



Understanding Employees' Career Development Expectations and Job Motivation in the Chinese Hotel Industry: Evidence from Chinese Homegrown Hotels

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Abstract

Background and Aim: The Chinese homegrown hotel industry has experienced remarkable growth in the post-pandemic era, with continued regional expansion despite COVID-19's significant operational challenges and persistent human resource issues, including high staff turnover. This study consists of two objectives: 1) To explore the factors that influence hotel employees' career development expectations within Chinese homegrown hotels; 2) To examine how employees' career development expectations relate to their job motivation, using interview thematic analysis with hotel employees.

Materials and Methods: This study employed semi-structured interviews with 13 participants from various positions within H World Group hotels in mainland China, selected through snowball sampling to ensure representation across organizational levels. After that, data were analyzed by thematic analysis using NVivo software to explore factors influencing career expectations and their relationship with job motivation.

Results: The study found that employees' expectations include self-efficacy, higher-level needs, prospects of the hotel industry, career counseling and appraisal, and promotion and training. The study also explored the relationship between employees' career development expectations and job motivation, which was categorized into themes such as goal orientation, hindering factors, and the positive cycle.

Conclusion: This qualitative study identified key factors shaping career expectations and their interconnectedness with job motivation. Self-efficacy, higher-level needs, career support, and growth opportunities significantly shape career expectations in Chinese homegrown hotels, directly impacting employee motivation through goal orientation and a positive reinforcing cycle. Addressing hindering factors like unclear paths and a lack of support is crucial for fostering an engaged workforce. These findings underscore the importance of targeted HR practices that align with employee career aspirations to enhance motivation and retention within this sector.

Keywords: Chinese Hotel Industry; Hotel Employee; Career Development Expectations; Job Motivation; H World Hotel Group; Employee Retention

Introduction

The Chinese homegrown hotel industry has seen significant growth, especially in the post-2009 era when hotel group operations began expanding (Su, 2021; Tang, 2021). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted this sector, causing a decline in operations across all hotel levels, though hotel groups continued regional expansions (China Tourist Hotel Association, 2021). The pandemic exacerbated challenges such as high staff turnover and recruitment difficulties (Hao et al., 2020). Despite this, Chinese hotel groups, particularly H World, have shown resilience, adapting their operations and strategies to meet new demands while addressing the industry's ongoing human resource challenges (Wang, 2020). The sustained human resource challenges, sustained by the pandemic, and lasting till post post-pandemic era, reveal the importance of understanding employee career expectations and motivation in Chinese homegrown hotel groups, such that, to enhance stability and sustainability amid the continued turbulence in the industry (Devi, 2023).

To understand the broader context of this study, it is essential to define several key terms relevant to hotel human resource management. Hotel human resource management (HRM) refers to the practices and policies managing employees within the hospitality industry, with a focus on recruitment, development, performance, and retention (Shen, 2020). Hotel groups are conglomerates that own and

manage multiple hotel brands, offering various services under different brand names. Notable among these is H World Hotel Group, formerly known as Huazhu Group Limited, which operates over 8,000 hotels across 17 countries (H World Group Limited, 2022). The focus of this study is on employee career expectations, which refer to employees' hopes and aspirations related to career development within the hotel industry, including anticipated career progression, growth opportunities, and the achievement of personal career goals (Wu & Xie, 2015). Additionally, job motivation is defined as the set of internal and external factors that influence employees' willingness to perform tasks and contribute to their organization's success. Motivation can be intrinsic, driven by internal factors like personal satisfaction, or extrinsic, driven by external rewards such as pay and benefits (Cameron & Pierce, 2002).

