The Life Cycle of Hotel General Manager

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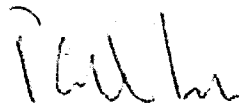
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LIU Ngai Wing

ABSTRACT

The study on the life cycle and tenure of chief executive is a complicated issue, not only

because of its longitudinal nature for maintaining a high validity, but also the availability

of its various relating interpretation in terms of different theoretical concepts.   In spite of

the research conducted so far, the fact that the hotel general manager (GM) is both

conceptually and practically the chief executive officer of the hotel (Nebel, 1991) has not

been sufficiently investigated in the past studies.   This research serves as a starting point

for further study on the topic – the multiple characteristics of the life cycle of a hotel

GM's tenure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Hotel general managers (GMs) are the officers with executive responsibility of the highest rank in a hotel. The roles played by the general manager of a hotel are analogous to those played by the CEO of a business. This is supported by Nebel (1991) when he argues that "A hotel's general manager is the chief executive officer of its business" and is the top executive position with "responsibility for the success and failure of the business". This was also supported by Conrad Hilton (Nebel, 1991), in affirming that the hotel GM is the first and most crucial staff member in operating a quality hotel. Nebel (1991) also elaborates on this by noting that a hotel, when viewed as a separate profit centre, can maintain profitability on the condition that the general manager can overcome obstacles, whereas profitability is out of question if the hotel GM is ineffective. Nebel (1991) has further stated that there is no staff member in a hotel other than the GM who possesses such a wide scope of responsibilities, and on whom a macroscopic perspective is required in managing and operating the hotel. Eder and Umbreit (1989) echo this by saying that "The general manager is the key implementer of the business strategy for the property and the behavioural role model for the entire management team". Similar analogies regarding the significance of a general manager resembling the CEO of a firm were also proposed by Henderson, Miller and Hambrick (2006), Gabarro (1987) and Kotter (1982).

1.1 Background of Study

1.1.1 The Peculiarities of the Hotel Industry

The hotel industry is an industry of high complexity. There are numerous external parties involved in the entire value chain of the industry. This complexity increases in proportion to the size of the individual hotel. Nebel (1991) notes that "hotels are an amalgam of different businesses performing different functions, different knowledge bases, different viewpoints, different kinds of people – all working under the same roof with a common purpose". The complexity evolves from the mixed characteristics of hotel operations, from being highly personal in nature, such as executive floor services, to those as impersonal as engineering. All components, however minute in their own right, have to be integrated in order to provide a complete spectrum of services to the customer. The substantial amount of resources invested, the vast amount of human resources involved with regard to its labour-intensive characteristic, the highly competitive business environment (Nebel, 1991) and, most importantly, the intrinsic nature of the service industry involved in the operations of services demand such unique features as the immediacy and spontaneity of managerial and operational issues (Nebel, 1991).

Hotels are usually owned by real-estate developers, large institutional investors, businesses or individuals. This ownership status can be separated from the operation of the hotels, resulting in such situations as the owner and operator of the hotel being different business entities. This segregation is unique from other market segments in which the owner of the business often participates in the business operations.

There are three common and dominant modes of owner-operator relationship in the hotel industry – in-house operations, franchising and management contracts.

In-house managed hotels are those premises managed by the hotel owner itself, usually under a separate arm of the holding company. There is a high degree of participation in the operations by the owner with more executives assigned to the executive committee of the hotel as compared to the other two modes of operation. Seemingly, the

decision-making on the hotel operations is subject to the highest involvement of the hotel owner.

Franchising is the second type of hotel operation, in which the hotel carries a well-known hotel brand name from the franchiser and is similarly operated by the hotel owner. As part of the franchising arrangement, the hotel owner (operator) has to follow usually well-defined policies and deliverables, as well as procedures and routines, so that the hotel owner can be assured that the hotel can be managed up to a certain industrial par for delivering the services that customers need, and eventually the profit that the hotel owner is targeting. Although similarly managed by the hotel owner, the fact that the operational details are subject to the policies and procedures of the franchiser decreases the level of participation by the hotel owner in the operations.

The third type of hotel owner-operator relationship is the hotel management contract. In this mode of operation, the hotel is managed by an assigned hotel management company or hotel operator, under a management contract (hotel management company and hotel operator are used interchangeably in this study). The hotel operators are commonly what the general public perceive as the "name of a hotel", and some have international business coverage and high brand equity, such as Ritz-Carlton and Marriott of the Marriott group, Westin and Sheraton of the Starwood group, Intercontinental and Holiday Inn of the Intercontinental group, and so on. Any details of the operations, including such high-level decisions as business strategies and human resources assignment are managed by the hotel management company. The hotel owner has the lowest degree of participation in the day-to-day operations of the hotel. In the extreme, the hotel owner is totally free from the hotel operations and acts as "an absentee owner" (Nebel, 1991) with the only focus on the financials of the hotel.

1.1.2 The General Manager of a Hotel as the CEO of the Hotel

Hotel general managers (GMs) are commonly perceived as people "who work long hours, have a high degree or mobility, are highly sociable, and are committed to their jobs and to

the hotel industry" (Ladkin, 1999). It is the post which is considered to be the final stage for hotel managers because they are accountable for an increasing size of hotel with higher remuneration and status (Guerrier, 1987).

While there is a body of research on hotel GMs, ranging from investigations of their pre-post career paths and profiles (for example, Swanljung, 1981, Nebel *et al.*, 1994; Ladkin and Juwaheer, 2000; Li *et al.*, 2007), the role of qualifications and higher education in the career path for hotel GMs (for instance, Baum, 1988; Harper *et al.*, 2005), to some managerial issues concerning the post of hotel GMs, including the nature of hotel GMs' role (Nebel, 1993). Although these studies exist, research specifically dedicated to the *evolution of hotel GM's tenure* is only tangential. There is, however, an analogous body of research on job mobility, career planning and development with respect to knowledge, skills, and what factors contribute to good performance of hotel GMs (for example, Riley, 1980; Antil, 1984; Ruddy, 1990; Ladkin and Riley, 1996). The investigation into the evolution of hotel GM's tenure is still a largely unexplored area.

To better understand the evolution of hotel GMs' tenure, the roles of hotel GMs in a hotel management company should be first investigated as below.

Hotels managed by the hotel owners, whether in-house or under franchising, operate as a separate business entity or subsidiary under the holding company of the hotel owner. The key question is whether hotels operated under a management contract between hotel owners and hotel management companies can be legitimately considered as separate and individual businesses, particularly with reference to the "hands-off" approach of some hotel owners.

The issue can be investigated by understanding the strategic planning function in hotels managed by international hotel operators. The following is a typical organizational chart of an international hotel management company (Nebel, 1991) and the position of the GM in individual hotels.
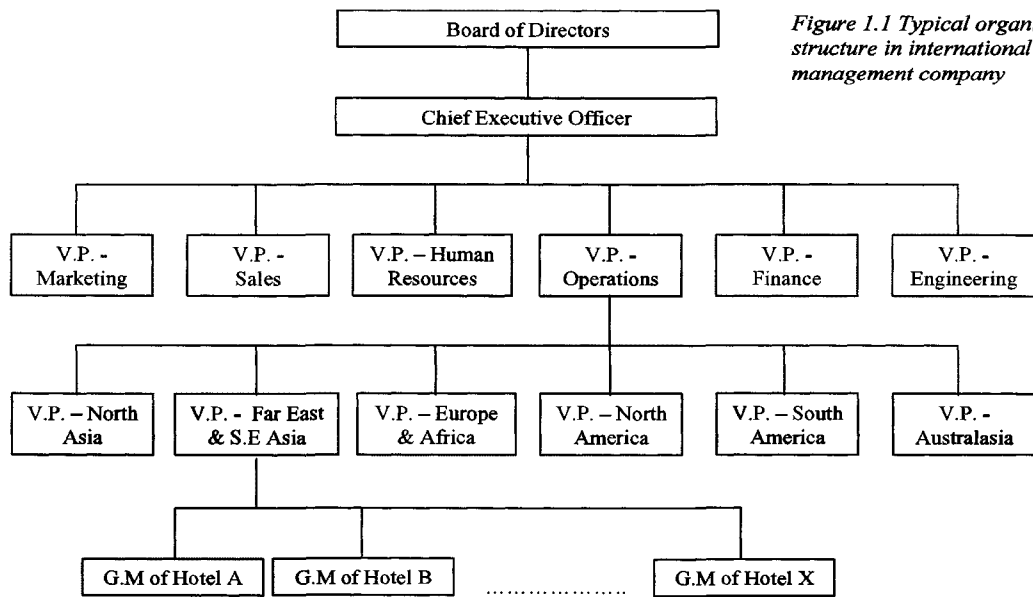
Figure 1.1 Typical organizational structure in international hotel management company

A hotel management company is managed by a board of directors and a chief executive officer (CEO) who is responsible for the highest-level decision-making concerning the whole group. A number of Vice Presidents, each of whom has a specific area of focus, report to the CEO on the overall strategies relating to their respective functions in the hotel group, across all member hotels of the group. Under the specific management of the Vice President of Operations, there are further vice presidents each of whom oversees the operations of the hotels within the assigned geographical region(s). These regional vice presidents subordinate a number of GMs each of whom oversees the business of one or more particular member hotel(s).

The decision-making processes on such issues as the geographical expansion, franchising strategy, and the market segmentation of the hotel group are conducted in the top management as corporate-level strategic planning with the goal of "striving to identify and secure the most promising market segments" (Pearce and Robinson, 1988).

The operations, marketing, finance, human resources, food and beverages, rooms and engineering functions of the individual hotels of the hotel operator are overseen by the respective functional corporate vice presidents. Their strategic planning can be

understood as a manifestation of the corporate-level strategies of the top management. Such strategies usually cover a time span of several years, while the strategies of these vice presidents focus on short-term objectives and goals as business-level strategies (Nebel, 1991).

Since it is the individual hotels which contribute to the business results of the hotel group, the strategies and operations of individual hotels are the focal points of the decision-making process.

One may argue that the business-level and functional-level strategies in hotel management companies dictate the strategies of individual hotels at the operational level, and that these member hotels have little discretion in the strategies of their hotels. There are several arguments which suggest that hotels managed by international hotel operators are generally run as individual businesses within a context of corporate strategies by the top management:

- Each member hotel is an individual profit centre

- The increasing size, organizational and operational complexity, and the amount of decision making and strategic planning in individual hotels, resemble the conditions of individual businesses

- The local conditions of hotels vary within even a single geographical region. These include the hotel size, history, locality, targeted market segments, competitive edges, local economic situation, ownership structure and labour markets (Nebel, 1991). The differing conditions and relationship between the hotel owner and the hotel management company also count.
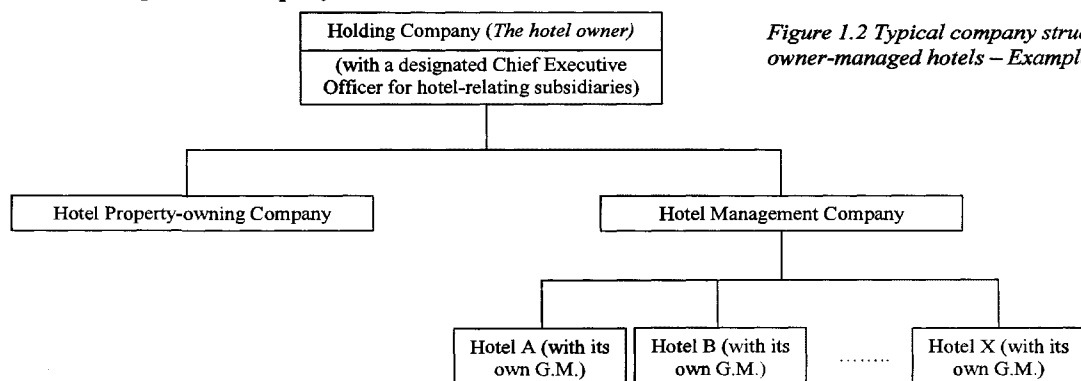
Figure 1.2 Typical company structure of owner-managed hotels – Example One
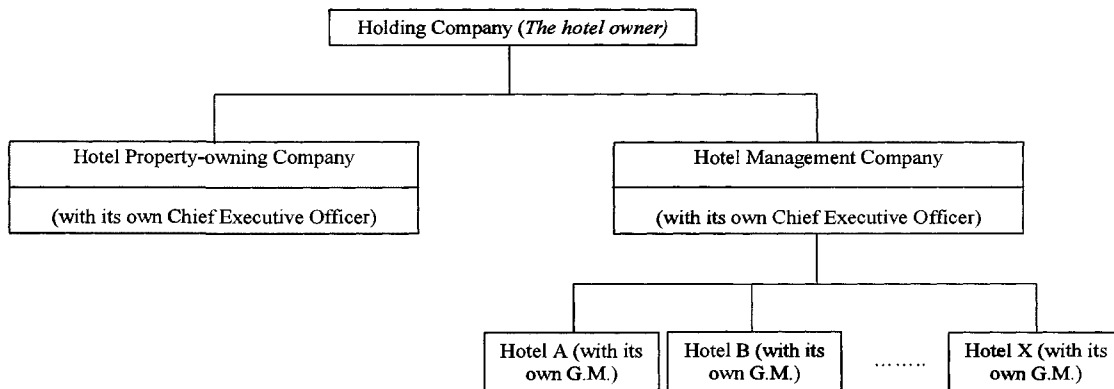
Figure 1.3. Typical company structure of owner-managed hotels – Example Two

The above are typical company structures of a local hotel owner's group in which the hotels are self-managed by the hotel owner or developer, and the two major modes of reporting line for the hotel GM, directly to the designated hotel business CEO of the holding company or the CEO of the hotel management subsidiary of the holding company.

The GM of a hotel owned by separate proprietors but managed by a hotel management company has two practical reporting lines – the area vice president in the hotel management company and the hotel owner. The hotel owners are not expected to be the instigator of the strategic plans of the hotels, and they often only act to endorse the decision-making process. For hotels managed by hotel operators, the GM, however, often takes the central and mediator role in the strategic planning process, in which the owners, area vice presidents and the GM are practically involved (Nebel, 1991) in wake of any possible conflicts between the hotel management company and the hotel owner. The mediation is marked predominantly by striking a balance between the organizational goals and objectives of the hotel management company and the profit target of the hotel owner.

1.1.3 The Hotel Industry in Hong Kong

The hotel industry, amongst the tourism industry as a whole, is one of the most important industries in Hong Kong. In 2005, the hotel industry generated HK$17,394 million (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2006), contributing significantly to the foreign exchange earnings of the city.

In total, there are about 20 regional and international hotel operators, with separate hotel brands, in Hong Kong. There is a lack of research on hotel general managers, not to mention studies with specific focus on the industry in Hong Kong. In research by Ruddy (1989), the size of the hotels ranges from a room size of fewer than 150 to over 700 and more than fifty percent of the hotels have more than 500 rooms. Of all these hotels, more than sixty percent maintain a headcount of more than 1,000 staff. In research by Ruddy (1989), the average age of general managers in Hong Kong was 48 years ,with an average of 10 years of experience as hotel GM. This is the most recent study in the literature available to the author.

Regional and International Hotel Management Groups in Hong Kong
• Accor (including the brands *Novotel*, *Ibis*) • CTS HK Metropark Hotels Management (including the brands *Grand Metropark*, *Metropark* and *Metropark Resort*) • Disneyland Hotels • Four Seasons • Guangdong (International) Hotel Management • Great Eagle Holdings (including the brands *Langham* and *Eaton*) • Harbour Plaza Management • Hilton Hotels (the brand *Conrad*) • Hyatt Corporation • InterContinental Hotels (including the brands *InterContinental*, *Holiday Inn* and *Holiday Inn Express*) • Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group (including the brands *Oriental* and *Excelsior*) • Marriott International (including the brands *Marriott, Renaissance* and *Courtyard*) • Miramar • Le Meridien Hotels and Resorts • Nikko Hotels International • Ramada Worldwide, Inc • Regal Hotels International • Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts • Starwood Hotels and Resorts (including the brands *Sheraton* and *W*) • The Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels (the brand *Peninsula*)

1.2 Definitions

1. **Life Cycle**: A term originating from the "product life cycle" in marketing (Bass, 1969). In general it states that the life span of a particular item is determined by certain traits or characteristics spanning across the life span. Typically there are stages of growth, stagnation and decline. The "life cycle" in the context of this research denotes the changes along the *tenure* of the hotel general manager in the perspective of *performance* or other intangible traits or characteristics demonstrated by the general manager. The changes above can range from interpersonal and organizational to social or economic; of personal or in short, or various degrees proximity to the hotel general managers. Essentially each complete "life cycle" of a hotel general manager corresponds to his or her complete "tenure" at a single hotel or post.

2. **Tenure**: This originally means "the period of time when somebody holds an important job, especially a political one; the act of holding an important job" (Oxford University Press, 2000). In the context of this study, it means the term of employment served by a hotel general manager (GM) at a single hotel establishment, or less commonly, at a number of hotel establishments, in a geographical location. Extrapolated from this definition, the career path of a hotel GM would consist of a number of periods of tenure at various hotels.

3. **Hotel General Manager**: The highest-ranked executive in a hotel or a number of hotels. . Cited by Guerrier (1987), the post of hotel GM is the final stage of the career for all hotel managers. Nebel (1991) asserted that a hotel GM practically acts as the chief executive officer (CEO) of the hotel because of the scope of decision-making and the business strategies managed by the hotel general manager. The complexity of both the local external and internal environment s of the industry also demands a full "responsibility for the success and failure of the business" (Nebel, 1991). Along this vein, the theoretical concepts behind this study are analogous to studying the life cycle of a CEO, with

focus cast on the distinctiveness of the hotel industry and the socio-cultural backdrop of Hong Kong.

1.3 Problem Statement

1.3.1 Previous Studies on the Life Cycle of the Tenure of CEOs

Tenure of employment is a theory that spans various areas of interest for researchers in human resources and organizational behaviour as well as business strategy. This is at least the case for high-ranking employees of an organization because of their essential roles as the strategists and decision-makers. With this assumption, the related research on the chief executive officer (CEO) of an organization should be of particular importance to business research. This importance was echoed by Hambrick & Finkelstein (1987) on the basis that on that "the highest-level officer is the one most likely to possess discretion with least restrictive oversight and hence (relative to lower level managers) has the ability to manifest personal preferences and energies into organizational outcomes." As the leader, his or her characteristics can trigger direct impact on the strategies and performance of the organization (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). It is also difficult for CEOs to interpret all environmental factors with an all-time rationality without bias (Cyert & March, 1963; March & Simon, 1958).

The past research on the role of the CEO was, on the one hand, more characteristics-focused in that only certain aspects, such as executive behaviours, general business environment, organizational strategies and organizational performance (For example, Gupta & Govindarajan, 1984: Hambrick & Mason, 1984: Kotter, 1982: Miller & Toulouse, 1986) have been studied. Other research was, on the other hand, more cross-sectionally oriented and timed specifically at a certain point across the entire tenure, such as the selection (pre-tenure), adaptation, dismissal (post-tenure), and so on. Still other studies on executive characteristics and behaviour, , focus on the entire career and lifetime of the executives in an ethnographic manner (Schein, 1978; Cron & Slocum, 1986). There has been little previous research on CEO or executive characteristics and

behaviour conducted on the tenure of the hotel GM. Such themes as the dual responsibility to both the corporate office of the hotel management company and the local hotel owner in the host country, common in the hotel industry, were rarely investigated. Research on the hotel GM is rare (Rutherford, 2002; Nebel, 1991), so that studies focusing on the hotel GMs in Hong Kong are unusual. Only a few studies specifically studying the post of hotel GMs are available. Ruddy (1989) has tried to pinpoint the relative weighting given to a set of fifteen "key influences" that guide the path to the position of hotel GM. The research participants were usually also studied on their pre-tenure managerial experience (Nebel et al., 1995). Attempts to investigate the career path of hotel general manager in the United States focused on the career path of the hotel executives prior to the post of hotel GM, rather than the path from becoming a hotel general manager onwards. The latest research by Woods, et al. (2002) has expanded the scope of study of hotel GMs by examining the skills needed in the post. Such indices range from financial performance to the effectiveness of research participants in achieving this spectrum of performance indices. In spite of the above research, little light was shed on the tenure of hotel GMs in a longitudinal perspective over a considerable time frame.

1.3.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of the proposed research are as follows:

1. To study the applicability of a time-phase perspective in the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers in Hong Kong

2. To determine the phases and their cyclic characteristics, in the form of a life cycle, of the tenure of hotel general managers (GMs) in Hong Kong

3. To investigate the human resources determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – the hotel owner, management executives of the hotel management company, the hotel general manager himself/herself and his/her predecessor and the board of directors

4. To explore the organizational determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – organizational structure (owner-managed, franchising managed by hotel management company) organizational performance, line of authority, customer satisfaction index, *et cetera.*

5. To study the psychological determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – the personality of the hotel general manager

6. To examine the socio-cultural or socio-political determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – the expectations and attributions; the allegiance and value of the board of directors (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988), the relationship with the board of directors/hotel owners, the relationship with the management executives of the hotel management company, cultural distance between the nationality of the hotel general manager and that of the host country, the degree of participation in the local industrial organizations.

7. To discover the presence of any other significant individuals or factors for the tenure and its phases

Translated into research questions, the research objectives can be represented as:

1. *Is there a time-phase perspective in the tenure of hotel GMs in Hong Kong?   If so, what are the phases and do they form cyclical in the form of a "life cycle"?   What are the characteristics of each phase?   What are the transition points between the phases?*

2. *What are the determinants and what is the degree of correlation of each of these determinants to the evolution of the tenure of hotel GMs in Hong Kong?*

Sub-themes in related questions include:

3. What are the roles played by the human resources determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – the hotel owner, management executives of the hotel management company, the hotel general manager himself/herself and his/her predecessor and the board of directors, management executives of the

hotel management company, including their expectations, attributions and allegiances- in the tenure of the hotel general manager and in each of its phases?

4. What are the roles played by the organizational determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – organizational structure (owner-managed, managed by hotel management company, franchising) organizational performance, line of authority, customer satisfaction index, etc. in the tenure of the hotel general manager and in each of its phases?

5. What are the roles played by the psychological determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – such as the personality of hotel general managers?

6. What are the roles played by the socio-cultural or socio-political determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – the expectations and attributions; the allegiance and value of the board of directors (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988), the relationship with the board of directors/hotel owners, the relationship with the management executives of the hotel management company, cultural distance between the nationality of the hotel general manager and that of the host country, the degree of participation in the local industrial organizations, etc. in the tenure of the hotel general manager and in each of its phases?

7. Are there any other individuals, bodies or factors playing a part in influencing the tenure of the hotel general manager in each of the phases?

1.4 Scope of the Study

The significance of hotel GM to the welfare of a hotel gives rise to the need to study the post in various aspects. The various stages, such as succession, acculturation, development and dismissal, and their determinants in top executive positions are also of interest to researchers. The notion of "hotel general manager being the CEO of the hotel business" proposed by Nebel (1991) implies a research area in which the related theories

and conceptual models on CEOs can be applied to the study of the hotel GM's tenure. It is thus presumed that the theories and conceptual models pertaining to the analysis on top managers can be applied in studying the tenure of hotel GMs.

While most hotels include the post of general manager in their organizational structure, this may not be the case for small-scale lodges where a functional manager may also assume the duties of a hotel GM. The target research participants of this research should thus focus on the top two tiers, High Tariff A and High Tariff B hotels according to the classification by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (2006). The proposed two tiers of hotels cover most of the hotels managed by regional or international hotel operators and well-established hotel owners or developers. The advantages in locating the research participants amongst these two classes rest with a clear line of command in the organizational structure and a wider coverage of both the hotels managed in-house by local hotel owners or international hotel operators.

The hotel industry in Hong Kong is an appropriate research base for the proposed research because of the ample presence of regional and international hotel management companies, as tabulated in Table 1, as well as hotels managed in-house by hotel owners.

It is noteworthy, however, that the objective to study the life cycle of tenure, nominally covering from the start to the end of a tenure for a hotel GM (duties at a single or certain number of properties in a geographical locality), requires research participants to have at least one prior and completed tenure as the general manger of a hotel in these two classes. This requirement may, on the one hand, seem to limit the validity and availability of research participants because of the level of seniority implied. On the other hand, it has extended the coverage of participants to include *retired* hotel general managers who may also be potential research candidates.

Studying the subject from hotel owners' perspective is nonetheless essential to the research for a number of reasons. First of all, the hotel owner is the principal stakeholder for most hotel GMs. This is not only because the hotel owner is responsible for the payroll for all hotel staff, including the hotel GM even in hotels managed by hotel

management companies. Other stakeholders, such as the hotel management company or the employees are partly dependent on the hotel owner for resources. In addition, any deviation in performance, of both the hotel and hotel GM from expectation, implies that the hotel owner would be amongst the first to witness any detrimental effects, such as a drop in hotel revenue or a shortfall in service quality.

In research methodology terms, the lack of a conceptual framework on the current research theme demands the use of a methodology facilitating the generation of theory or conceptual framework. Grounded theory as a qualitative research method focuses on the generation of mid-range theories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: p. 174-175).

1.5 Potential Contributions of the Study

This research study attempts to formulate a conceptual framework of the life cycle of hotel general manager with reference to Organizational Learning Theory, Contingency Theory, Succession model, Dismissal model and the Time-horizon framework of hotel general managers' tenure.

1.5.1 Potential Contributions to Academic Literature

1. The study aims to provide insights into the applicability of analogous models and related theories in the study of the tenure of CEOs and yield a conceptual framework or model on the tenure of hotel general managers

2. The study seeks to extend previous work on top executives in the context of the hotel industry and the cultural background of Hong Kong

3. The study complements the results of related previous studies. For instance, the study aims to verify the presence of the relationship between experimentation and performance of the organization

4. The research enriches past longitudinal research by emphasising the investigation of determinants of each phase and possibly establishing the relative degree of correlation

5. The theoretical model as obtained would serve as a groundwork for further enhancement to understanding the evolution of hotel GM's tenure

6. Further research on top executives in the hotel industry, for instance, in a heterogeneous cultural context, can be based on this study

1.5.2 Potential Contributions to Hotel Owners and Hotel Executives in Hotel Management Companies

1. The study has the potential to be helpful to the board of directors in employing a hotel GM based on the characteristics and traits demonstrated from past track record. For instance, boards need to be aware of selecting a hotel general manager who is well equipped to respond to a pressing initial mandate but who may not have the breadth of repertoire to pursue other managerial themes such as change.

2. The board of directors and owners of the business would have a better understanding of the performance pattern of the hotel GM and the hotel.

3. Concerning some other cross-sectional profiles such as executive succession and dismissal, the board of directors can also be alerted to clues signalling the phase at which the hotel GM resides, especially the ending of a phase. Hints such as long service (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991), or such typical characteristics as departures from the norm (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991) are useful signals. Particularly for hotel operators, such clues are usually instrumental in indicating a change in the assignment of hotel GMs. These signals are useful signposts illustrating as well the career path of hotel GMs and are useful to hotel management companies.

4. The study aims to highlight trends in the tenure of hotel GMs.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

According to Pandit (1996), one of the major roles of a literature review in grounded theory research is to define the *a priori* constructs so as to contain the research focus and increase the external validity. In this research, its role is to facilitate the researcher's understanding on the extant theoretical framework of the proposed research themes and their originating theories. It is also intended to relate this to the emergent themes and concepts.

While much has been studied on the tenure of chief executive officers ("CEOs") or top managers in the management perspective, specific analysis of hotel general managers (GMs) in their own right, and their role as the chief executives of hotels has only been tangential. There are a number of managerial themes which exert significant influence on the tenure of chief executives. Together with the discussion in Section 1.1.2, it can be reasonably deduced that research on top managers has significant influence on the relevant research into hotel GMs. Pertaining to the focus of the current research, there are several research domains which are related to the tenure of hotel GMs as chief executives:

- The time-phase model of the top executive positions across a tenure
- The five-phase model of top executives' tenure and the paradigm concept
- The three-time-frame model of top executives' tenure and the time-horizon
  perspective

- Model of dismissal

- Model of succession

- Weberian-Child Framework on organizational context

These research domains are primarily of three categories. The first is the longitudinal studies on the tenure of top executives with time-phase model. This corresponds to the current research theme and interest – concept of tenure evolution and cycle. The second is the cross-sectional studies which are targeted to search for possible areas of determinants effecting the one-time change for top executives – dismissal and succession. The third is about a proposed model which can explain the forces on an organization and, most importantly, the presence and origins of the determinants. A review of the background literature on the career progression of hotel GMs, and their career aims are given in the last section of the literature review.

The first section investigates the various temporal phenomena of the tenure of top executives, in the manner of time-phase and their theoretical context. The second section delves into the general determining forces on, and factors that influence, top executives' tenure. Elements of the literature are classic sources in human resources or organizational studies, especially on the tenure of top executives.

2.1 Time-Phase Concepts of the Tenure of Top Executives

There is a body of research on the time-phase nature of the tenure of top executives. Yet there is also divergence in these studies relating to the number of nominal phases in a tenure, the characteristics therein, the reasons and origins behind such characteristics, and so on. It is the variety of theoretical bases which results in the divergence. The theoretical perspectives taken by researchers who have studied the theme include organizational learning theory (Levinthal, and March, 1993; Senge, 1990; Stewart, 2001; March, 1991, Levitt and March, 1988), contingency theory (Reklitis and Trivelas, 2002; Thompson, 1967; Burns and Stalker, 1961) and time-horizon perspective (Nebel and Ghei,

2002). The application of these theoretical perspectives in the context of the tenure of top executives will be addressed in the following sections.

2.1.1 The Three-stage Model of Top Executives' Tenure and Organizational Learning Theory

The essence of applying organizational learning theory to the study of the tenure of top executives lies in the "learning by the top executives". According to Stewart (2001), organizational learning is "a type of collective cognition where individuals constantly make sense of the environment and negotiate each other's learning experiences". Miller and Shamsie (2001), with a focus on the post of chief executive officers (CEOs), posited that there are two major areas of interest in this perspective – (i) the learning pattern of the CEO during the tenure and (ii) the relationship between experimentation and the performance of the organization over the entire life cycle with the application of knowledge (Miller and Shamsie, 2001). From these scholars, it can be interpreted that the essence of organizational learning lies in the interaction with the environment, during which learning is constituted by means of testing for the organization's sake.

Proposed by the same authors, the predominant objective of learning by a CEO is to improve the performance of the company and to sustain this improvement. The organizational performance is thus an indirect indicator of the outcome of organizational learning by the CEOs (Miller and Shamsie, 2001).

Nevertheless, the effects of such learning practice by the top executives on their executive positions and tenure *per se*, and how such learning can be translated into the organizational performance, were not adequately explored in the study. The study was insufficient in building the causal relationship between the learning practice by CEOs and favourable organizational performance, if any.

The learning practice by CEOs during their tenure, especially in the early phase, usually concentrates on the areas of their jobs, organizations, and competitive environments (Miller and Shamsie, 2001). The start of executive tenure is always marked with an

apparent phase of acquisition of new knowledge, may it be of the organization itself, or the strategic and financial *status quo* of the organization.

In the early phase of learning by top executives, experimentation is cited as an essential predictor of organizational performance (Argyris and Schon, 1978). Experimentation as a knowledge-acquiring practice incurs a high cost and may also be inefficient. These two unfavourable situations would only improve when sufficient knowledge has been acquired by the CEO, which is more likely to be in the later phases of the life cycle (Walsh, 1995; Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991; March, 1991). However, organizational performance will decline as a result of the decreased level of learning (Miller and Shamsie, 2001).

In summary, the focuses of the studies above include the (i) decline of reform and learning in the top executives' tenure; (ii) the relationship between tenure and organizational performance and (iii) the significance of learning and experimentation to the performance. There are essentially two opposite forces exerted on the learning by the top executives along the progression of the tenure – a positive one that manifests itself as incurring a dwindling cost alongside the gradual accumulation of knowledge. A negative force is witnessed as decreasing efficiency in the level of learning, resulting in an accompanying declining organizational performance. It is also anticipated that such accumulated knowledge would become increasingly useful to the top executives in its application, towards boosting the performance of the organization.

Based on the organizational learning concepts, the tenure of the life cycle of CEOs can be divided into three distinctive phases – Learning Stage, Harvest Stage and Decline Stage (Miller and Shamsie, 2001).

2.1.2 Learning Stage

This is the first phase of executive life cycle and the degree of learning by the GM is the highest. In this stage, executives learn to work out feasible strategies for the organization before implementation (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991; Miller, 1991),

through seeking market opportunities and organizational strengths (Gabarro, 1987; Greiner and Bhambri, 1989). Before relevant market opportunities are identified and organizational strengths are ascertained and, most essentially, the optimum strategies are worked out, a CEO is expected to conduct continuous experimentation over such areas as the product line of the organization (Miller and Shamsie, 2001). Such experimentation is extended to changes in strategies and product lines (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991; Katz, 1980; Keck and Tushman, 1993). Essentially, the strategies chosen have to be those with a highly likely rate of success (Gabarro, 1987; Levitt and March, 1988; March, 1991). The practice of experimentation can also be taken as a search for organizational strengths, and the target customer profile as a means of learning to be effective with good performance (Gabarro, 1987). That means these two genres are likely to be considered successful.

