the organisational hierarchy (Maxwell, 1997; Baum, Amoah and Spivack, 1997; Li and Leung, 2001; Wong and Chung, 2003). A study by the German Federal Institute for Vocational Training found that more men (65 per cent) had access to training and work abroad than women (65 per cent) (Study highlights benefits of foreign placements for young trainees, 2003). Hotels, in particular, have been noted for employing female staff in predominantly unskilled and lower-paid positions (Biswas and Cassell, 1996; Davies, Taylor and Savery, 2001). A study conducted in all four- and five-star hotels in Northern Ireland (Baum and Devine, 2007) found that front office staff, who tended to occupy lower-skilled positions and have overall lower educational levels compared to other hotel department staff, were predominantly female, with male workers making up only 12.5 per cent of the front office workforce.

In the case of Jordan and other Arab countries, traditional religious attitudes have been cited as barriers to women's full participation in the industry (Würth, 2004; Baum, Amoah and Spivack, 1997; Magablih, 2006). The 'glass ceiling' effect may be particularly acute in Asian and Middle Eastern countries (Kattara, 2005). In Jordan, women represent only 9.1 per cent of total hotel employees, and the composition of the survey sample confirms that the industry is male-dominated at the middle management level.

At the same time, there is evidence that the situation is improving as social and cultural attitudes towards women continue to evolve (Lee and Chon, 2000). In this context, as Kattara (2005) and Liu and Wilson (2001) have argued, women's interpersonal skills and management style may give them an advantage in terms of human resources. International Hotel Chains, in particular, are noted for progressive policies that promote equal opportunity employment (Gröschl and Doherty,

1999). As Magablih (2000c) observes, the Jordanian government has undertaken initiatives, including the introduction of quota systems and subsidised tuition, that have resulted in more women being included in tourist guide training. This indicates that the situation is slowly changing, but also testifies to the continued difficulty of access for women. The apparent changes currently underway in gender employment equity in the hospitality and tourism industry, and hotels in particular, may help explain the discrepancies between findings in the literature and the results concerning gender and opportunities for OCT.

CONCLUSION

The selection of candidates for OCT reflects the fact that training is often deemed essential for promotion to higher positions, while those in higher positions tend to have more access to training and development. As with selection for recruitment and promotion, the study reflects the reality that, when selecting candidates for limited international training opportunities, it may not suffice to rely upon a single selection method or criterion; rather, it may be necessary to combine different techniques to assess a variety of skills and personal characteristics. For example, given the sensitive cultural territory at stake for trainees, less conventional approaches like peer assessment or simulation exercises may assist in the selection process by offering a wider perspective on which to base decisions.

Supportive of the literature on training, it was found in this research that international training is decided based on the discretion of top management, and the perception and support of middle managers are seen as secondary in making that decision. This is shown in tables 1-3 indicating that, despite the hotel managers' overwhelming support for out-of-country training (70.5 per cent affirmed they would absolutely participate) and its perceived importance (56.5 said that OCT is very important and 40.1 per cent said it is important), most of these managers (66.2 per cent) had not taken this kind of training. The results, based on middle managers' perceptions, show that the top management of IHCs does not see out-of-country training as highly important. This is supportive of the study by Agut, Grau and Peiró (2003), which found that training is not considered an appropriate strategy to sort out most managers' competency needs. Nevertheless, this study does support previous findings indicating a need for training programmes related to middle management in chain hotels, to adapt to future needs and to develop personnel potential, since management and professional work call for training for specific requirements (Garavan, 1997). Moreover, Avcikurt (2003) emphasised the importance of training for managers in hotels to improve their skills, knowledge,

behaviours, self-esteem and communication, and argued that the absence of managers' training resulted in inefficiency, in addition to lowering their self-confidence. In line with the above, Timo and Davidson (2005) found that middle managers strongly advocated the idea that they needed more training. In a survey with a wide sample carried out by Ramos, Rey-Maquieira and Tugores (2004), it was found that more training programmes are needed for heads of departments of hotels despite the fact that, among all of the individuals surveyed, those employees with greater job responsibility such as managers receive a much greater share of the training provided by hotels.

It is also apparent that the senior or top management is the ultimate arbiter of whether and for whom international training is needed. Thus, a future study may look at employees in higher level of management as participants, since they are the ones who wield real influence, if not the ones who make the final decisions in terms of investment in OCT for hotel staff.