This research focuses on understanding the career development expectations of employees who are working in hotel groups, specifically within the H World Hotel Group. Compared with independent hotels, hotel group companies own more brands with an increasing number of rooms and employees, which makes it more difficult to manage and operate. Therefore, the research results will have both academic and practical implications and can provide countermeasures for more hotels. Moreover, the research includes 13 interviews with staff at various levels, from front-line service staff to management, to provide insights into their career aspirations and how these expectations correlate with their job motivation. A key objective of this research is to explore the relationship between employees' career development expectations and their levels of job satisfaction and motivation. This qualitative approach, using thematic analysis, allows the researcher to capture the nuanced relationship between career expectations and job motivation under Expectancy Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Equity Theory. According to Expectancy Theory, motivation comes from the expectation that an individual's efforts will result in desired performance and outcomes (Ma & Yong, 2024), so this theory is directly relevant for comprehension how career aspirations impact current drive. According to Supatn & Puapradit (2019), Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory also differentiates between motivators and hygiene factors, career advancement being identified as a strong motivator, which makes it theoretically relevant when examining the effects on job engagement in an industry like hotels. The findings from the interviews will later guide the development of a more precise set of survey questions that can capture the complexities of these factors among hotel employees.

As the hospitality industry, particularly in China, faces significant turnover and recruitment challenges (Wang, 2020), understanding the factors that influence employee retention and job satisfaction is essential. High staff turnover is a major problem for hotel managers, exacerbated by a significant decrease of 126,468 workers in Chinese homegrown hotel brands in 2020 (China Tourist Hotel Association, 2021; Hao et al., 2020). Despite a slight easing overall in 2020, luxury hotels experienced the highest turnover rates, with up to 41% in 12% of these establishments (Beijing Hospitality Institute, 2022). Correspondingly, intensified competition has led to a prominent difficulty in recruitment, characterized by high demand due to turnover but a decrease in both the number of CVs received and the professional competence of applicants (Wang, 2020). By focusing on career expectations as a motivating factor, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to HR managers in the hotel industry, offering tools to better align their incentive models with employee needs. The goal is to improve retention and reduce turnover rates by addressing employee expectations and motivation effectively. The overarching objective of this research is to develop an incentive model based on hotel staff's career development expectations, focusing on how career prospects influence job motivation and satisfaction.

Objectives

1. To explore the factors that influence hotel employees' career development expectations within the Chinese hotel industry.
2. To examine how employees' career development expectations relate to their job motivation, using thematic analysis from interviews with hotel employees.

Literature review

This literature review studies the key concepts, theories, and research related to employee career development and motivation in the hotel industry. The key concepts discussed include employee career development, employee career expectations, employee motivation, job engagement, job satisfaction, employee turnover, and employee retention. Theories that guide the understanding of these concepts include Expectancy Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Equity Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. Lastly, there are literature studies that present the issues facing the Chinese hotel industry.

The relationship between career development expectations and employee motivation in hospitality contexts represents a complex interplay of individual aspirations, organizational structures, and industry-specific dynamics. To understand this relationship, this review begins by examining how expectancy theory illuminates the cognitive mechanisms through which career expectations influence motivation, before exploring how two-factor theory helps categorize the specific motivational elements relevant to hotel employees. The review then considers how equity considerations shape retention outcomes, and concludes by examining engagement as a mediating factor in the expectation-motivation relationship.

1. Employee Career Expectations and Expectancy Theory

Employee career development refers to the structured process in which individuals enhance their skills, knowledge, and competencies in alignment with their career aspirations. Career expectations, on the other hand, describe the goals or outcomes employees hope to achieve within a certain time frame, influenced by personal experience and organizational opportunities (Musa et al., 2014; Vipanya & Syah, 2023). The alignment between employees' career expectations and the opportunities within an organization is crucial for fostering job satisfaction and reducing turnover.

Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) provides a foundational framework for understanding how career development expectations influence motivation. According to Expectancy Theory, employees are motivated to exert effort when they believe that their efforts will lead to desired performance and rewards. The theory suggests that motivation is a product of three factors: expectancy (the belief that effort will lead to good performance), instrumentality (the belief that performance will lead to rewards), and valence (the value placed on those rewards). In the context of career development, when employees perceive that their career aspirations can be achieved through organizational support, their motivation and job satisfaction increase.

Career development expectations play a key role in influencing employee motivation. Employees with clear career goals and expectations that align with organizational opportunities are more likely to be satisfied with their roles and remain engaged (Leuhery, 2023). When organizations provide avenues for career advancement, employees are more likely to feel a sense of purpose and commitment to their work, enhancing their overall satisfaction and motivation to perform.