GMs or CEOs can learn as well from the outcome of the attempted strategies. The need for continuous experimentation and strategies can be understood as a result of the inexperience of the CEO over a spectrum of factors. These factors are diverse and include the company itself, the established system and hierarchy, the products and services, the network of suppliers and customers (Gabarro, 1987; Greiner and Bhambri, 1989), the politics in the company, the relationship with the board of directors and major shareholders (Aguilar, 1967), the financial strengths, and so on (Eitzen and Yeoman, 1972; Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991). This learning practice by CEOs or GMs can be accelerated by the use of product line experimentation (Argyris and Schon, 1978; March, 1991; Walsh, 1995). According to Gabarro (1987), the most important evolution led by CEOs takes place in the first three years of their tenure. In this Learning Stage, CEOs are expected only to create a modest return on financial investment because of the possibility of mistakes, but the performance is expected to improve gradually as the Learning Stage proceeds (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991).

2.1.3 Harvest Stage

This is the second stage of the tenure of CEOs or GMs in which the previously acquired knowledge is capitalised upon, resulting in elevated financial performance. Financial performance is anticipated to be the highest amongst the three stages, with fewer failures, because of the concentrated effort and the focus on the *status quo*. The obtained knowledge and experience also calls for a decreased need for further experimentation (Miller, 1990, 1994), particularly on the products and services of the organization (Miller, 1993a, 1993b; Miller and Chen, 1996). Senior management are more confident and feel secure in the implementation of obtained strategies and tactics (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991; Herriot, Levinthal, and March, 1985; Levitt and March, 1988; March, 1991). After the Learning Stage, CEOs or GMs have learnt how to perform effectively. This effectiveness, coupled with knowledge of the organization and accumulated experience, all contribute to high financial performance (Gabarro, 1987; Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991). Tushman and Romanelli (1985) named this as a period of "convergence and consolidation", while March (1991) branded it as a "phase of exploitation".

Despite the seeming advantageous situation, it is also usually in this stage that experience and positive feedback result in complacency and atrophy in learning. Such complacency and atrophy are projected to originate from the lesser need to experiment with the strategies and tactics (March, 1991; Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991; Levitt and March, 1988). Experimentation and its feedback, however, can prevent the chief executive from being overconfident and detached from the markets (Argyris and Schon, 1978). The decreased extent of these factors naturally means a detachment from the reality, according to the definition by Senge (1990), that learning manifests itself as an "inner representation of the reality in one's mind". The over-commitment to the *status quo* and diminished effectiveness were identified by a considerable number of researchers (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1995: 90; Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988; Hambrick and D'Aveni, 1992; Hambrick *et al.*, 1993; Katz, 1982; Miller, 1990, 1991, 1994; Sonnenfeld, 1988; Walsh, 1995). The executives having been in tenure for a prolonged period of time are believed to become "stale in the saddle".

2.1.4 Decline Stage

A number of researchers, including Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996), Hambrick, Geletkanycz, and Fredrickson (1993) report that as the tenure of CEOs or general managers proceeds, the evolution of strategies and tactics decreases. In this stage, the executives become "stale" (Miller and Shamsie, 2001). This Decline Stage usually happens after the CEOs or GMs have been in office for about 15 years (Miller and Shamsie, 2001), although a shorter timeline has been reported in other studies (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991; Miller, 1991). For instance, Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) and Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) have reported the onset of the Decline Stage after seven or eight years. The Decline Stage is marked by outdated and non-innovative products or services (Miller, 1991; Staw, Sandelands, and Dutton, 1981; Walsh, 1995), at least in comparison with the Harvest Stage (Miller, 1990, 1993b, Miller and Chen, 1994). The CEO or GM has become overconfident about taken-for-granted success (Levinthal and March, 1993). The accustomization towards the merits of the knowledge acquired (Kiesler and Sproull, 1982) and achievement, as in the Harvest Stage result in a high "resistance to change" (Wiersema and Bantel, 1992). It is likely that the established strategies have been over-committed or overused.

The stalemate in experimentation can, however, be a result of some non-rational factors (Sonnenfeld, 1988; Walsh, 1995). The degree of experimentation, from the strategic and tactical levels down to the product or services, has substantially decreased. The executives may become detached from the actual market situation while relying too much on their past achievement (Kiesler and Sproull, 1982; Staw, 1976). In the extreme, long-tenured managers will cease gathering data proactively from outside sources and depend largely on some specific, internal and filtered sources of information (Aguilar, 1967; Katz, 1982). This can commit them to an "obsolete paradigm" (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991: 732) or what is termed as the "executive commitment to status quo" (CSQ) (Geletkanycz, 1997; Geletkanycz and Black, 2001). While it is common for the CEOs or GMs to feel a lesser need of diversification, some executives also feel an

increased constraint by the precedents in furthering the evolution (Wiersema and Bantel, 1992). It is ironic that these precedents, systems and tradition may be established by the executives themselves during the earlier stages of their tenure. Eventually the level of complacency will outweigh the learning initiative, progress, and competency with an apparent diminished level of experimentation and financial performance.

In summary, Grimm and Smith (1991) concluded that the degree of learning initiatives, experimentation and innovation of products or services and evolution vary inversely with tenure. This correlation between certain characteristics in the tenure of CEOs or GMs with the timeline of the tenure is elaborated on by Miller and Shamsie (2001) who obtained the following correlation:

- *Product line experimentation will decline as the tenure of the top executive increases.*

- *There is an inverse U-shaped relationship between top executive tenure and financial performance, as performance first rises and then falls with increasing tenure on the job*

- *Product line experimentation is more positively associated with financial performance later than earlier in top managers' tenure.*

2.1.5 Research Gaps Posed by the Application of Organizational Learning Theory in the Studying of Tenure of Hotel GM

The application of Organizational Learning Theory in the study of hotel GM's tenure is useful to shed light on the performance characteristics of hotel GM tenure. Yet this research direction also poses a number of research gaps which point towards the need for further investigation. They include:

- The contextual characteristics of the hotel GM (The learning effectiveness and the priorities in the learning process depend on these characteristics)

- The relative importance amongst the particular targets and details of learning

- The pre-conditions to the experimentation practice at the start of the hotel GM's tenure.

- Other contributing factors to the higher financial performance than the results of effective learning by the hotel GM

- The determinants in constituting "good performance" of the hotel GM

- The traits or characteristics in hotel GMs favouring or being against complacency

- Signs of complacency as demonstrated by some hotel GMs

- The conditions of performance decline, and its absence

- The pre-requisites for overcoming complacency, in terms of personal, interpersonal, and organizational

- The possible actions, and the considerations behind, taken by the hotel GM in the decline stage

While the possible research gaps from a single research direction cannot be easily exhausted, it is implied that there are further aspects to the determinants of the performance of the hotel GM along the progression of his or her tenure than the sheer extent of organizational learning. Consideration of the conceptual levels of social, cultural, personal, interpersonal, organizational factors should be made for the sake for gaining deeper insights into the research theme. Yet these unexplored areas, empirically and specifically on the tenure of hotel GMs, demand exploratory study to achieve this end.

2.2 The Five-phase Model of Top Executives' Tenure and the Paradigm Concept

The life cycle of CEOs or general managers can also be interpreted in terms of a "paradigm" which is "how the environment behaves, what options are available, and how the organization should be run" (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991). The scholars have categorized the concept of paradigm with respect to the tenure of CEOs or GMs into two major and related elements – schema and repertoire. As per Fredrickson et al. (1988), there is a direct relationship between the stability of the environment and performance changes by the chief executive. The researchers posited a reverse correlation between the stability of the environment and performance downturn of a long-tenured CEO.

Such a correlation was echoed in another study by Karaevli (2007).

The concept of schema is tractable according to Lord and Foti (1986:20-48) and Kiester and Sproull (1982) who assumed that it is "a pre-existing knowledge system that a manager brings to an administrative situation". It includes conscious and unconscious preconceptions, beliefs, inferences, and expectations." The concept of schema was extended by Fiske and Tailor (1984) and Kotter (1982) as being also a derivation from experiences in culture, family, business, formal education and incidental observation. Schemas are the vehicles that managers use, consciously or unconsciously, in their perception and interpretation of the environment (Miller, 1991).

The repertoire of a general manager or a CEO is the "skills, devices and expedients possessed by a person" (Merriam-Webster, 2003). Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) have defined the repertoire of an executive as being his or her "armament or tool kit". The repertoire is also derived from one's experiences and personal aptitudes (Miller, 1991) and is a backdrop of the abilities on which the schemas can be applied in the given social and economic context.

The significance of the schema and repertoire of a CEO or GM is that it forms the paradigm within which the organization and the executive interact with each other. So as with the other environmental factors, the paradigm, and the constituting schema and repertoire, are in a continuous state of change. As far as the tenure of top executives is concerned, the paradigm defines how a top executive perceives and interprets the context and the environment in which his or her tenure evolves.

According to Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991), the tenure of a CEO, or the highest-ranked executive as a general manager, can be divided into five phases – (1) response to mandate, (2) experimentation, (3) selection of an enduring theme (4) convergence and (5) dysfunction.

Response to the Mandate	Experimentation	Selection of an Enduring Theme	Convergence	Dysfunction
• Act as per the mandate • For loyalty, demonstration of capabilities & alignment	• Detach from the mandate • Build-up of personal political agenda	• From the mandate & experimentation • Respond to both external & internal environment	• Refinement • Usually only slight changes in the same direction	• Mismatch with the environment • Can be sustaining

Figure 2.1   The Five-stage Model of the Tenure of CEOs by Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991)

2.2.1 Phase One – Response to mandate

Noted by Vancil (1987), the mandate for a CEO is the "message to the (new) CEO concerning the magnitude, direction, and pace of change that is expected", and is more likely to be implicit than explicit.   The mandate is usually given by the board of directors or the predecessor of the CEO or GM and, in return, the newly appointed GM or CEO is expected to respond to the mandate with sufficient attention and energy.   As per Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991), the general manager or CEO is obliged to pay particular attention to the mandate for three reasons – (a) the mandate is the "marching order" for the CEO or GM (b) the mandate should be aligned with the competencies behind the appointment and (c) the mandate is a means by which the newly appointed CEO or general manager can demonstrate his or her capability.   But, at the same time, the executive is under pressure to perform according to the mandate.   The mandate varies in nature, ranging from continuity (no change) to change (cost-saving, via innovated products or services, diversification, geographical expansion, and so on. (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991).   If the GM or CEO is free to enforce the necessary changes, it is more likely that he or she will implement those in which they are most experienced (Gabarro,

1987).

2.2.2 Phase Two – Experimentation

The adherence to the mandate by the GM or CEO can result in some successes, at least by enabling him or her to build up a political agenda at the start of the tenure. Based on the achievement, the executive can proceed to carry out the experimentation on the strategy as per his or her calibre or desires. This roughly corresponds to the Learning Stage in the three-stage model by Miller and Shamsie (2001). The experimentation and the implementation of the new strategy, system and tactic are partially a means by which the GM or CEO can separate themselves from the required mandate with one's wishes and aims intact. Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) have noted that this stage usually takes place in the second or third year of tenure, by which some knowledge has been acquired by the executive in the Learning Stage. Gabarro (1987) has nominated this phase as the "reshaping" phase. It represents a match between the credentials of the GM or CEO with intensive learning; a high degree of changes would take place according more to the personal preferences of the executive than purely the mandate imposed. This phase has some links to the Learning Stage as in the organizational learning understanding of top executives' tenure.

2.2.3 Phase Three – Selection of an Enduring Theme

This is a brief phase in which a certain paradigm is chosen by the executive. The paradigm is optimally able to cater to both the external environment, internal environment as built by the brought-in knowledge and system by the executive, together with the skills needed in the implementation.

2.2.4 Phase Four – Convergence

This is considered to be a stage in which the chosen paradigm, relating to the organizational strategy, structure and tactics, evolves with refinement to it through

continuous changes. These changes, however gradual or incremental, will eventually stabilise and take place within a limited scope. Described by Tushman and Romanelli (1985), the changes in these four phases usually form a cycle alternating between a short period of major change, refinement and a long period of incremental change in the manner of convergence. Quantitatively the researchers have noted the probability for change in the same direction to be three times higher than a total reversal of the paradigm. On the time scale, Gabarro (1987) has observed that major changes are more likely to occur in the first 2.5 years of the tenure for the GM or CEO, followed by a period of refinement to the paradigm and a long period of incremental change.

2.2.5 Phase Five – Dysfunction

This is the final phase of a CEO's or GM's tenure in which the achievements have started to be outweighed by unfavourable conditions. Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) have coined the change to be one in which "job mastery gives way to boredom; exhilaration to fatigue; strategizing to habituation". Internally promoted CEOs or GMs are expected to be more prone to the malaise because they are less socialised than their counterparts recruited outside of the corporation in handling changes in executive impression (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991). Analysing in terms of contingency theory, the match between environment and organizational strategies, structure and processes is higher under the tenure of CEOs or GMs of a medium length than that of a prolonged period of more than ten years (Miller, 1988). Notably, this phase of dysfunction can remain in place for a long period.

2.2.6 Research Gaps Posed by the Application of the Paradigm Concept in the Studying of Tenure of Hotel GMs

Again, as in the application of organizational learning theory, application of the paradigm concept opens up the possibility of further research with some unanswered questions arising from the concepts in this research direction. Some exemplary ones include:

- What is the common mandate faced by newly-appointed hotel GMs? By whom is it usually given? Will it differ for various types of hotels?

- Are there any other reasons that entice the hotel GMs to follow the mandate, rather than being purely "a matching order"?

- How do other factors, such as the personal characteristics of the hotel GM, the socio-cultural, economic and organizational environment, and so on, react with the mandate? For instance, what personal characteristics would make it more likely for a hotel GM to follow the mandate?

- What are the usual areas of experimentation for hotel GMs? How are they related to contextual factors such as the background and personality of the hotel GM, the performance of the hotel, and other macroenvironmental factors? (Beyer *et al.*, 1997, Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 1999; Ocasio and Kim, 1999, for example)

- Is the phase, the selection of an enduring theme, necessarily present in the tenure of the hotel GM?

- Is the selection of an enduring theme contradictory to the underlying concepts as in the contingency theory, with particular reference to the fast-moving hotel industry?

- Even if present, is this theme necessarily catering to both internal and external environment, if not carrying a heavier weight in either of them with respect to specific conditions (for example, of the hotel, the political, organizational, economic environment)?

- Specifically for hotel GMs, what are the typical enduring themes?

- What are the areas of consideration for hotel GMs in selecting the enduring themes? Personal wishes and aims? Requirements by the stakeholders?

- Are there any other parties, such as various stakeholders to the hotel GM, who participate in the designation of the enduring themes?

- Is it true that if there is no enduring theme, the phase of convergence will become non-existent?

- Is there any case in which phases three and four are non-existent and the

performance of hotel GM would quickly decline after a period of experimentation?

- What are the conditions for hotel GMs to implement major change, for instance, which induces a reversal of the paradigm? Are there any external conditions to the personal choice by the hotel GMs, such as the external environment, the requirements by the stakeholders, and so on?

- Again, is dysfunction an eventual step for every hotel GMs? If not, what are the measures which can be employed by the hotel GMs in order to prevent the malaise?

- Are externally recruited or executives with more extended social networking a better option for overcoming dysfunction?

- How is the issue of origin of CEO related to the context of the study on hotel GMs?

- When is the "exit point" for dysfunctional hotel GMs? Who is the major decision-maker behind such a verdict?

As a summary, it can be concluded that the research gaps from the research direction of paradigm concept lie predominantly in the context and conditions for the social phenomena surrounding the tenure of CEOs or GMs; or in other words, the how, why, when for the tenure *per se*. Further to this thinking, these contextual and condition-related factors have to be categorized into various common areas of concepts such as socio-cultural, economic, personal, and so on, in the same manner as in the major themes in each of the research questions. These extended areas of future research can again be possibly investigated by means of qualitative study because of the lack of the literature encompassing such a collection of conditions and context.

2.3   The Three-time-frame Model of Top Executives' Tenure and the Time-horizon Perspective

Following the application of the organizational learning theory and paradigm concept in studying the tenure of top executives, Nebel and Ghei (2002) conducted a research on the job demands and relationship demands of hotel GMs in the United States across various time frames. In the time-horizon perspective, the analysis was undertaken according to

the short-run, intermediate-run and long-run time frames of tenure. Beyond the nominal understanding of the time-frame characteristics, the job demands and relationship demands along the progression of the tenure of hotel GMs indicates, in the reverse perspective, the time-frame of the tenure in which the hotel GMs reside.

2.3.1 Short-run Time Frame

As the name implies, this is the first phase of the entire tenure of a hotel general manager. In terms of job demands, the hotel GM is anticipated to be highly involved in the everyday operations of service across various functions of the hotel, including rooms, food and beverages, finance, human resources, and so on. Emphasis on short-term profit and quality service is obvious. The relationship demands at this stage are mainly internally oriented with the most frequent communication with his or her subordinates, because the hotel GM has to get overall control of the hotel operations as well as achieving short-term profit targets.

2.3.2 Intermediate-run Time Frame

As the tenure proceeds, the hotel GM starts fine-tuning the strategy of the hotel in response to the local external environment, with the implementation of improvement plans on the hotel's operations. For hotels managed by a hotel management company, the strategy may originate from the senior management to the hotel GM at the corporate level. The fine-tuning would naturally include localization. The hotel GM is also expected to invest more resources in staff training and development, with corresponding change to the down-line organization. In terms of relationship demands, the downward and internal communication to his or her subordinates is still the major part of demands, yet lateral and external communications with counterparts in other hotels locally, and upward communications with the owners and corporate executives start to be more frequent. The major role played by the hotel GM at this stage is the "organizational developer" (Nebel and Ghei, 2002).

2.3.3 Long-run Time Frame

This is the phase along the tenure of the hotel general manager in which the focus is on maintaining the stability and vitality of the hotel. During this phase, the vision and mission of the hotel group are to be manifested at an elevated level. Such elevation lies mainly in the service quality of the hotel. The stability is also to be facilitated by means of human resources training and development in the intermediate phase.

The priority of relationship and frequency of communication are the reverse of those of the short-run time frame, with corporate executives and hotel owners being the highest, followed by lateral communication with other industrial counterparts and the downward demands from the subordinates. The predominant role played by the hotel general manager in this phase is the "business maintainer" (Nebel and Ghei, 2002).

2.3.4 Research Gaps Posed by the Application of the Time-horizon Perspective

As with other descriptive studies, the major objectives of the study by Nebel and Ghei (2002) are to extend the understanding of the tenure characteristics of hotel GMs because descriptive studies usually leave more questions than they have answered. From the above discussion of the three time frames of tenure of hotel GMs, further research needs can be identified in answering some gaps that evolved from the study itself:

- Amongst all the operational functions of a hotel, how would a hotel GM prioritise his or her attention in the short-run time frame?

- How does this process of prioritisation relate to the mandate by the stakeholders as given in the paradigm-perspective understanding of top executives, the personality of the hotel GM, the existing performance of the hotel, and so on?

- What are the closest working partners to the hotel GMs in different time frames, and why?

- What are the roles played by the hotel management company and/or hotel owner, also across various time frames?

- As in the short-run time frame, what is the priority for a hotel GM amongst the various operational functions for improving and enhancing the operations in the intermediate-run time frame?

- What are the major determinants behind such a priority arrangement?

- Are there any other major tasks for hotel GMs beyond localization?

- What is the degree of autonomy enjoyed by the hotel GMs? What characteristics of the organization and the hotel GM rule on such autonomy? Are there any differences of the extent of autonomy between various types of hotels?

- In the long-run time frame, what are the major working partners for the hotel GMs? Who is the most important stakeholder to the hotel GMs?

- Is there also any priority given to the relationship with the stakeholders?

- What are the effects in the change of communication focus and direction?

- Would it be possible for every hotel GM to reach this long-run time frame?

- Is service quality necessarily the most significant area for the hotel management company, regardless of the types or rating to which a hotel belongs?

- What is meant by stability? Branding? Financial performance? Systems and procedures? If its definition differs for different hotels, how to achieve it should then also vary for these different hotels.

- Does the personal agenda, such as career goals, of the hotel GM play any part in this long-run time frame?

2.4 Determinants and Conditions - Organizational

2.4.1 Contingency Theory

Contingency theory is one of several theoretical bases from which the development of the organizational determinants and conditions for the tenure of hotel GMs can be seen to originate.

Contingency theory can be applied in the study of the tenure of top executives by studying the relationship between organizational strategy, structure and the

unpredictability and dynamism in the environment of an organization. There are two levels of comprehension in the application of this theory in this specific context. Firstly, it is concerned about the "match" between the strategy and structure of the organization and the external environment, more in a static sense. The second level of understanding lies in the dynamic aspect of the "match" — how the top executives can steer the strategy and structure of the organization towards a closer, if not a better, match with the current macro environment (Reklitis and Trivelas, 2002).

In this understanding, good performance of organizations is at least partly contributed to by the specialization and flexibility in the organizational structure, innovation and strategies (Burns and Stalker, 1961, Thompson, 1967) adopted by CEOs or general managers. Miller and Friesen (1980, 1984) believed that the failure in corresponding the organizational strategy and structure to the dynamism in the external environment may lead to dismissal of top executives. Unresponsiveness towards the macro environment can only be reversed by the appointment of new top executives.

In short, the application of contingency theory in the illustration of the tenure of top executives centres on the assumption that the success and performance of top executives relies heavily on the "match" between the strategy, structure and innovation in the organization and the macroenvironmental factors. Notably, Henderson, Miller and Hambrick (2006) in a recent study, confirmed how quickly the paradigm of chief executives becomes obsolete and is, at least partially, determined by the dynamism of the macro environment. This is a notion supporting the rationale behind this research on the multidisciplinary nature of the determinants and conditions of the tenure of the hotel GM.

2.4.2   Contingency theory - Autonomy

The relationship between autonomy and the environment can be simplified in saying that the higher the autonomy possessed by a top executive, the lower the "match" between the organization and the external environment. Top executives are assumed to recruit like-minded subordinates after achieving a certain level of autonomy in an organization.

The start of such a practice could initiate the vicious circle of mismatch between the organization and the environment because of the presence of more like-minded personnel in the team of the top executives. As such, the more easily it is for the top executive to (i) believe in the soundness of the past strategies and to (ii) resist changes which are treated as a threat to power and autonomy (Staw, Sandelands and Dutton, 1981), resulting in an eventual likely deterioration of the performance of the executive. Such a derivation is supported by recent research such as the work by Mustten *et al*. (2006) and Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) in stating that a CEO or GM with a long tenure would likely over commit to the status quo with a decreasing level of variance to the everyday work and processing of new information.

With reference to the three-stage model of the life cycle of CEOs or GMs, the implications of this inflated autonomy may happen in the later stage of the Harvest Stage and in the Decline Stage. A high level of autonomy enjoyed by the CEO or GM is thus a negative determinant of the match between the organization and its environment.

Despite the above assumption that past good performance and success in strategies are pre-requisites for autonomy, there are other factors playing a part in the realization of autonomy for CEOs or GMs. They include, for instance, the trust by, and relationship with, the major stakeholders, the presence and rigidity of standards, policies and systems in the organization

2.4.3 Contingency theory - Past performance

Another determinant on the tenure of hotel GMs is the track record achieved by the CEOs or GMs. Understandably, the better the organizational performance, the less likely that a CEO or GM would be subject to involuntary turnover (Bishop, 1990). It is noted that successful achievement by top executives would increase their credibility, power and autonomy. With reference to the above section, the track record can also be considered as how well the CEOs or general managers draw a match between the environment and the organizational structure and strategy. With a similar logic, the better the track record,

and longer its duration, the more likely the top executive would be prone to overconfidence and complacency, leading subsequently to a lowered organizational performance. In a study by Schwenk (1993), it was found that complacency took the form of "self-serving attributions" – taking the liberty of credit for good organization and laying blame on the external environment for poor performance. Once again, the length and a positive track record of the executives are also negative determinants for the tenure of top executives.

2.4.4 Contingency theory – *Gestalts*, momentum and convergence

Another group of determinants of the tenure of the hotel GM drawing on the contingency theory is the *Gestalt*, momentum and convergence of the organization. As interpreted by Hinings and Greenwood (1988) and Miller and Friesen (1980), "gestalt" can be interpreted as the configuration of the organizational strategy, structure and process implemented by the CEO or GM (Hinings and Greenwood, 1988; Miller and Friesen, 1980). They prevent the widening of the gap between GM's perceptions and alertness and the environment. The need for reorientation of the organizational strategy, structure and process would be played down (Staw, Dutton and Sandelands, 1981). This stalemate is only changed with the appointment of a new CEO or GM (Miller, 1980; Tushman, Virany and Romanelli, 1987). Major accompanying change is witnessed only if the executive is recruited from outside of an organization, rather than promoted inside (Brockman, Hoffman and Dawley, 2006; House and Singh, 1987; Helmich, 1975, 1978) because of the likelihood of *gestalt* retention from predecessors. Following the status quo of the predecessor by the incoming CEO or GM may be understood as a tactic for ensuring good performance of an organization (Allgood & Farrell, 2003). Nevertheless, if the performance of the hotel at the time when an incoming CEO or GM assumes duty is poor, an "insider" would likely "inherit" the poor performance if the incoming GM follows the practices of his or her predecessor (Cannella and Shen, 2001). This

assumption, however, excludes the consideration of individual characteristics, such as personality (Lent *et al.*, 1994).

As a short conclusion, the application of contingency theory in the interpretation of the determinants of the tenure of hotel GMs is surrounded primarily by three organizational factors – autonomy, track record and the configuration of the systems, structure and policies in the organization. These three concepts are interrelated in the sense that a good track record of hotel GMs is believed to be a result of administering a good match between the *gestalt* of the organization with the external environment, resulting in a high autonomy proffered by a hotel management company or hotel owners. But such autonomy is not necessarily a blessing for the hotel GM because it would reinforce the *gestalt* of the organization, which would likely lower the initial successful "match" between the organization and the environment – a prelude to a drop of organizational performance. This logic of making use of contingency theory in the locating of determinants on the tenure of hotel GMs is clearly adopting only an organizational perspective without considering contributors of other classification or nature to "good performance" of hotels.

2.4.5 Model of Succession and Organizational Learning Theory

Succession is mainly concerned about the early stage of the tenure of a GM or CEO. Following the discussion earlier in the chapter on the first of the five phases of the life cycle – *response to mandate*, it can be deduced that succession is highly related to the **mandate** imposed onto the hotel GMs. Such mandate, from the organizational perspective, is usually concerned with the paradigm and the environment, such as the existing performance and issues faced by the organization. Gordon and Rosen (1981) stated that the orientation and initiatives to be adopted by an incoming chief executive are also within the mandate. In a later study, Brady and Helmich (1984) suggested that there were a number of organizational determinants including (1) the size, age, and growth of the organization; (2) the type of change mandated and (3) succession rate.

The study of executive succession can indeed be interpreted as a mechanism for organizational learning. The categorisation of organizational learning into "first-order learning" and "second-order learning" corresponds to the organizational activities during periods of stability and turbulence respectively, or periods of convergence and reorientation correspondingly (Virany, et al., 1992).

First-order learning acts upon a basis of well-established strategies, structures and practices by introducing enhancement and improvement (Lent and Mezias 1992) for rectifying errors and discrepancy (Louis and Sutton 1989). Second-order learning is, on the contrary, concerned mainly about "changes" to the established basis of strategies, structure and practices. However, the essence of organizational learning theory lies in the idea of "change", from problem-solving to the overall welfare of the organization involving changes in the mentality of the personnel towards the transformation of the entire organization (Harung et al., 1999). This is especially relevant and significant to the role of succeeding CEOs or GMs in organizations.

Conceptually, there are similarities in, but also contrasting differences between, the application of contingency theory and organizational learning theory in the context of top executives' tenure. The similarities lie in the emphasis of two elements – a set of organizational strategies, policies and structure, and the changes on them corresponding to the environment. Nevertheless, the two theories imply opposite results in application, at least in the top executives' adherence to the well-established structures and strategies in the organization. With contingency theory, the response to the existing set of strategies and structure without sufficient consideration of the external environment is likely to make the top executive fall prey to unfavourable performance. Organizational theory implies that top executives avoid deviation from the structures and strategies in order to secure favourable performance.

Such juxtaposition is in fact a result of the context of the theories – in contingency theory, the volatility and contingencies in the market are assumed to be all-time present while in organizational theory, first-order learning is presumed to take place in a period of relative

stability. The market and environmental context of the second-order learning is similar to that of the contingency theory (Weick, 1979; Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson, 1967). More significantly, the application of established theories in the interpretation of the tenure of top executives such as hotel GMs should at least be made in a wider context than sheer organizational characteristics. It should include such macroenvironmental factors as the economic ones. The study of these other macroenvironmental factors, as research gap, should be explored in future research.

2.4.5.1 Organizational Learning Theory – First-order Learning

First-order learning rests with organizational practices, structures and strategies; any deviation from the infrastructure would be avoided by the chief executive. It is also understood that this force of repelling deviation would increase as the tenure of the top executives continues (Ancona, 1989). This means that the longer the tenure of the chief executive, the stronger will be the force for homogenisation of practices, structures and strategies (Tushman and Keck, 1990). This condition leads to a stalemate towards awareness of problem-solving (Louis and Sutton, 1989), and decreased external communication (Katz, 1982; Wagner, Pfeffer and O'Reilly, 1984).

2.4.5.2 Organizational Learning Theory – Second-order Learning

Assuming that first-order learning is continuously contributing to a good organizational performance, the contribution continues so long as the macroenvironmental issues can be resolved with the present strategies, structures or processes from first-order learning (Lant and Mezias, 1992: 49), and there is no seeming decrease of organizational performance. Otherwise, second-order learning, a means of introducing changes and new strategies and practices, should be in place. As stated by Grainer and Bhambri (1989), executive succession is a common mechanism for introducing second-order learning. After succession, the new chief executive is expected to introduce a new paradigm, corresponding to the environment and the "new" issues, by which the existing

infrastructure established by predecessors may have to recede (Dutton and Jackson, 1988; Bartunek, 1984). Common tactics include the use of experimentation (Ancona, 1989; O'Reilly and Flatt, 1989) and the resumption of communication with the external network, long needed by the organization.

2.4.6　Model of Dismissal

The dismissal of a GM or CEO is a drastic event for any organization. It is an action initiated by the board of directors (Huson *et al.*, 2001; Furtado and Karan, 1990; Mintzberg, 1983). Poor organizational performance was cited as the most common reason of dismissal, as proven in a number of empirical studies (Brunello *et al.*, 2003; Denis and Denis, 1995). Arguably, poor organizational performance can only account for less than one-half of the variance in the dismissal and turnover of chief executives (Fredrickson, Hambrick and Baumrin, 1988).

Fredrickson, Hambrick and Baumrin (1988) have pioneered the study of the dismissal of chief executives from socio-cultural and socio-political perspectives. They conceived that the dismissal of such top managers as GMs or CEOs is also attributable to other social and political factors including interpersonal relations, coalitions, power and political agendas, than purely an account of the organizational performance (Fredrickson, Hambrick and Baumrin, 1988). They are projected to complement the organizational performance as the major determinants in the *last phase of the tenure* of a GM or CEO.

However, the researchers proposed in the same study that there are five areas of organizational factors which determine the odds of dismissal of top executives including the characteristics of (a) the board of directors (b) the organization (c) the industry (d) the chief executive and (e) the previous chief executive. The organizational factors and socio-cultural or -political factors will be discussed separately below.

2.4.6.1 Model of Dismissal and the Characteristics of the Board

Because of the high personal subjectivity involved in the tenure-related decisions of the board, it can be deduced that the larger size of the board, the higher the degree of diversity and conflict of thoughts, particularly over the *perceived organizational problems and performance of the chief executive.* The focus lies in the **conflict** between the governing stakeholders and the CEO. In the context of the current research, the "board" can be interpreted as the collection of the executives at either the hotel management company or the hotel owners' company, or both.

"Inside" directors, with better knowledge about the operations of the organization are more likely to be in support of the job of the GM or CEO (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988), whereas "outside" directors are more likely to cast more attention on the hard facts of the performance, such as revenue and cost structure of the organization. It is likely for them to exercise control (Mace, 1971; Mizruchi, 1983) but not empathy towards the performance of the GM or CEO. Executives at the hotel management company and hotel owners with rich experience in hoteliering are more likely to be "insiders" while hotel owners with a different business focus are possibly more of "outsiders", according to the job details possessed by these directors (Haleblian and Rajagopalan, 2006).

Another area of concern is how the "board" considers what good performance means to them. Further to this, it is concerned about to what extent the directors perceive the seriousness of the issues facing the organization, and the *perceived attributions* of the executive in enhancing the performance of the organization (Fredrickson, Hambrick and Baumrin, 1988). Such subjectivity in the determination of the performance was affirmed in a recent study by Haleblian and Rajagopalan (2006). It is crucial for hotel GMs to align the expectations and attributions of all executives to avoid negative attributions (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988). In addition, the values and

allegiances as constituents of the culture (Trice and Beyer, 1993) are reported to be determinants.

