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Career path determinants of Eco-tourism and Hospitality Management university graduates

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Abstract

There has been an increase in the number of hospitality management university graduates working in non hospitality organizations in Kenya. Despite this, studies have not been undertaken to investigate the factors that influence these graduates' career decisions. The purpose of this study was thus to investigate the career path determinants of Maseno University's hospitality management graduates. The population of study was ecotourism, hotel and institution management graduates of Maseno University working within and outside the hospitality industry. 150 respondents, from the sampling frame consisting of students who graduated between the years 2005 and 2010, were selected through snowballing. Structured questionnaires were self-administered to the respondents. Frequencies, percentages, means, factor loadings and regressions were computed and presented using SPSS version 17. The study revealed that the graduates' major career path determinants are unpredictable events, career satisfaction levels, chance and permanency of career.

Key words: Career path determinants, Hospitality management graduates, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Universities in Kenya started offering hospitality and tourism undergraduate and post graduate courses in the late 1990's, in line with the growth of tourism in the country. Tourism is now a leading economic activity in Kenya (Ministry of Tourism, Kenya, 2010) and a major employer of hospitality management graduates. There has however been an increase in the number of hospitality management graduates working in non hospitality organizations in Kenya. This trend has also been observed in other countries. For example, O'leary & Deegan, (2005) in studying the career progression of Irish tourism and hospitality management

graduates, revealed "significant drop-out rate from employment in the hospitality industry". However, despite this, the factors influencing these graduates' career decisions have not been adequately addressed and previous studies conducted in Kenya, for example Irungu (2006), have tackled hospitality employee turnover in general. A revelation of the factors influencing hospitality management graduates' career decisions and subsequent career paths would thus fill gaps in knowledge that need to be investigated. Subsequently, this study intended to investigate the career path determinants of Maseno University's ecotourism and hospitality management graduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term career refers to “the general course a person chooses to pursue throughout the working life” (Mondy et al, 1996, p. 300). Career path, on the other hand, is the way in which an individual’s career develops leading to the realization of career goals. Several factors have been cited as determinants of employees’ career decisions and subsequent career paths. They include demographics (Dessler, 1997, p. 385-386, Mondy et al, 1996, p.301), career anchors (Danziger & Valency, 2006, Mondy et al, 1996, p. 302), job satisfaction levels (O’leary & Deegan, 2005), chance, labour market conditions (Agarwala, 2008), the general economy (Arnold & Davey, 1994), choice and unpredictable events.

Career Path Determinants

Career stage

People go through various career stages that influence their career decisions. Dessler, (1997, p. 385-386) identifies these stages as the growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline stages. Dessler, (1997, p. 385-386) further describes “the growth stage as the stage where an individual’s career preferences are most influenced by personal interests and desires and occurs from birth to age 14. The exploration stage occurs between ages 15 and 24. In this stage, a person starts developing realistic expectations of own capabilities and interests. The establishment stage, which is the stage where most graduates would fall, occurs between ages 24 to 44 and is the stage where a person attempts to establish a permanent career in the chosen field. This stage is made up of the trial, stabilization and midcareer crisis sub-stages. The trial sub stage occurs between ages 25 to 30 and is the stage where most people would change jobs when not satisfied with the chosen field. Stabilization sub stage occurs between ages 30 to 40 and is the sub stage where a person establishes solid career goals and attempts to achieve these goals.

The midcareer crisis sub stage occurs between ages 34 to 46. In this stage, a person critically analyzes the career goals that can be achieved in reality and identifies inevitable career sacrifices. The maintenance stage occurs between ages 45 to 65. It is the stage where most people actually establish permanent careers and experience minimal career deviations. The final stage, which is the decline stage, occurs as one approaches retirement”.

Career anchors

Career anchors are values, motives and competencies that dictate ones desires in pursuing a career (Danziger & Valency, 2006). When these values, motives and competencies are met, then career commitment is enhanced and career change intentions are minimized. Individuals usually discover a dominant career anchor, which is a value that a person will not give up if a choice is to be made, during their employment span. Consequently, employees often build their careers based on the dominant career anchor which then becomes the focus of their careers albeit this anchor may evolve over time as an individual further understands personal values. There are eight career anchors: technical or functional competence, general management competence, autonomy and/or independence, security and stability, entrepreneurial creativity, pure challenge, lifestyle and sense of service or dedication to a cause (Dessler, 1997, p. 389-390).

