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Full Length Research Paper

Career change intentions of eco-tourism and hospitality management University graduates

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Abstract

In the recent past, there has been an influx of hospitality management university graduate employees into non hospitality organizations in Kenya. However, the main causes of this career change have not been examined. This study thus intended to investigate career change intentions of hospitality management graduates of Maseno University. The employees sampling frame consisted of employees who graduated from Maseno University in the years 2005 to 2010. Snowballing sampling was used to identify 150 representatives. The findings indicated that some graduates would like to build permanent careers outside the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Eco-tourism and hospitality management, university graduates, career change intentions, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's major international trade categories having provided 6-7% of the overall number of jobs both directly and indirectly in 2008 (UNWTO, 2009). In Kenya, tourism is a leading economic activity generating billions in earnings and employing thousands of people. Among those employed are hospitality and tourism students who graduate from institutions of higher learning. However, there has been an increase in the number of hospitality management graduates working outside the hospitality industry (O'leary and Deegan, 2005). Furthermore, a majority of hospitality professionals working in the hospitality industry have plans to leave the industry (Hjalager and Andersen, 2001). Most defectors eventually establish successful careers outside the hospitality industry. In light of this, the current study purposed to investigate career change intentions of Maseno University's ecotourism and hospitality management graduates.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the observed entry of hospitality management university graduates into non hospitality organizations in

Kenya, very little research has been done to examine the root causes of these career deviations. Although these graduates hold competent qualifications in hospitality management, a significant proportion do not work in the hospitality industry. There has been an influx of hospitality management graduates into other industries with the highest entries being the banking industry. This could indicate either career changes or intentions to change careers among the graduates. It also highlights the possibility that the graduates may be holding competencies, skills and qualifications that are attractive and beneficial to employers operating outside the hospitality industry.

Career change often occurs when one decides to leave a job and subsequently an industry with an intention of never working in that industry again. There is abundant literature highlighting that hospitality employees intend to leave the hospitality industry due to career dissatisfaction. Several recommendations have thus been made to manage turnover and career change among employees. Some of these recommendations have worked while others have proven to be futile. Unfortunately, most organizations still focus on human resource policies in dealing with turnover problems despite studies that evidence that the policies on their own cannot ensure retention of employees within the hospitality industry. However, the concept of managing

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the root causes of employees' career deviations has not been widely studied.

The root causes of career deviations among hospitality graduates therefore need to be examined before they adversely affect the hospitality industry. If not tackled, their contribution to the current trend of career change surrounding the graduates could pose risks such as the creation of a bad reputation for the hospitality industry, problems in attracting, recruiting and retaining hospitality students and employees and subsequent hospitality skills shortages.

The objective of the study was thus to ascertain the career change intentions of ecotourism and hospitality management graduates of Maseno University working within and outside the hospitality industry. Results arising from this study revealed why most hospitality graduates accept employment outside the hospitality industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several factors affect employees' career decisions. Job and career satisfaction has been cited as being a major factor that influences employees' career change intentions. Often, employees who are dissatisfied with their jobs and perceive this dissatisfaction to be a reflection of the general working conditions in an industry will attempt to change careers. Several studies (Gunlu et al, 2009; Ghiselli et al, 2001) have been undertaken to establish the link between job satisfaction and career decisions of hospitality employees. Ghiselli et al, (2001), studied satisfaction and turnover intent among foodservice managers and found that satisfaction plays a major part in managers' career change intentions. Another study conducted by Tutuncu and Kozak (2007) also established that overall job satisfaction levels influence employees' decisions to build careers in the hotel industry. However, previous studies for example S. Irungu, (Maseno University, Kenya, unpublished thesis) have shown that workers would still remain in their jobs and industries despite not being satisfied. S. Irungu, (Maseno University, Kenya, unpublished thesis) concluded that this career change resilience could have been due to the poor economic conditions and high unemployment rates that prevailed in Kenya during the study period.