2.4.6.2 Model of Dismissal and the Characteristics of the Organization and Industry

Organizations with a longer history are more capable of nurturing top-level executives from within the organization (Helmich, 1975). Upon the succession of chief executives, older organizations are anticipated to have a large pool of eligible candidates for the top job, resulting in a higher rate of GM or CEO turnover (House, Singh, & Tucker, 1985). In the current research, international hotel management companies are envisaged to possess more eligible candidates than local owner-managed hotels.

In research by Pfeffer and Moore (1980), it was found that the turnover of leaders in organizations in the early stage of paradigm development was the highest. This is because consensus by the board on performance benchmarking is more difficult for a new industry. In reverse, organizations would have better knowledge on the optimal organizational strategies, structure and processes. This derivation is in line with previous research by Calder (1977) and Pfeffer (1977) that "stronger causal attributions" would be made to the chief executive in wake of a higher degree of uncertainty. In the current research, however, the stage of development, instead of the paradigm, can be interpreted as the hotel itself rather than the industry as a whole.

Another determinant is the sheer number of companies in the industry. Common sense dictates that there are more alternative top executives in similar companies if the number of firms in the industry is large.

In any organizations, the obtained "power" by a hotel GM is one of the tools in acting against any possible dismissal. This definition of power can take the form of a number of characteristics such as whether the executive is a charismatic figure (Zaleznik & Kets de Vries, 1975); in control of critical resources (for instance, major clients, proprietary technology, or key contacts (Ocasio, 1994, Hambrick, 1981; Dickson *et al.*, 1971; Perrow, 1970), and so on.

2.4.6.3 Model of Dismissal and Performance Characteristics

How "good" the performance of top executives is seen to be is subjective and relative (Haleblian and Rajagopalan, 2006; Cyert & March, 1963) and is contingent on the stakeholders' subjectivity. Based on the definition of prior performance (Zajac and Westphal, 1996; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996), it is the *comparative* performance between the recent past and the current which is of focus. That of the distant past (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988) is of much less significance.

2.4.6.4 Model of Dismissal and the Characteristics of Tenure

The longer the tenure of the GMs or CEOs, the more closely the allegiance and values of the board of directors will resemble that of the chief executive (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988). This can be understood from two perspectives. First, the executives at the hotel management company and the hotel owners have increasing knowledge about the GM and his organizational strategies, structure and processes. If this paradigm delivers favourable results, the trust by these executives for the chief executive will be strengthened. This attribute is also partially reflected by the age of the GM as older top executives are predicted to be more risk-averse, a pre-requisite for change and improvement (Barker and Mueller, 2002). In contrast, new CEOs are more vulnerable to dismissal (Allgood and Farrell, 2000) than their medium-term counterparts.

In terms of compensation, CEOs or GMs having a higher guaranteed compensation than that of the predecessor or the industry norm (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988), would imply higher expectations and causal attributions to "good" organizational performance. If the performance falls short of expectation, the tenure would be shortened due to high incurred cost.

2.4.6.5 Model of Dismissal and the Characteristics of the Predecessors

It has been proven by numerous scholars that CEOs or GMs are, to a high extent, bound by the characteristics and achievements delivered by their predecessors (Gordon & Rosen, 1981: Guest, 1962: Helmich, 1977: Reinganum, 1985: Zald, 1965). If the predecessor of the hotel GM is ousted, the GM would, at least, face the pressure in remedying the problems or issues faced, or generated by, the predecessor (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988).

Helmich (1977) has proposed an inverse relationship between the length of the tenure of a CEO and that of his predecessor. The relationship is derived from three major elements of rationale, including that the longer the tenure of the predecessor, the more probable that (a) the board of directors are more influenced by the predecessor (b) the board has already maintained an allegiance to the new GM's strategies, structure and process and (c) the performance of the organization and the chief executive would be brought into direct comparison with those of this predecessor.

2.5 Determinants and Conditions – Socio-cultural and Socio-political

2.5.1 Model of Succession and Origin of Succession

There are a number of socio-cultural or socio-political determinants of top executives' succession (Cao *et al.*, 2006; Brady and Helmich, 1984:24-25). They include, for instance, the involvement of the board, the characteristics of the successor, the relationship between successors, organizational change, successor styles and needs.

To revive the good performance of an organization after succession is a major task for the incoming chief executive. The capability to turn around profitability is quintessential to the tenure as it sheds light on whether the CEO or GM is able to manage the different phases of his or her tenure (Greiner & Bhambri, 1989).

The origin of this successor, as an "insider" or "outsider", instils different expectations on their performance. There is research showing that "insiders" are expected to deliver better profitability (Shen and Cannella 2003, Zhang and Rajagopalan 2004). "Outsider"

succession is expected to result again in negative subsequent organizational performance (Lin and Li, 2004) and mixed market responses (Davidson *et al.*, 2002; Davidson, Worrell and Cheng, 1990; Beatty and Zajac, 1987).

But in a study by Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin (1988), it was found that it is the expectation from "outside" by the board that is higher because the board's allegiance to an outside chief executive would be less than on an insider. As long as there is a gap between the expected organizational performance and the actual one, "outside" top executives are envisaged to experience a shorter tenure. This phenomenon may only be applicable in the present study on hotels managed in-house by the hotel owners because hotel GMs working for hotel management companies are likely to be "insiders".

2.5.2 Model of Succession and Rate of Succession

Some researchers emphasise the effects of organizational performance as a major determinant of rate of succession. The rate, especially of "outsider" succession, is notably higher for low-performing organizations (Cannella and Lubatkin, 1993). Higher organizational performance results naturally in lower succession rate, and vice versa (Warner *et al.*, 1988; Morck, Schleifer & Vishny, 1998; Benston, 1985; Coughlan & Schmidt, 1985). Other contextual factors for low succession rate include (1) a higher degree of consensus among the executive team (Pfeffer & Moore, 1980); (2) CEO's ownership positions (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1980); (3) the power of incumbent CEOs (Allen, 1981; Allen & Panian, 1982, Ocasio, 1994); (4) ownership changes (Jauch *et al.*, 1980); and (5) the financial strategies of the organization (Osborn *et al.*, 1981).

2.6 Weberian-Child Framework on the Organizational Context

The latest update to the upper echelons theory by Hambrick (2007) has insinuated a new direction for researchers in reconsidering such other environmental factors as the macroeconomic, cultural disposition and institutional forces behind the strategic choices by top managers.

Hambrick's study is the refinement to the Upper Echelon Theory which denotes how the personality, personal experience and values of the senior managers or executives affect how they perceive the environment. For example, the national systems, compensation systems in a hotel, the certain "systems" affect the **perception** of the GMs. The perception by the GM would immediately affect how he or she would act in response to these systems. For instance, if the "national systems" that the GM is facing are unfavourable, would he or she consider changing jobs?

In essence the study by Hambrick (2007) obtains insights into the impact of environmental forces, such as macroeconomic, cultural and institutional, over the strategic choices of senior managers.

Such macroenvironmental factors are believed to exert impact over the behaviour of top managers during their tenure. This notion has encouraged the researcher to locate, postulate and categorize the possible, if any, determinants of the hotel GM's tenure.

Highlighting specifically, the macroeconomic, cultural disposition and institutional forces as the external influence over the shaping of the behaviour, and hence the tenure, of hotel GMs echoes with the typology of the forces by Child (2001) in explaining Weber's (1978) interpretation of organizational context, as given below in Figure 2.2.
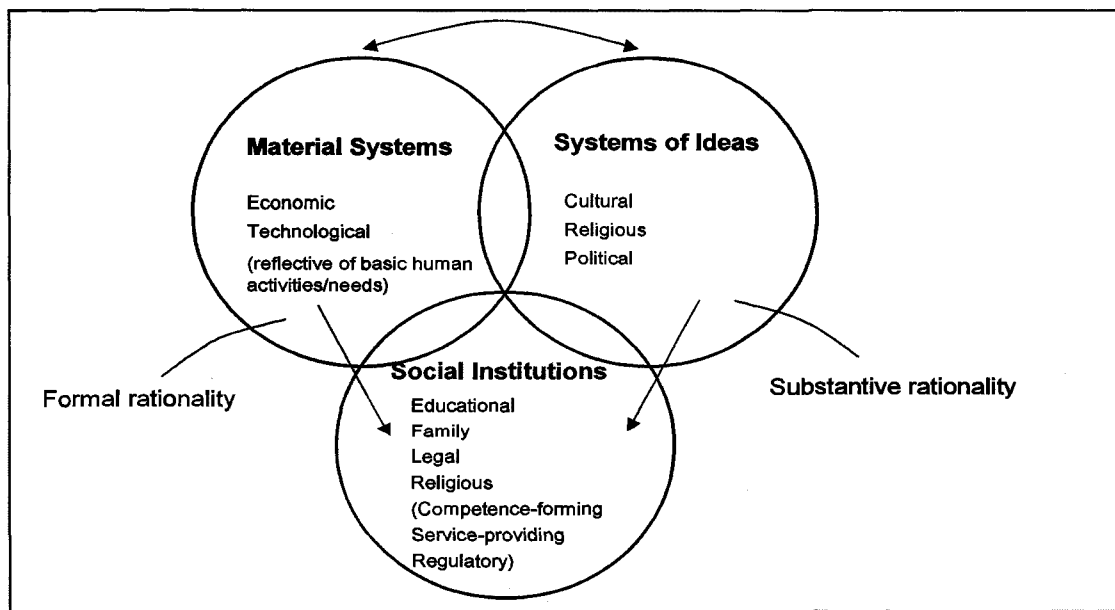
Figure 2.2   A Weberian Interpretation of Organizational Context (Child, 2001: 45)

The above model, based on Weber's (1978) framework on socioeconomic development, synthesized by Child (2001) is characterized by several notable points:

- "Organization" can be understood in the context of firms and individuals (Earley and Singh, 1995: 337-338)

- Material forces exert influence on the social institutions in the manner of "formal rationality" – the "social arrangements in terms of routines, structures, and so-forth" which take the form of "efficiency-oriented rules and codified knowledge" (Child, 2001: 43)

- Ideational forces exert impact on the social institutions in the form of "substantive rationality" – the "meaning that people give to social organization and to the processes that take place within it such as the exercise of authority" (Child, 2001: 44)

- Material and ideational forces are mutually impacting

- "Social action" (Child, 2001: 45), the "intentional action [by any organizations] oriented toward others" (Child, 2001: 45) is triggered by material forces, ideational forces, or a joint forces of them both

The principal level of analysis for the model lies in "organizations" being firms or commercial bodies. They exert immense impact over the strategic choices of managers in global firms. A number of examples by Child (2001: 54-55) have postulated the applicability of the model on individual levels, in particular if the individuals concerned are the key figures in an organization.

An example is the mandate by transnational corporations (TNC) to impose not only "formalization and standardization of structures and systems", but also a coherent set of practices and procedures for the sake of nurturing competencies amongst major executives "who are loyal to the corporate culture". This example exemplifies that key executives in corporations are understandably under both ideational and institutional forces imposed by the organization.

Another instance is that the macroscopic characteristics of an organization are expected to be heavily influenced, if not shaped, by the cultural disposition of the top managers, such as the chief executives or directors on board. This is the case, however small the group or secluded the cultural propensity, at least initially. Child (2001: 59) has further elaborated on the model by stating that managers hold an essential role in the interpretation of the material, ideational and institutional forces, with respect to any possible inference to the organization. These two examples together illustrate a significant application and predictability by the Weberian-Child model of organizational context on the environment to the hotel GM's tenure.

2.7 Career Development, Progression and Aims of Hotel GMs

Career, according to Arthur *et al.* (1989) means "the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time". A number of researchers have attempted to study the career development and progression of hotel GMs from various perspectives. According to Guerrier (1987), the post of hotel GM is the third and last stage of the career progression for hotel manages in which there is a greater scope of responsibility, higher remuneration and status. Upon assuming the post, Antil (1974) believed that hotel GMs should conduct a self-evaluation of their own interests, abilities and career directions within a proposed framework. This framework can be considered as a scheme of *career planning* by hotel GMs. Noted also by Antil (1974), career planning is a continuous process which is essential to the long-term career success of hotel GMs. Ruddy (1989) has also studied the *career development* of hotel managers in the context of Hong Kong.

On career progression, Ladkin and Riley (1994, 1995 & 1996) have studied the job mobility of hotel GMs for an extended period of time. In later research by Ladkin & Juwaheer (2000), two significant phenomena about the career progression of hotel GMs were confirmed – (i) hotel managers plan for their long-term career and (ii) external job mobility, the career move outside of one's company, is more common than internal job mobility. One of the core concepts behind this phenomenon of external job mobility is

that hotel managers use this external job mobility as the foremost personal strategy for career development by enriching one's knowledge and work experience. In the body of research by Ladkin (1994, 1995 & 1996), the external job mobility is investigated to be usually self-initiated, a phenomenon in line with it being "personal strategy" in career development as in the later study.

Although the "aim of career" has not been subject to sufficient empirical research such that it has already become an established research construct, some researchers have attempted to explore the concept of the "aim of career" in various descriptive studies. One of the most authoritative researchers is Schein (1978, 1996) who has established the "career anchor theory". This is a theory in which there are long-term and long-staying preferences of workers over their job and working environment (Schein, 1996; Suutari and Taka, 2004). There are two major concepts surrounding "career anchor theory" – "internal careers" and "external careers". "Internal careers" is a person's subjective idea on the direction and destination of one's work life (Schein, 1996). "External careers" refers to "the formal stages and roles defined by organizational policies and societal concepts of what an individual can expect in an occupational structure" (Schein, 1996; Suutari and Taka, 2004).

As far as the "career aim" of a person is concerned, a close resemblance to the interpretation can be drawn from the concept of "internal career anchors" (Jiang and Klein, 1999/2000) which consist of three significant "self-concepts" (Schein, 1996):

- Talents and abilities as in self-perception

- Fundamental values

- Emerging motives and needs in relation to one's career

There are also eight essential anchors (Schein, 1978 & 1996):

1. technical or functional competence;

2. managerial competence;

3. security and stability;

4. autonomy and independence and entrepreneurial creativity

5. service and dedication to a cause;

6. pure challenge; and

7. lifestyle

The previous studies on career anchor theory were limited to descriptive rather than empirical studies (Arnold, 1997). The lack of a congruent research construct demands further research including the enrichment of constituting dimensions, such as *internationalism* as in the study by Suutari and Taka (2004).

2.8 Chapter Summary and Research Gap

Before the shortfalls in the literature can be collectively discussed in order to derive and justify the directions of the current research, it would be informative to take an overview of the major concepts and theoretical basis of the literature pertaining to the studying of the tenure of hotel GMs as a top executive to a hotel, and its determinants and conditions as below.

Theoretical Frameworks / Models	Research Perspective	Number of Stages	Key Features
Organizational Learning Theory (for instance, Miller and Shamsie, 2001)	Longitudinal	Three	• **Learning**: Experimentation, and its outcome, as a learning process for the searching of the optimal strategies, markets and organizational strengths. • **Harvest**: Best in financial performance out of confidence in the *status quo*. Possible complacency and less experimentation. • **Decline**: Onset from 7-15 years after being in office. Outdated products or services; detached from the market; overuse of the optimal strategies.
Contingency Theory and Paradigm Concept (for instance, Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991)	Longitudinal	Five	• **Response to the mandate**: Act according to the mandate by the board as a kind of loyalty, demonstration of capabilities and alignment. • **Experimentation**: Detach from the mandate. Build-up of personal political agenda. Onset from the 2-3 years after being in office. • **Selection of an Enduring Theme**: A result from the mandate and experimentation. It can hopefully respond to both the external and internal environment. • **Convergence**: Refinement to the paradigm chosen. Only slight change in the same

			direction is usual. ● **Dysfunction**: Boredom, habituation, a high mismatch with the environment. This stage can be sustaining.
Time-Horizon Perspective (Nebel and Ghei, 2002)	Longitudinal	Three	● **Short-run**: Highly involved in operations. Emphasis on profits and service quality. Communicate most with subordinates. ● **Intermediate-run**: Fine-tuning in strategies, operations and human resources. Communicate most with subordinates still but more with lateral and external parties. ● **Long-run**: Emphasise the vision, mission and stability of the hotel. Communicate most with corporate executives and industrial counterparts
Contingency Theory (on determinants) (for instance, Miller, 1991)	Longitudinal	Not Applicable	● Autonomy ● Tenure and past performance ● *Gestalts*, momentum and convergence
Model of Succession & Organizational Learning Theory (for instance, Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991; Brady and Helmich, 1984)	Cross-sectional	Not applicable	First-order Learning: ● Response to the practices, structures and strategies ● Problem-solving with existing strategies ● Less communication with external parties Second-order Learning: ● Changes to the practices, structures and strategies ● More communication with external parties Characteristics of the: ● Organization ● Board of directors ● Predecessor ● Successor ● Succession process
Model of Dismissal (for instance, Fredrickson, Hambrick and Baumrin, 1988)	Cross-sectional	Not applicable	Characteristics of the: ● Board of directors (composition, source, attributions and other nominal features) ● Organization (size, age, performance composites) ● Industry (stage of development, number of firms, ● Predecessor (tenure, conditions of departure) ● Chief executives (power, stockholding, tenure length, origin, remuneration) ● Successor (availability)

There are a number of research gaps which sponsor the significance of a time-phase study of the life cycle of tenure of a general manager or CEO (Henderson, Miller and Hambrick, 2006; Miller, 1991; Gabarro, 1987). Amongst preceding studies on executive tenure,

their temporal characteristics usually receive little attention (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991). The importance of time-phase study of the tenure for chief executives and general managers lies in that it can pinpoint the critical trends that are more likely to exist in an executive's tenure (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991). Nevertheless, most of the studies in the literature focus on the cross-sectional characteristics and data within a specific period, such as succession (Sonnenfeld, 1988, for example) and dismissal (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988).

As pointed out by Hambrick and Mason (1984) and Miller and Toulouse (1986), it is difficult for researchers to separate the determinants from the study of the top executives' tenure because they intertwine and interact with the characteristics of the tenure if not amongst themselves. Typical determinants would include leader traits, organizational characteristics and performance. With such complexity in the mechanism and interaction, it is thus

Difficult for researchers to differentiate between cause and effect. Added to the complexity is the dynamism in the macro environment against which the organization operates, and a CEO or GM works.

The application of certain theoretical frameworks in the establishment of the model of the tenure of top executives seems to be unable to draw a complete picture of the understanding of the various aspects of the tenure of CEOs or GMs along its progression. It even advocates that the study is conducted in a holistic manner. For instance, the organizational learning theory and the paradigm concept within the regime of contingency theory put more emphasis on the study of their presence in the early tenure than in the later stages. In a holistic fashion, the study should be able to cover the longitudinal nature of the tenure instead of only the cross-sectional one.

Such cross-sectional studies, with the application of the succession model and dismissal model, highlight the determinants and conditions along the progression of tenure primarily of an organizational, socio-cultural or socio-political nature. Seemingly there are more necessary disciplines of these determinants and conditions of hotel GMs' tenure

than the above three. For example, they may include human resources, personal, economic, social, and cultural factors, to name a few (for example, Akrivos, Ladkin & Reklitis, 2007; Tsai *et al.*, 2006). In particular for the hotel industry, the partial dependence of the success of a hotel GM's tenure on personality, for instance, has been identified by Wilson (1998) and Worsfold (1989a, 1989b).

A need to focus on the disciplines in studying the determinants and conditions was highlighted by Musteen *et al.* (2006) and Fizel, Louie and Mentzer (1990). This is despite the fact that these studies concentrated on a certain aspect of managerial action or two, such as decision-making, change or remuneration. Research gaps in exploring the determinants and conditions of tenure were reported.

The research by Nebel and Ghei (2002) has examined the hotel GM's tenure in a longitudinal methodology. But the focus cast upon the job demands and relationship demands at different times of the tenure shed little light on the observable phenomena. They include the determinants and reasons behind such characteristics and phenomena. In better understanding the determinants and reasons, hotel owners and developers can maintain a closer grasp on the how to boost the profitability of the hotel, as well as to correct unfavourable performance.

In summary, the previous studies leave two predominant research gaps – (i) covering only a cross-sectional profile of the tenure of CEOs or GMs and (ii) studying only partially the determinants and conditions of the tenure, instead of a more comprehensive theoretical conceptualization of their various disciplines. It is the attempt of this research to try to answer some of the research gaps as in 2.2.6 and 2.3.4.

The attempt to include Weberian-Child framework of the contextual forces on organizations is to prompt the researcher in thinking through the fundamental causes behind the actions of the hotel GM while tenure advances. It is also useful in drawing possible linkages between the determinants and conditions.

The literature review on career development, progression and aims is to shed light on whether there are recognized patterns of career development and progression in the post

of hotel GM. The possible goals for hotel GMs behind their various behaviours during their tenure are also being explored by relating to analogous theories on the aims of career for hotel GMs.

2.9 Chapter Conclusion

Regardless of the long history of studies on the tenure of chief executives, no consensus has yet been achieved on a unified model of the analysis, particularly on the starting and ending points of each of the phases along the tenure, if applicable. There is, however, a good prospect of profiling the determinants of the tenure of CEOs or GMs with respect to the research gap in the previous related studies.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, THEORETICAL
FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

This chapter is concerned with the theoretical framework and the research propositions that underpin this study. An essential fact about the current research is that the topic is relatively new to both the fields of organizational behaviour and human resources management. There is a lack of hotel-specific literature, empirical research, established research constructs and model. This is in spite of the *analogous* research on the tenure of chief executive officers (CEOs), their appointment, retention and dismissal. Some of the analogous research can be incorporated into this study as a source of reference as well as for triangulation of the constructs as obtained. Against such a research context, a *predominantly* qualitative research underpins the research paradigm.

3.1 Research Assumptions

The basic assumptions of the research that will be tested include:

1. The concept of "life cycle" is an analogous term originating from marketing (Bass, 1969), subsequently to the concept of the biological life cycle of organisms. The context of its use in this research is the "life cycle of the tenure of hotel general manager in Hong Kong".

2. There are several characteristics embedded in the meaning of "life cycle" that are applicable to its context of the tenure of hotel general managers – (i) the span of every "life cycle" is limited; (ii) it can be segregated into stages or phases, every one of

which is marked with specific features, such as the phenomena of introduction, growth, maturity and decline in product life cycle (Kotler, 2000); (iii) it is periodic – the characteristics, particularly the stages or phases repeat themselves in every new cycle; (iv) every stage is characterised by different opportunities and threats and require various handling strategies

3. The determination and determinants of each stage or phase in the life cycle of tenure, one of the major objectives of this proposed research, is highly dependent on interpersonal relationships and the socio-political factors.   An example is that the dismissal of a chief executive is not necessarily due to poor performance, but is subject to such factors as the expectations and acknowledgment of the managing board of directors (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988).   Adding to this complexity, it is difficult to determine in which phase of the life cycle a hotel GM resides.   Because of the dependency on such socio-political factors, the determination and determinants are subject to the *subjective perception* of the hotel general managers and the *gestalt* of the external environment, including to a large extent the individuals with working relationships with the general managers.

4. In spite of some previous research in the related fields, there is a lack of empirical research, let alone an established *theory* on the tenure of the hotel general manager, the time-phase concept, the determinants in each phase and their periodicity.   The correlation between, and applicability of, other models of human resources practices such as appointment, dismissal and the tenure life cycle of tenure are also unexplored areas.

3.2   The Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology, Rhetoric and Methodology of the Research

In terms of ontology, the fact that the reality in the proposed research is subjective and the presence of multiple perceived "reality" demand a constructivist ontology.   The "multiple reality" includes the phases in the tenure, the reasons behind the appointment,

the exit of the hotel GM, and so on. These are expected to differ amongst the research informants. The role of the researcher as a hotel owner representative implies an insider role to the research. It is understood there will be interaction between the researcher and the informants, with personal and value-laden data collection practices, as far as the epistemology and axiology of the research are concerned. The interaction between the researcher and the informant also means there will be personal voice and qualitative-oriented rhetoric used in the data collection process (Creswell, 1994). In addition, the research process is anticipated to be inductive in that there is simultaneous definition of concepts and categories during the research process. An illustrative example is the translation of certain actions by the managing board of directors into practices understood to be affecting the hotel GM's tenure. The data collected in the research are expected to be highly context-bound. Theories have to be developed for a thorough understanding of them. A qualitative methodology is thus necessary.

3.3 Research Paradigm

From the discussions above, especially points 3 and 4, it can be deduced that the major paradigm of this research is grounded theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) since there is no *a priori* theory or empirical research on the life cycle of the tenure of hotel GM and its determinants. In another sense, the existing literature on the proposed topic is immature. From discussion in the above section, the "insider" role of the researcher allows a secondary paradigm, ethnography, to be used. The essence of applying ethnography lies in the participation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) by the researcher in the research setting and the reflexive nature of the data collection (Goulding, 2005).

Theory is thus to be inductively derived from data collection, data analysis and verification (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

The need for adopting a qualitative methodology is ascertained by the facts that (Creswell, 1994):

1.   It is the *meaning* of the tenure, and the accompanying experiences, of the hotel

general mangers

2. The research would be the primary instrument of data collection and analysis

3. The data collection procedure would involve fieldwork, primarily in the in-depth interview with the research participants

4. The data as collection would only be descriptive in nature which are then subject to the interpretation by the researcher into underlying processes, meanings and understanding

5. The research is inductive that the concepts and theories are to be built by the researcher

The research paradigm would thus adopt a **qualitative methodology** (Creswell, 1994). The propositions and its research constructs are guided by the literature review. The literature review is mainly focused on the **grand tour questions** (Creswell, 1994) and sub-questions, as in ordinary qualitative research, as some related subtopics:

- Time-phase model

- The applicability of contingency theory

- The applicability of the model of succession

- The applicability of the model of dismissal

- The time-horizon perspective (short-term, mid-term and long-term)

3.4 Research Questions

There are two predominant themes emerging from the literature review – (i) the time-phase characteristics of the tenure of hotel GMs in a longitudinal perspective, and (ii) the multiple disciplines of the determinants and conditions affecting tenure. It is envisaged that the hotel GM's tenure exhibits cyclical across their job assignments. By proposing that there are multidisciplines of determinants, it is assumed they cover more than merely the organizational and socio-cultural or socio-political arenas but also include

as well the human resources, economic characteristics of the environment if not also the psychological and personal traits of the hotel GMs.

In essence, the research is an attempt to investigate all of these characteristics in an integrated manner different from the literature, in which they were studied in a separate manner with thorough consideration of the interdependent and interactive mechanisms between them.

From the previous two chapters, the grand tour questions and sub-questions of the proposed research are proposed as below:

Grand tour questions:

1. Is there a time-phase perspective in the tenure of hotel GMs in Hong Kong? If so, what are the phases and do they form cyclical in the form of a "life cycle"? What are the characteristics of each phase? What are the transition points between the phases?

2. What are the determinants and what is the degree of correlation of each of these determinants to the evolvement of the tenure of hotel GMs in Hong Kong?

Sub-themes related questions:

3. What are the roles played by the human resources determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – the hotel owner, management executives of the hotel management company, the hotel general manager himself/herself and his/her predecessor and the board of directors, management executives of the hotel management company- such as their expectations, attributions and allegiance, in the tenure of the hotel general manager and in each of its phases?

4. What are the roles played by the organizational determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – organizational structure (owner-managed, managed by hotel management company, franchising) organizational performance, line of authority, customer satisfaction index, etc. in the tenure of the hotel general manager and in each of its phases?

5. What are the roles played by the psychological determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – such as the personality of hotel general managers?

6. What are the roles played by the socio-cultural or socio-political determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – the expectations and attributions; the allegiance and value of the board of directors (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988), the relationship with the board of directors/hotel owners, the relationship with the management executives of the hotel management company, cultural distance between the nationality of the hotel general manager and that of the host country, the degree of participation in the local industrial organizations, etc. in the tenure of the hotel general manager and in each of its phases?

7. Are there any other individuals, bodies or factors playing part in influencing the tenure of the hotel general manager in each of the phases?

3.5 Research Methodology – Grounded Theory and its Theoretical Basis

Grounded theory originated from the sociology and philosophy of the Chicago School in the 1920s to 1950s (de Laine, 1997) which emphasized the interaction and process in a sociological perspective. As noted by Strauss (1987), "Chicago Sociology almost from its inception emphasized the necessity of grasping the actor's viewpoints for understanding interaction, process and social change" (Strauss, 1987: p.6).

Grounded theory, as per Strauss (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: p.24), is defined as a "qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon". Strauss and Corbin (1994, p.273-275) have also delineated grounded theory as "a general methodology for developing theory" and "a way of thinking about conceptualizing data".

In methodological typology, grounded theory is considered as a "general strategy for designing, conducting, analysing and theorising" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). It is "a style of extensive interrelated data collection and theoretical analysis" with "an explicit mandate to strive toward verification of its resulting hypotheses (Strauss and

Corbin, 1994, p.275). Theory is an outcome of the data collection and data analysis. Towards that end, data collection and analysis are steered in directions with regard to the emergent theory in an iterative process (de Laine, 1997).

3.5.1 Characteristics of Grounded Theory

Strauss and Corbin (1990: p.6) highlighted several characteristics central to the methodological procedures and strategies of grounded theory – (i) constant comparative method (ii) theoretical sampling and (iii) the use of a coding paradigm. Before these three peculiar characteristics are discussed in greater depth, there are several features of grounded theory which may be commonly shared with other qualitative research methods:

- **Emphasis on the emergence of theory**: The emergence of theory from grounded theory can be understood in the sense that "theory consists of plausible relationships proposed among concepts and sets of concepts" (Strauss and Corbin, 1994: p.278) and such concepts and processes are relevant to the "reciprocal changes in patterns of action/interaction and in relationship with changes of conditions either internal or external to the process itself" (Strauss and Corbin, 1994: p.278).

- **The use of both qualitative and quantitative data**: The use of quantitative data and the combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques of analysis is feasible in grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: p.274; Charmaz, 2000; Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

- **Applicability in new research domains**: Grounded theory is of particular use in domains where little previous research has been conducted (de Laine, 1997) and literature is not exhaustive (Goulding, 2005)

- **Concurrent processes of data collection, data analysis and concept emergence**: Grounded theory can be considered as "part of an iterative, inductive and interactional process of data collection, simultaneous analysis and emergent interpretation" (Goulding, 2005)

- **The use of a variety of instrumentation or data sources for data collection**: Data can be multifarious, ranging from in-depth interviews, participant observation, review of documents (Glaser, 1978) to life histories (Clondinin and Connelly, 1994), biography or autobiography (Corbin, 1998) or even secondary data (Szabo and Strang, 1997)

- **The nature of "induction" with respect to the presence of extant theories**: Grounded theorists need not disregard any existing theories, concepts or literature in relation to the research area of interest and the emergence of theory is not necessarily purely from the data as obtained, as per Glaser and Strauss (1967: p. 253):

  "The core categories can emerge in the sociologist's mind from his reading, life experiences, research and scholarship; [furthermore] no sociologist can possibly erase from his mind all the theory he knows before he begins his research. Indeed the trick is to line up what one takes as theoretically possible or probable with what one is finding in the field"

- **The saturation of data**: Fieldwork and data collection should continue until data saturation has been reached (Goulding, 2005)

- **Focus on the middle-range theories**: Grounded theory focuses on the emergence of middle-range and substantive theories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: p. 174-175)

- **The possibility of extending substantive theory to formal theory**: "...categories and hypotheses can be derived from existing grounded theory and that empirical investigation of these can lead to the further development of that theory, perhaps transforming it from the substantive level to the formal level" (Strauss, 1970)

3.5.2 Constant Comparative Method

Glaser and Strauss (1967) stress the importance of a "constant comparative method" as central to the generation of concepts and accompanying properties. The significance of "constant comparative method" to the analysis and concepts, their interrelationship and relationship with others is highlighted by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: p.213):

"The analyst examines each item of data coded in terms of a particular category, and notes its similarities with and differences to other data that have been similarly categorized. This may lead to vaguely understood categories being differentiated into several more clearly defined ones, as well as to the specification of subcategories. In this way, new categories or subcategories emerge and there may be a considerable amount of reassignment of data among the categories"

In methodological procedures, constant comparative analysis involves multiple comparisons between groups of actors, which are segmented according to the contextual settings, chronology, or the normative characteristics or nature of the actors *per se* (de Laine, 1997). The aim of such practice is to maximise the differences between different groups or segments of actors in order to investigate as many phenomena or categories inherent in the research area in the study across the various phases of the research as is possible.

3.5.3 Theoretical Sampling

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), sampling operates on the basis of analysis facilitating the investigation of the same phenomenon in various perspectives. In other words, the sampling strategy in grounded theory is primarily "purposive sampling" (Coyle, 1997) with the research participants being those "who are most likely to provide early information" in a commonsensical manner (Goulding, 2005).