Chance and unpredictable events

Chance is the availability of a job when looking for one (Mathis and Jackson, 2008, p. 298). Chance can drive an employee towards accepting an unanticipated job or career. However, an employee can also change careers when the possibility of finding employment in a chosen field is not promising.

Unpredictable events could also affect employees’ career decisions and employees may consider changing careers when their lives have been affected by

events such as divorce, redundancies, accidents and illnesses.

Social influences

Employee career decisions can also be influenced by family, peers, spouse, friends, relatives, co-workers and managers (Agarwala, 2008; Garavan & Coolahan, 1996). These relations can pressure an employee against pursuing certain careers in favour of others.

METHOD

Research design

The researcher used descriptive survey design which Kombo (2006, p. 71) describes as “a method of gathering information through the administration of questionnaires and conducting of interviews on sample representatives and is appropriate for use when collecting information on social issues”. Subsequently, the researcher administered structured questionnaires on selected graduates in an attempt to establish their perceptions towards career decisions.

Study population

The population of study was employed graduates who studied ecotourism and hospitality management at Maseno University. Snowballing was used to select 150 graduates from the sampling frame consisting of students who graduated between the years 2005 and 2010.

Data gathering instrument

The data gathering instrument used was survey questionnaires. The graduates completed information on their demographics and career decisions. Likert scales with five degrees of relative agreement, satisfaction and importance were used. Data was collected in the months of March, April and May, 2011. 109 filled questionnaires were returned. However, usable questionnaires were 105 thus giving a usable response rate of 69%.

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha is often used to “determine the internal consistency reliability of items comprising scales” (DeVellis, 1991, p.25). Field (2006, pp. 667-680) states that an alpha score of at least 0.70 is good. The cronbach's alpha for the scale on the graduates perceived career path determinants was .723, for the graduates' actual career path determinants .851 and for the graduates' career satisfaction levels .816. The reliability of the measuring instrument was also enhanced through piloting. Piloting helped identify and correct any problems on the questionnaires before they were administered to the final representatives.

Data analysis

Data collected was analyzed and presented using SPSS 17. Frequencies, percentages, means, factor loadings and regressions were computed. Frequencies and percentages formed the basis of comparisons between the graduates' ages, employment status and most important career anchors. Means were used to rank the career path determinants and career satisfaction levels. Exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factor and varimax rotation was used to classify the career path determinants.

Hierarchical multiple linear regression with entry and backward methods was also computed. Multiple regression is “a method of multivariate explanatory analysis that analyzes the relationship between a single, metric outcome variable and two or more predictor variables. The analysis establishes the relative magnitudes of the contributions of each predictor variable” (Blaikie, 2009, p.146).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics and human capital characteristics of respondents

65 (62%) of the respondents were male and 40 (38%) female. The graduates' ages ranged from 23 to 40 years. Their average

age was 27.35 years. This indicates that most graduates were 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. 73 (69.50%) respondents were employed within the hospitality industry while 32 (30.50%) were employed in non hospitality organizations and in areas such as 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, 1.90%), commerce (n=2, 1.90%), revenue collection (n=2, 1.90%), design (n=1, 0.95%) and printing (n=1, 0.95%).

Perceived career path determinants

The graduates indicated the extent to which various career path determinants could influence their career decisions. The findings illustrate that the graduates perceived unpredictable events (4.26) to be their most important career path determinant followed by career anchors (3.99), social pressure (3.91), chance (3.72), prevailing labour market conditions (3.58), personal choice (3.40), prevailing economic conditions (3.29), opportunity (2.95) and lastly career satisfaction levels (2.21).