Among the numerous factors identified as causes of job dissatisfaction and subsequent career change intentions within the hospitality industry are poor remuneration, unsuitable working hours, lack of work-life balance, lack of career opportunities, insufficient staff development, seasonality, insecurity and unchallenging work (O'leary and Deegan, 2005). Some of these factors are industrial in nature in that they are specific characteristics of the hospitality industry notably the hotel's sector. They also affect all levels of staff. The industrial factors that enhance career satisfaction among

hospitality employees include "consumption of tourism products, assisting tourists, discovering the tourism industry" (Weaver, 2009), food appeal, perks and global nature of tourism industry. Seasonality of business, job insecurity, unsocial working hours and insufficient staff development on the other hand are sources of dissatisfaction inherent to the hospitality industry.

Gender has also been shown to influence career change intentions of tourism employees. (O'leary and Deegan, 2005) found that more females than males work outside the hospitality industry. They linked this to the "unsocial nature of the work which is often incompatible with family life".

METHOD

The researcher used descriptive survey design. This involved use of questionnaires on respondents. Snowballing was used to select 150 graduates from the sampling frame consisting of students who studied ecotourism and hospitality management course at Maseno University and graduated between the years 2005 to 2010. The researcher postulated that not all the graduates were in employment during the study period. At the start of the study, one graduate employee was identified and using snowballing approach, other graduate employees were identified until a sample size of 150 graduates was selected. The questionnaires were sent to the respondents by postal and electronic mail. Where possible, the researcher personally distributed them. A total of 82 questionnaires were distributed via postal mail. A further 63 were sent via electronic mail while another 5 questionnaires were hand delivered. A pre paid postage envelope was also provided so that the graduates could return their completed surveys to the researcher. Data from the questionnaires was collected in the months of March, April and May 2011. The total number of responses was 109 giving a response rate of 71.7%. There were 105 usable questionnaires thus giving a usable response rate of 69%. The response rates may have been influenced by the use of electronic mails survey as some people did not respond to electronic mails. This is unlike the postal mail survey in which relatively more responses were achieved due to provision of stamped envelopes.

Structured questionnaires were self administered to the selected graduates. The questionnaires entailed open and closed questions on the graduates' demographic characteristics, career decisions and career change intentions. Likert scales were used to measure the graduates' career perceptions. According to Clark et al. 1998, likert scales are often used in measuring negative, neutral and positive attitudes towards objects. Likert scales compute midpoint scores that indicate neutrality of opinion. Scales (1 to 5) were assigned nominal values with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5

strongly agree. The midscore for this scale was 3. Any scores below 3 meant negative values while scores above 3 meant positive values.

Reliability

The reliability of the measuring instrument was determined. According to Field, (2006), reliability is the consistency of a measurement device. It refers to the degree to which an instrument measures the same way each time it is used under the same conditions with the same subjects. The reliability of the measuring instrument was enhanced through pilot studies. The ten graduates who participated in the pilot studies were thereafter excluded from the final sample. The Cronbach's alpha for the different scales in the questionnaires were also computed as part of reliability testing. The cronbach's alpha for the scale on the graduates perceptions towards hospitality careers was .714 and for the graduates' entry into new industries .753. Thus these alpha scores were accepted since a score of atleast 0.70 is considered good (Field, 2006).

Data analysis

Using SPSS version 17, frequencies, means, percentages, regressions and factor loadings were computed. The means were used to rank the graduates perceptions towards the hospitality industry and desired new industries. Cross tabulation was used to establish associations between variables such as age and career change intentions as well as industry and career change intentions.

Exploratory factor analysis was computed using principal axis factor and varimax rotation. Factor analysis identifies "underlying factors or latent variables present in the patterns among a set of measures" (Blaikie, 2009). It was used to identify key factors that propel the graduates into industries outside the hospitality industry. Sample adequacy was ascertained using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO). A KMO value of $>.5$ is considered adequate for factor analysis. The observed KMO value for this study was 0.668 thus confirming sample adequacy. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity values recorded for all the variable sets were highly significant (i.e. $p < 0.001$) an indication that the R-matrices obtained were not identity matrices. Average communalities of $>.5$ were recorded for all the observed variables.