Methodologically, the sampling should facilitate the generation of categories towards the eventual emergence of theory. The population of the sample need not be rigidly defined but evolves naturally when the research proceeds with reference to, and essentially based on, the previously generated results across the various phases of the study.

3.5.4 The Use of a Coding Paradigm

There are three major purposes of the use of coding paradigm in grounded theory – (i) to generate interim concepts, as categories or subcategories, from the research data (Goulding, 2005; de Laine, 1997) (ii) to provide guidelines to the researcher for the "theoretical sampling" (Goulding, 2005) and (iii) to form the early typology, categories and themes towards the emergence of substantive theory (de Laine, 1997).

3.5.5 Open coding

The first level of coding is named "**open coding**" and is defined as "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: p.61). Coding, at whatever conceptual levels, is a process concurrent with the data collection process. The major conceptual aim of open coding is to elevate the conceptual level of the data so as to increase its theoretical sensitivity ultimately towards the emergence of theory by means of the generation of categories (Glaser, 1978: p.56)

In practical terms, open coding involves the word-, sentence- or paragraph-level of analysis by the researcher (de Laine, 1997) from which certain of them are separated from the transcript and field notes, and grouped according to the emergent categories or themes based on the similarity or dissimilarity (de Laine, 1997). There are three major outcomes of the open coding process – (i) the naming of categories (Glaser, 1998: p.140); (ii) the identification of their properties and the (iii) dimensionalization (de Laine, 1997). On top of the above three outcomes, Glaser and Strauss (1967: p.106) have highlighted that the researcher, after the generation of the categories, will also consider the conditions for the various phenomena of the categories, their pre-requisites and outcomes in certain specific context. By definition, "phenomena" mean the "important analytic ideas that emerge from our data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: p.114); "properties" represent the "general or specific characteristics or attributes of a category" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: p.117) and "dimensions" denote the location of a property along a continuum or range (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: p.117).

In the process of dissecting the data according to the paragraph-, sentence- and word-levels (de Laine, 1997), the researcher should bear in mind the three fundamental rules of open coding (Glaser, 1978: pp 57-58):

1. "What is this data a study of?"

2. "What category, or property of a category, does this incident indicate?"

3. "What is actually happening in the data?"

By constantly asking himself the above questions, the researcher will be able to keep track of the conceptual focus for and while the categories are being generated.

3.5.6 Axial Coding

The second level of coding is "**axial coding**" during which the data can be regrouped into different and new categories from those obtained in open coding, for making associations between them. It is notable that during axial coding, it is the "conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences "(Strauss and Corbin, 1990: p.96) which are focused. In practical terms, the regrouping is conducted based on investigating the similarities and differences of the codes, their conditions, context, pre-requisites and consequences as obtained in the step of open coding. It is the *categories*, and their linkages, which result from the axial coding process. By means of the *constant comparative method* across various cases of research participants, the categories and their inter-relationship are in continuous fine-tuning (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The relationships between categories are usually expressed in *relationship statements* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: p.135). They link up the concepts in a phenomenon.

For validating these emergent categories, cases across the research participants, no matter whether agreeing with or being against the hypotheses, are used in the validation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). There are primarily two purposes for this validation process – firstly, to facilitate theoretical sampling for further validation and, secondly, to allow a dimensionalization of the positively validated categories. Alternatively, they indicate the

need for the further regrouping of open codes into different categories for negatively validated ones.

The above process of validation and invalidation of categories, especially with the addition of new codes from the constant comparative method, and when there are still cases of invalidation, is a continual process. It continues until the categories as generated are "rich in detail, dimensionalized and densified by full descriptions of their properties, the conditions under which the categories occurred, any strategies involved, and the consequences of the actions or outcomes" (Strauss, 1987).

3.5.7 Selective Coding

The third level of coding is "**selective coding**". It designates "the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to the other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: p.116). Subsequent to the axial coding, selective coding is the process whereby the generated categories, subcategories and their inter-relationship are "integrated to form a larger theoretical scheme the research findings take the form of theory" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: p.143).

In the course of theory building, the researcher makes use of not only the relational statements, as in axial coding, but also *explanatory statements* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: p.145) that define the conditions and sequences of such relationships.

One of the essential steps in the integration of categories and subcategories for the emergence of theory is to designate a **central category**. Theoretically it is one that is concise but comprises all the major concepts and categories that emerge. Strauss (1987: p.36) has suggested six important criteria for the selection of a central category:

1. The category must be "central" in the sense that there should be recognized relationship between it and other categories

2. The central category should exist, or indicate the existence, of relating concepts with high frequency across most, if not all, cases

3. There should be logic and consistency in the rationale of the relationship between the central category and other key categories with no enforcement of explanation on the data

4. The typology for the central category should maintain a sufficient level of abstraction that it can be extended beyond the current substantive level to reach a more generalized theory

5. The theory must be generated as to increase the depth and width of the explanatory power by subjecting the concept to refinement and integration with other concepts

6. The explanatory power of the central category should be extended beyond the major concepts as elucidated by the data of the study to the variations therein, with possibly different phenomena demonstrated by the changes in the data, conditions and context, even in contradictory or alternative cases.

Several techniques help the integration of categories and the building of linkages between them and the central category (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:148). They include (i) writing the storyline for expressing "what seems to be going on" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 148) which usually involves a reflection on the raw data in a general, but not detailed or contextually-specific, sense; (ii) moving from description to conceptualisation, which mean the representation of the "essence of the process" in terms of concepts; (iii) using diagrams, which are a good means of transcending from the data to concepts and to visualize the logic and flow of relationships between the central category, categories and subcategories, and (iv) reviewing and sorting through memos, in which concepts, phenomena, categories and dimensions are contained and are to be revisited for clues on the integration.

3.5.8 Tools for Coding – Memoing

Memoing is the process of recording the elevation of the abstraction level by the researcher in the coding processes of ideas and their inter-relationship (Glaser, 1978:

pp.83-84). Memoing, alongside the subsequent procedures of *sorting* and *writing*, is a continual procedure in the ideation of the codes as generated in the entire coding process (Glaser, 1978: pp.83-84). The significance of memoing to the emergence of theory by grounded theory can be understood as follows (Glaser, 1978: p.84):

1. The elevation of data to a conceptual level

2. The evolvement of the properties of categories as to give categories definitions towards operationalization

3. The drawing of connections between the categories and/or their properties

4. The emergence of integrated connections of categories for theory generation

5. The generation of theory and other possibly relevant theories

In spite of its significance, memoing does not take a specific format, in terms of the length, level of elaboration, rules and style (Glaser, 1998) as long as it represents an exhaustion of the researcher's ideation of the collected data and the codes as generation in the data collection and coding process.

3.5.9 Tools for Coding – Sorting

The ideas and concepts that result from memoing are arranged so as to facilitate the emergence of theory and the later stages of writing. This process, named *sorting*, is a re-organization of the ideas – a sorting of the concepts rather than data (Glaser, 1978: p.116-118). Operationally the sorting is conducted according to the theoretical codes generated from the coding processes (Glaser, 1978: p.116-118). It is noteworthy that the researcher should avoid being preoccupied with any ideas or concepts during the sorting procedure. The theoretical outline would then be obtained in the manner of emergence, but not preoccupation, by means of locating the similarities, differences, or such concepts of higher abstraction levels, such as the properties, conditions, context, pre-requisites or outcomes of the codes as generated from the coding processes (Glaser, 1978: p.116-118).

3.5.10 Tools for Coding – Writing

The next step in the grounded theory method is the *writing*, a formal written representation of the ideas and concepts as generated from the *sorting* (Glaser, 1978: pp.128-134). The result is a "theory of a core variable" (Glaser, 1978: pp.128-134) which is able to explain a body of behaviour, or phenomena of interest, to the respective study. There may be variation in the above behaviour or phenomena, yet the theory should, first of all, be applicable across such a varied and united scenario. In operational terms, the theory should provide a linkage between ideas and concepts, their properties, conditions or any other contextual factors, rather than between the research participants. It is the conceptual linkages between ideas and concepts rather than the proofs to such ideation (Glaser, 1978: pp.128-134) which is of concern.

3.5.11   The Significance of Saturation

One of the significant steps in the data collection for qualitative research is to reach "saturation". By definition, Glaser and Strauss (1967:61) proposed that "saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop the properties of the category". Glaser and Strauss (1967) further their interpretation that saturation means the "capacity of the data to generate new ideas that is exhausted here, and not the accumulation of evidence to support these ideas" (Dey, 1999; pp.116-119). Also, as pointed out by Morse (1995), saturation is defined as "data adequacy" and operationalized as "collecting data until no new information is obtained". Dey (1999, pp.116-119) referred to saturation in qualitative research as "category sufficiency" where "partial coding can be stopped". It was also referred to as the "stage at which categories seem to cope adequately with new data without requiring continual extensions and modifications".

Despite this definition, there are a number of methodological intricacies inherent in the manifestation of saturation of data in grounded theory, mostly concerned with the lack of rules, guidelines or tests as commonly available in data collection and analysis in quantitative research (Morse, 1995):

- There is no defining method for the estimation of sample size contributing to the attainment of saturation in grounded theory, analogous or identical to statistical formulation of such as in quantitative research. Such statistical tools as frequency counts may be inapplicable. Yet it is notable that no initial data are to be discounted

- Even upon the emergence of categories, themes or patterns (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), no guidelines or rules as to the *a priori* estimation of necessary amount of data are present

- There is also an absence of guidelines or standard procedures for data analysis towards data saturation

- That certain data being repeatedly recorded is mistaken to be a sign of data saturation

- No limitation is imposed on the types or forms of "occurrences" (Morse, 1995). The variation of such, especially such from the "negative case" (Morse, 1995), greatly contributes to the vigour of data as they increase the "variation of occurrences". They also put the researcher and the readers in another perspective towards a better understanding and interpretation of the data towards the delineation of a theoretical model

- It is the richness of the description in the data which contributes to the saturation of data

Indeed, Dey (1999; pp.116-119) suggests that the procedures in sampling and data collection in qualitative studies enable a convergence of analysis and would be demarcated when data collection proceeded. In spite of the above indeterminate notes on the data collection and data analysis in grounded theory towards saturation, Morse (1995) has highlighted a number of principles for reaching data saturation in qualitative research:

1. The researcher has to strike a balance between the "cohesiveness of sample" and the generalizability of the research topic. The higher the cohesiveness of the sample,

especially in terms of the cultural disposition of the sample, the faster saturation can be reached, but with perhaps lower the generalizability of the research theme

2.   Theoretical sampling is a useful sampling method for increasing the cohesiveness of the sample, and thus a faster achievement of data saturation

3.   Besides theoretical sampling in the positive sense, sampling for the "negative cases" in theoretical sampling, towards maximising the "variations in occurrences", should be made

4.   Saturation data demonstrate "richness, fullness and completeness" and "make sense". There is no conspicuous conceptual gap in saturation data towards a comprehensive theoretical model.

3.5.12   Grounded theory and its relevance to the current research

Grounded theory as a research methodology is derived from the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism.   This relationship sheds light on how grounded theory can be applied in the current research.

According to the theoretical concepts of the theory of "self", proposed by Mead (1934), one of the originators of symbolic interactionism, "self" emerges as a result of taking "the attitude of the other" or the "generalized other" (Mead, 1934: p.154).   Even "self" *per se* comes to existence because of the interaction and "conversation of gestures" (Mead, 1934: p.167), or communication in another word, between "I", the personal dimension of "self", and "me", the social dimension of "self".   As far as interaction is concerned, an individual "self" is exposed to the interaction between not only "I" and "me" in an intrapersonal manner, but also such with "the significant other" (Shibutani, 1962: p.141) and the "generalized other" (Perinbanayagam, 1975: p.508).   By definition, "the significant other" means "those individuals directly responsible for the socialization of an individual" (Shibutani, 1962: p.141) and the "generalized other" "appears as the attitude of the community in direct or indirect manifestation, as an instrument of the social control of the self" (Perinbanayagam, 1975: p.508).   In considering the concepts of "self", "the

significant other" and the "generalized other" together, what interaction in symbolic interactionism actually means can be referred to the interaction between an individual and any others in the society. Again as presumed by Blumer (1969), such interaction between an individual, as the actor in a social context, and any other individuals in the society or a specific social context, exactly defines the behaviour of that individual concerned. In the specific context of an organization, or society in general, **grounded theory** can be applied in the investigation of the interaction and processes which the social actor(s) conduct in order to deal with, or adapt to, the situations or to resolve the problems (Yamashita and Uenoyama, 2006).

In the specific context of a hotel, a newly-arrived hotel GM interacts with a large number of external objects, or "divergent things" as per Blumer (1969), in this initial phase of his new tenure. Some of these "divergent things" include the new hotel premises, organizational culture or subculture (specific to this new hotel premises), national culture, the business environment, including legal, economic and technological areas of the host country, and, quintessentially, the interpersonal relationships with the new colleagues and working partners, such as the supervisors and, specific to the hotel industry, the executives in the hotel management company and the hotel owner. How the hotel GM adapts to the new tenure and adjusts to the environmental factors heavily depends on his interpretation of, and meaning conveyed to him by, the interaction with all of these "divergent things".

3.6 Research Methodology – Ethnography and its Theoretical Basis

In terms of etymology, "ethno" means "folk" while "-graphy" means "description" (Goulding, 2005). According to the Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), ethnography means "the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that

are the focus of the research". "Ethnography attempts to explicate structured patterns of action that are cultural and/or social, rather than merely cognitive, behavioural or affective" (Arnould, 1998; p.86). Having a rich historical background (Wax, 1971), ethnography is believed to be one of the fundamental methods in social research because it "bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

Ethnography originates from the "naturalism" perspective of social research (Denzin, 1971; Guba, 1978). By definition, "naturalism" means the "philosophical view that remains true to the nature of the phenomenon under study" (Matza, 1969:5). As cited by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), there are several premises in which naturalism resides:

1. The social world or the settings of the research specifically, should be in a "natural" state without disturbance by the researcher. Further to this understanding, it is the "fidelity to the phenomena under study, not to any particular set of methodological principles" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) which is to be maintained.

2. Its focus lies in the descriptions of the happenings within the settings, including the actions of the participants involved, how such actions are being perceived by themselves or others, and the contexts in which such actions occur.

3. The researcher should demonstrate "respect" and "appreciation" towards the social world and the research setting.

4. It is a means by which the behaviour of people, whether or not as part of a culture or subculture, and more macroscopically, the world, are understood.

3.6.1 Characteristics of Ethnography

Residing at the heart of ethnography is the *emic* orientation of the meanings and meaningfulness of the behavioural account (Boyle, 1994), in contrast with the *etic* perspective as in abstractions by quantitative research (Boyle, 1994). As discussed earlier in this chapter, there is the aim of searching for patterns in the analysis of ethnographic results, yet by taking into account both the *emic* and *etic* perspectives (Goulding, 2005).

Beyond the orientation of the meanings and meaningfulness of ethnography, Arnould (1998) has summed up some of the characteristics of ethnography as a research method:

- **Objective**: Ethnography aims at explaining the construction of cultures and subcultures by the behaviours and experiences of the intended research participants.

- **Duration**: Ethnography is usually concerned about an extended participation by the researcher in a culture or sub-culture

- **Generalizability of Ethnographic Accounts**: Ethnographic data are usually substantive rather than generalizable

- **Data Collection for Ethnography**: Multiple data collection methods on a single social or cultural phenomenon in ethnography are common. They range from interviews, surveys, and observation, to audio or video tapes, photographs and document reviews.

Adding to the above summary by Arnould (1998), a number of researchers, such as Boyle (1994) and Goulding (2005) have complemented the characteristics of ethnography with the following:

- **Entirety of completeness of ethnographic data**: Ethnographies can be full or partial description of a group of targeted research participants (Goulding, 2005)

- **Entirety of population**: Other than longitudinal, ethnographies can be a cross-section of the whole population of the targeted participants (Fine and Martin, 1990)

- **Disciplinary orientation**: Ethnographies can be of religious, social, cultural, or management nature (Goulding, 2005)

- **Applicable cultural contexts**: The cultural contexts be categorized according to geography, language, theory, etc. (Boyle, 1994)

- **Retrospectivity of ethnography**: Ethnographies can be "ethnohistorical" – explanation of the culture at present as a results of the historical past (Goulding, 2005)

- **Role of the researcher**: Reflexivity is an important characteristic of ethnography. The researcher acts as a constituent of the social or cultural world with which the researcher reacts, effects impact and *vice versa* (Boyle, 1994)

- **Role of the outsider**: The views of both insiders and outsiders contribute to deeper insights into the social or cultural phenomenon than either of them alone (Goulding, 2005).

- **General method of data analysis**: As in other qualitative methods, categories or instances emerge from the data as collected by the researcher towards a number of central themes after the application of labels onto certain texts, usually from fragments of the data as collected, in order to reflect the concepts as analyzed by the researcher. After the fragmentation, other specific analytical methods, qualitative or quantitative, are applied and the fragments are regrouped into different themes or research constructs (Goulding, 2005) until the scenarios, incidents and exceptions can be interpreted from an *emic* point of view (Morse, 1994) where comprehension is possible.

3.6.2   Ethnography and its Relevance to the Current Research

The *researcher* is playing a significant role in the collection and analysis of the data. The researcher interacts with the social or cultural world at a macroscopic level.   The research setting and the phenomenon in a microscopic perspective (Boyle, 1994) contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon with the input by the researcher from a *reflexive* perspective (Goulding, 2005).

The prowess of *reflexivity*, for its experiential, reflective and critical nature (Murphy, 1999b) in ethnography has been long remarked upon by a number of researchers including Rabinow (1977), Benson (1993) and Fox (1991).

In order to secure the *reflexive* power of ethnography, researchers have adopted a number of critical research strategies such as ethnographical or autobiographical textual data towards auto-inspection (Dumont, 1992; Probyn, 1989), narratives as dialogues covering

the evolvement of field experience by the researcher (Tedlock, 1991), experiential stories (Ceglowski, 1997), and so on. The significance of the employment of these strategies lies in ensuring that the texts are "interpretive" rather than "evocative" (Murphy, 1999a), as well as making the researcher be aware of the "objectification and exoticization" (Murphy, 1999a) of the research participants.

The researcher is a hotel owner's representative of hotel properties overseeing the "life cycles" and the determinants, from both the objective and subjective perspectives, of a number of hotel GMs. This very fact also gives rise to the fact the researcher has indeed been "in the field" long before the data collection and analysis of the current research nominally started and also to a good understanding of the focused theme in the research by the researcher.

Based on the above rationale, what is defined as the *emic* view of the life cycle of the hotel GMs' tenure and its determinants should include not only the experience of the hotel GMs themselves, but also the experience of those who have *participative observation* on the life cycle and tenure, by, namely, hotel owners, hotel owners representative and executives of the hotel management companies.

The *reflexive* power of ethnography has been reflected in the manner of an autobiographic ethnographic text (Probyn, 1989) by the researcher. Such an ethnographical note took the form of "personal experience narratives" (Denzin, 1989a) of the researcher. By definition, "personal experience narratives" are "stories people tell about their personal experience" (Stahl, 1977: p. 7; Denzin, 1989b: 186).

The narrative form taken for the representation of the *reflexive* power of ethnography can be understood by the fact that there is increasing recognition of the importance and usefulness of narrative analysis as an element of doing ethnography" (Cortazzi, 2001). As both a text and process (Cortazzi, 2001), narratives can be utilized as "reflexive analyses of various stages of doing ethnography" (Cortazzi, 2001). The significance given to narrative analysis on denoting and assessing human experience was studied in a number of works (for example, Cortazzi, 1993; Riessman, 1993 and Polkinghorne, 1988). The

importance of narrative analysis to ethnography can be understood from two perspectives. First of all, it grants access by the researchers to the "meaning, relevance and importance" (Cortazzi, 2001) to certain events in the life of the research participants. Narratives can additionally be considered as a joint and interactive means by which the experience can be constructed and interpreted by both the researcher and the research participants, towards an agreed and negotiated perspective on the meaning of the events (Edwards, 1997).

This ethnographical note by the researcher rests primarily on the personal experience of the researcher, thus taking the form of "personal experience narratives" (Stahl, 1977: p. 7; Denzin, 1989b: 186) for providing reflexivity. It is imbued with several characteristics – (i) the "self", the researcher in the ethnographical note, is not necessarily in the centre of the story (Denzin, 1989b: 187). As far as the current research is concerned, it centres on the personal experience narratives by the researcher with the hotel GMs being studied; (ii) the ethnographical note is based on "anecdotal, everyday and commonplace experiences" rather than "the pivotal or critical life experiences" of the researcher (Denzin, 1989a); (iii) the ethnographical note should be a consistent and linear account of the subject matter by the researcher (Denzin, 1989a); (iv) the ethnographic personal narratives need not be mandated but may only be told to another person (Denzin, 1989a).

Objective (Arnould, 1998)	The purpose of using ethnography in this study is to study the phenomena, behaviours and experiences of the hotel GMs.
Duration (Arnould, 1998)	The researcher has been a hotel owner's representative and a senior executive at a hotel management company for over 20 years, which serve as an extended participation by the researcher.
Generalizability of Ethnographic Accounts (Arnould, 1998)	The nature of the hotel GM's tenure and the accounts by the research participant is substantive.
Data Collection for Ethnography (Arnould, 1998)	There are two major means of ethnographical data sources for the researcher: (i) an ethnographical note by the researcher and (ii) the reflective notes used by the researcher in relating his experience to, and integrated with, the relevant themes and concepts purported by the research participants.
Entirety of completeness of ethnographic data (Goulding, 2005)	The ethnographical data by the researcher with relevance to the research participants are partial.
Entirety of population (Fine and Martin, 1990)	For those research participants who had a working relationship with the researcher, the ethnographies are both cross-sectional and longitudinal, while the ethnographical account by the researcher is longitudinal.
Disciplinary orientation (Goulding, 2005) and **applicable cultural contexts** (Boyle, 1994)	Management studies and its theoretical model are the main discipline in the obtained ethnographies.
Retrospectivity of ethnography (Goulding, 2005)	Retrospectivity is applied in the ethnography of this research because the ethnographical data on the phenomena of hotel GM's tenure are referred to the historical past of the researcher as a hotel owner's representative and executive at a hotel management company.
Role of the researcher (Boyle, 1994)	The researcher employed reflexivity in the ethnography in the ethnographical note and the reflective note in the interpretation of the researcher participants' data so that the researcher reacts with "social world" of the hotel GMs.
Role of the outsider (Goulding, 2005)	The researcher takes both the role as an "insider" (as a hotel owner's representative for over 20 years) and an "outsider" (the role as a researcher in this study). They contribute to deeper understanding of the phenomena.

From the above, it is ascertained that the majority characteristics of ethnography have been fulfilled in this research context. Amongst the above substantiation and reflection on the use of ethnography in this research, the **retrospective** nature of the ethnography in this research is remarkable. Apart from many ethnographic studies in which researchers purposively enter into the field with the aims of conducting an ethnographical study in mind, the researcher of this study entered into the field as a hotel owner's representative and senior executive to a hotel management company and an "insider" to this study, long before the start of this research. Several of the research participants have also been working with the research for extended period of time. This context set a naturalistic setting for the researcher in which disturbance to the research setting is minimized, and high fidelity to the research themes can be maintained (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The retrospectivity, when explaining the present phenomena of the life cycle of hotel GM's tenure, takes the form of relating the historical past and experience of the researcher in the ethnographical account, to the interpretation of the relevant data by the research participants, although such use is implicit as it has been integrated with the emerged concepts and themes.

3.7 Mixing Qualitative Methodologies of Grounded Theory and Ethnography

In qualitative research, it is not uncommon for researchers to use a wealth of qualitative methodologies at various phases of the study in response to specific context, requirements and results therein. According to Frank Bechhofer (1974; p.73), "the research process is not a clear cut sequence of procedures following a neat pattern, but a messy interaction between the conceptual and empirical world, deduction and induction occurring at the same time". Notwithstanding that, the qualitative research method is usually an iterative process, the choice of methods *per se* can also be an iteration (Barbour, 1998).

Highlighted also by Barbour (1998), there are a number of reasons behind the use of a combination of methods in qualitative studies. First of all, various qualitative methods can complement each other and locate the aspects or data which cannot be identified by

one another (Barbour, 1998). Further to that understanding, they complement the discrepancy, as well as the void of each other, because each particular research method is believed to be representing only a limited perspective of the entire phenomenon under study (Barbour, 1998). Most important of all, a mixing of different qualitative research methods serves as a means of triangulation, as in quantitative studies, for "proof and confirmability" (Barbour, 1998).

In the current research, the attempt to combine the qualitative research methods of grounded theory and ethnography can be understood in the following context. First of all, there is coherence in terms of the ontology and epistemology in the context of the current research between the methodologies of ethnography and grounded theory.

In terms of ontology, the "multiple realities", namely, the concepts on the same conjecture of the existence of life cycle for the tenure of hotel GMs, the phases and the determinants therein, if any and applicable, are multifarious. In simple projection, different research participants for the grounded theory methodology would nominate divergent naming and definition of phases in the tenure of hotel GMs with a wealth of various determinants, for instance. So as the researcher, in the midst of ethnography, gives in the *reflexive* account of such concepts and yields dissimilar answers. In terms of "socially-constructed realities", each of the research participants had been subject to a unique combination of socialization by their education, cultural background, life experience and working experience, particularly such in terms of the *interaction* with hotel owners and their representatives. As the researcher had also been involved in the ethnographic process, his working experience with the working parties was what differed from that of the research participants.

With respect to the epistemology of both grounded theory and ethnography in the context of the current research, the nature of the findings and the meanings between them from grounded theory and ethnography in the current research are similar to each other. This can be illustrated by the fact that, for grounded theory, the findings are obtained from the interaction between the researcher and the research participants in the semi-structured

open-ended interviews. In ethnography such as attained from the *reflection* on the interaction between the researcher and hotel GMs other than the research participants, the cultural disposition of the sample (Morse, 1995) in the current study, as in his past working experience. The interaction in the interviews between the researcher and research participants as in grounded theory also plays the role of a reminder to the researcher of the *reflexive* account in ethnography.

The *emic* perspective orientation of both grounded theory and ethnography allowed a natural combination of these two methodologies. The "insider" perspective as in ethnography refers to that of the researcher while such as in grounded theory refers primarily to that of the research participants. A delineation of *emic* perspective of this research is given in the section on the "**Ethnography and its relevance to the current research**".

Even in the operationalization, the roles of the researcher are the same – a passionate participant (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; p.115), a hotel owner representative with close working relationships with numerous hotel GMs and an ardent researcher who tries to understand the views of the research participants on their views over the life cycle, tenure and determinants of hotel GMs in his interpreted understanding.

3.8   Data Collection

In both the research methodologies of ethnography and grounded theory, there is an emphasis on the studying of the behaviour of individuals towards an "interpretation" of such in response to certain social contexts in the manner of "interaction" by the actors (Blumer, 1969). Across these two methodologies, such data collection methods as in-depth interviews, participation observation, document reviews and biography or autobiography (for example, Glaser, 1978; Arnould, 1998 and Corbin, 1998) are commonly used methods. In the current research, data were collected by semi-structured, open-ended in-depth interviews with incumbent and ex-hotel GMs, as well as the autobiographical ethnographical note by the researcher.

3.9   Pilot Study

3.9.1   Assumptions about the Pilot Study

In order to study the feasibility of the presumed data collection methods and allow customization by the researcher in the data collection methods, a pilot study on two hotel GMs was conducted.   The pilot test also served the purpose of obtaining a better picture by the researcher of such data collection details as the designation of the grand tour and sub-questions (Creswell, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1984), timing, and the continuation of eliciting further responses from the questions.   The interviewees gave an account of their experiences in the numerous tenures they had experienced throughout their careers, and a reflection on whether there were signs and phenomena of "life cycle" in these tenures and, if so, the existence of conspicuous determinants and time-segmental features. Even though there are data collection methods other than in-depth interviews, most of the themes and concepts in this research are highly contextual and not necessarily available via other means such as document review. Although not explicitly expressed, the observation by the research in a retrospective sense has been applied in the data analysis, reflective and ethnographical notes.

Corresponding to the mix of research methodologies, the researcher first conducted the data collection processes for grounded theory then, produced an ethnographical note in an autobiographical and reflexive manner in an *emic* perspective (Goulding, 2005; Boyle, 1994).   In this perspective, the researcher took the role as an *ex-hotel representative* for hotel owners who maintained a close working relationship with, and gained an insight into, the tenures of the hotel GMs.   The executives of the hotel management companies and other executives working for the hotel owners played interactive roles in the working relationship with the researcher.

The major part of the data collection process was conducted on a time-arbitrary basis as per the arrangement between the researcher and the research participants.   The assumption was that the cross-sectional timing of such a data collection method bore no significant impact to the data to be amassed, because the main focus of the study is on the

reflection of the tenure(s) of the research participants. Further to that understanding, the range of possible timing for the interview, arranged between the researcher and the research participants, was relatively short compared to the usual duration of tenures for hotel GMs. Each interview lasted for about one to two hours and the interviews were transcribed, supplemented by telephone follow-up if necessary, and reflective notes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) for the subsequent process of data analysis. English was the primary language in the process of transcribing and reflexive notes. The interviews conducted in Cantonese or Mandarin were first translated into English for the transcript before the subsequent processes of data analysis of the transcripts and reflexive notes was carried out. The possible problem of translation has been overcome by the fact that the researcher had worked as an English-Chinese bilingual interpreter and translator. The fact that it was the underlying meanings in the coding processes which were of significance in the determination of the emerged concepts and themes lowers the importance of a literal translation of the exact words and phrases by the research participants.

3.9.2 Primary Insights from the Pilot Study

Largely in accordance with the studies covered in the Literature Review, the pilot study substantiated the significance of the current study, in terms of both the academic and industrial perspectives. In short, the time-phase feature and some conspicuous determinants of such time-phases have been recorded in the pilot study. The periodicity of such time-phases in the hotel GM's tenures, the "life cycle" as per the typology of the current research, was quintessentially recorded in the pilot study. The pilot study also confirmed the assumption in it that the cross-sectional timing of the interview carried insignificant impact to the data to be collected as the research participants inclined to focus more on past tenures than their incumbent ones. This added to the advantage that the data originated from the *completed* tenures of the research participants.

3.10 The Settings of Data Collection Method

As in the pilot study, the data collection process occurred out of office hours and the office environment, with regard to the convenience of the participants and the possible sensitivity of the participants' discussion of work-related issues with the researcher. Such considerations were undertaken with respect to the ethical concerns inherent in the study. The interviews were usually made in a secluded environment, such as a private room in a public food and beverages venue, so that sensitivity to the privacy of the discussion could be preserved without loss of an informal ambience. It facilitated a more relaxed, self-assured and open manner by the research participants. Such mindful and intentional settings were made possible by two facts – (i) the specific nature of the research topic, the investigation on the periodicity, time-phase features and determinants of tenures of hotel GMs; (ii) the biographical and autobiographical nature of the data to be collected for the grounded theory research methodology (Corbin, 1998) that a natural setting, as in some other longitudinal studies, for the tenure of hotel GM, one of the major artefacts in the research theme, was unnecessary.

3.11 The Procedures of Data Collection

In the beginning, the researcher nominated a considerable number of potential research participants based on the criteria that a research participant (i) is or was a hotel GM, having completed at least one tenure, counted in terms of the assumption of duty in at least a single hotel premises; or (ii) is or was a senior executive working in hotel management company; or (iii) is or was a senior executive working with a hotel owner. The nomination process could also be considered as one for short listing appropriate candidates. It was more usual than not that the researcher had had direct correspondence, in the context of business associates, with the nominees beforehand. The basic demographics of these potential research participants were thus known to the researcher before the interviews.

However it was anticipated that the researcher's knowledge of the participants' primary working details, such as the working position, duties, and so on, at present and in the past, had would need to be updated by the research participants in the interviews.

The language of communication between the researcher and the research participants included Cantonese, Mandarin and English with respect to the mother tongue of the research participants. A conversational approach was adopted by the researcher, with the occasional use of industrial jargon in creating an informal manner for the interviews. It was deemed to allow a better position for the researcher to seek elaboration and clarification by the participants.

The three categories of potential research participants were nominated as part of the theoretical sampling process as a "purposive sampling" (Lincoln & Guba, 1995) as these research participants "are most likely to provide early information" (Goulding, 2005) and triangulation. In a practical perspective, the latter two types of research participants are the ones who have a close working relationship with hotel GMs, and are the ones who oversee and witness the progress of hotel GMs' tenures. The multiplicity in the working experience and duties of the potential research participants all enable an exploration of the same phenomenon, in the different perspectives pertaining to their varied working experience and duties (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), one of the essential features for sampling in grounded theory.

After the nomination, the researcher attempted to invite the participants, in person wherever possible, to a first appointment for interview by means of a telephone conversation. Participation was entirely voluntary. After the invitation had been accepted, the date, time and venue of the appointment were arranged and communicated with the research participants, with cautions over the timing and venue, as discussed in the Settings section above For a handful of participants, a preview of the interview questions, especially the grand tour questions, was shared before the interview was conducted, for the sake of preparation and formality.