(see table 1)

With regard to gender, the most important career path determinant as perceived by male respondents was unpredictable events (4.35) followed by social pressure (4.11) then career anchors (4.02) while that for female respondents was unpredictable events (4.10) followed by career anchors (3.95) then chance (3.80). Chance, personal choice, prevailing economic conditions and career satisfaction levels mattered more to the female respondents than to the male respondents. However, t-tests showed that the only significant differences between the means emerged under labour market

conditions, $t(103) = 2.77$, $p = .000$ with men receiving more scores than women.

Actual career path determinants

The graduates were then presented with a list of reasons for joining their current industries. These reasons were based on various career path determinants. The means on the career path determinants were then ranked. Based on the ranked means, the reason why most of the graduates joined their current industries and thus their most influential career path determinant was unpredictable events (3.71) followed by career satisfaction levels (3.46), chance (3.38), permanency of career (3.30), labour market conditions (3.28), choice (3.23) and career anchor (3.07). Economic conditions (2.97), opportunity (2.15) and lastly social influences (1.71) can be considered to be the graduates' minor career path determinants.

(see table 2)

The most influential career path determinant for the male respondents was unpredictable events (3.94) followed by prevailing labour market conditions (3.72) then permanency of career in the industry (3.37) and choice (3.37) while the most influential career path determinant for the female respondents was chance (4.00) followed by career satisfaction levels (3.70) then unpredictable events (3.35). Career satisfaction levels, chance, opportunity and social pressure influenced the female respondents' career decisions more than they did the male respondents. However, t-tests showed that the only significant differences between the means emerged under chance $t(103) = -3.36$, $p = .000$, unpredictable events $t(103) = 2.14$, $p = .000$, personal choice $t(103) = 1.46$, $p = .000$ and labour market conditions, $t(103) = 4.23$, $p = .000$ with men receiving more scores than women in unpredictable events, choice and labour market conditions.

Regarding labour market conditions, men tend not to be selective of the jobs and careers they pursue and do not pay much attention to the type of work, risk and procedures the jobs entail. Unpredictable

events and choice could influence male respondents' career decisions more than they could female respondents' because men are more open to risks that come with such conditions and they tend to be more focused when making decisions on jobs and careers. Chance could influence female respondents' career decisions more than they could male respondents' because of the family roles they play that may disrupt their careers thus making them settle for jobs and careers that come along when they need one.

The data was further subjected to principal axis factor (PAF) aimed at identifying the key factors that influence the graduates career decisions and multiple linear regression aimed at identifying the variables contributions to their respective factors. Only variables with mean scores of three and above were analysed. Economic conditions, social pressure and opportunity were therefore excluded from the analysis. Two key factors were computed, "value based and environmental" and "personal and career satisfaction". These factors explained 43.35% of the total variance. Factor one accounted for 28.54% while factor two accounted for 14.82%. Four items loaded onto factor one while three items loaded onto factor two.
(see table 3)

Factor one (Value based and environmental)

The four items that loaded onto factor one were: "I joined this industry by chance", "unpredictable events forced me to join this industry", "I joined this industry due to prevailing labour market conditions" and "the industry is in line with my career anchor". These four variables relate to environmental conditions and personal values. This factor was therefore labelled "value based and environmental". The R square of the four variables was 0.99 indicating that the predictor variables in this factor explain 99% of the variation in the factor structure.

(see table 4)

The F value (2705.65) 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 industry is in line with my career anchors" has the greatest contribution ($\beta = .54$, $t = 41.94$) towards factor one followed by "I joined this industry due to prevailing labour market conditions" ($\beta = .32$, $t = 26.64$) then "unpredictable events forced me to join this industry" ($\beta = .11$, $t = 10.08$). "I joined this industry by chance" ($\beta = .10$, $t = 7.62$) on the other hand has the least contribution. This could be because career anchors are personal values which would typically be taken to be more important than unpredictable events, labour market and chance which are external factors that an employee cannot have much control over.

Career anchors

Some graduates joined industries which they believed were in line with their career anchors. The findings indicate that the most important career anchor for both genders was technical function followed by security and stability, entrepreneurial creativity, autonomy and independence, sense of service and dedication to a cause, managerial competence, pure challenge and lastly total lifestyle.