Multiple linear regression was then used to identify the variables contributions to the various predictors. Multiple regression is a "multivariate explanatory analysis tool that indicates relationships between predictor and outcome variables" (Blaikie, 2009). Hierarchical multiple linear regression was used with entry and backward methods. Beta values were used to determine the greatest and

least contributor variables and how strongly each predictor variable influenced the criterion variable. R^2 was used to determine the proportion of the variance in the criterion variable accounted by the model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics and human capital characteristics of the respondents

Questionnaire responses were obtained from 105 graduates. 65 (62%) were male and 40 (38%) female. 74 (70.5%) of the respondents were single and 31 (29.5%) married. None was separated, divorced or widowed. The age of the graduates ranged from 23 to 40 years with an average age of 27.35 years. 12 (11.4%) of the respondents had graduated with their first hospitality management degree in the year 2005, 21 (20%) in 2006, 8 (7.6%) in 2007, 6 (5.7%) in 2008, 18 (17.1%) in 2009 and 40 (38.1%) in 2010.

The study showed that previously, the graduates had work experiences in the following industries; hospitality, tertiary education, security and technology, banking, non-governmental parastatal, fleet management and consultancy, commerce, research, entrepreneurship, food production, insurance, design, printing and health care. From the finding, it is apparent that some of the graduates have changed jobs several times indicating that there is significant job mobility amongst them.

At the time of this study, 73 (69.5%) of respondents were employed within the hospitality industry compared to 32 (30.5%) that were employed outside the industry. Those working outside the hospitality industry were involved in a variety of areas including banking ($n=12$, 11.43%), energy technology ($n=4$, 3.81%) information and communication technology ($n=4$, 3.81%), non-governmental organizations ($n=4$, 3.81%), fleet management and consultancy ($n=2$, 1.9%), commerce ($n=2$, 1.9%), revenue collection ($n=2$, 1.9%), design ($n=1$, 0.95%) and printing ($n=1$, 0.95%). These findings of the study highlight that hospitality management graduates are able to successfully secure employment in fields outside the hospitality industry thus presenting a clear indication that the hospitality industry shares its labour market with other trades.

Graduates perceptions towards the hospitality industry

The graduates characterised hospitality careers as being global, challenging, with opportunities to meet different people, accumulated work experience, variety of tasks, self employment opportunities, excitement and adventure, wide career prospects and managerial opportunities. The graduates however felt that negative

Table 1. Demographic and human capital characteristics of respondents

Demographics	Frequency	Valid percent
Gender of respondents		
Male	65	61.9
Female	40	38.1
Total	105	100.0
Marital status of respondents		
Married	31	29.5
Single	74	70.5
Total	105	100.0
Year of graduation		
2005	12	11.4
2006	21	20.0
2007	8	7.6
2008	6	5.7
2009	18	17.1
2010	40	38.1
Total	105	100.0

Table 2. Respondents perceptions of hospitality careers

Characteristics of hospitality careers	Rank	Mean	SD
Hospitality careers are global	1	4.50	.64
Hospitality careers offer opportunities to meet different people	2	4.48	.84
Hospitality career offer challenging work	3	4.11	.73
Hospitality careers offer accumulated work experience	4	4.00	.78
Hospitality careers offer variety of tasks	5	3.87	1.00
Hospitality careers offer self employment opportunities	6	3.63	1.06
Hospitality careers are exciting and adventurous	7	3.61	.99
Hospitality careers offer wide career prospects	8	3.45	.99
Hospitality jobs offer managerial opportunities	9	3.32	1.05
Hospitality careers offer adequate benefits	10	2.77	.82
Hospitality careers offer good pay	11	2.42	.96
Hospitality careers offer readily available jobs	12	2.30	.84
Hospitality careers offer job security	13	2.17	1.03

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Uncertain 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Table 3. Cross tabulation of respondents' ages and intentions to build permanent career outside the hospitality industry

		Intention to build permanent career outside the hospitality industry		Total
		Yes	No	
Age of respondents	Below 26	0	2	2
	26-30	50	45	95
	31-35	2	2	4
	36-40	0	4	4
	Over 40	0	0	0
Total		52	53	105

Table 4. Cross tabulation of current industry the graduates are working in and intention to build permanent career outside the hospitality industry