REFERENCES

- Agut, S., Grau R., and Peiró, J. M. (2003). "Competency needs among managers from Spanish hotels and restaurants and their training demands." *Hospitality Management* 22, (3) 281-295.
- Alwahidi, J. (1990) The Workforce in Tourism Sector in Jordan. Unpublished Master thesis, University of Jordan.
- Analoui, F. (1999) "Eight parameters of managerial effectiveness: A study of senior managers in Ghana." *Journal of Management Development* 18, (4) 362-390.
- Antigua and Barbuda Bureau of Standards (2008). *Smart Partnership: The Way Forward into the Millennium* [online] available from <<http://www.abbs.gov.ag/>> [10 January 2008].
- Avcikurt, C. (2003). "Auditing managerial training needs of Turkish small and medium-sized hotel enterprises." *Managerial Auditing Journal* 18, (5) 399-404.
- Baines, A. (1998). "Technology and tourism." *Work Study* 47, (5) 160-163.
- Baum, T. (1989). "Managing hotels in Ireland: research and development for change." *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 8, (2) 131-144.
- Baum, T., Amoah, V., and Spivack, S. (1997). "Policy dimensions of human resource management in the tourism and hospitality industries." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 9, (5) 221-229.
- Baum, T., and Devine, F. (2007). "Skills and training in the hotel sector: The case of front office employment in Northern Ireland." *Tourism and Hospitality Research* 7, (3/4) 269-280.
- Biswas, R., and Cassell, C. (1996). "Strategic HRM and the gendered division of labour in the hotel industry: A case study." *Personnel Review* 25, (2) 19-34.

Boella, M.J., and Goss-Turner, S. (2005) *Human resource management in the hospitality industry: an introductory guide*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Carbery, R., Garavan, T. N., O'Brien, F., and McDonnell, J. (2003). "Predicting hotel managers' turnover cognitions." *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 18, (7) 649-679.

Chand, M., and Katou, A. A. (2007). "The impact of HRM practices on organisational performance in the Indian hotel industry." *Employee Relations* 29, (6) 576-594.

Chow, C. W., Haddad, K. and Singh, G. (2007). "Human Resource Management, Job Satisfaction, Morale, Optimism, and Turnover." *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration* 8, (2) 73-88.

Davies, D., Taylor, R., and Savery, L. (2001). "The role of appraisal, remuneration and training in improving staff relations in the Western Australian accommodation industry: a comparative study." *Journal of European Industrial Training* 25, (7) 366-373.

Dewald, B and Self, J.T. (2008). "Cross Cultural Training for Expatriate Hotel Managers: An Exploratory Study." *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration* 9, (4) 352-364.

Farrell, D. (2005). "What's the ROI of Training Programs?" *Lodging Hospitality* 61, (7) 46-46.

Galagan, P. (1983) "Training the American Way." *Training & Development Journal* 37, (10) 4-4.

Garavan, T. N. (1997). "Training, development, education and learning: different or the same?" *Journal of European Industrial Training* 21, (2) 39-50.

Gröschl, S., and Doherty, L. (1999). "Diversity management in practice." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 11, (6) 262-268.

Harrison, J.K, Gowan, M., and Neill, H. (2004). "Effects of organizational rank and length of time in assignment on expatriate commitment." *The Social Science Journal* 41, 471-476.

Huyton, J. R., and Ingold, A. (1999) "A commentary by Chinese hotel workers on the value of vocational education." *Journal of European Industrial Training* 23, (1) 16-24.

Ingram, A., and Brown, S. (2000). "Labor turnover in four and five crown Edinburgh hotels: managers' perceptions and strategies to cope." *Praxis: The Journal of Applied Hospitality Management* 2, (2) 80-99.

International Labour Organization. (2001) Human resources development, employment and globalization in the hotel, catering and tourism sector: Report for discussion at the Tripartite Meeting on Human Resources Development, Employment and Globalization in the Hotel, Catering and Tourism Sector [online] available from <<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/techmeet/tmhct01/tmhctr1.htm>> [12 September 2007]

Kattara, H. (2005). "Career challenges for female managers in Egyptian hotels." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 17, (3) 238-251.