It was observed that the articulation of the purpose of the interview using the typology of this study, such as "life cycle" and "determinants", was not readily realized by the research participants due to the technicality of such typology. Elaboration and paraphrasing into everyday terms had to be made. Yet open-ended and in-depth interviews were in general a feasible method for the research participants. The pilot study provided the researcher with insights on not only the research significance, but also the technical arrangements on where, how and what to administer in the data collection method which paved an important way for the researcher in the subsequent data collection practices.

The interviews were initiated by the researcher's briefing to the participants on the major purpose of the interview and some preliminary information about the current research, before the researcher's opening note with a question such as "How has your work been recently?" The grand tour questions and sub-questions (Creswell, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1984) as denoted in Section 3.5 formed the guidelines in the questions to be asked by the researcher, yet without strict adherence to the phrasing, wording and order, based on the following assumptions about the interviews, so that the researcher could attempt to understand the social issue in the perspective of the research participants according to the view of the social world (Miller and Glassner, 1997).

1. Informality: The research participants were in principle free to express their points of view and, most importantly, their *personal* feelings and comments about the interviews and the themes in discussion.

2. Semi-structure: It was unnecessary for the researcher and the research participants to conduct the interview in a one-question-one-answer approach, or to follow any pre-designated questions. That meant the research participants could vary the structure and the direct correspondence of the answers to the any of the questions.

3. Open-endedness: Similar to the semi-structure, it was at the discretion of the research participants to maintain the length and depth of the answers. It was possible some of the intended questions by the researcher might have already been

covered by the research participants as a natural elaboration, even before the researcher asked the question.

With the above methodological characteristics in mind, the interview questions had been paraphrased so as to elicit the largest amount of data from the research participants. For instance, for one of the grand tour questions below:

Is there a time-phase perspective in the tenure of hotel general managers in Hong Kong? If so, what are the phases and do they form a periodic cycle themselves in the form of a "life cycle"? What are the characteristics of each of these phases?

A paraphrased group of questions would resemble, for instance:

1. "What was the first task for you, or what was on the top of your agenda, when you started a new tenure in a hotel?"

2. "Who were your major working partners then?"

3. "Then, on what did you do focus and do next?" and "How long after your arrival did you do these, and what were the conditions?"

4. "What were the major forces – events, settings or people- supportive or impeding, at these different times?"

Similarly for one of the sub-questions as in Section 3.5 as follows:

What are the roles played by the human resources determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers – the hotel owner, management executives of the hotel management company, the hotel general manager himself/herself and his/her predecessor and the board of directors, management executives of the hotel management company, such as their expectations, attributions and allegiance, in the tenure of the hotel general manager and in each of its phases?

a paraphrased group of questions from the above sub-questions could look like:

1. "Who were the major working partners then?"

2. "How was the relationship between you and the hotel owner then?"

3. "How was the relationship between you and the other senior executives with the hotel owner then?"

4. "How about the relationship with the executives in the hotel management company?"

5. "What were the factors contributing to such relationship status?"

In summary, the interviewing process was an interactive one, being affected by the structure, timing and even the questions to be asked by the researchers, just as the responses and answers by the research participants were important in determining the flow of the interviews. Further to this proposition, every interview was unique in its characteristics. It is notable as well that the structure and results from the pilot test and early interviews would facilitate a more focussed approach in the later interviews. For instance, the emergence of the weight of the relationship with the hotel owner upon the different times across the tenure of a hotel GM was noted. As a result, the researcher was able to work further on the elaboration of the impact of this relationship and how the hotel GMs attempted to manage the relationship, in subsequent interviews.

3.12 The Research Participants

All research participants fitted the criteria congruent to the major research subject as discussed in the above section. In short, they must be or have been hotel GMs, for anyone who has or was having a close working relationship with the hotel GMs, such as a senior executive working for the hotel owner or hotel management company. Essentially, because of the discretionary nature of their participation, they should be willing to pronounce their viewpoints, feelings and comments (Morse and Field, 1996).

A total of nine research participants took part in the interviews. All participants were able to speak Cantonese, Mandarin, or English, or a combination of any of them, and all

of them were male. All participants possessed more than ten years' experience in the hotel industry, and all but the acting hotel GM and the hotel owners' representatives had assumed more than one term of tenure as hotel GM. The ethnicities of the majority of research participants were Chinese, with five of them being Hong Kong Chinese. Two of them were Mainland Chinese while the remaining two participants were of Caucasian ethnicity, and these four participants served as expatriates in the course of their tenures in Hong Kong.

The working positions of the research participants also varied, including the General Managers (GMs) of hotels (including six incumbent hotel GMs and another acting, one of whom was co-acting as vice president in the corporate office of an international hotel management company, and another co-acting as the executive director and chief operating officer of a locally-based hotel management company) and two hotel representatives for hotel owners. The organizational orientation of the hotel management companies or hotel owner companies differed too. Three of the interviewed hotel GMs worked for local hotel brands managed by locally-based hotel owners, yet with regional hotel premises coverage. Two of the participating hotel GMs worked for *xxx hotel management company* (also as hotel owner) based in Mainland China, while another two hotel GMs served international hotel management companies with global hotel premises coverage. For the two hotel owners representatives, the hotel owner companies were both Hong Kong-based but with respectively regional and global hotel premises presence.

3.13 The Dual Role of the Researcher as Participant (Ethnography) and Researcher (Grounded Theory)

The researcher was on the one hand a "participant" in the research', when the researcher's long working experience as a representative for, and a senior executive with, a regional hotel owner is concerned. This enabled the use of the methodology of ethnography in the study of the main research theme from an *emic* perspective. On the other hand, the

researcher played the role of a "researcher" in the use of the grounded theory, and attempted to take an *etic* viewpoint over the major research concepts.

The *emic* and *etic* perspectives taken by the researcher can be understood as the viewpoints of an "insider" and "outsider" over the main research concepts. Yet there are both pros and cons in the researcher being an "insider" to the research topic.

Pros of being an "insider"

The "insider" role enabled the researcher to get access to interviewing the hotel GMs and other senior executives at the hotel owners and hotel management companies. Getting access to research participants of high seniority in commercial organizations usually poses a difficulty to many researchers in the first place, because many senior executives are likely to decline non-business-related projects amongst a hectic working schedule. The nature of this research, in which there is discussion over some sensitive issues such as the reasons of dismissal and retention of hotel GMs, and the subjective element in the appraisal of hotel GMs' performance, demands further effort by the researcher in securing the interview opportunities. Acquaintance or even a previous working relationship was essential to realizing certain interviews in this study.

Beyond data collection, the "insider" role also enabled the researcher to substantiate the credibility of the settings and data with a high thematic sensitivity towards the research theme accumulated through the long working experience in the industry. The high thematic sensitivity of the researcher also facilitated a more efficient understanding and analysis over the collected data than an "outsider" researcher.

Cons of being an "insider"

In the many years as a hotel owner's representative and a senior executive with a hotel management company, the researcher used to be the chief executive. As a certified public accountant by training, as many executive directors of public listed companies are, the researcher may cast a particular focus on the finance and accounting perspectives of the hotels and the hotel management company. In this research, however, the "insider"

role and training background of the researcher poses a possible source of cognitive and experiential bias about the research theme. For instance, the measurement of hotel GM's performance may be assumed to be highly relevant to the financial performance of the hotel. It might, however, not be considered as important by some research participants. In analysis of the determinants over the hotel GM's tenure, it was possible that analysis from a different perspective, such as sales and marketing, or human resources and operations, could be overlooked. Such research limitations will be discussed in greater depth in a later section.

Strategies for overcoming the cons of being an "insider"

These "insider" challenges to the researcher were counteracted by a number of means. According to Morse (1994), the researcher had to maintain "open-mindedness", take the position of a "stranger" and be "non-judgmental" in entering the field and conducting the interviews and the subsequent analyses.

First of all, the researcher attempted to maintain a balanced perspective by inviting to the interviews not only hotel GMs, the predominant research subject in the current study, but also other senior executives with the hotel owner in order to achieve plurality.

The second strategy by the researcher to minimize any possible bias was to diversify over the background the research participant, from the working position, years of working experiences to the ethnicities and nationalities; types of the hotel premises concerned classified in terms of being local owner-managed or managed by international hotel management companies; or according to the organizational base of the hotel(s), from Mainland China, Hong Kong to globally-oriented, so that maximum variations to the research topic could be attained. Such characteristics about the research participants are given in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2.

Code	Working Position	Years of Working Experience as Hotel GM	Age	Ethnicity	Modus Operandi of the Working Company	Size of the Hotel or Hotel Chains	Mode of Management of the Hotel
A	Hotel Manager	About 6 years	42	Caucasian	International hotel chain	216 rooms	Managed by international hotel management company
C	Hotel General Manager	About 10 years	45	Chinese	Local hotel chain	1,149 rooms	Owner-managed
D	Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer	Not Applicable	45	Chinese	Local hotel chain	Over 1,800 rooms	Owner-managed
H	Hotel General Manager	About 10 years	38	Chinese	Hotel chain in China	245 rooms	Owner-managed
L	Vice President and Regional General Manager	More than 10 years	51	Caucasian	International hotel chain	Over 2,700 rooms	Managed by international hotel management company
M	(Acting) General Manager	About 5 years	45	Chinese	Hotel chain in China	350 rooms	Owner-managed
R	Hotel General Manager	About 10 years	37	Chinese	Hotel chain in China	338 rooms	Owner-managed
S	Owner's Representative	Not Applicable	55	Chinese	Regional hotel chain	Over 920 rooms	Managed by international hotel management company and the owner
Y	Executive Director	Not Applicable	53	Chinese	International hotel chain	Over 5,900 rooms	Managed by international hotel management company and the owner

Code	Highlight of Working Experience
A	Possessing and holding key positions in the properties across China, Hong Kong and South-east Asia of the same international hotel chain
C	As the hotel GM for two properties; in the present post since 2001 and has far-reaching international hotel chain experience in China, the Philippines and Vietnam
D	Working for a local hotel chain with a portfolio of about more than 3,500 rooms, focusing on the medium-tariff market in Hong Kong and Macau
H	A hotel GM assuming his first post in HK after serving past tenure in Mainland China with the same hotel chain
L	A renowned hotel executive with substantial management experience throughout Asia, with more than 20 years of experience in the industry
M	Having extended working experience in both China and with international hotel chains
R	Having extensive hotel management experience across various properties in Mainland China and Hong Kong
S	Overseeing a number of properties of the hotel owner at the same time
Y	Working at one of the largest hotel groups in Asia with more than 80 properties and listed in London, focusing on four-star and five-star hotel properties

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 - Some Characteristics of the Research Participants

The dialogical and conversational approaches adopted by the researcher, as the third strategy against any possible bias, enabled the researcher to probe continuously the data as given by the participants as extending the context of any mentioned social phenomena by asking further questions on "why", "when", "how", "what" and "who".

Theoretical sampling was another strategy employed by the researcher in enhancing the body of data from participants of purposive sampling, and at the same time lessening any possible bias by the researcher as a participant in ethnography. A typical example was the impact of the relationship with the hotel owner on the hotel GM's tenure, as noted in the results of the early interviews. Further interviews with regard to a higher amount of weight given to interpersonal relatedness (Cheung & Leung, 1998; Cheung, et al., 1996), typical of which is in the Chinese cultural context of *guanxi*, were made with hotel GMs of strong Chinese cultural background and who originated from Mainland China. "Negative cases" (Morse, 1995), with concepts or themes in contrast with, if not only divergent from, the emergent ones, were probed further in subsequent data collection process in order to maximize the scope covered in the concepts and categories. The divergent concept of the possibility of opportunism in the involvement of a hotel GM in industrial and governmental organizations was discussed in greater depth.

3.14 The Trustworthiness and Rigour of the Data

Further to the above discussion of the dual role of the author as both a researcher and participant across the two major research methodologies employed in the research, the trustworthiness and rigour of the studies, which pose as usual, a concern for qualitative research, are to be studied in greater depth as follows.

The qualitative paradigm administered in the current study readily means an ontology of "subjective and multiple reality" and an epistemology of an interactive nature in the exchange between the researcher and the research participants, according to Creswell (1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the "truth value" of a research is chiefly determined by the epistemological assumption of the study, which in the current one is overall of naturalist nature (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In contrast to the validity and reliability of the positivist paradigm of research, the "truth value" of the data in a naturalist paradigm can be established through ascertaining the credibility, dependability, confirmability and partly, transferability, of the research. "Truth value" is amongst the

regime of "trustworthiness" and analogous to the validity as in positivist paradigm. Credibility means the truthfulness of the data, and their interpretation, as well as the process whereby the data are collected, against refinement of the "working hypotheses", tests and interpretations on the "raw data" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 301-331). Confirmability is concerned with the groundedness of the data, and whether the logical foundation of the inferences, the "appropriateness of the category labels" and the "quality of the interpretations", any possible "alternatives" and such of the "utilization of category structure" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 301-331). Dependability means the "appropriateness of the inquiry decisions and methodological shifts", which are closely related to how comprehensive the data are to be collected and interpreted without succumbing to early closure because of some pragmatic and administrative factors.

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 301-331) advocated five major techniques in enhancing the credibility of qualitative data – (i) some positive credibility-enhancing field activities such as "prolonged engagement", "persistent observation" and triangulation; (ii) peer debriefing; (iii) negative case analysis; (iv) referential adequacy and (v) member checks.

In the present study, the positive credibility-enhancing field activities, negative case analysis and member checks were employed to elevate the credibility and trustworthiness of the research data.

First of all, prolonged engagement and persistent observation have been in place primarily due to the fact that the researcher has obtained extended experience and calibre as a representative for hotel owners and their companies which may operate hotel management companies as well. Almost all the research participants had long-time direct or indirect working relationships with the researcher long before the data collection period of this research. As discussed in the previous section, the use of the research methodology of ethnography is partly attributed to the need of triangulation, for ascertaining the truthfulness of the data from the research participants from another perspective.

All along the process of data collection, the researcher maintained communications with the research participants from which "member checks" were conducted, even though these were not exhaustive as revisiting every single body of data, on the essential corpus of data and their interpretations by the researcher towards the emergent categories and conceptual framework.

Due to the discrete and non-null nature of the characteristics of the research participants in relation to the criteria of the research, for example, on whether the research participant is or was a hotel GM, or an executive working for the hotel management company and/or hotel owner, or whether the hotels at which the research participants were working were managed by a local or international hotel management company, and so on, the "negative case analysis" as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is adapted so as to include the greatest variety of characteristics, as mentioned above, in order to maximize the "thickness" and mutually validate the data between the research participants. The characteristics of the research participants can be referred to the Tables 3.1 and 3.2 of the paper.

3.15 The Context of the Data Collection

A number of substantive contextual factors are posited to be essential to the determination of the performance of hotel GMs, as well as to anticipate the progress or the evolvement of his or her tenure. Examples include such macroenvironmental factors as the economic situation, cultural and institutional disposition of the geography where the hotel GM is located. The dependency of the organizational performance on the prevailing macroeconomic situation was first reported by Lieberson and O'Connor (1972), albeit of the argument and objection later posted by other researchers. The divergence of the previous research outcome in relation to the significance of macroeconomic factors has prompted the researcher to highlight the longitudinal economic situation of Hong Kong. It is highly noteworthy that the immediate decade prior to the data collection was marked by several epic economic downturns, The Asian financial crisis which began in mid-1997,

the burst of the "dotcom bubble" in 2000, the "September 11" event in 2001, and Severe and Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 all contributed to recession in the hotel and tourism industry for extended periods. Such a series of depressing events for the hotel industry may provoke an easy reference by the research participants in denoting the determinacy of the prevailing economic situation on the hotel GM's tenure, in particular if the research participants have witnessed any anomalies over the evolvement of hotel GM's tenure as a predominant result of the macroeconomic upheavals. Despite the lack of ascertained causality between the impact of macroeconomic forces and hotel GM's tenure as in previous analogous studies, it is possible that the anticipated reference made by the research participants in the current studies may be filling the gaps unnoticed or unstudied in previous research.

Another body of substantive context worth consideration is the cultural and institutional disposition of Hong Kong and the hotel industry *per se*. The rationale behind such a supposition is echoed by Hambrick's (2007) latest research on a refinement to the upper echelons theory, in which the cultural disposition and institutional forces were postulated to be a future research direction on the applicability if not its also being an independent variable or moderating factor in the strategic decisions by the top management team.

3.16 The Delineation of Phases and Determinants

The phases as defined in the following sections are obtained predominantly by two means:

- The *in-vivo* codes of the research participants

- The derivation from the coding processes

The first two phases given in the model, **Familiarizing and Learning**, and **Reforming and Responding** are delineated, except for the use of the word "Responding "for the core themes, according to the *in-vivo* codes by the research participants. These are also the

phases which are unanimously pronounced by the research participants about their presence.

Several major themes and concepts were, however, given by the research participants in the discussion of the later evolution of the hotel GM's tenure. The divergence of the major themes indicates that there may be the existence of "multiple truth" to the later stages of hotel GM's tenure, contingent on the conditions and the determinants in this phase. The major themes in this phase are derived from a combination of the *in-vivo* codes by the research participants and the coding methods.

These two means of delineation are also used in naming and describing the determinants, the moderating factors influencing across the phases. But because of the variety of themes and concepts, as well as their implicit nature as compared to the major phases, derivation from coding is more frequently used in setting out the determinants.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

One of the purposes of this chapter is to present the research results and analyse the characteristics of the tenure life cycle and the determinants on the various phases of the tenure. The determinants are analysed and discussed correspondingly in the sections for the phases on which they have the greatest impact.

4 Determining the Phases in the Life Cycle of Tenure

From the data given by the research participants, discernible phases are observed during the life cycle of tenure of the hotel GMs, contributing to the establishment of the theoretical framework of this study. It is notable, however, that the development of the phases is in the context of large hotels, which include local, regional and international hotel chains, and which fall into the categories of High Tariff A and B of the Hong Kong Tourism Board (2002a). The organizational structures as depicted in Section 1.1.2 are applicable to the large hotels where the research participants are working at.

The designation of this context is to define, in addition, the applicability of the theoretical model obtained from this study. The designated functional units, departments and regional offices in these large hotels subsequently define the operations, strategic planning, decision-making, and other managerial functions in the hotel (Nebel, 1991). It is anticipated the complexity in the organizational structure and the environmental conditions facing large hotels (Nebel, 1991) will affect the evolution of the hotel GM's

tenure. More importantly, they are expected to influence the determinants, conceptually the moderating factors, across the various phases of the hotel GM's tenure.

Last but not least, the fact that the researcher has long been the hotel owner's representative for a regional hotel chain raises the argument of possible bias in the analysis. The issue of bias and the strategies employed by the researcher to minimize the effects of the bias have been discussed in Section 3.13.

4.1 Phase One: Familiarizing and Learning

As noted by all research participants, the first phase of the tenure for hotel GM after first assuming duty lasted from several weeks to months. It was, however, more common for this phase to last for months. This phase was marked by **familiarizing**, a process in which the GM attempted to gain an understanding of the various aspects of his post. This phase had eleven core elements, which will be discussed separately below:

- Developing relationships with working partners

- Fact finding

- Understanding the requirements of the hotel owners

- Effective communications

- Developing local knowledge

- Understanding the organisational culture of the hotel owner company

- Understanding the organizational structure of the hotel

- Development stage and positioning of the hotel

- Understanding external environmental factors

- Understanding expectations from 'Bosses'

- Transition to Phase Two

Notably, these included operational issues across different functional departments and getting to know major stakeholders including the hotel owners, hotel employees and

customers. For most hotel GMs, it can be assumed that there is an existing relationship with executives from the hotel management company, and that this relationship possibly existed long before the start of the particular tenure at the specific hotel. In addition, Participant Y suggested this first phase involved an initial appraisal of personnel in order to locate any incapable staff for rectification.

In the course of gaining understanding, the hotel GM was expected to acquire local market knowledge. Participant M, noted that this "learning process" could last for up to two years and might even extend to the later stages of the hotel GM's lifecycle. This was true, regardless of the operational procedures and systems in the hotel, or the adaptability of the hotel GM to the host country or the new working environment.

4.1.1 Relationships with Working Partners

A hotel GM in this phase has to establish a close working relationship with key working partners, including the chief of finance and accounting (usually the financial controller), the director of sales (DoS) and the Deputy GM (DGM). Participants A, C, D and M all believed this to be a major task in Stage 1. Participant C commented,

> "Yes, There is a close working relationship and frequent communication with the head of accounting, usually the financial controller, and the director of sales. We are just like working partners."

Participant A named similar posts as the closest working allies, at least initially,

> "at first I worked very closely with the FC [financial controller], and ...... of the concierge, as well as the rooms [department]. I was also to pass the message of the management across"

The financial controller was naturally a significant working partner because of the necessity to obtain up-to-date financials about the hotel, as well as the fact that the hotel GM had to "report to" this person, for he or she sometimes acted as the representative of

the hotel owner. Getting to know both the DGM and DoS were important because of their knowledge of the market, a fact underlined by Participants D and Y. This task was of critical importance if the GM was a newly-arrived expatriate. Participant M mentioned as well, the need to develop a close working relationship between the hotel GM and the deputy general manager (DGM), especially if the DGM came from a different background from that of the hotel GM.

Finally, Participant M identified an additional task that is most relevant for hotels managed by international hotel management companies, where GMs tended to have short tenures before being moved on. The GM had to demonstrate his or her capability quickly, but without involvement in long-term projects, such as large-scale refurbishment or renovation. As a result, new GMs tended to have a task focus on an area with which the GM had been trained or was more familiar with, and to invest more endeavours and deploy more resources for development in this area.

4.1.2   Fact-finding - Problems-finding and Immediate Past Performance of the Hotel and Learning

Becoming familiar with the hotel operations was clearly a major task. Participants A, H, L, M, R, S and Y identified this issue specifically. Familiarization could be gained by making frequent visits to the customers and competitors, general observation, and by studying internal memoranda, reports and analyses. As Participant A noted, exchange with customers was useful to provide general feedback and to identify areas in need of improvement. GM's visits to competitors facilitated a better understanding of the general market situation. The focus of such visits was to reveal existing problems in operations and systems. Participant S remarked, *"If he does not consider improvement, he would eventually lose,"* and *"When he first arrives, he does not necessarily learn, but have familiarization.   He usually looks for areas of improvement."*

One of the outcomes was to identify incapable or non-performing staff and to instigate a turnaround solution or replace the person quickly. Such action was easier if the hotel was managed by an international hotel management company and had established systems and set of procedures, as noted by Participant L.

Participant M noted further that the new (GM) may also need to develop proficiency in other functional areas, especially if he or she was relatively young.

Initially the GM generally adhered to existing practices and plans set by his or her predecessors, according to Participant Y. Following existing practices and plans posed both pros and cons, regardless of whether the predecessor was a strong or weak performer. Following a poor performer posed tremendous difficulties for an incoming GM, for desired improvements could lead to the management company setting large performance improvement benchmarks for the GM. Following a strong performer enabled the GM to follow *status quo*, initially, but also raised the risk of subsequent performance being judged as being mediocre or poor due to the lack of discernible new initiatives.

Following existing practices could also produce a dilemma, as Participant R, noted:

> *"What was done by the predecessor can put the GM in a difficult position. For bad [prior] performance, the GM will have a hard time correcting the situations. For good [prior] performance, the new GM will be considered only as of average."*

4.1.3   Requirements by the Hotel Owner

While the requirements by the hotel management company may be clear, little might be known about the requirements the hotel owner sets. They could be haphazard, contextual and be dependent on a host of other factors relating to their prior experience of the hotels, personal preferences of the hotel owner or its representatives. As Participant D mentions,

the requirements of the hotel owners could influence the GM's task focus, making them more "hands-on." Input into the marketing functions, securing corporate accounts, maintaining a high yield and room occupancy, enlarging market share, and exploring new markets are just some examples of added tasks required by hotel owners. These requirements depend on the functional background of the hotel owner. A hotel owner who is a property investor may want to maximise the yield and profit, but would otherwise adopt a "hands-free" attitude towards hotel operations. An owner who was a hotelier, on the other hand, may focus more on operational aspects beyond purely the financials. Participant D summarized the typical requirements of hotel owners as being: (i) financials (the revenue and profit, GOP, of the hotel); (ii) the brand equity and reputation of the hotel; (iii) the system and policies of the hotel, and; (iv) the interests of the hotel group on the whole.

The length of the tenure of the GM, in an owner-managed hotel, is dependent on two vital factors — (i) the performance of the hotel GM, including the *adherence to the requirements of the hotel owner*; and (ii) the relationship, on the interpersonal level, between the hotel owner and hotel GM. Nevertheless, the performance of the GM, is also subject to the subjective interpretation by the hotel owner. According to Participant L,

> "......it is certain that a hotel GM should re-invent himself continuously, remain competitive and conscious over the changes. Hopefully the changes are to deliver good results for the hotel owner......In some hotel management companies, the duty of some hotel GMs is to reinvigorate various hotel properties every several years or so."

4.1.4 Communications

Effective communication with employees was also a critical Phase 1 task, for the new GM needs to share the vision of the new top management with staff. This specific role

was noted by Participant A. This practice enables the GM to gain insights into the profile and characteristics of the employees in general, and especially with subordinates having a direct working relationship. Strategically, communication is utilized to impose managerial control over the local practices and to align the local human resources with those of the headquarters. Top-down communications allowed the GM to know the views of the staff and department heads, an important element leading towards the success of the tenure of a hotel GM.

4.1.5 Knowledge about the Host Country and its Operations

The GM must make him or herself familiar with the host community or country as soon as possible. Understandably, it takes less time if he has obtained a certain degree of familiarity beforehand. Importantly, the GM has to learn the host city's culture. In a practical sense, there are certain locations where settling down is easier for expatriate hotel GMs, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, where cultural differences are small. But it takes longer in other countries, where cultural differences, reflected in local culture, social hierarchy and modes of decision-making are significant. Participant A reflected on his own experiences:

> *"For a hotel GM who has previous knowledge about a host country, it usually takes one month for the hotel GM to settle down. But a hotel GM has to learn its [the host country's] culture. Settling down in such cities as Hong Kong, Singapore is relatively easy because they're just like New York, London or Tokyo. But it can be tricky in South Korea, for example, and it takes more effort and longer time because of the unique local culture and [modes of] decision-making."*

The national cultural background of the GM also plays a role, as observed by Participants C and Y. They noted the need for deep local knowledge in sales and marketing, corporate customer profiling and liaison with the local agents network, which entailed

additional efforts by a new hotel GM in the learning regime. On the other hand, the local practices could be enhanced by a GM who comes from a similar cultural background. This is a situation particularly conspicuous amongst expatriate hotel GMs, as reflected by Participant A.

The practices and expectations of the GM may meet scepticism and be perceived to "clash" with some local staff if not handled delicately. The feasibility of the practices and values introduced by an incoming GM lay in the relationship with the staff. As noted by Participant R, trust was a core factor. A hotel GM would thus study the profile and characteristics of the local employees, especially those subordinates with whom there is a direct working relationship.

The knowledge of the host country and host operations additionally included the organizational culture in the hotel premises and the hotel owner. First of all, a hotel GM had to be interested in the hotel and what the hotel owner did. This enthusiasm should be extended beyond the hotel owner to all stakeholders – hotel owner, employees, customers and the corporate office of the hotel management company. Participant A, as an expatriate hotel GM, seemed to have a particularly deep feeling on this notion. These four stakeholders included the hotel owner, employees, customers and the corporate office of the hotel management company. Respectively these stakeholders were taken care of by the financial controller, the human resources director, the sales director and the GM himself. That explained the GM's close working-partner relationship with the financial controller and the director of sales (DoS) upon the start of the tenure.

4.1.6   Organizational Culture of the Hotel Owner Company

The impact of the organizational culture of the hotel owner on a GM's was high in the decision-making, political concern and characteristics of the tenure. Compared to the organizational culture of the hotel management company, that of the hotel owner was more need- than institutionally based. That meant an enthusiastic response to the

requirements of the hotel owner was expected if a GM was to succeed in a tenure. Participant C also projected a practical reason for the heavy influence of the hotel owner company's culture upon the start of a new tenure:

"Of course the hotel management company has known the hotel GM for long while it's a new working relationship for the hotel owner. The GM will feel a higher extent of influence by the hotel owner [owner's culture]"

Participant A proposed that *"a hotel GM has to understand the culture of the owner's organization and to satisfy the owner's requirements"*. For instance, hotel owners who were of oriental or patriarchal culture may be more used to a "hands-on" management style, meaning that the hotel owners may monitor the performance of the hotel GM more closely than their occidental counterparts. The performance benchmark of the hotel for the GM would be affected by the cultural orientation of the hotel owners. It was at the same time compounded by the subjective interpretation and arbitrary judgment of the hotel owner. An example of such subjectivity was declared by Participant D:

"[In certain areas], a "favourable" performance [by the hotel GM] can be interpreted as "unfavourable", or vice versa, by the hotel owner, if the relationship between the hotel owner and the GM is poor. This is true especially if the capabilities [of the GM] are as challenging to the leadership [of the hotel owner]. The subjective [evaluation] is also seen in the appointment of staff."

In terms of organizational characteristics, the functional focus of the owner's representative would greatly affect the task attention of the hotel GM. For instance, many of the hotel owner's representatives were certified accountants by training. Such performance benchmarks as profitability and capital investment would be the centre of performance evaluation. For hotel owners who were experienced in operating and investing in hotels, some specific phenomena, such as the high capital investment upon the start of business or hotel revamp can be better understood and accommodated without the hotel GM having to pay the price of mismanagement. It was also common for hotel

owners to search for GMs themselves if candidates were not readily available at the management company.

Another example by Participant Y shed light on the effect of cultural predisposition – about the concept of "face", an important cultural dimension in Asia deeply rooted in Confucianism. For instance, a face-concerned hotel owner would set the market positioning and customer service of the hotel as performance benchmarks.

A GM working for an owner-managed hotel was more inclined to respond keenly to the requirements and culture of the hotel owner than one working for a separate hotel management company. It was because the hotel owner was the one and only "boss" for the GM.

4.1.7 Organizational Structure of the Hotel

Organizational structure exercised a direct effect on the tasks of the GM, such as decision-making, task-focus and relationship-focus. A hotel GM working for owner-managed hotels usually had to cater to the viewpoints and specific requirements of the hotel owners. This was true especially on such long-term projects as overall renovation and major capital investment. It was because such projects were highly sensitive to the concerns and the preferences of the hotel owner. The limitation on the number of hotel properties by the same hotel owner may be perceived by the hotel GM to be a constraint on further job prospect. This was likely to be a reason behind the keen response to the owner's likes in such context.

Usually, only a moderate level of concern for hotel owner's likes was necessary for a GM working for a hotel management company. According to Participant S, the influence of the hotel owner was limited because of the need to comply with the management contract. Such indices as yearly goals, objective and targets were stipulated on an annual basis. Any suggestions by the hotel owner would be taken as advice but it was the hotel management company which had the final decision and a tight scope of control.

4.1.8 Development Stage and Positioning of the Hotel

As exemplified by Participant D, starting a hotel property from scratch was considered to be the greatest test of the capability of a hotel GM. The GM would be involved in a wealth of decision-making without reference to any existing practices. A new property can be ambivalent for a GM – either to prove his or her capability or spell an early end to the tenure, according to Participant L. According to Participant D,

> *"Starting a hotel from scratch is the greatest test on the genuine capabilities of a hotel GM. Against the experience as claimed, the hotel GM has to work on a number of issues and their decision-making. There is no reference [to any existing practices]. "Free-riding" is not possible. But it is possible for an operating hotel."*

Thus, a GM working for a new property cannot "free-ride" on any existing practices, or dedicate the everyday tasks to the Deputy General Manager (DGM) or Assistant Managers (AMs).

The requirements by hotel owners of the GM also varied according to the market positioning of the hotel. In medium-tariff hotels, meeting the profit and budget targets through realising a high occupancy rate were the core requirements. The above could be accomplished by securing the group-tour customers specifically for the Hong Kong market. In high-tariff hotels, other factors such as the compliance to the system, corporate policies, and so on, of the hotel were also in play. Again, according to Participant D,

> *"The requirements [by the hotel owner] on the GM differ for different market positioning of the hotel. In medium-rated hotels the budget targets have to be meet, by high occupancy rate. And group-tour [customers]. These are the core requirements for the GM. In high-rated hotels, other factors as [the compliance to] the system, [corporate] policies are to be met".*

The development stage of a hotel property could be illustrated by the popularity of its services and facilities, including the overall style and ambience, and its food and beverages outlets. Despite the popularity, a hotel may need a GM change if the hotel has run out of reform and innovative ideas on continuously improving the services. This idea, however, was counterbalanced by the continuous upgrade in facilities and regular refurbishment.

Organizational structure, ownership structure and hotel portfolio, as underlined by Participant L as determinants, could in fact be also considered as the institutional forces on the tenure, as discussed in Section 5.7.3. It was noteworthy that the two areas of determinants were not mutually exclusive but highly related to each other.