		Intention to build permanent career outside the hospitality industry		
		Yes	No	Total
Current industry the graduates are working in	Hospitality (Hotel, restaurants, clubs, game parks, catering and related fields)	22	27	49
	Hospitality (Tertiary education)	8	16	24
	Banking	10	2	12
	Energy technology	2	2	4
	Information and communication technology	2	2	4
	Non-governmental organization	2	2	4
	Fleet management and consultancy	2	0	2
	Commerce	0	2	2
	Design and printing	2	0	2
	Revenue collection	2	0	2
Total		52	53	105

aspects of hospitality careers are that they are characterised by inadequate benefits, poor pay, scarce employment opportunities and job insecurity. These results are similar to those cited by Nickson, (2007) in which he has outlined low wages, unsocial hours and shift patterns, casual and seasonal employment as being negative aspects of the hospitality industry.

Graduates career change intentions

Out of the 105 respondents, 52 (49.5 %) indicated that they would wish to build permanent careers outside the hospitality industry. Almost the same number (53, 50.5%) indicated their satisfaction with a career in the hospitality industry and wished to stay in the industry.

With regard to gender, 30 male and 22 female

respondents desired to leave the hospitality industry while 35 male and 18 female respondents had no intentions of leaving the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry has always been seen as demanding especially to women who have family roles to play. Therefore turnover and career change intentions amongst women are often higher than amongst men working in the hospitality industry. However, the results of this study indicate that more men than women intend to leave the hospitality industry, which is a deviation from the norm and could be explained by the high number of male respondents who participated in this study.

With regard to age, most of the graduates (n=50) who wanted to leave the hospitality industry were aged between twenty six and thirty years while most of those (n=45) who had no intention of leaving the hospitality industry were aged between twenty six and thirty years.

These results indicate that all the graduates are in the establishment career stage in which a person attempts to establish a permanent career in a chosen field. However, this stage is crippled by high career change especially in the trial sub stage that occurs between ages twenty five to thirty (Dessler, 1997). This career change is often due to career dissatisfaction. The stabilization sub stage which occurs between ages thirty to forty on the other hand is the stage where a person establishes solid career goals and attempts to achieve these goals (Dessler, 1997). Career change intentions in this sub stage as illustrated by the results are minimized and most people consider it too late to risk building a new career and would rather invest on what they already have.

With regard to industry, thirty of the seventy three graduates employed in the hospitality industry wanted to leave the hospitality industry while forty three of them had no intentions of quitting the industry. This observation reinforces Hjalager's and Andersen's (2001) views that "jobs in the tourism industry are not the first career choice among young people and are regarded as a temporary stepping stone even for those with dedicated professional training".

Previous studies (Weaver, 2009 and Rheede et al., 2009) have found that both perceptions of the actual job as well as characteristics of the hospitality industry are important considerations when individuals decide on whether to pursue hospitality related careers or to opt for employment in another industry. 41 of the 52 respondents who wanted to build permanent careers outside the hospitality industry indicated that they wanted to leave the hospitality industry because the hospitality industry is characterised by long working hours and poor pay (n=12, 23.08%), the hospitality industry is not satisfying (n=8, 15.38%), the graduates had already deviated from the hospitality industry (n=4, 7.69%), hospitality careers in Kenya do not offer much opportunities (n=4, 7.69%), the graduates are not satisfied with entry positions offered to graduates in the hospitality industry since they are more operative than

managerial (n=4, 7.69%), hospitality careers are boring (n=4, 7.69%), the graduates would like to start their own businesses (n=4, 7.69%) and because success in the hospitality industry requires personality (n=1, 1.92%). These findings are similar to O'Leary and Deegan's, (2005) and Hjalager and Andersen's, (2001) who have identified poor remuneration, unsuitable work hours, lack of career opportunities, insufficient staff development, insecurity and unchallenging work as some of the causes of career dissatisfaction in the hospitality industry.