2. Employee Motivation and Incentive Systems and Heisenberg's Two-Factor Theory

Employee motivation is a crucial factor in ensuring high service quality and organizational success in the hotel industry (Dobre, 2013). Motivation can be intrinsic, arising from personal goals and satisfaction, or extrinsic, driven by external rewards such as salary, recognition, and career development opportunities (Herzberg et al., 1959). A well-designed incentive system, combining both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, is essential for enhancing employee engagement and reducing turnover.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) distinguishes between motivators, which lead to job satisfaction (e.g., achievement, recognition, and career growth), and hygiene factors, which prevent dissatisfaction but do not directly motivate employees (e.g., salary, working conditions, and job security). For hotel employees, career development opportunities represent a key motivator, contributing to job satisfaction and engagement. In contrast, extrinsic factors such as salary and benefits are important hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction but are not sufficient on their own to drive long-term motivation.

A balanced incentive system that includes career growth opportunities, recognition, and appropriate compensation is vital for motivating employees in the hotel industry. Studies show that financial incentives and non-financial incentives can have equally significant effects on job satisfaction and engagement. Ercegović (2025) mentions the influence of both financial rewards (e.g., bonuses) and non-financial incentives, such as career development opportunities, on employee motivation and productivity, examining their impact on both immediate engagement and sustained output. As Chigbo (2024) mentioned that when employees feel that their career goals are supported and their contributions are recognized, they are more likely to stay engaged and perform at higher levels.

Table 1 Motivational Factors

Authors (year)	Motivational factors
Dobre (2013); Jaworski et al. (2018); Neeyakorn and Kaewnuch (2018)	Salary, welfare, performance pay
Febrianti et al. (2019); Dobre (2013)	Reward, recognition, social recognition, and performance feedback
W. Li et al. (2018); McGregor and Doshi (2015)	Organizational culture
Jaworski et al. (2018); Raimel et al. (2019); H. Wang (2019)	Staff training and development
Idowu (2017)	Performance appraisal
Dobre (2013); Jaworski et al. (2018)	Job recognition and trust, responsibility, and the job itself
Dobre (2013); Luo (2009); Raimel et al. (2019)	Authorization, freedom of independent decision-making, and participation in decision-making
Febrianti et al. (2019); McGregor and Doshi (2015); S. Wang et al. (2018)	Cultural environment, working atmosphere, and good working environment
Musa et al. (2014); H. Wang (2019)	Promotion, career development, and personal growth

3. Employee Turnover and Retention, and Equity Theory

Employee turnover is a significant challenge in the hotel industry, as high turnover rates lead to increased recruitment and training costs, as well as loss of experienced staff. Career development opportunities have been identified as a critical factor in reducing turnover intention, as employees who perceive a lack of career growth options are more likely to leave (Solihat & Salendu, 2023). Employee turnover and retention are strongly influenced by perceptions of fairness in the workplace, a concept central to Equity Theory.

Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) suggests that employees are motivated to stay in an organization when they perceive fairness in the distribution of rewards and opportunities. When employees feel that their career development expectations are not met, they may experience dissatisfaction, which increases the likelihood of turnover. Organizations that provide clear career paths, fair compensation, and opportunities for personal growth are more likely to retain employees and reduce turnover rates (Shrestha, 2025). Conversely, perceived inequity leads to dissatisfaction, demotivation, and behaviors such as reduced effort, resistance, or quitting.

Research supports that equity fosters a fair and equitable work environment. Employees who feel fairly treated are more likely to stay, reducing costly turnover and preserving organizational knowledge and talent. Equity also contributes to attracting and retaining diverse talent, further benefiting organizational performance. For example, high turnover rates in the hotel industry are often caused by factors such as low salary, long working hours, and limited career development opportunities (Shen, 2020). Moreover, studies have shown that equity sensitivity affects turnover intentions. This dynamic



underscores the importance of addressing equity perceptions to manage turnover effectively (Management Is A Journey, 2025). However, when employees perceive that they have opportunities for advancement and personal growth, they are more likely to remain with the organization. Therefore, addressing career development needs is crucial for improving employee retention and reducing the costs associated with turnover (Hao et al., 2020).