4.1.9 External Environmental Factors

The impact of the external environmental factors on the success of the tenure of hotel GM, agreed to by at least five Participants, C, H, L, S and Y, can be comprehended at two levels, industry-specific and macro-environmental. Participant L recommended that when a hotel GM first arrived at a new tenure, he should make minor but fast-responsive changes over the cost, sales and marketing function, and so on. They were necessary for repositioning or turning around against unfavourable situations, both externally and internally. Change in human resources may be necessary too. After the business results have improved, further study into the products, services and positioning can be made. For the external environment, a hotel GM has to pay special attention to the opportunities and threats, especially competition. Changes for improvement and strategies against the competition have to be devised. The changes to the above functional variables and characteristics are all responses to the external industry-specific and market conditions. The rationale behind such an immediate and fast response to the market could be understood by that it was the market situation which dictated the sales and marketing strategy, competitive profile, conditions for the operations towards the long-term planning for the hotel. As a result, a hotel GM should maintain a vision in

overseeing beyond the everyday tasks to consider seriously the market situation in the near future.

The secondary level of macro-environmental factors include those of an economic, political, social, cultural, legal and technological nature. The overall economic environment posed the most immediate impact to the hotel performance of the hotel and subsequently the tenure of the hotel GM. A rosy economic environment would bring positive results for both. The reverse also held true. This notion was proposed by both Participants S and Y. An illustrative example was the spectacular performance of the ex-Regent Hotel in Hong Kong in the 1990s, the heyday of Hong Kong's economy in the late twentieth century, before seeing a dramatic downturn in the late 1990s. In reverse, prolonged financial loss suffered by the hotel amidst a gloomy economic situation triggered the dismissal of the hotel GM, even though it was well understood that the overarching economic downturn was likely to be the genuine culprit, as agreed to by Participant C:

"In good economic environment, hotel GMs can easily survive [the tenure] while in bad [economic] times, a hotel GM would easily be fired because of the [financial] loss, although it's everyone's knowledge that he is not to blame."

The duration of such economic impact on a hotel generally lasted for several years. It was true that the management style of the hotel GM could be facilitated or debilitated by the macroeconomic environment. A convincing example was the blanket depression of the hotel industry caused by the effects of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 during which a drastic downturn in hotel business became the norm. Some hotel GMs in Asia were dismissed, in spite of the known uncontrollable nature of the incident, out of the some organizational politics and financial concerns. According to the personal experience of the researcher, the similarly tremendous impact of the Asian financial crisis in 1997 was another landmark economic calamity which had a deep impact on the hotel industry in Hong Kong. Such macroenvironmental impact was mentioned by Participant S as below:

"On environmental [issues], they change every year, such as the SARS [in 2003].
So is the economic environment. It is thus difficult to determine........What has
been done, the managerial style and the allocation of resources would be subject
to change because of the environmental factors. Most of the GMs would do the
same. Because of the impact by the environmental factors, long-term investment
in bettering the staff and the quality, as well as fulfilling social responsibility by
donation, would be held back. The environmental factors do have their impact
on the hotel GM."

Economic downturn was a period in which the capabilities of the GMs in minimising the losses and reviving the business afterwards were put to test. The hotel GM's acts were also closely monitored by the hotel owners and the hotel management companies. Another instance was the unfavourable economic environment in Hong Kong in the early 2000s during which many hotel GMs were seen to adjust the allocation of resources and management style by withholding long-term investment in enhancing quality, as well as fulfilling social responsibility by donation. The "fit" between the hotel GM, his or her management style and the macro-environment accounted for the sustainability of the hotel GM's tenure in such a drastic environment.

4.1.10 Expectation from the "Bosses"

In particular, during reform, the expectations and preferences of the "bosses" of the hotel GM held a substantial significance. These "bosses" may include both the hotel management company and the hotel owner. The alignment of expectations and pace was more apparent in major projects. The "bosses" of a hotel GM may give guidance and directions on major projects, and they are expected to be followed by the hotel GM. As remarked upon by Participant S, the compromises and alignment of expectations by the hotel GM were considered to be a practice to "please" the hotel owner, or the hotel management company. It was speculated by Participant S that the hotel GM would have

more time, and possibly extended responsibilities to work for the corporate offices or other regional offices, as demonstrated in the following comments by Participant S:

"If he [the hotel GM] has become familiarized, he would have time, as everything has stabilized. He has become familiarized with the boss, after the probation, and he can deliver the profits. He knows how to please the boss. Then he would have more time. When he has got more time, for a GM working for the group [large hotel management companies], he can start working in another country. That is the reality. Or he can work on something personal."

4.1.11 Transition between Phase One and Phase Two

Noted again by Participant M, the Phase of Familiarizing and Learning finished only when a "complete accustomization" has been achieved. Such "complete accustomization" could also be elaborated upon as familiarization with the (i) stakeholders to the hotel and (ii)the host country, including but not limited to, the local market situation. Participant L stated, however, that "learning" could also take the form of making some minor changes to the hotel operations, even including a personnel appraisal, as the "initial task focuses" as dubbed by Participant Y. Achieving targets signified the completion of the familiarization and learning.

4.2 Phase Two: Reforming and Responding

To the research participants, such as Participants S and D, there were two levels of reform, primary and secondary, in a hotel, especially for a newly-arrived hotel GM. Primary reform was made on the "hardware" of the operations, including the fixtures, placement and installations in the hotel premises. The majority of such changes were non-political and did not involve much interpersonal relationship. Secondary ones, however, involved greater depth and had higher implications on the operations. These related to areas such as strategy, human resources, and market positioning, which were likely to involve political or interpersonal repercussions, and were typical examples. Yet to all

research participants, these two levels of reform were not totally separable from each other. An emphasis on the secondary reforms was always observed. Summarized from the research participants, the purposes of the secondary reforms were multifarious, ranging from building networking to achieving personal interests.

4.2.1 Reform and Changes

In the second phase, coined the "adjustment period" by Participants A, C, L, R and S, remedies for problems were sought. Enhancement and adjustment to the policies, systems and operations, with even dismissal and replacement of the human resources were witnessed. In the following few months, the GM had to ensure the new measures were running smoothly and on track. The areas where reforms and changes were necessary may diverge from the goals of the hotel GM. The goals, in particular the personal ones, are highlighted by the notion of Participant R as follows:

> "In the first three months [of the tenure], a hotel GM is to locate the existing
>
> problems on the systems, operations and human resources of the hotel. The six
>
> months following [the first three months] is the "adjustment period". A hotel
>
> GM looks for remedies for the problems. Enhancement and adjustment to the
>
> policies and systems are needed. Even those on human resources, including
>
> firing and replacement are necessary. Then the results are to be evaluated."

Some hotel GMs would use the reform to test the capability and trustworthiness of his or her staff members, as stated by Participant R. Participant C also highlighted that reform may mean harder work for the GM because of the policy changes and personnel turnover:

> "Some systems may already be there but how they fit the management style [of
>
> the hotel GM]. But they may fail or need reforming. That's a hard time for the
>
> hotel GM"

However, any measures of change could not be implemented immediately. Change could be evolutionary or revolutionary, but was definitely necessary and preventive against performance downturn.

In face of possible resistance to the changes, a hotel GM has to understand the reasons behind the resistance. Besides resistance, the success of reforms depended on the external environment and its fit with the reforms. The attack of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) serves as an illustration.

As summarized by Participant L, the keywords for this phase of the tenure for a hotel GM included "change, stabilize and regroup" (with respect to the attitude to change in business). Such practices could be witnessed in the short-term of up to three years after the commencement of the tenure.

It was usually the younger hotel GMs, according to Participant S, who had a better drive in feeding input towards enhancement and reforms, as per his or her style, than more senior hotel GMs. Such initiatives were appreciated by some hotel owners and representatives.

4.2.2   Business Performance of the Hotel

No matter how important other determinants on the tenure of hotel GM were, the most prominent performance index was the financial performance of the hotel – revenue, gross operating profit (GOP), occupancy rate, averaged room rate, a comparison with the market average and those of the competitors- that carried a higher weight than any other indices. As remarked by Participant C, the weight is heavier particularly in Asia:

> "In Asia, performance [to the hotel owners] is measured by comparing the results with those of the competitors. They are definitely more important than other indices, such as business ethics."

Participant M stated that, in a hotel managed by an international hotel management company, the targets for the hotel GM were usually beyond the above to include, in addition, maintaining the integrity of the brand equity of the hotel group by means of major renovations and change in positioning if applicable.

The types of performance indices being in focus relies on the training and operational experience of the hotel owner and owner's representative. Special attention was paid to

the GOP by an owner's representative who was an accountant. The tolerance level for obtaining positive financial return against, for instance, new opening, recovery, could be low.

The financial performance of the hotel was the foremost performance benchmark and it had to be fulfilled no matter the conditions of the other benchmarks. Of all the determinants for the business performance of the hotel, the business underpinning, past history of the hotel performance weighed more than others such as the personal inclination (being a business maintainer, business adventurer, and so on) of the GM.

4.2.3   Institutional Factors

The tenure of the hotel GM was also subject to a number of institutional factors. For instance, these include the requirements of the hotel management company and the hotel owner, the background of the hotel owner, human resources policies, the system, standards and policies in the hotel, and so on.

Certain institutional factors formed a *status quo* for the hotel GM. Some hotel GMs were complacent over the *status quo* and prone to a reluctance to change and improve. This may lead to a decline in the performance for both the GM and the hotel, resulting in involuntary replacement or dismissal.

For other hotel GMs, there was not necessarily a performance decline before the handover of the current tenure cycle to a new one. The non-existence of decline was evidenced through good performance throughout the tenure. Partly this was because the hotel GM was subject to the well-established policies in the hotel management company. As pointed out by Participant R, there was a post-stability period of a hotel GM's tenure:

> *"After four to five years [of stable performance], a hotel GM may become satisfied with the situation. He may not want to change or improve. The status may continue until another hotel GM is on board. Decline is not a must for hotel GMs because there are the policies and usual practices of human resources, especially in international [hotel] management companies."*

Such related policies are underlined by Participants S as well:

"For large hotel management chain, the hotels follow more closely the structure of the [management company]. They have got the system, guidelines for promotion, budget, planning, standards, replacement, etc. The [hotel GM] has to comply closely to the guidelines. Some decision-making is present but it is common to conform to the guidelines. For some change to be implemented, they would have the guidelines and [a hotel GM] cannot deviate from the group policies."

4.2.3.1 Systems, Standard Procedures and Policies

The systems, standard procedures and policies of a hotel or hotel brand, played a determining role in the characteristics of the tenure of hotel GM. The higher the structure of the systems, standard procedures and policies, the smaller the effect of the management style of the hotel GM, noted by the research participants. It was because the hotel operations relied more heavily on the working teams and systemic procedures rather than any individuals. A "handbook of operations", resulting from a long history of operations was an epitome of such. Again, the higher the structure of the system, the lower effect of the management style of a GM, and furthermore, the more difficult it was for the GM to manipulate the hotel performance.

Participant D considered that the systems in hotel management company could be seen as constraints. Participant S noted the influence of the systems and policies imposed by the hotel management company:

"For large hotel management chains, the hotels follow more closely the structure of the [management company]. They have got the system, guidelines for promotion, budget, planning, standards, replacement, etc. The [hotel GM] has to comply closely with the guidelines. Some decision-making is present but it is common to conform to the guidelines. For some change to be implemented, they would have the guidelines and [a hotel GM] cannot deviate from the group policies."

The more comprehensive the systems, standard procedures and policies in a hotel, the shorter the early phase of **familiarizing and learning** will be. This was because the hotel GM, especial one promoted within the system, would follow suit the systems and standard procedures already implemented. Learning, adapting or bringing remedies to problems, let alone building system or standard procedure from scratch, as in a hotel managed in-house by the hotel owner, was unnecessary.

As experienced by the researcher, well-established systems, common in international hotel management companies, could be impeding substantial reform. A realistic example was the constraint over a GM to propose changes to the design of a kitchen for a food and beverages outlet in the hotel. There was also little room for a hotel GM to prove that he is better than his predecessors. However, a hotel GM would usually try to prove this and those who succeed would likely get an "accelerated promotion".

Yet the effectiveness and time duration of the system on the phase of **Reforming and Responding** was arguable since they were dependent on the flexibility inherent in the systems, standard procedures and policies. The personality of the hotel GM in implementing reform and change was in play as well.

Similarly, the more mature the management structure and the "software" of the hotel, in terms of the completeness and integrity of procedures, the lower the degree of advancement could be witnessed. Whereas in a hotel that was less systematic and procedural, the enhancement facilitated by the management practices of the GM would become conspicuous.

4.2.3.2   Human Resources Policies

In an international hotel management company, the tenure of a hotel GM in a certain property could be on a temporary basis. Participant A speculated this policy to be breeding opportunism. Participant Y commented that working for an owner-managed hotel can be seen as a "life-long" job, resulting in a more down-to-earth approach and

more focus on the operations of the hotel. Such a practice of fixed-term or rotation of hotel GMs had become common even in Mainland China.

The opportunism in the above meant a hotel GM could demonstrate his or her capability without involvement in long-term projects, such as large-scale refurbishment or renovation. A new hotel GM may tend to have a task focus on an area with which the GM was familiar. This tactical managerial decision was underscored by Participant S as being common to many hotel GMs.

The presence or absence of certain posts, particularly those with a direct and close working relationship with the hotel GM exerted effects on the tenure of a hotel GM. Deputy General Managers (DGMs) or numerous Assistant Managers (AMs) in international hotel management companies, or the absence of such in some local managed-hotels, caused a subtle shift in the task and relationship focus of the hotel GM. As Participant Y revealed, the relationship-maintaining practice, making up sixty percent of the time of duty for hotel GM was made possible only with the dedication of operational duties to a capable Deputy General Manager (DGM) or Assistant Managers (AMs). The multiple reporting lines, as common as the hotel GM reporting to the Area Vice President and the Vice President of Sales in the corporate office, for instance, in the matrix organizational structure of international hotel management companies also inflicted a great difference in relationship and task focus for the hotel GM.

As far as even the recruitment, retention, succession and turnover of the post of hotel GM was concerned, international hotel managed companies always demonstrated a more systematic approach towards the their local owner-managed counterparts. Such a divergence was reflected in the following quote by Participant S:

For recruiting Hong Kong GMs, in the large [hotel] groups, the human resources departments have their policies in recruiting GMs. For the smaller groups, the Chinese owners usually locate one to two CEOs, on their discretion, to recruit the staff. There is no standard to follow on whom to be employed. Some are referred to by friends. If they think one is suitable [for the post], then he would be hired.

4.2.4 Relationship with and Trust from the Hotel Owner

In the initial phase of the tenure of a hotel GM, one of the relationship-related tasks was to cultivate a reasonable level of trust with the hotel owner. Yet in Asian culture, or for hotel GMs working with Asian hotel owners, trust-building is time-consuming and in need of delicate and everyday attention. Hotel GMs were subject to a period of performance monitoring and general observation by the hotel owner. Upon the securing of trust, the hotel GM was expected to proceed to reforms. The support of the hotel owner over such reforms, especially those of large scale or involving high capital investment, was essential to reforms initiated by the hotel GM. This is the primary level of significance borne by trust above.

A high level of trust with the hotel owner would lower the tendency towards dismissal by the hotel owner. Tenure was naturally lengthened in owner-managed hotels because of the relative ease in building the trust with the hotel owner, as noted by Participant C. . In contrast with the general belief that maintaining the relationship with the hotel owner was high on the agenda only for GMs working for owner-managed hotels, such was also true for those working for international hotel management companies, as per Participant Y.

4.2.5 Transition between Phase Two and Phase Three

After the reform phase, the "stability period" lasted for several years when the hotel GM felt more at ease. The policies and operations were largely in line with the management style of the hotel GM. Most importantly, favourable performance as shown by stronger financial results and upgraded service quality was often observed. In short, the "stability" manifested itself as such in (i) human resources; (ii) policies and (iii) mode of operations, according to Participant R. Again as referred to by Participant R, there are three aspects of the hotel operations reflecting this assumed stability. They include (i) the "hardware" of the hotel – refurbishment to the infrastructure which reflected the approval of the decisions of the hotel GM by the hotel management company and the

hotel owner; (ii) the "software" of the hotel – the realignment of the human resources of the hotel with appropriate change to the assignment of staff to the respective posts with the best "fit"; (iii) the marketing function of the hotel. According to Participant C, results appraisal, refinement and enhancement to the reform were usually made. The fulfilment of the above conditions spelt the start of Phase Three.

Participants S noted, however, that it was natural for a hotel GM who maintained a good performance to choose to stay in the current tenure. Such common issues may include the policies of the management company or interpersonal relationship problems. The availability of external job opportunities with better remuneration and rosier career prospects counted as well. On the other hand, successful hotel GMs would have higher expectations. In international hotel management companies, a hotel GM with good performance, and endorsement by his "bosses", may be promoted to be an area vice president or simply to hold responsibility for more hotel premises. If such a plan was not fulfilled, he or she may choose to seek opportunities in another hotel management company, as stressed again by Participant S:

> "At the start, they would have many such [reforming] activities. Then after a year or two, he will have higher expectation. In large [hotel management] companies, one would be promoted to be the area VP, for example, if he can satisfy his boss, or for China. There is a career plan. If he cannot, then he will leave and change to another international [hotel chain]."

4.3   Phase Three: Stabilizing, Re-visiting and Declining

In the later phases, different GMs would adopt divergent strategies towards their tenure. Some proactive hotel GMs adopted a "continuous improvement" approach by re-visiting the strategic and operational aspects of the hotel, and tried to implement reforms continuously, as noted by Participant L. Nevertheless, some hotel GMs had become over-accustomed to the daily routines, resulting in a lack of motivation and eventually a performance decline, as pointed out by Participants C, R and S. With stabilized or

declining performance, this last phase in a tenure would see a promotion, turnover or dismissal of the hotel GM, voluntarily or involuntarily.

It was, as well, a phase in which the hotel owner showed more concern for hotel performance, market conditions, and the upkeep of the image – corporate image, hotel image- as agreed by Participants H and S. A hotel owner was also likely to exercise sufficient control over the effort and time spent on the core business of the hotel by the GM. But it was more an art than science in exercising such control. It was also in this phase that clashes between the hotel owner and the hotel GM would emerge, particularly on reaching consensus over significant decisions. The relationship and trust between the hotel owner and the hotel GM would thus become essential. This was a fact highlighted by Participants A, L and Y. Provided that the relationship between the hotel owner and the hotel GM was fine and the mutual trust and consensus was strong, the hotel owner would work together with the hotel GM regardless of the performance of the hotel, and continue to provide the GM with necessary support. Participants S and Y, both being hotel owners' representatives, agreed with such a notion.

Unanimously, the research participants denoted that a hotel GM would sustain the tenure for an indeterminate duration if there was conspicuous stability and continuous reform. On the contrary, the tenure would come to an end if there were enough signals of decline. Yet there was no hard-and-fast rule as to which one of the two phenomena would occur, as it was dependent on a wealth of other determinants.

4.3.1 Personal Characteristics of the Hotel GM

Reform of systems, successful and effective or not, relied heavily on how they fitted with the management style of the hotel GM. Their implementation was highly dependent on the personality of the hotel GM himself or herself – for "fast-moving" hotel GMs, reforms may start shortly after the assumption of duty; the reverse for some GMs who were "laid-back". As given by Participant C,

*"The personality of the hotel GM counts [for the reform]. There are some
"fast-moving" hotel GMs who reform after being on board, but there are some
"laid-back" ones. They may be dismissed for not performing or improving."*

Upon reaching targets, how the personal time of a GM could be used was a personal
choice of the hotel GM. Some hotel GMs may elect to work further for the corporate
offices or other regional offices, while some may investigate the opportunity of private
businesses. Other hotel GMs may choose to extend professional and personal
networking by joining some industrial organizations, such as the hotel association. Yet
such choices of how to spend the extra time were subject to such personal characteristics
as ethnicity and cultural background, personal interests and career plan.

4.3.1.1 Personality, Leadership Style and Cultural Orientation of the Hotel GM

The personality and leadership style of a hotel GM were two other determinants of his
tenure and term, as ascertained by Participant L. Acumen, responsiveness, decisiveness,
and interpersonal skills were some of the highlighted traits. Added by Participant Y, the
reliance by the management of the hotel on the leadership and the management style
should be more prominent in owner-managed hotels than those managed   by
international hotel management companies.

Participant D presumed that there were two major types of personal characteristics of the
hotel GM – "follower", following the *status quo* established by the predecessors; and
"reformist", introducing changes to the *status quo* for the betterment of the hotel, while
Participant R proposed that there were "business maintainers" and "business adventurers",
analogous and further to "follower" and 'reformist" above. As from Participant D,

*"There are two major types of personal characteristics of the hotel GM –
"follower", following the predecessors; and "reformist", introducing changes
for the bettering the hotel."*

A hotel GM with the personality traits of "business maintainer" traded off significant
enhancement and continuous improvement for stable growth in revenue and market share

by balancing the interests of various parties. A "business adventurer" strived for conspicuous betterment across various operations of the hotel, and attempted to achieve noticeable performance improvement.

The personality of the hotel GM also manifested itself in some managerial practices. It contributed to the leadership style of the hotel GM, such as the mode of decision-making, degree of empowerment of the staff and hands-on participation in the everyday operations. For a hotel GM adopting a democratic mode of decision-making, the irregularities in the personal capacity of the GM could be buffered by the collective decision-making of the entire management team. Eventually it would be the business results of the hotel which benefited from centric decision-making by the GM alone. A hands-free mode of operations was possible with empowerment, and nurtured motivation in staff. Another personality trait, sociability, was considered to be favourable, in particular if the hotel is located in an emerging economy where liaison with the officials from the governmental agencies is essential for the smooth running of the business. It was notable that such personality dependency of the hotel GM, can be extended to the executives at the management company, collectively presented as the company **values**. An example by Participant S illustrated the impact of the personality of the hotel GM:

> *"The personal character of the GM and his social group also have effects on the*
>
> *GM's work and operations. Some GMs close to the Chinese culture know how*
>
> *to cater [to the wishes of the boss]. Some other GMs newly arrived from the*
>
> *U.S. may not be flexible, or even refute the boss [when what is suggested is*
>
> *professionally not as the usual practice] because he does not worry about being*
>
> *dismissed. This is a reflection of his character and based on his experience,*
>
> *Asian experience."*

Participant M put forward another example – the frugal character of a hotel GM may result in a high awareness of the cost-effectiveness of the operations. A hotel GM with a visionary personality may cast more focus on the long-term development of the hotel. In

an owner-managed hotel, the hotel GM was expected to exert a higher degree of personal leadership style, compared to one in an international hotel management company.

The cultural predisposition of the hotel GM was an additional force in determining the tenure of a hotel GM. Participant M observed that a hotel GM was likely to follow the usual practice in the country of origin of training. A typical example was the multi-functional responsibilities of the hotel staff as trained in Europe and, conversely, the higher degree of functional concentration as in some Asian countries. Another example was the generalist characteristic of hotel GMs originating from the U.S. where they were trained as management trainees in the hotel management company. Their counterparts in Europe were, on the other hand, trained as apprentices from the start, and had undergone job rotation including being a bell boy, in the front office, or as a chef in food and beverages. They were more hands-on and better at practical tasks.

A hotel GM would concentrate on a functional area where he or she excelled because of the fact there would be a higher possibility of success in performance. For instance, if a hotel GM had a background in food and beverage (F&B) by training, then he would be expected to pay more attention to F&B, and perform more poorly in some other functional areas, such as sales and marketing. Such influence could even be witnessed in the leadership style of the hotel GM. Hotel GMs were predicted to study more into the practices of the same functional area as set out by his or her predecessor. Such an inclination was remarked by Participant S as follows:

> *if he is F&B by training, then he performs better in F&B. He would pay more attention to F&B and perform not as well in marketing. Then the performance lies more in F&B......If the GM employed is of marketing by training, he would spend more and performs less well in F&B, banquet and operations. Some others are of operations by training, from bell boy, doing bedding [housekeeping], front office, housekeeper, etc. Because he knows the operations, the hotel would be neater and cleaner. But he may not emphasize marketing. Then the question is − if the predecessor has completed [the tenure] and the incoming GM*

is well-versed in F&B, then he would spend a lot of time looking into the details of F&B. His style and background influence the style of the entire hotel and the management focus.

Moreover, the impact of the personality of a hotel GM was reflected in his or her career plans. After making certain achievements, a hotel GM usually had higher expectations. In international hotel management companies, a hotel GM could be promoted to be area vice president or a post with more responsibilities. However, if rewards were not forthcoming, the hotel GM may choose whether to stay with the same company or to seek other job opportunities – a decision largely dependent on his or her personality.

Besides career plans, personality imposed direct effects on such practices as acculturation for hotel GMs as well. For expatriate hotel GMs, the progress of acculturation was highly reliant on the personality of the hotel GM as well as the previous working experience in the same country. An illustration was the adaptation by the expatriate hotel GMs to the "face" concept in Asia. Directly rebuking the mistakes of the hotel owner, more so in owner-managed hotels, was considered to be highly unfavourable and may be detrimental to the tenure of the GM. Yet whether to employ a more diplomatic stance in face of such situations was a personal choice by the GM. A rich experience in working in the relevant countries would definitely help in facilitating such an attitudinal change.

4.3.1.2 Personal Agenda of the Hotel GM

The emergence of a personal agenda along the tenure of hotel GM was controversial. It was arguable that the personal agenda of a GM, such as the over-enthusiastic participation in some industrial, governmental or quasi-governmental organizations, to secure a personal network, would be detrimental to all other parties. The personal agenda *may* create an all-win situation, for the GM, the hotel owner, the hotel management company and the organizations. This was only possible if the GM was highly capable without any loss of focus on the business of his or her hotel. The use of the hotel's resources should

be avoided and the personal attitude of goodwill should be kept up. This kind of all-win situation was suggested by Participant R:

> "......participation in some industrial and governmental organizations, while it may be for personal networking or personal concerns on his career. A capable GM can create an all-win situation, with himself, the hotel owner and the [hotel] management company. But it's important to avoid using the hotel's resources. Good business ethics are significant as well."

In an ideal situation the interests of all parties could be well-balanced, bringing benefits to all parties. The possible benefits of this were seconded by Participant A. The expansion of the social circle of the hotel GM may nevertheless be related to the hotel business, directly or indirectly. For instance, a hotel GM may be invited to a social gathering where he would get to know some other invitees working for a major financial institution, a possible source of hotel guests in the future, even if the gathering was not meant to be strictly business-related. The degree of linkage to the hotel business would increase along the tenure. Such examples of personal agenda were also dependent on the general market environment, as mentioned by Participant S:

> "When the economy in Hong Kong is good, every hotel achieves the [occupancy rate] 90%, every hotel does well. It is only the hotel GM who decides whether to leave and whether the boss [hotel owner] can meet his requirements. Or, the owner does not like him, or cannot fulfil his requirements. But he can still generate profits, continuously even without striving, at 90%, so that he, after several years, may become bored and look for outside job opportunities, or leave. If there is loss, then he has to leave for sure."

However beneficial such networking events could be, Participant H cautioned that a hotel GM should put the interests of the hotel ahead of any personal networking should possible conflicts become foreseeable. It was also possible for a hotel GM to exhibit personal opportunism after the phases of **Familiarizing and Learning**, and **Reforming**

and Responding, in which aggressively building a personal network was a part of elevating one's fame and interests.

The attitude towards networking could be considered as a part of an industry tradition. As Participant L indicated, that "traditional" hotel GMs, who were predominantly Germans and Swiss, were more used to a hands-on approach in the management of hotels, while their counterparts from America may concentrate more on the external and personnel networking.

The speculation of a personal agenda in the tenure of hotel GM could happen in everyday managerial decisions. Some hotel GMs, with the knowledge that the tenure may only last for a several years, opted for short-term and low-involvement projects for boosting the gross operating profits (GOP), and thus higher bonus for the hotel GM. Eventually the service quality and the requirements of the hotel owner could be adversely affected.

4.3.1.3 The Complexity of Personal Characteristics on the Hotel GM's tenure

The effect of the personality of a hotel GM on his or her tenure was a complicated issue. There was neither right nor wrong, nor good nor bad personality of the hotel GM. The personality interacted with some other determinants such as the operational situation of the hotel, its ranking and performance, the calibre of the staff, the situation of the hotel, the human resources, the social and economic environment and their mutual interactions. While the personality may be unalterable, it was paramount for a hotel GM to manipulate and adjust his or her management style correspondingly to the hotel situation in order to deliver the best results. Personal traits were seen as important in decisions involving higher risks. Risk aversion may set in to avoid the uncertainty over the possibility of success. In the long run, as Participant L asserted, the strategies, teams, products, sales and leadership account for more in the mid- to long-term of the tenure.

4.3.2 Organizational Culture of the Hotel Management Company

A hotel GM employed by a management company was expected to follow the corporate culture of the management company. However noticeable the effect on the tenure of a hotel GM could be, its impact to the hotel GM was predicted to be of a lesser extent than that of the hotel owner because of a likely extant working relationship. Understandably a hotel managed by an international hotel management company nurtured a more international corporate culture, while one managed by local hotel owners had a more locally-oriented culture.

Participant M noted that the cultural orientation of the hotel owner weighed much more in affecting the tenure and the decision-making process of the hotel GM. That of the management company did so more on the everyday operations of the hotel.

The organizational culture of the hotel management company could manifest itself in various aspects. For instance, some hotels focused more on cost control than fulfilling customer needs. Changes on such focus required a period of familiarization and accustomization for a hotel GM when he or she migrated from one hotel group to another. Participant C proposed that culture exerted a more significant role over the determination of characteristics along a hotel GM's tenure.

In addition to the attribution to the institutional aspects of organizational culture, executives working at the hotel management company also played an influential role in the shaping of the organizational culture. An illustrative example was the presence of "in-group" versus "out-group", pre-employment association, reliance on trust, predecessor-successor relationship, the patriarchal decision-making pattern, role of relational predisposition and other organizational phenomena in hotels of heavy Chinese context. It is notable that such personality dependency of the culture could be extended to that of the management company. The delicate positioning and phenomena of "in-group" and "out-group" were elaborated by Participant R:

> *"Of course the trust [by the hotel management executive] rests on the capabilities of the hotel GM. Trust may already be there because he (the hotel management executives) may already be a business associate of the hotel GM before the GM is*

employed......the GM would be treated as of the "in-group". For outsider (GM employed from an external source), he (the hotel management executive) would consider him as of "out-group" and would not trust him [the hotel GM]. "

The extent of centralization in decision-making was another factor in moulding some characteristics of a hotel GM's tenure. In a highly centralized hotel management company, common in owner-managed hotels locally, a hotel GM experienced a lower sense of responsibility by the hotel with regard to his or her low span of influence.

Compliance to systems, standard procedures and policies in a hotel also constituted part of the values, practices and in general an institutional environment in these companies. These values and practices may not necessarily be written down in such a way that they could be explicitly taught or enhanced. Yet it was the individuals' reaction toward the systems and standardization which represented the organizational culture.

Participant H suggested that any hotel GMs had to recognise the organizational culture of the hotel management company positively before his or her own capabilities could be substantiated.

4.3.3 Relationships with and Satisfaction of the Hotel Management Company

Relationship with the hotel management company was of high importance because the company was the direct employer of the GM. On a practical level, such relationships were rendered as an interpersonal relationship with the executives in the company. One of the primary pre-requisites for a successful relationship resided in the achievement of performance benchmark by the hotel GM. The relational factor exerted impact over the proposals by the GM and the interpretation of "success". More substantially, as pointed out by Participant L, the common reasons behind a hotel GM's ending a tenure or starting a new tenure in another property or host country, lay most heavily in decisions by the corporate office of the hotel management company, as follows:

"The most common reasons behind a hotel GM's ending a tenure or starting a new tenure in another property or host country are the e decisions by the corporate office."

In Chinese owner-managed hotels, Participant R reported that the personal relationship with the immediate supervisor to the hotel GM and the trust between them were particularly crucial. The level of trust directly determined whether the hotel GM's proposals, such as assignment of senior hotel staff or high-capital projects, would be approved. A lack of trust of the hotel GM would also shatter the line of authority as perceived by the GM's subordinates. Such significance of the relationship with the hotel management company was emphasised by Participant R:

"The relationship with the managers at the management company is very important because whether your proposals and plans will be accepted depends on it."

The trust by the hotel management executive was shaped by (i) the capabilities and personality of the hotel GM. While it may be argued that trust was not in play during the initial stage of the tenure, the hotel management executive may already be a business associate of the hotel GMs and may even be considered as part of the "in-group". A status smacking of cronyism may be crucial to the employment of the hotel GM in the first place. Further, it could be considered as fulfilling self-agenda, actualisation of authority and nurturing of the hotel GM as a successor for the hotel executives. For the hotel GM with whom there was no pre-employment relationship, the hotel management executive would consider him or her as of the "out-group" with a minimal level of trust.

Against common wisdom, the subjective perception by the hotel management executives on the performance benchmarks may override numerical results and interpretation, according to Participants D & Y. Further, the favourable flair of a hotel GM can be considered as "unfavourable" if such capabilities are being considered as a challenge to the leadership of the hotel owner. Such influence by the hotel owner can also be

witnessed in the appointment of staff so that the "fit" between a staff member and the post would be interpreted subjectively.