The 52 respondents who wanted to leave the hospitality industry indicated that they would like to build permanent careers in industries such as banking (n=16, 30.77%), any industry that offers managerial responsibilities (n=6, 11.54%), entrepreneurship (n=4, 7.69%), commerce (n=4, 7.69%), nutritional health (n=3, 5.77%), academics or non-governmental organizations (n=2, 3.85%), real estate (n=2, 3.85%), community development (n=2, 3.85%), civil service or banking (n=2, 3.85%), branding (n=2, 3.85%), accountancy (n=2, 3.85%), consultancy (n=2, 3.85%), corporate business (n=2, 3.85%) and civil service (n=1, 1.92%). Two of the graduates were not sure of the industries they desired to join. The results thus show that the influx of these graduates into organizations outside the hospitality industry especially the banking industry could continue for a while.

Most of the graduates felt that the new industry will offer them increased range of benefits, more job and career security, more work life balance, better working conditions, better pay and more autonomy and independence. The analysis thus indicates that most defectors from the hospitality industry seek security, adequate compensation, work life balance and better work conditions in sectors outside the hospitality industry. This also indicates that career dissatisfaction in the hospitality industry is a major cause of career change intentions among hospitality graduates. That is why most of these graduates are willing to quit the hospitality industry if given the chance and secure employment in fields they perceive will satisfy their career needs.

Factor analysis was then performed with the aim of establishing the key factors driving the graduates into the new industries. A principal axis factor (PAF) with a varimax rotation of thirteen likert scale questions from the survey questionnaire was conducted on data gathered from the participants. Five key factors were extracted. These factors were growth, value, motivation, personal development and reward. These factors explained 69.59% of the total variance thus showing that they are significant. Factor one accounted for 17.73%, factor two accounted for 16.51%, factor three accounted for 12.68%, factor four accounted for 12.61% and factor five accounted for 10.06%. Two items loaded onto factor one, four items loaded onto factor two, three items loaded onto factor three, two items loaded onto factor four and two

items loaded onto factor five. Multiple linear regressions were then performed with the aim of identifying the contributions of various items to their respective factors.

Factor one (Growth)

The two items that loaded onto this factor were “the new industry will offer me greater managerial responsibilities” and “the new industry will offer me enhanced managerial skills”. These two variables relate to employee growth. The factor was therefore labelled “growth”. This factor explained for the greatest percentage of the total variance. This could be because the items that load onto it relate to management which is the main focus of the graduates’ degree qualifications. However, the other factors should not be disregarded. The R square of the two variables was 0.851 indicating that the two variables explained 85.1% of the variation in the growth factor. The F value (91.648) and t values registered were highly significant ($p < .001$). The beta values obtained for the two predictor variables indicated that the statement in the five-point likert scale “the new industry will offer me greater managerial responsibilities” has the greatest contribution ($\beta = .490$, $t = 4.695$) towards factor one while “the new industry will offer me enhanced managerial skills” ($\beta = .343$, $t = 3.115$) has the least contribution. This could be because the graduates have managerial qualifications and would like to settle for jobs that offer them managerial opportunities in line with their qualifications.

Factor two (Value)

The four variables that loaded onto this factor were “the new industry will offer me more challenges”, “the new industry will offer me increased sense of service and dedication to a cause”, “the new industry will offer me variety of tasks” and “the new industry will offer me excitement and adventure”. Two of the variables relate to career anchors. The factor was therefore labelled “value”. The R square of the four factors was 0.84 indicating that the predictor variables in value factor explained 84% of the variation in the factor structure. The F value (61.601) and t values registered were highly significant ($p < .001$). The beta values obtained for the four predictor variables indicated that the statement in the five-point likert scale “the new industry will offer me more challenges” has the greatest contribution ($\beta = .442$, $t = 6.528$) towards factor two followed by “the new industry will offer me increased sense of service and dedication to a cause” ($\beta = .376$, $t = 4.665$) then “the new industry will offer me variety of tasks” ($\beta = .160$, $t = 1.681$). “The new industry will offer me excitement and adventure” ($\beta = .159$, $t = 1.480$) on the other hand has the least contribution. This could be because the graduates are still young and would enjoy

challenges as part of their development at work.