(see table 5)

This finding is somehow similar to Kniveton's, (2004), who found that younger people preferred talent based anchors which are managerial competency, technical/functional competency and entrepreneurial creativity. Technical competence (talents and skills) was also selected as the most important anchor by both male and female graduates. This could be because most hospitality graduates believe that one cannot manage what he does not know thus they have to master technical skills before managing them.

Labour market conditions

The global recession experienced in 2008 led to many hospitality establishments in Kenya especially those related to

accommodation and food and beverage provision cutting down on staffing costs through staff layoffs and stalling recruitment. There was thus a surplus of qualified hospitality professionals in the labour market. Yet, industries such as the insurance and banking industries and tertiary institutions within the hospitality industry had shortage of qualified staff and as a result recruited graduates of all fields in large numbers. Some graduates therefore opted to join these industries and sectors.

Other graduates (n=6, 5.71%) also sought industries that assured job security. Such industries include the banking industry which they believed was more secure and had more employment opportunities than the hospitality industry. They felt that the banking industry which has been growing rapidly in the recent past had room for them and actually employed them on permanent basis thus providing job security. The hospitality industry is known for its high levels of job insecurity portrayed by factors such as insecure employment terms where most employees are employed on contract and casual basis. This trend is evident especially during the off peak seasons of tourism when employers try to minimise costs by sending employees home.

Unpredictable events

Some graduates (n=9, 8.5%) reported that they never anticipated unemployment rates to be so high. The graduates actually thought they would get jobs immediately after graduating. They however had to look for work for a while and settle for the first job that was available irrespective of the industry. The graduates also never anticipated that they would end up working outside the hospitality industry and were surprised to get employment offers from non hospitality organizations and in sectors such as the tertiary education sector within the hospitality industry. They felt that the reluctance of hospitality employers to give them a chance in employment drove them to seek and secure employment outside the industry. The graduates observed that

employees who possess diploma qualifications were being favoured and preferred by employers since graduates were considered to be overqualified for the various positions in the hospitality industry. These observations replicate Hjalager's and Andersen's, (2001) views on the tourism industry's reluctance to employ tourism professionals. Some graduates (n=2, 1.9%) were also made redundant after the organizations they were working for shut down. One graduate reported that he secured a job outside the hospitality industry but was forced to leave and rejoin the hospitality industry after he failed to perform due to lack of skills and knowledge. Another graduate indicated that he was poached from his last employer by his current employer.

Chance

Luck can either be good, bad or both good and bad (Chen, 2005). Some graduates disclosed that they joined their current industries by chance after being on attachment in the organizations (n=8, 7.62%) or after volunteering for sometime (n=8, 7.62%). Others (n=6, 5.71%) could not get jobs in the hospitality industry and therefore had to settle for the first opening that came along irrespective of the industry. This they believed was because the hospitality industry is overcrowded with diploma holders and employment opportunities for graduates are scarce. Other graduates (n=8, 7.62%) joined their current industries by luck after being referred to employers by friends or after applying in many organizations.

Factor two (*Personal and career satisfaction*)

Three items loaded onto factor two. They were: "I chose this industry", "I want to build a permanent career in this industry" and "the industry offers high career satisfaction levels". These three variables relate to personal satisfaction and career satisfaction. The factor was therefore labelled "personal and career satisfaction". The R square of the three variables was

0.95 indicating that the predictor variables in this factor explain 95% of the variation in the factor structure. The F value (633.25) and t values registered were highly significant ($p < .001$).

(see table 6)

The beta values obtained for the predictor variables indicated that the statement in the five-point likert scale “the industry offers high career satisfaction levels” has the greatest contribution ($\beta = .86$, $t = 33.08$) towards factor two followed by “I want to build a permanent career in this industry” ($\beta = .10$, $t = 4.05$). “I chose this industry” ($\beta = .10$, $t = 2.75$) on the other hand has the least contribution. This could be because career satisfaction matters in any job. Career satisfaction is also a security need. It would thus be considered more important than choice which is a personal value and esteem need. Security needs are often satisfied before esteem needs.