Katz, J.P., Seifer, D.M. (1996). "It's a Different World Out There: Planning for Expatriate Success Through Selection, Pre-Departure Training and On-Site Socialization." *Human Resource Planning* 19, (2) 32-47.

Kline, S., and Harris, K. (2008). "ROI is MIA: why are hoteliers failing to demand the ROI of training?" *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 20, (1) 45-59.

Kuruüzüm, A., Anafarta N., and Irmak, S. (2008) "Predictors of burn-out among middle managers in the Turkish hospitality industry." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 20, (2) 186-198.

Ladkin, A., and Juwaheer, T. D. (2000). "The career paths of hotel general managers in Mauritius." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 12, (2) 119-125.

Lee, C., and Chon, K.S. (2000). "An investigation of multicultural training practices in the restaurant industry: the training cycle approach." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 12, (2).

Li, L., and Leung, R. W. (2001). "Female managers in Asian hotels: profile and career challenges." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 13, (4) 189-196.

Li, L., Ching-Yick, E., and Xie, L. (2007). "Hotel general manager profile in China: a case of Guangdong Province." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 19, (4) 263-274.

Littelljohn, D. (1997). "Internationalization in hotels: current aspects and developments." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 9, (5/6) 187-192.

Littrell, R. F. (2002). "Desirable leadership behaviours of multi-cultural managers in China." *The Journal of Management Development* 21, (1) 5-74.

Liu, J., and Wilson, D. (2001). "The unchanging perception of women as managers." *Women in Management Review* 16, (4) 163-173.

Magablih, K. (2000c). "Role of Female Employees in the Hotel Industry of Jordan." *Al Edari* 83, 181-210.

Magablih, K. (2005). "Potentials of developing tourism and hospitality Education in Jordan." *Achievements and Creativity*. Conference held March 15-16, 2005 at Philadelphia University/Amman.

Magablih, K. (2006). "Dimensions of Women Participation in the Jordanian Tourism Industry." *Abhath Al Yarmouk* 22, (1) 95-122.

Magnini, V. P., and Ford, J. B. (2004) "Service failure recovery in China." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 16, (5) 279-286.

Maxwell, G. A. (1997). "Hotel general management: views from above the glass ceiling." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 9, (5/6) 230-235.

McCarthy, Pat. (1990). "The Art of Training Abroad." *Training & Development Journal* 44, (11) 13-18.

McGunnigle, P. J., and Jameson, S. M. (2000) "HRM in UK hotels: a focus on commitment." *Employee Relations* 22, (4) 403-422.

Ramos, V., Rey-Maqueira, J., and Tugores, M. (2004). "The role of training in changing an economy specialising in tourism." *International Journal of Manpower* 25, (1) 55-72.

Rowley, G., and Purcell, K. (2001) "As cooks go, she went: is labor churn inevitable?" *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 20, (2) 163-185.

Ruddy, J. (1989). "Career development of hotel managers in Hong Kong." *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 8, (3) 215-25.

Sofo, F. (2007). "Transfer of training: a case-study of outsourced training for staff from Bhutan." *International Journal of Training & Development* 11, (2) 103-120.

"Study highlights benefits of foreign placements for young trainees." (2003) *Journal of European Industrial Training* 27, (9) 484-484, 1/3p.

Taylor, P., and Urwin, P. (2001). "Age and Participation in Vocational Education and Training." *Work, Employment & Society* 15, (4) 763-779.

Terterov, M. (2004). *Doing Business with Kazakhstan*. London: Kogan Page.

Timo, N., and Davidson, M. (2005). "A survey of employee relations practices and demographics of MNC chain and domestic luxury hotels in Australia." *Employee Relations* 27, (2) 175-192.

Tracey, J.B., and Hinkin, T.R. (Feb 2008). "Contextual Factors and Cost Profiles Associated with Employee Turnover." *Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly* 49 (1) 12-27.

Wong, C. S., and Chung, K. M. (2003). "Work values of Chinese food service managers." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 15, (2) 66-75.

Würth, A. (2004). *Women's Rights in the Arab world: Overview of the status of women in family law with special reference to the influence of Islamic factors* [online] available from <<http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-frauenrechte-arab-welt.pdf>> [5 August 2007].

Submitted: 10th October 2012
Final version: 30th January 2012

Accepted: 12th February 2013
Refereed anonymously