Factor three (Motivation)

The three items that loaded onto this factor were “the new industry will offer me better working conditions”, “the new industry will offer me increased job and career security” and “the new industry will offer me better pay”. These three variables relate to employee motivation. The factor was therefore labelled “motivation”. The R square of the three items was 0.942 indicating that these variables explained 94.2% of the variation in the motivation factor. The F value (258.778) and t values registered were highly significant ($p < .001$). The beta values obtained for the three predictor variables indicated that the statement in the five-point likert scale “the new industry will offer me better working conditions” has the greatest contribution ($\beta = .639$, $t = 15.541$) towards factor three followed by “the new industry will offer me better pay” ($\beta = .420$, $t = 10.765$). “The new industry will offer me increased job and career security” ($\beta = .134$, $t = 3.288$) on the other hand has the least contribution. This could be because employees prefer better working conditions and better pay since they are physiological needs and enhance performance at work which is a prerequisite to job and career security in the long-term. Job and career security is a security need which is often satisfied after physiological needs are satisfied.

Factor four (Personal development)

The two items that loaded onto this factor were “the new industry will offer me self-employment opportunities” and “the new industry will offer me autonomy and independence”. These two variables relate to personal growth and development. The factor was therefore labelled “personal development”. The R square of the two variables was 0.992 indicating that these variables explained 99.2% of the variation in the personal development factor. The F value (288.556) and t values registered were highly significant ($p < .001$). The beta values obtained for the predictor variables indicated that the statement in the five-point likert scale “the new industry will offer me autonomy and independence” has the greatest contribution ($\beta = .640$, $t = 13.327$) towards factor four while “the new industry will offer me self employment opportunities” ($\beta = .443$, $t = 9.223$) has the least contribution. This can be attributed to recent changes at the workplace where more employees enjoy freedom at work. Autonomy and independence is also an esteem need, a personal value and career anchor while self employment opportunities is a self actualization need that may not matter much to everyone on employment. Esteem needs are often satisfied before self actualization needs. In addition, self employment ventures are not

always successful and would be considered to be risky ventures especially to these graduates who are at early stages of their careers.

Factor five (Reward)

The two variables that loaded onto this factor were “the new industry will me offer me increased range of benefits” and “the new industry will offer me more work-life balance”. These two items relate to employee recognition and compensation. The factor was therefore labelled “reward”. The R square of the two variables was 0.918 indicating that the predictor variables in reward factor explained 91.8% of the total variation in the factor structure. The F value (273.115) and t values registered were highly significant ($p < .001$). The beta values obtained for the predictor variables indicated that the statement in the five-point likert scale “the new industry will offer me increased range of benefits” has the greatest contribution ($\beta = .846$, $t = 18.528$) towards factor five while “the new industry will offer me more work life balance” ($\beta = .210$, $t = 4.598$) has the least contribution. This could be because benefits and work-life balance are both physiological needs. However, benefits are naturally a greater attraction to employees as compared to work-life balance.

The ease of successfully establishing permanent careers outside the hospitality industry was also examined. The 52 graduates who wanted to leave the hospitality industry were asked to indicate how easy it was for them to build permanent careers outside the hospitality industry. 6 (11.5%) respondents believed that it would be “extremely easy” to build a permanent career outside the hospitality industry, 10 (19.2%) said it would be “very easy”, 28 (53.8%) said it would be “moderately easy”, 4 (7.7%) said it would be “slightly easy” and 4 (7.7%) said it would “not be easy at all”. These results show that most of the graduates were confident that they could establish successful careers outside the hospitality industry.

The 52 graduates who wanted to build permanent careers outside the hospitality industry indicated that their career change intentions would be facilitated by their interest in the new industry, their dynamism due to their training in the hospitality industry, availability of opportunities for graduate recruitment in the new fields, their networking abilities and the fact that some of them already hold permanent jobs in the new industries. They however felt that that their career change intentions would be hindered by lack of capital, lack of time and opportunity, lack of work experience in the new industry, complicated entry levels needed to join the new industries, competition from co-workers and similar businesses and their experience and professional training in the hospitality industry.

CONCLUSION

The findings illustrate that some graduates would like to leave the hospitality industry. Most graduates felt that the new industries will offer them increased range of benefits, more job and career security, more work life balance, better working conditions and better pay. The study has implications for employers within the hospitality industry who should strive to ensure that there is no managerial skills shortage in the hospitality industry.

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