4. Employee Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Social Exchange Theory

Employee engagement is the degree to which employees feel connected to their work, committed to their organization, and motivated to contribute to its success. Engaged employees exhibit higher levels of energy, dedication, and absorption in their roles, leading to improved performance and service quality (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Job satisfaction, the emotional response to one's work, is closely linked to engagement and directly influences retention rates (Ampofo, 2020). Engagement is positively influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, including career development opportunities, recognition, and financial rewards. When employees' career development expectations are met, their engagement and satisfaction with their work increase, reducing turnover intention and enhancing their commitment to the organization (Raimel et al., 2019).

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between career development and employee engagement. Social Exchange Theory is a behavioral and sociological framework that explains social interactions and relationships as a process of exchanging costs and benefits between individuals or groups. According to SET, when employees perceive that they are receiving fair treatment and adequate rewards (such as career advancement opportunities), they are more likely to feel emotionally committed to the organization and remain engaged in their work (Zhu et al., 2022).

Job satisfaction plays a key role in fostering work engagement and organizational commitment. Employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to stay with the organization and invest effort into their roles, which contributes to the overall success of the organization (Leuhery, 2023). For example, when employees feel that their career goals are aligned with the organization's objectives and they are given growth opportunities, their job satisfaction increases, leading to higher levels of engagement and reduced turnover intention. Social Exchange Theory explains job satisfaction as a result of employees evaluating the balance of costs and benefits in their relationships at work, including compensation, recognition, career opportunities, and work environment. When employees perceive that the benefits they receive from their employer and colleagues outweigh the costs, they experience higher job satisfaction and are more likely to remain committed and engaged (Shams & Niazi, 2018).

Methodology

This study utilizes a semi-structured interview method to explore the perspectives of hotel employees regarding hotel staff's career expectations and motivations.

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1. Population and Sample

The population for this study consists of employees working at H World Group hotels in mainland China. H World Group Limited was founded in 2005 and is one of the leading multi-brand hotel groups in China. According to open information, H World hires nearly 140,000 employees. As H World is a huge group, to obtain samples more conveniently and find target employees more accurately, this study first confirmed the employees who are already available, and then asked them to recommend more employees who are willing to accept the interview. Snowball sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling technique that starts from a small number of people, and then the respondents recommend more respondents who may be willing to participate (Hung, 2019). However, snowball sampling also has some limitations, such as sample homogeneity and selection bias because respondents tend to suggest other people with similar characteristics or experiences, which may impair the diversity of views in the sample (Kirchherr &

Charles, 2018). Despite the limitations, this approach was necessary due to the organizational constraints and difficulty in directly accessing a wide range of employees across different levels within H World Group's complex corporate structure. The sample is drawn from a range of staff positions, including general managers, department heads, and frontline employees, ensuring diverse representation from various organizational levels and departments. In selecting the sample, non-probability sampling techniques, specifically snowball sampling, were used. In this study, 13 interviewees were finally settled on.

Here are the criteria for sample selection: 1) Staff working in H World for at least one year, which can ensure they have a sufficient understanding of the hotel. 2) Respondents are willing to participate in the interview. 3) Respondents had time to participate in the interview. To avoid sampling bias, the following measures are taken: 1) Initial samples are selected across classifications and layers, targeting both management and frontline employees from various departments and positions to ensure balanced representation across all employee levels. 2) Each interviewee is asked to recommend multiple potential participants, from which the researcher only selects those from different hotels, departments, and positions to minimize homogeneity and broaden the survey scope.

2. Question Design

This study employs semi-structured interviews as its primary data collection method. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2015), interviews (in-depth exchanges on specific issues) are the most common data collection methods in qualitative research across most social science fields, including business, management, marketing, and education. Similarly, Hung (2019) notes that interviews are the most common data source in hotel and tourism industry research.