Career satisfaction levels

Some graduates joined industries which they felt would offer them career satisfaction. All the graduates were thus queried about their satisfaction levels with various aspects of their current careers. The means were computed and ranked.

(see table 7)

The analysis revealed that the graduates were most satisfied with availability of opportunities to meet different people, challenge, sense of service, variety of tasks and autonomy and independence in their current industries. The graduates were however least satisfied with pay, job security, work-life balance, managerial responsibilities and job availability in their current industries.

Permanency of career

Other graduates ($n = 6$, 5.71%) joined industries in which they hoped to establish permanent careers due to the job security that comes with such status. A permanent job often comes with benefits such as insurance covers and guaranteed employment.

Choice

Some graduates reported that they wanted to work in their current industries because the industries were in line with their skills and qualifications ($n = 4$, 3.81%), they were interested in the industries ($n = 4$, 3.81%), they were curious about the industries ($n = 4$, 3.81%), they liked the industries ($n = 4$, 3.81%), they preferred the industries ($n = 4$, 3.81%) and they enjoyed working in them ($n = 4$, 3.81%). Other graduates ($n = 3$, 2.86%) however felt that they did not have much of a choice and simply needed jobs and financial security thus settling on the first industry that offered them an employment opportunity.

Economic conditions, opportunity and social pressure

These three factors emerged as the graduates' least influential career path determinants. Some graduates ($n = 5$, 4.95%) indicated that they joined their current industries because they needed jobs and were in pursuit of financial security. There was a global recession in 2008 that affected employment. However some industries and sectors such as the banking industry and tertiary education sector within the hospitality industry were not greatly affected and still recruited in large numbers. Other sectors in the hospitality industry such as hotels and restaurants were on the other hand firing people. Eleven (10.48%) graduates reported that they joined their current industries because the job opportunity came along while other graduates ($n = 8$, 7.62%) reported that their relatives influenced their career decisions.

CONCLUSION

Previous studies on hospitality careers have focused on undergraduates' career decisions. Graduates career decisions have however not been widely studied. This study thus intended to investigate the career decisions of ecotourism and hospitality management graduates of Maseno University. The analysis revealed that the

graduates perceive unpredictable events to be their most influential career path determinant followed by career anchors, social pressure, chance, prevailing labour market conditions, choice, prevailing economic conditions, opportunity then career satisfaction levels. The findings also revealed that the graduates' major career path determinants are unpredictable events, career satisfaction, chance, permanency of career, labour market conditions, choice and career anchors. These determinants can be grouped into two factors "value based and environmental" and "personal and career satisfaction". The graduates' minor career path determinants on the other hand are economic conditions, opportunity and social pressure. The study has implications for employers who should strive to understand the factors that influence employees' career decisions.

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Tables follow...

TABLES

Table 1: Graduates' perceived career path determinants

Perceived career path determinant	Both genders			Male	Female
	Rank	Mean	SD	Mean	Mean
Unpredictable events	1	4.26	1.00	4.35	4.10
Career anchors	2	3.99	1.22	4.02	3.95
Social pressure	3	3.91	1.20	4.11	3.60
Chance	4	3.72	1.23	3.68	3.80
Prevailing labour market conditions	5	3.58	1.29	3.85	3.15
Personal choice	6	3.40	1.19	3.31	3.55
Prevailing economic conditions	7	3.29	1.15	3.18	3.45
Opportunity	8	2.95	1.12	2.98	2.90
Career satisfaction levels	9	2.21	1.12	2.18	2.25

1=to no extent at all, 5=to a very large extent

Table 2: Graduates reasons for joining their current industries-actual career path determinants

Reason for joining current industry	Both genders			Male	Female
	Rank	Mean	SD	Mean	Mean
Unpredictable events forced me to join this industry	1	3.71	1.39	3.94	3.35
The industry offers high career satisfaction levels	2	3.46	1.32	3.31	3.70
I joined this industry by chance	3	3.38	1.55	3.00	4.00
I want to build a permanent career in this industry	4	3.30	1.14	3.37	3.20
Prevailing labour market conditions made me join this industry	5	3.28	1.47	3.72	2.55
I chose this industry	6	3.23	1.17	3.37	3.00
The industry is in line with my career anchor	7	3.07	1.42	3.23	2.80
Prevailing economic conditions made me join this industry	8	2.97	1.09	3.08	2.80
The job opportunity came along	9	2.15	1.29	2.00	2.40
Social pressure made me join this industry	10	1.71	0.99	1.69	1.75