A GM can demonstrate his or her loyalty and respect to his or her supervisor by seeking advice in the decision-making processes, as the expectations and decision-making processes were sometimes based on the personal vision of the executives, highlighted by Participant R. Perceived capability and trust could be built by the hotel GM's taking the same stance as the supervisor's in some crucial managerial issues. Eventually an originally "out-group" GM may become an "in-group" member to a certain hotel management executive. Such trust, however, was contingent on the specific hotel executives rather than the post. This was how the mechanism in which the two essential artefacts, trust and business performance, affected the tenure of the hotel GM.

In the context of a hotel GM working for a hotel management company, the hotel GM usually acted as an "ambassador" to fulfil the requirements of all parties. Difference in opinions should always be respected and communicated between the various parties, and making compromises and accommodating differences should be considered. Participant C stressed the importance of the balance in the tripartite relationship:

> "A hotel GM must balance out the interest of the management company and the hotel owner. He cannot be perceived as inclined towards either side"

Such a balance of the interests across various stakeholders to the hotel GM was unanimously agreed to by different participants. Participants A, C, D, H, L, M and R cited that this was largely dependent on the personality, talent and chemistry created by the hotel GM. The tripartite relationship was considered to be a complex one for a GM, with the need to balance and reach consensus between the hotel management company and the hotel owner.

4.3.4   Relationships with and Satisfaction of the Hotel Owner

A favourable relationship with the hotel owner was another crucial factor. Participant Y mentioned that the relationship-maintaining practice made up for nearly sixty percent of the duty time for hotel GMs.

Even in the circumstance of a tripartite situation, a harmonious relationship with the hotel owner should at least be able to lessen any possible conflicts between the three parties. A GM was usually judged by whether he or she was able to fulfil the requirements of the hotel owner. At least on the numerical performance results, the requirements of both the hotel management company and the hotel owner should align with each other. A "good" relationship could be mirrored by the trust of and the degree of delegation of autonomy to the hotel GM. For a hotel GM provided with sufficient support from the owners, his or her personal management style can be applied to the operations. The fostering of such a good relationship took time and due attention. Such subtlety as the "face" concept and the institutional impact of the appointment of management executives could be influential. Participant C noted the following:

> "The hotel GM has to build trust with the [hotel] owner. But it takes time before the performance proves itself. It takes a long time but will last long for Asian owners. Trust can lower the possibility of conflict and being fired."

The GM's projects and management style could only be extended if not in conflict with the existing policies and systems, and the corporate image. This was a perfect example of reaching a balance between the interests of a hotel management company and owner. They may have divergent requirements and interests concerning such organizational issues as public listing schedule, boost to property value, financial return, and branding development. Other possible conflicts of interests included business outcomes versus the ranking and **brand image of the hotel, corporate image and the standard of service quality**. Since the subjectivity in the judgment of the performance of the hotel GM could exist in both the hotel management company as well as in the hotel owner, the balance of interests seemed more important.

As per Participant H, the relationship orientation between the hotel GM and the hotel owner should always be "co-operative". However, it did not readily mean that the hotel GM was to adhere strictly to the instructions of the hotel owner without exceptions. Conversely, it was essential for a hotel GM not to blame the hotel owners for management problems. The optimal attitude towards the relationship with the hotel owner should be "compromise" and "consensus-oriented", which demanded the diplomatic and management skills of the hotel GM. Two other Participants, S and A, reflected on the practice of compromise and consensus respectively:

"Then it is necessary to compromise his [the hotel GM's] style and character to follow the boss and see whether the boss believes in the idea. For those with one to two properties, it is common for the GM to compromise and adhere to the preference and decisions of the owners."

"The relationship between the [hotel] GM and the corporate head office, and [that] with the hotel owner should be an "ambassador" in fulfilling the requirements of all parties, with compromise which is possible......Difference in opinions should be taken care of and communicated across the various parties. GM has to get ready for compromise and consideration of the benefits [to the various] parties. Of course, there are both good and bad times in the relationships with the stakeholders. The sense of harmony then [amongst all the stakeholders] is important."

In Hong Kong, the influence of the hotel owner on the operations of the hotel was thorough, according to Participant S. The hotel owner was commonly the decision-maker in projects with large capital investment. It was more common for a hotel GM to compromise and adhere to the preference of the owners. The influence was even seen in the everyday operations of the hotel such as the appointment of senior staff to the hotel. The growing influence of the hotel owner was also due to the intense competitive environment amongst the international hotel management companies, so that

catering to the wishes of the hotel owners was common for securing management contracts. Such an expanding influence of the hotel owner was balanced by the fact that some hotel owners lacked expertise in hotel operations. There was illustrated well by Participant S:

> *"However, at present, for the Mainland China and Hong Kong, there is a trend, because of the intense competition, that even the large hotel management companies are influenced by the owners, but unlike in the owner-managed hotels where the owners have the absolute authority; they would try to accommodate. For example, with respect to the room, on which there is standard on the size, the owner may leave it to the management company to decide whether to accept [a certain room size or not]. The management companies start to cater to the wishes of the owners. "*

A good relationship with the hotel owner, however, did not guarantee an extensive tenure. The tenure of a hotel GM was under constant review. It was also subject to a host of factors such as the subjective perception of the hotel owner, the sheer "degree of fondness", and the GM's career opportunities, career plan and personal interest. Hotel owner was influential to the tenure upon critical points as such the resignation of the GM, new assignment or retention. In short, the hotel owner held a "hire and fire" stake, as per Participant S, in the tenure of a hotel GM. Participant L highlighted that

> *".......a hotel GM should re-invent himself or herself and continuously, remain competitive and conscious over the changes ".*

4.4 Signs of Decline and Inertia to Change

After succeeding in reform, it was natural for a GM to sustain good performance and tenure. Yet the prolongation of a hotel GM's tenure was anticipated to breed unfavourable conditions for the hotel owner. Cited by Participant S, with the perspective of hotel owner's representative, long serving hotel GMs were often seen to lack innovation and enhancement to the management and operational practices. Even

with reforms, a hotel GM was likely to exhaust them in a period of three to four years after first assuming the tenure. Further performance boosts would be hard, according to Participant H. The hotel GM would act rather as a "business maintainer".

Opportunism was another phenomenon exhibited by a GM after a prolonged period of tenure. Lax practice and over-delegation to the subordinates were common. As above, some hotel GMs chose job rotation, working in the corporate office, starting private businesses or participating in some industrial organizations. Participants C, H, R and Y all cited these phenomena. Assuming that the hotel owner or hotel management company may or may not fulfil his or her expectations, even upon good performance, a hotel GM could seek a new job with another hotel owner or hotel management company. Ultimately the hotel GM would be dismissed or resign.

According to Participant H, the lack of continuous enhancement was anticipated to be the outcome of two facts – the repetitive nature of the everyday job of a hotel GM and the thorough understanding of every aspect of the job after three to four years. Having only slight diversity in everyday duties diminished the enthusiasm and consciousness towards the job. Stagnation and complacency thus set in. Participant H cited the following for the reasons of complacency:

> *"The job nature of [hotel] GM can be repetitive. This is the case if a GM has been [on board] for three to four years. The GM will experience lack of motivation and awareness towards the job."*

For example, the everyday routine of a hotel GM included the briefing sessions in the morning with the sales team and the department heads, followed by the reporting sessions in the afternoon. The *anticipated rewards* from further betterment played also a part. Hotel GMs would speculate that even further betterment may yield limited rewards. In an illustrative example given by Participant S, a hotel GM working for a small local management company with an advancing performance may only lead to a rise in salary. Increased responsibilities or higher ranks may not be possible because of the organic growth limitation in a local hotel chain, as compared to international hotel groups. In

spite of the unfavourable prolonged tenure, some hotel GMs opted for re-examining improvements and changes continuously.

In conclusion, the research participants agreed that the tenure for a hotel GM proceeded according to the phases in the form of a "life cycle".

4.5   Characteristics of the Various Phases of Life Cycle of Tenure
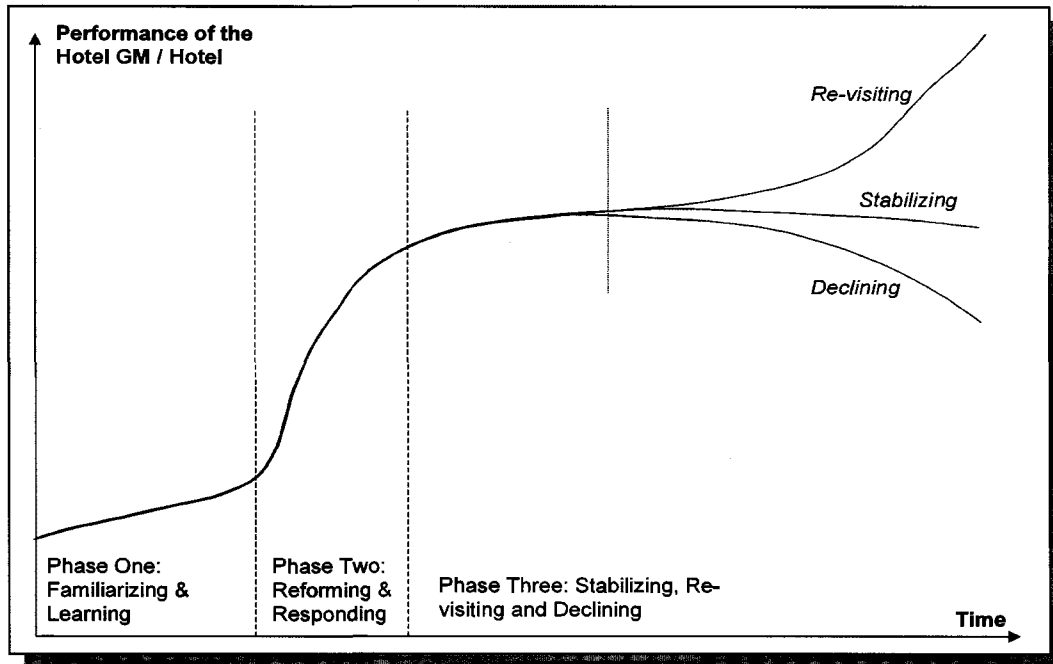
Figure 4.1   A Graphical Representation of the Life Cycle of Hotel GM with the Constituting Phases

Phases	Familiarizing and Learning	Reforming and Responding	Stabilizing, Re-visiting and Declining
Performance of the Hotel and the Hotel GM	Increasing	Increasing at a faster rate	A variety of possibilities: from stagnating, slowly increasing to declining
Characteristics	- Usually lasts for months if not years - Learning about the various functions in the hotel - Local market information is essential - Performance measured against the market benchmark metrics	- Primary and secondary reform - From apolitical to political involvement in the reform - Intending to bring (i) human resources; (ii) policies and (iii) mode of operations in line with the hotel GM's own management style - Upon well-performing, a hotel GM would struggling between whether to stay or aiming for higher career goal	- The divergence in the performance is mainly due to the various career strategies adopted - The major clue is whether "continuous improvement" is amongst the themes of career - A growing concern by the hotel over the different performance metrics of the hotel - Greater autonomy towards the time and effort spent on the core business - Trust between the hotel owner and the hotel GM is player an ever-important role in the decision-making and

			the career path of the hotel GM
			• Some unfavourable phenomena such as lack of innovation, complacency, boredom, opportunism, favouritism, or higher equity may be witnessed
Length Determination	• The pace at which the hotel GM is to get familiarized with the internal of and external environment to the hotel	• How fast the primary and secondary reform intended is completed • How much the reformed forms, structures and procedures are in line with the management style of the hotel GM	• Whether continuous improvement is employed • Learning about the various functions in the hotel
Transition	• The completion of familiarizing with both the internal and external environment • The objectives of the initial intentional changes have been met • Training as required has been completed	• The reform being in line with the desired and management style of the hotel GM • "Stability" has been reached • Accustomization to the everyday routine of the job has been witnessed • External job or career opportunities have begun to emerge	• The hotel GM being dismissed, or he or she resigns voluntarily. It is also possible that this end is sustaining
Effect of the Development Stage of Hotel	• The degree of complexity and systematicity in the procedures and standards of the hotel	• The flexibility in implementing reform against the old practices and personnel requirements	• The establishment of human resources practices on hotel GM's tenure • The availability of ready replacement for hotel GM's post

4.6 Ethnographical Note by the Researcher

The experience of the researcher in the hotel industry began in the 1970s when the researcher was the Financial Controller of a well-established conglomerate listed in Hong Kong with business coverage throughout Asia. Since then, the researcher has been highly involved in the property investment and development, and their strategies, for several

public-listed conglomerates with ownership of hotel properties managed under a number of prestigious hotel brands including Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton, Beverley Wiltshire, Delta, Furama, Century and Majestic. From 1998 to 2001, the researcher was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the hotel arm of a public-listed conglomerate in Hong Kong, directing the two core businesses of the group in (i) hotel ownership and (ii) investment in hotel management companies. Throughout the experience of the researcher as a hotelier, he has witnessed the rise and fall of the hotel business of several conglomerates, from the acquisition, investment and management of a large number of hotel properties managed by world-renowned management companies to the divestment from the hotel properties for corporate and financial restructuring. The researcher has been a witness, as the chief executive of some listed companies, as well in some overwhelming economic upturns and downturns, to events such as the booming of the worldwide stock and property markets, and the rocketing of the economy in Hong Kong in the 1970s to 1990s, the tremendous impact of the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and that of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) on the general business and the economy and, specifically to the current research topic, how such dramatic upturns and downturns have effected their impact on the hotel industry in Hong Kong.

In the perspective of the researcher as the hotel owner's representative, monitoring not only the hotel property investment and development strategies of the companies, but also the tenures of a number of hotel general managers (GMs), there are five noticeable and noteworthy phases in the course of the tenure of a hotel GM, as witnessed from the *personal experience* of the researcher.

1. **Familiarisation** – the first phase in which the hotel GM becomes familiar with, and learns from, the environment, the local business environment across various aspects, the stakeholders (hotel owner, executives from the hotel management company, customers and employees) and the operations.

2. **Primary Changes** – the second phase in which changes pertaining to the "hardware" of the operations, such as fixtures, placement and installations, are

made. The majority of such changes are non-political and do not involve interpersonal relationships.

3. **Secondary Changes** – the third phase in which changes ranging from human resources allocation to local business strategies are made. Some of these changes may involve political or interpersonal implications.

4. **Public Responsibilities and Opportunism** – the fourth phase in which a hotel GM would be more actively participating in public duties, such as those of industrial bodies or the government. Understandably the personal and social networking of the hotel GM would be extended, and the time spent in the duties as the hotel GM would be lessened.

5. **End of a Tenure** –this is the last phase in which a turning point in the tenure of a hotel GM is witnessed. As the increase in the public responsibilities or opportunism may not necessarily be inauspicious to the determination of job performance of or the career path of a hotel GM, no matter what the perspective of the hotel owner or the hotel management company, this last phase in a tenure may see a promotion or dismissal of the hotel GM, which can be voluntary or involuntary.

4.7 Chapter Summary

For hotel owners, there are noticeable phases in the tenure of a hotel general manager (GM). In the phase of **familiarization**, which usually last for the first three to four months, the hotel owner was to "pat the hotel GM's back" and make him feel comfortable and try to provide him with trust and support. The hotel owner delivered the message that "this property is a place where you can demonstrate your capabilities and do whatever to prepare for better performance". The hotel owner provided a good environment for the hotel GM to settle down and bring in changes that are in line with his paradigm – suggestion to change.

In the phases of **primary changes and secondary changes**, the performance of the hotel, such as the sales and revenue, was not yet a major concern for the hotel owner. Hotel GMs would come up with some minor changes, but whether such changes were strongly supported in financial terms by the hotel owner depended on whether there was trust. Trust depended on the GM's character, overall presentation and whether the proposed changes were in line with the ideas of the hotel owner or whether there were any perceived wrongdoings.

In the subsequent phase of **Public Responsibilities and Opportunism**, beyond the possibilities of the hotel GM's taking up public office, duties and possible opportunism, the hotel owner started to demonstrate their concern for hotel performance, market condition, brand and corporate image. A hotel owner was also likely to exercise his control over the effort and time on which the hotel GM is focusing on the business of the hotel. It was also in this phase that clashes between the hotel owner and the hotel GM would emerge. The relationship and trust between the hotel owner and the hotel GM was thus crucial. Provided that the relationship between the hotel owner and the hotel GM was fine, trust being strong and a general consensus of opinions, it was expected that the hotel owner would be co-operative.

In the final phase of **End of a Tenure** for the hotel GM, there were various possible actions by the hotel GM, dependent largely on a large number of factors. They included the relationship between the hotel owner and the hotel GM, whether there were suitable candidates as successors, the performance, and so on, in an interactive framework.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, in-depth discussion of the determinants and factors of hotel GM's tenure, including industrial, socio-cultural and personal factors, in the context of the hotel industry in Hong Kong is to be made. The impact of the phenomenon of multiple phases on the "life cycle" and the periodicity of such phases across tenures of hotel GM, shall be studied. The advancement of the hotel GM's tenure shall be examined with respect to these determinants and factors which are posited to emerge from the three-phase tenure framework for "achieving career aims" of the hotel GM, as derived in Chapter Five.

5.1   A Re-visit to the Research Questions

With the research findings as in Chapter Five, it is essential to review how well the findings answer the grand tour questions and sub-questions of the research as set out below:

Grand tour questions:

1. *Is there a time-phase perspective in the tenure of hotel general managers in Hong Kong? If so, what are the phases and do they form a periodic cycle themselves in the form of a "life cycle"? What are the characteristics of each of these phases?*

2. *What are the determinants and what is the degree of correlation of each of these determinants to the evolvement of the phases and life cycle of the tenure of hotel general manager in Hong Kong?*

Sub-questions of the grand tour questions:

3. *What are the roles played by the human resources determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers?*

4. *What are the roles played by the organizational determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers?*

5. *What are the roles played by the psychological determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers?*

6. *What are the roles played by the socio-cultural or socio-political determinants of the life cycle of the tenure of hotel general managers?*

7. *Are there any other individuals, bodies or factors playing part in the tenure of the hotel general manager and in each of its phases?*

5.2   A Summary of the Major Findings with respect to the Research Questions

The major sub-categories and themes which emerged from the research findings closely correspond to the research questions.   They affirm the presence of time-phase features in every tenure of hotel GMs, as well as such across various tenures.   They also locate the determinants of various classifications.   In essence, the life cycle of the tenure of hotel GMs is constituted by three phases, with a graphical representation given as follows:

- Phase One: Familiarizing and Learning

- Phase Two: Reforming and Responding

- Phase Three: Stabilizing, Re-visiting and Declining

Central Category – "Achieving
Career Aims"

Familiarizing and
Learning

Reforming and
Responding

Stabilizing and
Re-visiting

Declining

A New "Life Cycle" of Tenure
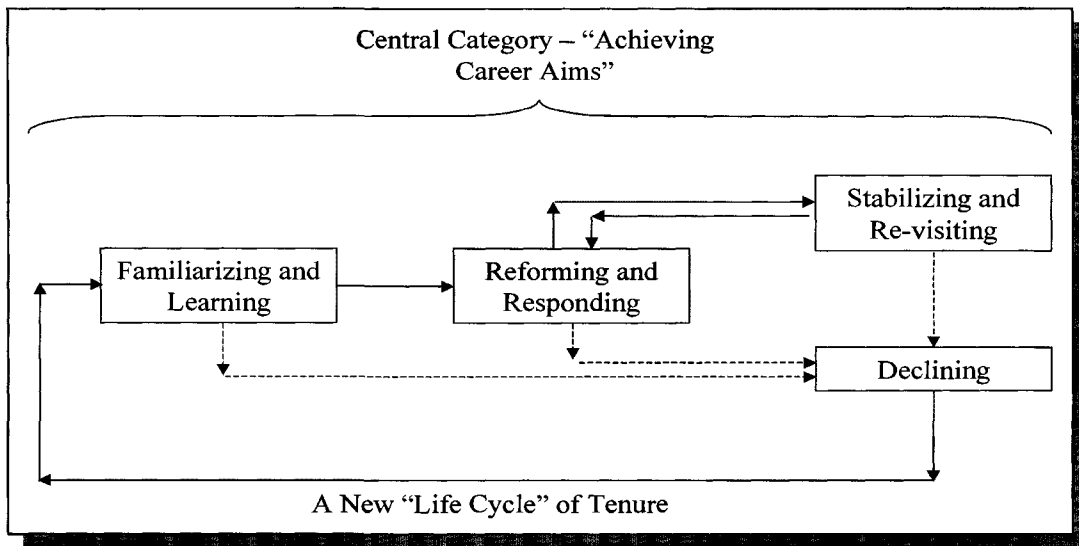
Figure 5.1   *The Life Cycle of Hotel GMs and the Constituting Phases of the Tenure of Hotel General Managers*

The naming of the themes, some of which have originated from the *in-vivo* codes by the research participants resides in (i) the actions taken by the hotel GMs (the phase of Familiarizing and Learning, Reforming and Responding, Re-visiting); and (ii) job performance (the phases of Stabilizing, Declining). It is notable, however, that the job performance of hotel GM can be reflected by the hotel performance. The hotel performance will thus sometimes be the point of interest in later discussion.

The commonest pattern of progression starts with a slowly increasing performance with learning, followed by a more rapidly increasing performance, with reforming, before it stabilizes and declines.

Besides the implications of the names of the various phases, one should also pay special attention to the fact that the phases do not necessarily proceed linearly – (i) there is a suggestion of shortcuts from one phase to another, namely from the first phase of Familiarizing and Learning, or Reforming and Responding to the phase of Declining, and; (ii) *status quo* being maintained in the manner of a "circulation" between two phases, such as the circulation between the phases of Reforming and Responding, and Stabilizing

and Re-visiting. This kind of non-linear phenomena includes the sudden change to a performance decline from any of the previous phases due to a wealth of reasons, such as a soured relationship with the owner, economic downturn, and so on.

In reverse, the change from stabilized or increasing performance to decline is not essential for hotel GMs. If hotel GMs can maintain revisiting and reforming of the areas which need improvement, the performance can be maintained if not boosted continuously.

The above two characteristics of the phases of life cycle can be best illustrated by examples given by the research participants. For instance, according to Participant L, the prime objectives of some hotel GMs are to "*reinvigorate various hotel properties every several years or so*". If a hotel GM fails to do so by adhering to the old practices of his or her predecessors, the performance of the hotel may see a decline. This is due to unresponsiveness towards the market change, accompanied by a shortcut to the Phase of Declining. On the other hand, as per Participant R, the phase of Declining is not a must for every hotel GM because continuous improvement exists with a to-and-fro relationship between the phases of Familiarizing and Learning, and Reforming and Responding. An excellent industrial example is Kurt Wachtveitl, the General Manager of the world-famous The Oriental Bangkok in Thailand for nearly forty years (The Institutional Investor, 2005) and yet the hotel is continuously receiving industrial awards and accolades for excellence over a variety of measurements.

There are several possibilities for the completion of one tenure life cycle. It can be a voluntary arrangement, internal transfer to another host country, working in another hotel management company; or involuntary dismissal.

From the results in the preceding chapter, these determinants affect more than one of the three phases, but the affect of a determinant is usually strongest in a certain phase. There is thus a need to study the relative weight between the determinants across the three phases. Because of the relative weight and its transient nature, a framework for the determinants would facilitate a systematic understanding of them. It is useful as well in categorising the determinants.

5.3 Life Cycle Phases of Hotel GMs

The term of "life cycle" is an analogous term from marketing (Bass, 1969), first denoting both the progression and the phenomena under a GM's tenure. It also means the general trends of the progression, and certain phenomena will happen in not only one tenure but repeat themselves in various tenure of hotel GMs with different hotels.

5.3.1 Phase One - Familiarizing and Learning

This phase starts from the first day of a hotel GM's new tenure. The research participants reported diverse duration, ranging from months to years. Added to this diversity of duration is the lack of confirmative empirical data, although Miller & Shamsie (2001) reported that it lasted for several years. The variation of the duration of this phase suggests the presence of various factors contributing to the phase duration.

The findings on the "learning" theme and determinants in the phase of **Familiarizing and Learning** correspond to the concluding statement by Henderson, Miller and Hambrick (2006) and Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) that the learning is about the "jobs, organizations, and environments" associated with the GM. There are, as well, the **"task"** and **"relationship"** environments. The research participants also reported such environments It can be hypothesized that the "task" and "relationship" environments and the "jobs, organizations, and environments" as denoted by Henderson, Miller and Hambrick (2006) and Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) can conceptually form a two-dimensional classification to the learning regime by hotel GM in a tenure, as follows:

	From personal to impersonal →		
	Jobs	Organizations	Environments
Task			
Relationship	Classification of the nature of learning		
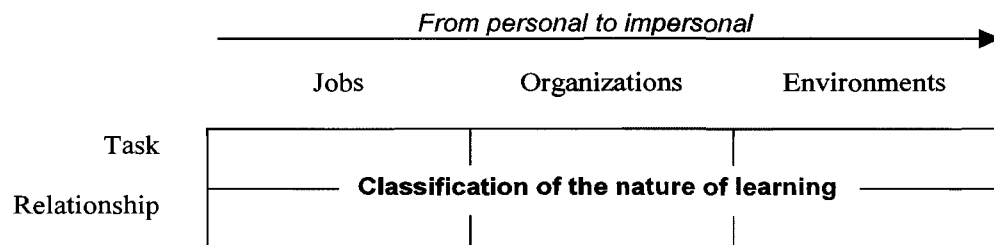
It can be deduced that *learning*, a major theme of this phase, focuses on the **task and relationship environment** of this new tenure. For learning on the **task environment** in

a new tenure, the routines enable the GM to become familiar with the new task environment. The systemic nature of the routines and the external environmental factors, the targeted market segments, customer profile, and major industrial contacts may be similar (Gabarro, 1987; Greiner and Bhambri, 1989).

In short, hotel GMs *with horizontal, intra-group or intra-segment experience* can have a shorter duration of learning than otherwise.

The learning over the **relationship environment** is closely related to the "significant others" of the hotel GM. The weight of learning to a GM was highlighted by Henderson, Miller and Hambrick (2006) who asserted that boards preferred candidates for the post of CEO with a flexible and contingent paradigm to those with long-standing ones. It was because firm performance can be partly determined by the degree of learning by the top executives (Miller and Shamsie, 2001). Such a paradigm can be interpreted as the responsiveness to the environment by learning. Two major actions are cited as the means of learning about the task environment by the hotel GMs – participation and experimentation. In participation, hotel GMs pay frequent visits to the hotel premises so that they can observe the operations of the hotel in detail, and work closely with the staff in decision-making and problem-solving. In this way, a hotel GM is conducting "learning by doing", a regime which is believed to be able to boost the performance of the hotel (Henderson, Miller and Hambrick, 2006).

Experimentation is another way of "learning by doing". It is common amongst hotel GMs who are keen to introduce reform and improvement. Experimentation is crucial because there is no single best answer for operational issues. Macroscopically, the dynamism of the market demands a correspondingly dynamic approach in the GM's strategies. Experimentation is a good tactic against market dynamism and changes.

A GM may be familiar with the host country or operations, by working experience in the country, ethnic or cultural association. They may be seasoned in various aspects such as the business environment, market situation and trends, business etiquettes, do's and don'ts, and so on, which make it easier for them to prepare for their new duties. Even

without previous knowledge, a high degree of internationalisation in some countries or cities (such as Hong Kong and Singapore) contributes to easier learning about the task and market environment for hotel GMs. The higher the degree, the higher is the proximity between the work and economic practices between these cities and the Western societies where the expatriate Western hotel GMs originate.

The "relationship environment" is the relationship between hotel GMs and their working partners. The three working positions of heaviest weight almost unanimously highlighted by the research participants included the financial controller (FC), the director of sales (DoS) and deputy general manager (DGM), the *in-vivo* term used by some of the research participants which is functionally equivalent to executive assistant manager (EAM).

In terms of organizational structure, the EAM and the DoS focus on the operations of the hotel, while the FC usually resides in the corporate office of the hotel management company. The FC holds a high stake in the reporting of the hotel GMs. These two working partners of a hotel GM, one in operations while the other is closer to the corporate office or the hotel owner, hint at a number of phenomena.

First of all, the close working relationship with the EAM, the right-hand man of the overall operations of the hotel, and the DoS, the person-in-charge of the revenue of the hotel, is believed to secure the collection of "environmental information" for a new general manager (Aguilar, 1967).

Another rationale behind the existence of these working relationships stems from the fact that the majority of the hotel GMs (87.5% according to Nebel, Lee and Vidakovic, 1995) are trained in only one functional department, most likely to be Food and Beverages (F&B) and Rooms Departments. This over-emphasis on certain functional departments limits the exposure of the hotel GMs to other hotel functions. Hotel GMs thus have to rely on the executive assistant manager and the director of sales for their expert input into everyday decisions. Naturally hotel GMs will put more effort and resources into the functional area with which he or she is most familiar.

The FC can also be senior to the hotel GM and a primary source of financial information to the GM. The working relationship between them is *in situ*. Besides being a source of information, the FC is essential in his or her role in acting as political support for the hotel GM. The appointment of the FC, regardless of the modes of operation, must be made with the hotel owner's blessing. In this respect, the hotel GM has to secure the resources, especially the political ones, through the FC.

Most importantly, Familiarizing and Learning should be present in every phase of the tenure of the hotel GM. Seemingly clear, the market positioning, customer segments and other operational facts are different from one hotel to another because of the organizational, geographical and national differences. Beyond these "task environment" for learning, the relationship environment is naturally different because of different personnel. Again, even for hotels managed by international hotel management companies, the change of tenure from one location to another for hotel GMs is usually accompanied by a change of hotel owner. Different relationships would thus emerge.

5.3.2 Phase Two: Reforming and Responding

Implementing change is a crucial task for hotel GMs. Yet, as noted by the research participants, change varies in terms of the magnitude and duration between one hotel GM and another. The indefinite duration and extent of change is a result of the intertwining effects of a wealth of factors.

Underlying the above observational and participative "learning" approaches in Phase One, there is a dilemma facing newly-arrived hotel GMs – the issue of whether to, and how far to follow the *in-situ* practices of the hotel GM's predecessors. Another dilemma is the inevitable comparison between the GM's performance and that of his or her predecessors. Such a comparison practically shapes the performance expectation by the executives at the hotel management company and the hotel owner (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin, 1988; Gorden and Rosen, 1981: 239).

Against the remarks made by the research participants, it is uncertain whether following the practices of a hotel GM's predecessor(s) is favourable or not. The subjectivity involved in performance determination and the relationship with the management company and owner add to the uncertainty.

The mandate designated by the executives at the management company or hotel owner, as well as the existent performance benchmark and problems, actually dictate the selection of the hotel GM. This is a phenomenon missing in the data from the research participants, but is believed to be in place even *before the tenure starts*. Some hotel owners thus nominate known business associates or confidantes as candidates for the hotel GMs.

The mandate defines the expectation and requirements by the hotel owner and the hotel management company. It covers what the hotel GM can and should do during the tenure. In terms of reform, the mandate may be translated into the limitations over possible change.

Most GMs can apply their managerial decisions in administering changes. Some hotel GMs follow closely the mandate of the hotel owner or hotel management company, and the practices of the predecessor(s). This can be considered as the first sense of "responding" as in the research theme. According to the research participants, such an adherence to the mandate may be made at the expense of the original goals of the hotel GM. A hotel GM may thus choose to minimize such jeopardy by introducing as few changes as possible if there is no discernible problem in adhering to the existing practices.

In hotels managed by international hotel management companies, the tenure of the hotel GM is also subject to certain human resources policies and systems. They may offer a safe harbour for the hotel GM against the risks involved in introducing changes or reforms. Free-riding" over the existing practices is a possible tactic in minimizing failure. In a further sense, ample change in repositioning a hotel, or a large-scale refurbishment, is more often driven by the corporate office for hotels managed by international hotel management companies.

While it may be argued that *reforming* may not necessarily be present for those long well-performing hotels, the dynamism in the hotel industry simply refutes this argument. For example, the rise of information technology, leading to the need for IT-enabled rooms for business travellers, is a latest requirement. Another illustrative example is the recent popularity of the spa service so that even business hotels have to dedicate resources for it. In short, the hotel industry is a dynamic industry in which reforming, beyond simply *responding*, is deemed to be essential to every GM.

5.3.3 Phase Three: Stabilizing and Re-visiting, and Declining

From the remarks made by the research participants, it can be deduced that there are three types of progress in this later phase of the hotel GM's tenure. As the name implies, stabilizing means that the performance of the hotel GM and the hotel reaches a stage where only limited fluctuation or growth is witnessed. Re-visiting is a pre-requisite for limited fluctuation or steady growth because it enables *responding* to the market situation. Or it is fundamental to the *reforming* effort by locating the areas where reform is needed. Without re-visiting, *Declining,* in the performance of both the hotel and hotel GM, will be witnessed. The persistent re-visiting of strategies and functions by hotel GMs, and thus **learning**, can safeguard against decline. This shows the close relationship between the three phases.