Previous research related to hotel employee expectations and motivation has been thoroughly reviewed by the researcher of this study. This literature serves as a reference to formulate precise questions aligned with the research objectives. Building upon this foundation, the interview questions are a flexible guide during the semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to elaborate freely without interruption to capture a comprehensive range of perspectives. This approach facilitated the collection of rich qualitative data, which was subsequently analyzed to define key themes. Below are the questions used in this study and their sources:

Table 2 Interview Questions

Research Objective	Question	Source
Objective 1: To explore the factors influencing hotel staff's career development expectations	What has the hotel done for the staff's career development? Do you think the hotel staff have good career development?	(Kong et al., 2010; Luo, 2009; Musa et al., 2014).
	Do you think different departments and different levels of staff in the hotel have different career expectations?	(Hitka et al., 2018; Huang & Xie, 2021)
	What factors do you think will influence staff's career development expectations?	(Aldag & Kuzuhara, 2002; Vroom, 1964).
Objective 2: To examine how staff's career development expectations relate to their job motivation	What factors do you think influence staff work motivation?	(Cameron & Pierce, 2002; Herzberg et al., 1959).
	Do you think staff's career development expectations affect staff work motivation? If yes,	(Nduka, 2016; Nimri et al., 2015)



Research Objective	Question	Source
	what is the specific relationship?	
	What do you think are the factors that influence staff job satisfaction?	(Dobre, 2013; Gabriel & Nwaeke, 2015)

3. Interviewees

The researcher prepared an interview outline in advance to prompt the interviewee and control the interview rhythm and direction. During the interview, the content and rhythm of the interview are flexibly adjusted according to the interviewee's situation, and the interviewee is encouraged to put forward real ideas. The researcher may ask questions about specific answers to maximize the information from the interview.

The interview was conducted by WeChat video call, texting, and face-to-face interviews. The average face-to-face interview time was 15 minutes, whereas the researcher contacted interviewees for confirmation and to acquire more details. The actual time spent on this process was uncounted. The interviewees mainly came from H World Group's hotels in Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Lijiang, and Xinjiang. The member structure of the in-depth interview is shown in Table 3:

Table 3 Information of Interviewees

No.	Department	Position
A	Management	General Manager
B	Human Resources Department	HR Director
C	Sales Department	Sales Director
D	Front Office	Guest Relations Manager
E	Food and Beverage Department	Supervisor
F	HR Department	Recruitment Specialist
G	Engineering Department	Maintenance Worker
H	Housekeeping Department	Executive Butler
I	Finance Department	Finance Manager
J	Sales Department	Sales Coordinator
K	Front Office	Receptionist
L	Food and Beverage Department	Restaurant Waiter
M	Housekeeping Department	Housekeeper

4. Data Analysis

All interviews were conducted in Chinese, then translated into English by the researcher before conducting thematic analysis. To ensure the accuracy of the coding and adherence to the interviewees' original meaning, after finalizing the transcript, the researcher used WeChat to send key sections of the interview content back to all interviewees for verification. All information was confirmed by the interviewees to ensure that the content did not deviate from their original intent. This step helps mitigate potential biases from a single researcher's translation and organization so as to directly verify the authenticity of the coding.

Thematic analysis was conducted on interview data by NVivo software, employing an inductive approach where themes emerged directly from the collected data rather than being predetermined. The



analysis process involved three progressive stages: preliminary code identification, theme development, and framework construction.

In the preliminary stage, interview transcripts were analyzed line by line to identify meaningful segments, which were then assigned initial codes.

During theme development, these codes were systematically grouped based on similarities and relationships that naturally emerged from the data, for instance, the "Factors influencing career development expectations" theme emerged from participants' responses that consistently referenced five key aspects: self-efficacy, high-level needs, industry prospects, career counseling and appraisal, and promotion training.

The final framework construction stage synthesized these organically developed themes into a comprehensive structure that authentically represents participants' perspectives and experiences.

5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee in Human Research at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) before data collection. To ensure that both the source of information regarding career experiences and characteristics, as well as the specific organization, are not disclosed, possibly considered a sensitive area to discuss confidentiality was taken very seriously. No identifying material is included in the transcription, and all participants have been given alphanumeric codes as well to ensure further anonymity. In addition, the specific hotel locations of H World Group were de-identified to the city level rather than individual hotels due to internal identification protection.