1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree

Table 3: Actual career path determinants-factor analysis

Variables	Factor	
	1	2
I joined this industry by chance	.57	
Unpredictable events forced me to join this industry	.58	
Prevailing labour market conditions made me join this industry	.67	
The industry is in line with my career anchor	.82	
I chose this industry		.55
I want to build a permanent career in this industry		.55
The industry offers high career satisfaction levels		.82
Percentage of variance explained	28.54%	14.82%

Table 4: Regression coefficients for items predicting factor 1-value based and environmental

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	sig
(Constant)	-1.72	.06		-28.32	.000
I joined this industry by chance	.19	.01	.10	7.62	.000
Unpredictable events forced me to join this industry	.09	.01	.11	10.08	.000
Prevailing labour market conditions made me join this industry	.24	.01	.32	26.64	.000
The industry is in line with my career anchor	.42	.54	.54	41.94	.000

B-unstandardized coefficient beta value; β -standardized coefficient beta value; t-t values; $R^2=0.99$; F value=2705.65 ($p<.001$)

Table 5: Respondents most important career anchors

Most important career anchor (N=105)	Both genders		Female		Male	
	Rank	n	Rank	n	Rank	n
I would pursue a career that utilizes my talent	1	41	1	12	1	29
I would pursue a career that gives me a sense of security and stability	2	14	2	8	4	6
I would pursue a career that gives me the opportunity to exercise my entrepreneurial creativity	3	14	5	4	2	10
I would pursue a career that gives me autonomy and independence at work	4	12	6	4	3	8
I would pursue a career that offers me a sense of service and dedication to a cause	5	12	3	6	5	6
I would pursue a career that enables me to exercise my general management competencies	6	8	4	6	6	2
I would pursue a career that offers pure challenge	7	2	7	0	7	2
I would pursue a career that is integrated with my lifestyle	8	2	8	0	8	2
Total		105		40		65

Table 6: Regression coefficients for items predicting factor two-personal and career satisfaction

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	sig
(Constant)	-2.40	.13		-18.79	.000
I chose this industry	.10	.02	.10	2.75	.000
I want to build a permanent career in this industry	.11	.03	.10	4.05	.000
The industry offers high career satisfaction levels	.76	.02	.86	33.08	.000

B-unstandardized coefficient beta value; β -standardized coefficient beta value; t-t values; $R^2=0.95$; F value=633.25 ($p<.001$)

Table 7: Graduates satisfaction levels with various aspects of their current careers

Graduates career satisfaction levels (N=105)	Rank	Mean	SD
Satisfaction with availability of opportunities to meet different people careers in this industry offer	1	3.90	1.15
Satisfaction with challenges careers in this industry offer	2	3.63	.96
Satisfaction with sense of service derived from working in this industry	3	3.41	1.09
Satisfaction with variety of tasks careers in this industry offer	4	3.33	.89
Satisfaction with autonomy and independence careers in this industry offer	5	3.31	1.31
Satisfaction with the way careers in this industry utilize ones talents and skills	6	3.28	.99
Satisfaction with entrepreneurial opportunities careers in this industry offer	7	3.19	1.30
Satisfaction with excitement and adventure levels offered by careers in this industry	8	3.16	1.01
Satisfaction with range of benefits careers in this industry offer	9	3.08	1.14
Satisfaction with life-work balance careers in this industry offer	10	2.90	1.43
Satisfaction with managerial responsibilities offered by careers in this industry	11	2.89	1.16
Satisfaction with job availability in this industry	12	2.81	1.00
Satisfaction with levels of pay careers in this industry offer	13	2.73	1.00
Satisfaction with the job security careers in this industry offer	14	2.70	1.26

1=not at all satisfied, 5=extremely satisfied