Results

Systematic thematic analysis was conducted on interview texts through three stages: preliminary theme identification (extracting core concepts), theme aggregation (summarizing codes into four first-level themes: career development expectations, influencing factors, incentive needs, and motivation/expectations), and final framework construction (revealing the formation and influence of career expectations). For instance, "Factors influencing career development expectations" integrated self-efficacy, high-level needs, industry prospects, career counseling, and promotion training.

The analysis of the interview transcripts summarized below reveals strong connections between employees' career aspirations and their motivation at work. The thematic analysis of interview data from H World Hotel Group employees, guided by the research objectives outlined in Table 2, was categorized according to the two primary research objectives.

Table 4 presents an overview of the factors that were identified as influencing career development expectations. Table 5 is an illustration of the themes that were identified with respect to the relationship between career development expectations and motivation. Below are further details on these findings. Illustrative quotes from the interview respondents are provided.

Table 4 Thematic Analysis Coding of Factors Influencing Career Development Expectations

Parent Code	Factors influencing career development expectations
Reference Count	34
Theme	Examples of Interview Excerpts
Self-efficacy	I think employees' sense of self-efficacy is very important. If they feel that they are effective in their work, they will look forward to a higher position and do more effective things (A)
	I regard this job as my career development goal. My goal is to become the general manager of a branch store step by step (I)
	I think self-efficacy has a great impact on me. For example, if I can handle some emergencies independently and help customers solve problems, I will feel that I have



	done a good job. This sense of achievement makes me more confident about the future (A)
Higher-level needs	The hotel will set up a clear career development path for employees and provide relevant management skills training (D)
	If the hotel can make employees feel that this is a place where they can develop long-term, such as providing academic advancement or skills training opportunities, employees may be more willing to stay (L)
	If there are more training opportunities to improve our skills and have a clearer promotion path, then my expectations for career development will be higher (B)
Prospects of the hotel industry	From the macroeconomic perspective, the domestic economy is in a downturn, and the foreign situation is turbulent. The global economy has entered a turbulent period. The real estate industry is no longer a pillar industry of the economy, franchisees do not have sufficient funds, and the lack of economic development in the first and second industries directly affects the salaries of employees in the hotel industry (G)
	Before the epidemic, they actively sought changes to obtain better positions and salaries; during the epidemic, mobility began to decrease, salary increases for some positions decreased, and most employees were content with the status quo; after the epidemic, they began to look for new opportunities (J)
	I think I value the development prospects of the hotel industry very much, because once HR becomes a director, there is no room for advancement (J)
Career counseling and appraisal	The leaders of each department of the hotel will formulate development plans for employees. They need to have in-depth conversations with employees at the end of the year and in the middle of the year to ensure the employees' work status and plan future development (B)
	I think career counseling and assessment have a great impact on my career development expectations (G)
	If the hotel can provide professional career assessment services to help employees discover their strengths and development space, then employees will be able to know their position in the company more clearly (E)
Parent Code	Factors influencing career development expectations
Reference Count	34
Theme	Examples of Interview Excerpts
Promotion and training	Compared with employees in the back-end support departments, employees in the front-line departments have a stronger desire for job promotion (E)
	If I know that I can be promoted to a higher position through hard work, or have the opportunity to take on more responsibilities, I will be more motivated to do better (J)
	Employees in positions like ours will feel more motivated to work if they can start from the grassroots and provide a clear promotion path (F)

Table 5 Thematic Analysis Coding of the Relationship between Career Development Expectations and Employee Motivation

Parent Code	Career Development Expectations and Motivation
Reference Count	20
Child Code	Examples of Interview Excerpts



Goal Orientation	I think there is a strong correlation between work motivation and career development expectations. For example, if I have a clear career development goal, my work motivation will be stronger (C)
	Especially when we have a clear promotion goal, work is no longer just about completing tasks, but more about accumulating experience and skills for future career development (E)
	A person with a clear career goal will have a stronger work motivation because they know that their efforts are preparing for the realization of the goal (I)
Hindering factors	Unclear career development path (F)
	Management support is really important, but many times, they seem to focus more on the needs of customers rather than employees (L)
	I think work motivation directly affects career development expectations, and vice versa. For example, I encounter many challenges in my sales job and sometimes feel very tired, but when I imagine that I can be promoted to a higher position through hard work, the work becomes meaningful (D)
Positive cycle	The switchboard position is relatively basic. If people feel that they can transfer to other departments or be promoted to foreman, they will be more motivated (1)
	I think that the relationship between work motivation and career development expectations is largely mutually reinforcing. For example, when I see that I have achieved some results in my position and can get recognition from my superiors, I will be more eager to develop my career to a higher level (B)
	I think career development expectations can help employees maintain long-term work motivation. Especially in the marketing department, we need to continue to innovate and respond to changes (E2)

Discussion

Based on the findings, five key factors were identified as significantly shaping employees' career development expectations.

1) Self-efficacy emerged as a key factor influencing career development expectations. Employees with higher self-efficacy were found to have greater aspirations for career advancement, as self-efficacy fosters goal-setting, perseverance, and adaptability, ultimately enhancing job performance and motivation (Bandura, 1977; Chuang et al., 2007). This aligns with previous research indicating that self-efficacy is a significant determinant of career progression (Lent et al., 2010; Metz et al., 2009).

2) High-level needs, such as self-actualization and esteem, were also identified as influencing career development expectations. Employees who experience fulfillment of these needs demonstrate stronger career aspirations, as intrinsic motivation drives sustained commitment and interest in their work (Aldag & Kuzuhara, 2002; Maslow, 1946). Addressing these needs through recognition and opportunities for growth can significantly enhance career expectations (Kim et al., 2023).

3) Career counseling and appraisal positively affect employees' career development expectations. Effective counseling helps employees clarify their career paths, recognize their strengths, and increase their confidence in career progression (Pereira et al., 2022). This supports the idea that structured guidance is essential for setting realistic career goals and improving job satisfaction (Merchant Jr, 2010).

4) Promotion and training are crucial for fostering career development. Opportunities for advancement and tailored training programs significantly enhance employees' career aspirations and motivation (Frenkel & Bednall, 2016; Wu & Xie, 2015). Training programs provide employees with the necessary skills and prepare them for career progression, which reinforces motivation and career expectations (Chiang et al., 2008).

5) Prospects of the hotel industry were found to have a significant relationship with career development expectations. Prior studies suggested that the industry's future outlook could influence career aspirations. This study found that employees' career development expectations were more shaped by personal capabilities and organizational support structures than by external industry conditions. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns about job security, employees' career expectations remained high, suggesting adaptability in the face of uncertainty (Rosyidi, 2021; Lopes & Gomes, 2023).

Additionally, this study explored the relationship between career development expectations and work motivation among hotel employees. Three key themes were identified:

6) Goal orientation emerged as a central theme, with employees who had clear career development goals displaying stronger work motivation. Several interviewees mentioned that having a defined career path allowed them to see their work as more meaningful, with one participant stating, "When we have a clear promotion goal, work is no longer just about completing tasks, but more about accumulating experience for future development". This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that clear career goals are crucial for motivating employees to achieve higher levels of performance (Lent et al., 2010).

7) However, hindering factors such as unclear career development paths and insufficient management support were also identified. One participant noted, "Management focuses more on customer needs than on employee development". This highlights the importance of addressing these barriers, as a lack of clarity and support can significantly reduce motivation and hinder career progression (Robinson & Morrison, 2000).

8) Finally, the positive cycle between career development expectations and work motivation was evident. Employees who believed in their potential for advancement were more motivated to perform well. As one interviewee explained, "When I see results in my position and receive recognition, I'm more eager to develop my career further". This feedback loop reinforces the importance of providing opportunities for career growth to maintain long-term motivation (Frenkel & Bednall, 2016).

Conclusion

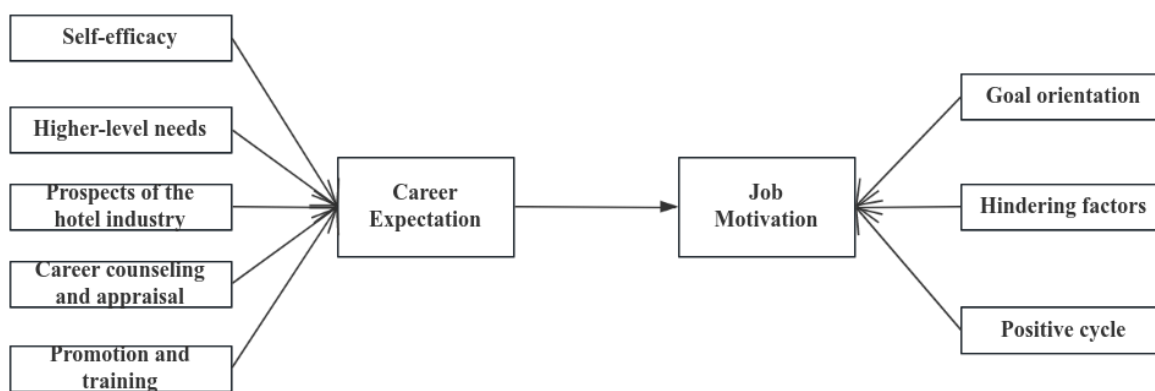


Figure 1 A Expectation and Motivation Framework
Note: (Author, 2025)

This study gathered perspectives from hotel staff across various roles and hierarchical levels through individual interviews. Participants, including front desk receptionists, room attendants, duty managers, and sales managers, shared their understanding of career expectations and identified the factors they believed influenced these aspirations. These factors include self-efficacy, higher-level needs,

prospects of the hotel industry, career counseling and appraisal, and promotion and training. The study also explored the relationship between employees' career expectations and job motivation, which was categorized into themes such as goal orientation, hindering factors, and the positive cycle. Based on these findings, the researcher developed a framework to illustrate the relationship between career development expectations and work motivation.

The Expectation and Motivation Framework (Figure 1) is a conceptual framework that synthesizes results, depicts dynamically how career expectations affect motivation mechanisms in Chinese homegrown hotels. The framework was designed to replace linear models that only conceptualize expectations as simple antecedents of motivation, with a model in which the relationship between successful or not performance legitimately supports and reinforces both expected success and lack thereof. The framework also illustrates how this cycle is replicated by a similar set of internal (self-efficacy; higher-level needs) and external influences (industry prospects; organizational support structures). For Chinese hotel managers, the framework provides a diagnostic tool for identifying potential intervention points to enhance both career expectations and motivation among their staff.

The following are some important implications of the qualitative findings for Human Resource Management of H World Group: First, managers should increase employees' self-efficacy by providing them with training, success experiences, and helpful feedback in order to raise their career expectations and further their work motivation. Second, managers should meet employees' high-level needs by satisfying their recognition needs, providing them with challenging work, and creating opportunities for their self-actualization to enhance their career aspirations and work motivation. Third, although the hotel industry's perceived prospects held different opinions among employees, the hotel could still establish a strong career counseling and appraisal system to make employees clear about their career paths and career development potential, and further improve their career expectations. Finally, the hotel should provide clear opportunities for promotion and accessible training to indicate to employees that the hotel is willing to support their career development so as to further improve their career expectations and work motivation. The above hindering factors, such as unclear career paths and a lack of management support, are important for hotel management to create a good environment for employees' career development and motivation.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This qualitative study is part of the researcher's dissertation on *an incentive model based on staff career development expectations in Chinese homegrown hotels*. By gathering the opinions of interviewees, the researcher aims to develop more precise quantitative survey questions and identify relevant variables for inclusion in a questionnaire. As part of a dissertation, this study inherently has limitations in its breadth and depth, aiming to lay the groundwork for subsequent, more in-depth exploration. Secondly, the snowball sampling method employed in this research may have led to a higher degree of homogeneity among respondents in certain characteristics, despite the author's categorization of participants by job role.

Therefore, future research could consider broadening the scope of respondents' employing hotels to include, for example, independently operated or globally franchised hotels for comparative analysis. Regarding the respondent sample, future studies could employ a saturation-based interview strategy, such as doubling the number of interviewees and, after initial data organization, supplementing the sample based on the content to obtain more comprehensive and diverse data.

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