Yet for the same practice of re-visiting and learning, that of experienced hotel GMs is predicted to be more effective than that of their less-experienced counterparts (Miller and Shamsie, 2001; Miller, 1991). *Ceteris paribus*, the tenure of long-serving hotel GMs can witness an even further extension if continuous re-visiting is in place. It is notable, however, that the above is transient on the sustainability of a hotel GM's tenure and the dual relationship of hotel performance and learning.

In summary, in all of the phases of the hotel GM's tenure there are certain determinants and phenomena which are of particular significance, as tabulated below, and the detailed

relative significance between the determinants across the phases is given in section 5.5.2 of the paper.

Phases	Determinants of Particular Significance
Familiarizing and Learning	• Task focus • Past performance of the hotel • Requirements by the hotel owner • External environmental factors • Working partners • Knowledge about the host country and its operations • Organizational culture of the hotel owner company • Political environment • Development stage and positioning of the hotel
Reforming and Responding	• Problems of the hotel • Business performance of the hotel • External environmental factors • Relationship with and satisfaction by the hotel owner • Trust • Personal characteristics of the hotel GM • Systems, standard procedures and policies (including human resources policies)
Stabilizing, Re-visiting and Declining	• Business performance of the hotel • External environmental factors • Personal agenda of the hotel GM • Relationship with and satisfaction by the hotel owner • Trust • Personal characteristics of the hotel GM • Systems, standard procedures and policies (including human resources policies)

Either *Stabilizing* or *Declining* as a performance phenomenon will exist in the later phase of every hotel GM's tenure at a hotel. It is expected, however, that *re-visiting* is more likely to be demonstrated by hotel GMs whose performance is stabilizing.

5.4 Unification of Themes and Transition of Phases

5.4.1 The First Unifying and Core Group of Categories for the Determinants – Learning

Of all the determinants, "learning" by the hotel GM exerts a heavy weight on the tenure. The significance of "individual learning" to the continuation of the tenure across various phases can be understood as follows.

In the initial "familiarizing and learning" phase, learning about the internal details is an overarching task for hotel GMs. Failure to learn, especially the requirements of the executives at the hotel management company and those of the hotel owner, would likely pose an immediate threat to the tenure.

Upon entering the "reforming and responding" phase, the learning by the hotel GM focuses on two major areas. The first is the external market situation while the second area lies in the relationship intricacies and trust, particularly by the hotel owner.

Learning is a crucial part of "stabilizing and re-visiting" the phases because re-visiting is what is necessary in maintaining a continuous improvement over the hotel performance (Mitki, Shani & Meiri, 1997). Failure of continuous learning turns the performance into a decline.

5.4.2 The Second Unifying Group of Categories for the Determinants and the Transition of Phases – Weberian Perspective of Organizational Context

In spite of the fact that the determinants seem to be multifarious, they can be categorized into three sub-categories towards an embracing theme of "organizational context", according to the Weberian framework (Weber, 1978; Child, 2000).

Even in literature, some recent studies point to a significant new direction in studying the tenure of top managers. It is coherent with the categorization of the determinants to be presented hereby – the studying of the effects of macroenvironmental and industrial factors on the tenure (Henderson, Miller and Hambrick, 2006) with the addition by Hambrick (2007) of the consideration of cultural and institutional forces to the tenure.

Before the determinants are delineated in terms of the Weberian framework on "organizational context", a discussion of the framework has to be made. According to Weber (1978), there are two types of social forces – **materials systems** and **ideational system**. Materials force is of an economic and technological nature and effected through "markets and programs of technological innovation" (Child, 2001: 45) while ideational force is cultural, religious or political in nature and represents culture and norms (Child, 2001: 58). According to Child (2001), **social institutions** formed the third system of contextual forces on organizations. They comprise "educational, family, legal and religious" (Child, 2001: 45) institutions which rest on the concept of "competence-forming, service-providing or regulatory" (Child, 2001: 45).

The determinants can be housed under the Weberian-Child framework on organization context (Weber, 1978; Child, 2000) under which any organization is supposed to be under the impact of three bodies of forces – materials systems, ideational systems and social institutions (Child, 2000), which subsequently affect the "strategic choice and action" by the organization. Figure 5.2 is a conceptual diagram of the impact of the determinants, categorized into **materials, ideational** and **institutional** forces, on the tenure of hotel GMs (Child, 2001: 58).

The use of the Weberian perspective in Figure 5.2 is to try to understand the nature of the obtained determinants better. Certain determinants noted for their economic, monetary and interest nature are grouped as of the **"Materials Force"** on the GM's tenure. Other determinants are concerned with the more abstract nature of the influence, such as the interpersonal, psychological, cognitive or cultural nature, and they are grouped as the **"Ideational Force"**. The last is about the system, policies, standard or statutory influence of the tenure and they are grouped as the "**Institutional Force**". The link between the forces themselves has two meanings. Firstly they indicate that some of the determinants may be categorized according to more than one force, for instance, culture can be grouped under materials or ideational forces. Secondly it is concerned with the interaction between the forces themselves.

In addition to the grouping of forces, the key theme for the hotel GMs is to maintain a continuous **learning** on the forces by continuously studying the gaps and errors in the hotel and adjust the actions with respect to these forces, and reform and improve accordingly.

The use of the Weberian perspective follows a recent trend in studying the tenure of top executives in multiple perspective, such as the enhancement to the Upper Echelon Theory (Hambrick, 2007).

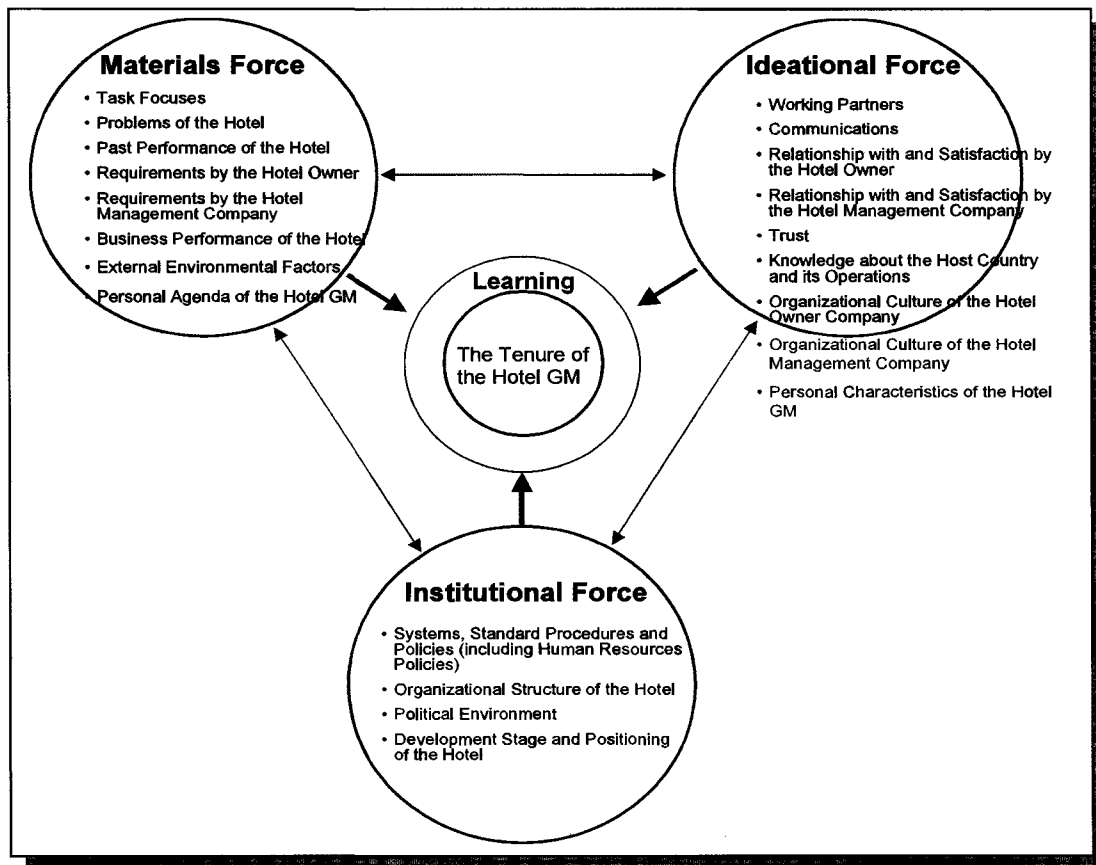*Figure   5.2 The Impact of the Determinants, Categorized into Materials, Ideational and Institutional Forces, on the Tenure of the Hotel GMs (extended from Child, 2001: 58)*

The categorization of the determinants into the three organizational contextual forces with their relative extent of influence as projected from the research data is tabulated as below. The relative extent is but descriptive and arbitrary manner,

	Familiarizing & Learning	Reforming & Responding	Stabilizing, Re-visiting / Declining
Material Forces			
Task Focuses	+++	++	+
Problems of the Hotel	++	+++	++
Past Performance of the Hotel	+++	++	+
Requirements by the Hotel Owner	+++	++	++
Requirements by the Hotel Management Company	++	++	++
Business Performance of the Hotel	++	+++	+++
External Environmental Factors	+++	+++	+++
Personal Agenda of the Hotel GM	+	++	+++
Ideational Forces			
Working Partners	++	+	+
Communications	++	+	+
Relationship with and Satisfaction by the Hotel Owner	++	+++	+++
Relationship with and Satisfaction by the Hotel Management Company	+	++	++
Trust	+	+++	+++
Knowledge about the Host Country and its Operations	+++	++	+
Organizational Culture of the Hotel Owner Company	+++	++	+
Organizational Culture of the Hotel Management Company	+	+	++
Personal Characteristics of the Hotel GM	+	+++	+++
Personal Agenda of the Hotel GM	+	++	+++
Institutionnel Forces			
Systems, Standard Procedures and Policies (including Human Resources Policies)	++	+++	+++
Organizational structure of the Hotel	++	+	++
Political Environment	+++	+	+
Development Stage and Positioning of the Hotel	+++	++	+

("+" denotes the strength or impact; "+", "++" and "+++" thus signify an increasing order of strength or impact)

With an understanding of the determinants' nature and their relative degree of impact on the tenure, it can be proposed that **the transition between any of the phases along the tenure of hotel GM is triggered by a reversal of the extent of the major contextual forces**. What is meant by "reversal of the extent of the forces" can be pragmatically understood as *"successful fulfilment, response or utilization, or, in reverse, the failure to fulfil, respond to or utilize the relevant forces so that such a force would become less relevant"*.

5.5 The Major Determinants and Phase Transition

5.5.1 The Major Determinants of Phase One and Its Transition

As from the results in Chapter Five, there are a number of determinants which govern the success of the Familiarizing and Learning actions by hotel GMs. They include:

	Human Resources	Organizational	Psychological	Socio-cultural / Socio-political
Material Forces				
Task Focuses		✓		✓
Past Performance of the Hotel		✓		
Requirements by the Hotel Owner		✓		✓
Ideational Forces				
Working Partners	✓	✓		✓
Communications	✓	✓		✓
The Knowledge about the Host Country and its Operations		✓	✓	✓
Organizational Culture of the Hotel Owner Company		✓		✓
Institutional Forces				
Organizational structure of the Hotel		✓		
Political Environment				✓
Development Stage and Positioning of the Hotel		✓		

The success of the first phase by the hotel GM is highly dependent on the **task focuses**. They are more usually than not imposed by the hotel management company or the hotel owner even before a hotel GM's tenure starts. For different hotels, the initial task focuses may be different – for instance, for poorly-performing hotels, the priority for a hotel GM may be to streamline the cost structure and cut the expenditure. While for well-performing hotels, the upfront tasks for hotel GMs may be to revamp and upgrade the brand image and hotel properties.

The diversity points to another significant determinant, the **past performance of the hotel**. These differences directly affect what are to be familiarized and learnt by the hotel GM. Further to the above examples, the hotel GM in the former has to be familiar with the finance executives at the hotel management company and hotel owner, and their targets and plans on a day-to-day basis. In the latter case, the hotel GM has to be

familiar with the targeted segments of the hotel, their demographics and psychographics. GMs have to work with marketers, contractors, and so on for repositioning or a revamp. Beyond the immediate past performance of the hotel, that of the more distant past also affects the **requirements of the hotel owner.** Inevitably the expectations of the hotel owner are derived from the past performance. The above diverse examples mentioned above concerning well- and poorly-performing hotels are illustrative. Yet it is also true that hotel owners of different backgrounds will naturally have different expectations. For hotel owners who are property developers, maximizing the return of investment is on the top of the agenda. A hotel owner who is traditionally a hotelier may focus more on maintaining the brand image of the hotel property under its portfolio. These two scenarios echo closely with the **Development Stage and Positioning of the Hotel** – the brand-building stage for new hotels and maximizing return and profits for well-developed ones; brand-image enhancing for higher-rated hotels and strengthening cash flow for medium- to low-rated hotels.

Nevertheless, the task focuses and requirements of the hotel owner are more than organizational. Neither of these determinants are usually explicitly expressed by the hotel executives, so that the hotel GMs need to be aware of the political relationship with the hotel owner. GMs have to additionally study the relationship with the hotel management company before such desired focuses and requirements can be pinpointed.

To work through the political agenda and to realize the task focus and requirements at the beginning of the tenure, a hotel GM has to rely on a number of peers, the **working partners** of a hotel GM. The discussion on the roles and significance of the FC to the GMs in this chapter is a good illustration of such socio-political roles played by these working partners. It is a must for a newly-arrived hotel GM to understand the socio-political relationship with these working partners. In building the relationship with them, the **organizational culture of the hotel owner** has to be well comprehended by the GMs not only because the hotel GM is new to the tenure. It is also because these key posts have invariably been made with the blessing of the hotel owner. The

organizational culture propensity, for instance, the degree of openness, control, being people- or result-oriented, as from Hofstede *et al.* (1990), and so on, will immensely affect how, and how well, a hotel GM perform in Phase One. Certainly, for hotels with different **organizational structure**, operations being owner-managed or assigned to an international hotel management company, the task focus, requirements, working partners, and so on, differ.

Seemingly it would be easier for a hotel GM who has a good **knowledge of the location of the hotel**. The phase of Familiarizing and Learning would be shorter in such a case because the hotel GM is more "connected" with the host country and the host hotel, and there is a lighter impact of cultural shock. Considerable knowledge about the host country means knowledge about the local **political environment**. It includes the roles played by the government, industrial organizations, and major relevant legislature and policies towards the hotel industry and the key personnel. While it may be less relevant to a developed city as Hong Kong, the political environment is in general a very essential aspect of the familiarizing and learning endeavour for hotel GMs in developing countries such as China.

A hotel GM has to secure and met the **task focuses** and **requirements by the hotel owner** before he or she can proceed to the next phase. These contribute to the performance appraisal of the hotel GM. It is possible only when the hotel GM has already obtained a good understanding on the more factual background of the tenure, such as knowledge about the organizational structure, political environment and positioning of the hotel, for instance. Yet a good relationship with the closest working partners, and immersing himself or herself in the organizational culture of the host hotel are both essential to achieving the tasks focuses and requirements.

According to the proposition earlier in the Chapter, that phase transition occurs when **there is a reversal of the extent of the major contextual forces**. In the phase of **"Familiarizing & Learning"**, the fulfilment of the requirements of the hotel owner, or business performance, would illustrate the competence of the hotel GM. Then the GM

will be ready for wider reforms to the extant strategies. In a negative sense, if a hotel GM is unsuccessful in securing sufficient knowledge about the host country or the operations, or in trying to learn about the organizational culture of the hotel owner, he or she may suffer from a cultural shock as to trigger an early exit from the tenure voluntarily.

5.5.2 The Major Determinants of Phase Two and Its Transition

The determinants which are the most highly relevant to the success of the Reforming and Responding actions by hotel GMs in this phase is as follows:

	Human Resources	Organizational	Psychological	Socio-cultural / Socio-political
Material Forces				
Problems of the Hotel		✓		
Business Performance of the Hotel		✓		✓
Ideational Forces				
Personal Characteristics of the Hotel GM			✓	
Relationship with and Satisfaction by the Hotel Owner				✓
Trust				✓
Institutionnel Forces				
Systems, Standard Procedures and Policies	✓	✓		✓

Every hotel operation has problems, however small or large. It is in the presence of problems that hotel GMs need to conduct **reform** in the hope of providing a remedy. In other words, the **problems of the hotel** govern what is to be included in the reforming initiatives by hotel GMs.

However, not every hotel GM is keen on reforming. Some hotel GMs, for the sake of "playing safe" and minimizing the risks incurred in introducing reforms which may fail, may choose to adhere to the mandate, the initial requirements, of the hotel management company or hotel owner. They are interested more in being the "business maintainer" of the hotel, rather than being the "business reformer". Other hotel GMs, especially the

younger ones as noted by the research participants, may be more aggressive in initiating reforms because of the wish to achieve conspicuous performance. That means the **personal characteristics** of the hotel GM play a part in determining whether reforming or responding is to be adopted, if not its success.

Despite the drive to initiate reform, hotel GMs usually have to face the hindrance imposed by the **Systems, Standard Procedures and Policies** of the hotel. In the case of international hotel chains, some of these systems, procedures and policies are set out by the headquarters. Little can be done, or reformed, by a hotel GM even though they may not suit the local environment of the hotel. At a more macroscopic level, these policies may dictate the authority, such as the financial limit of approval, given to a hotel GM. The stronger such systems, procedures and policies, the less a hotel GM can do or achieve in reforming and responding.

Before any reforms can be made by the hotel GM, hotel GMs have to secure a good **relationship with and satisfaction by the hotel owner**, no matter whether the hotel GM is working for a owner-managed hotel or one managed by an international hotel management company. Subsequently good terms with the hotel owner are essential to the further ascension to a considerable level of **trust** bestowed on the hotel GM. These pre-conditions are prominent where the reform involves high capital investment on which the owner has a high decision making power. Even providing that such reform is objectively feasible from a financial point of view, a soured relationship with the hotel owner may jeopardize the green light on such reform.

In the end, however, it is the **business performance of the hotel** which weighs heaviest in determining the success of the hotel GM in this phase of Reforming and Responding. In other words, it is a direct reflection of whether the reforms driven by the hotel GM are successful or not. Nonetheless, how "successful" is the performance, it is subject to the perception of the hotel owner and the management company. Paradoxically, a low performance can be considered as satisfactory, or a high performance may be considered as not satisfactory or insufficiently good. Such a subjective bias in the determination of

whether the performance of the hotel GM is highly related to the personal relationship between the hotel GM and the hotel owner and the management company.

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that both the trust and satisfaction bestowed upon the hotel GM by the hotel owner serve as the pre-requisites to enter into the later phase of the hotel GM's tenure.

In the phase of "**Reforming & Responding**", for example, if a hotel GM's attempt to secure the trust and support by the hotel owner is in vain, any major reforms with large financial commitment will become infeasible. The hotel GM will become a "business maintainer". In another illustration, if the hotel GM does not respond to the existing "problems of the hotel", his or her performance will become highly doubtful. Of course, further achievement concerning the "business performance of the hotel" means that the hotel GM is able to enter into the phase of performance stability.

5.5.3 The Major Determinants of Phase Three and Its Transition

A number of determinants are in play in the final phase of the tenure of hotel GMs. They include:

	Human Resources	Organizational	Psychological	Socio-cultural / Socio-political
Material Forces				
Personal Agenda of the Hotel GM			✓	
Ideational Forces				
Relationship with and Satisfaction by the Hotel Owner				✓
Trust				✓
Organizational Culture of the Hotel Management Company	✓	✓		
Institutional Forces				
Systems, Standard Procedures and Policies	✓	✓		

In this last phase of a GM's tenure, there are two predominant forces affecting its advancement. First of all, the combination of the **relationship with and satisfaction by the hotel owner** and the **trust** from the hotel owner still ranks highly in determining the

success of the GM. For hotel GMs who have been high performers, sustained support by the hotel owner in terms of finance and politics is essential to maintaining steady growth of the hotel. Conversely a poorly-performing hotel GM may be spared the risks of dismissal if he or she is highly trusted by the hotel owner so that the GM can reverse the decision by the hotel management company in turnover. An example by the researcher on how a mediocre hotel GM on the verge of being displaced can retain the post by securing sufficient support of the shareholding owners of the hotel, clearly illustrates this type of paradox.

Yet however well or poorly hotel GMs are performing, they must be subject to the **organizational culture of the hotel management company** and the **systems, standard procedures and policies**. For instance, policies of location rotation or assignment to a different host country every several years or so is in place in some hotel management companies. Yet it does not necessarily mean that international hotel management companies do not encourage long-serving hotel GMs.

As described by the research participants, well-performing hotel GMs may have the option of working continuously for the same hotel management company or hotel owner, in the hope of an advancement in the career path. These GMs can pursue other higher posts with another management company or an alternative career pursuit.

Conversely, an underperforming hotel GM may choose to stay with the same hotel management company or hotel owner until he or she is dismissed. Alternatively, he or she can make a change to their working style by continuously learning and improving the operations and strategies of the hotel so as to improve the performance of the hotel. Even in situations where a high degree of subjective appropriation in the performance of the hotel GM and hotel is involved, the personal choice, as the **personal agenda of the hotel GM**, is still one of the most decisive factors in this last phase.

Subsequently, the actions taken by the hotel GM are inevitably influenced by the personal agenda of the hotel GM. Keen participation by the hotel GMs in industrial or governmental organizations, for instance, is speculated to be an action by the hotel GMs

in extending personal networking. So is the case for long-serving hotel GMs who see little chance in further career advancement. Maintaining a stable performance level and mandate by the executives at the hotel management company or hotel owners may be a better option than aggressive reforms.

There are two determining factors on the transition of this last phase. First of all, the **systems, standard procedures and policies** may limit how long a hotel GM can serve in a single property and that a mandatory end of the current tenure is possible.

Another is the **trust** and **relationship with and satisfaction by the hotel owner**. It is evident from the above discussion that the hotel owners can have a very powerful impact on whether a hotel GM is to be retained or discharged. In essence, a soured relationship with the hotel owner can put an easy end to the tenure of a hotel GM.

In the **Stabilizing, Re-visiting or Declining** phase a GM resting on the complacency of favourable performance and disregarding learning will gradually see a deterioration of performance and an entry into the phase of decline. The emergence of events of massive scale, such as economic depression, will easily drive the stability in performance into decline.

In the setting of stabilization or a continuous boost to the performance, the hotel GM's expectations over personal benefits would be higher. The expectation, as a form of opportunism would prompt the hotel GM to end the tenure voluntarily in order to seek other job opportunities.

In the opposite situation, in which the performance of the hotel GM is witnessing a continuous decline, incurring discontent by the hotel management company or the hotel GM, the GM may then seek another job out owing to the continuously poor performance. Otherwise, a perpetual performance decline would eventually result in involuntary dismissal.

The above examples illustrates that "personal agenda of the hotel GM" is a major contextual force leading to phase transition. For hotel GMs with declining performance, the "business performance of the hotel" and the "requirements of the hotel GM" as major

contextual forces are also poised to trigger a phase transition. It is likely to be involuntary dismissal. The elevation of the "personal agenda of the hotel" counteracting the "trust" upon the hotel GM denotes the interaction between the materials, ideational and institutional forces.

5.6 Theory Building

5.6.1 A Growth Framework for Achieving Career Aims

With grounded theory, this research investigates the process of growth for hotel GMs in tenure evolvement in a single job assignment. The basis of the study lies in what hotel GMs would experience during the tenure. "Achieving career aims" is being recognized as the central process underlying the progression of tenure for hotel GMs. "Achieving career aims" practically delineates the "what, when" and, more importantly, "how and why" hotel GMs do for growth during the tenure. In another sense, the framework illustrates the actions and thoughts of the hotel GMs in the process of growth.

Upon assumption of a new tenure cycle, a hotel GM reflects on the opportunities and threats facing achievement of the current aims in his or her career. In greater detail, a hotel GM may define the conditions and pre-requisites for achieving the desired aims. To achieve them, a hotel GM has to get himself or herself familiar with the environment and to learn about the conditions and pre-requisites. Towards the aims, a hotel GM has to demonstrate his ability to fulfilling such common pre-requisites. Responding to the requirements and introducing reforms are part of the requirements. In the end, a hotel GM may boost his or her performance by re-visiting the strategies adopted. Or, a hotel GM may simply decline in performance.

5.6.2 Achieving Career Aims

Achieving career aims is a managerial and social process as per grounded theory. It concentrates on the endeavours and thoughts of a GM towards achieving the aims in their career. Such aims are not necessarily confined to a single tenure, assignment or a job

with a single employer. As described above, it is the "what, when, how and why" a hotel GM does to achieve the aims. With the meaning of "aim", "what one is hoping to achieve by a plan, action or activity" (Longman Press, 2000), its use is more on a transient and contingent basis than "goal", "something that one hopes to achieve in future" (Longman Press, 2000). This can be understood by the fact that the career aims of hotel GMs at the start of a tenure are not necessarily long-term.

Three phases in the process of achieving career aims are derived from the data collected from the research participants. Despite of the differences in the various aspects of hotel GM's tenure, they all delineate "how and what" hotel GMs do for the sake of growth.

In the three phases of "familiarizing and learning", "reforming and responding" and "stabilizing, re-visiting and declining", hotel GMs use various approaches to achieve career aims. In familiarizing and learning, hotel GMs learn about the conditions and pre-requisites for the career aims and get themselves familiar with the context and environment of these conditions and pre-requisites. In the second phase of reforming and responding, hotel GMs demonstrate their capabilities by introducing reform or responding to the requirements. In the last phase, some hotel GMs are able to achieve the initial aims by stabilizing their job performance and re-visiting the strategies. Nevertheless, some hotel GMs are to witness a decline in performance. In essence, the three phases describe the change of behaviour and thoughts of hotel GMs in achieving career aims.

5.7   Significance of the Research

There are two major areas of significance and contributions of the current research – academic significance and managerial significance. The evolvement of the hotel GMs' tenure, and the associated social process and phenomena, are anticipated to be highly complicated, individualized and distinctive. A qualitative research is thus employed so that the contextual factors can unfold towards a delineation of the evolvement. The context of the research includes the tenure of the hotel GM, in the industrial environment

in Hong Kong and a wealth of examples as given in the previous two Chapters. Grounded theory fits precisely the contextual complexities of the current research (Locke, 2001). Such context is applied roundly in the data collection process in which data collected are in the form of narrative, open-ended and semi-structured interviews. The employment of the grounded theory is positioned to generate a substantive theoretical framework or theory on the evolvement of a hotel GM's tenure. Another reason behind the utilization of grounded theory lies in its capacity of multi-faceted explanations (Martin and Turner, 1986) which help, on the one hand, industry practitioners better understand the evolvement of a hotel GM's tenure and, on the other hand, adding to the theories and research on executive tenure and turnover.

5.7.1 Theoretical Implications of the Research

This study yields several contributions to the theories and literature:

1. It specifies the social process of *achieving career aims* by the hotel GMs during the progression of tenure, in the specific context of the hotel GM being a top executive in a hotels, in the hotel industry of Hong Kong

2. A principal interest for hotel GMs is to achieve progress in, whatever the job post, authority, trust, remuneration or career advancement

3. The conceptual coverage of the empirical and descriptive models on the evolving of executive tenure as discussed in the Literature Review can be summarised as below:

   - The temporal dimension of the tenure

   - The inherent characteristics of the *external environment to the hotel GM*, such as the organization, and the various stakeholders to the hotel GM

   What is lacking in these models lies in the study of (i) the interaction between the hotel GMs and any external forces to them; (ii) the dynamism of the interaction along the tenure and (iii) the personal orientation of the hotel GM.

4. The three-phase evolvement of a hotel GM's tenure as a cycle consists of a number of descriptive, behavioural and cognitive features of the hotel GM and his or her tenure.

altogether they form an entire tenure as a separate cycle. The phase model proposed in this research is characterized by a bilateral interaction – the socio-psychological needs of the hotel GM in "achieving career aims" and the external environment, such as the organizational and the personal attributions of the stakeholders. These two elements of the interactive process and the dynamism therein jointly constitute the phenomenon of tenure progression for a hotel GM.

5. Further to the above designation of the roles played by the external environment to the hotel GMs, their relative extent of influence over hotel GM's tenure across various phases is asserted. So it is such for other intrinsic determinants to the hotel GMs' tenure, such their personal characteristics.

5.7.2 Practicality and Implications for Hotel GMs

For hotel GMs, the phenomenon of a "life cycle" along the advancement of their career paths has two major implications for the hotel GMs. First of all, hotel GMs have to be aware of the discernible phases of their performance, and that of the hotel, namely the growth, stability and decline. Another notable inference for hotel GMs is the possible similarity between the substantive and contextual environment faced by the hotel GM between one tenure and another. What has been learnt by a hotel GM in one tenure is likely to be applicable to his or her later tenures.

The hotel GM's tenure is subject to the effects of a number of factors which are classified into four groups, and coined as the determinants in the research – (i) relationship building; (ii) hotel structures and systems; (iii) institutional culture and others, and (iv) the personal characteristics of the hotel GM. A successful tenure for hotel GMs can only be possible if they pay sufficient and close attention to various working relationships, marked by the two of utmost importance –that with the executives at the hotel management company and that with the hotel owner. Institutional culture, most easily ignored because of its tacit nature, is another area which hotel GMs should pay heed in order to sustain a successful tenure. In a practical sense, hotel GMs at the start of a new tenure have to

appreciate and respond to the dynamics of the relationship with, and the goals, background, training, scope of business, priorities, and so on, for these two important stakeholders. This process of making acquaintance is more frequently observed in hotel GMs working for hotel owners, unless the hotel GM is new to a hotel management company.

The other two groups of determinants, the hotel structures and systems and the personal characteristics of the hotel GM are posited to be more static, and are beyond easy control of the hotel GM. Yet a hotel GM also needs to recognize the procedures and limitations imposed by the hotel structures and systems. Hotel GMs should reflect on their own capabilities, strengths and weaknesses, career development and ambitions so that he or she can manage the hotel and personal performance with respect to the opportunities and constraints.

In a reverse sense, the relative degree of impact between these determinants hints at the areas that require attention or where problems typically arise. They are the areas of pre-requisites for sustaining a specific phase along the tenure.

Learning is a central theme to the tenure of any hotel GM if they are to become high-performers. On the other hand, hotel GMs should always pay attention to any possible reversal of the impact of the major determinants and noticeable changes in the contextual forces. Certainly, noticeable change in a positive manner is more likely to yield an advancement of performance for both the hotel GM and the hotel.

Against the constraints by the substantive and contextual environment of the determinants, hotel GMs can make an effort in coming to terms, and adjusting, in better accordance with the determinants For some, such as the learning process, the requirements of the stakeholders and communication, hotel GMs can exert a certain degree of control.

In essence, a hotel GM has to be self-aware of the pursuit of "achieving career aims" and attempt to prioritize these against the performance of the hotel, and the interests of the stakeholders during the different stages of the tenure.

5.7.3   Practicality and Implications for the Stakeholders to the Hotel GMs

For the stakeholders to the hotel GMs, the cyclicality as in a life cycle infers that executives at the hotel management company and the hotel owner have to recognize the intrinsic characteristics of the phases.   For instance, the need for accustomization implies that certain management measures as a concession to the performance requirements can be made for a newly-arrived hotel GM.   Another illustration is the acknowledgement that a hotel GM may already be in performance decline so that reviving measures, such as monitoring or even the seeking of replacement have to be considered respectively.

The wealth of determinants and their varying influence is meaningful to the stakeholders. As far as the four dimensions of determinants are concerned, the hotel structures and systems play a diverse role in enhancing or dampening the performance of the hotel GM, as can some institutional cultures, with tactical implementations.   A constant review to the structure, systems and institutional settings is proposed in order to maximize the performance of the hotel GM and the hotel.

In the assignment of hotel GM's post, executives at the hotel management company or the hotel owner should also consider an evaluation of the personal characteristics in the recruitment process.   While there is no absolute good or bad personality, the fit with the objectives of the management teams of the hotel should be present in the nomination of a specific candidate.   Another important element of HRM, performance appraisals and retention (and dismissal), should then be made in consideration of the prime objective of hotel GMs – to achieve his or her career aims, and whether the needs of responsibilities, job positions or titles, authority, remuneration, personal ambitions, career path and development, and so on are sufficiently fulfilled in the present post.   For sub-performing hotel GMs not to be retained, the primary reasons of failure have to be well-comprehended by the stakeholders so that chances of repetition of failure can be minimized.

In the transition between phases, hotel executives at the management company or the hotel owner should beware of the possible signs of substantial change in the extent of

influence by the major determinants. They signal that the tenure of the hotel GM is to enter a new phase; the decline phase which is the most worrying to these hotel executives. A changing personal agenda of the hotel GM alluded to opportunism, a much worsened relationship with the hotel executives or a significant shortfall from the performance targets should demand the need for a new hotel GM because of the implications on other organizational conditions and the hotel performance.

5.8   Chapter Summary with Reference to Life Cycle of the Tenure of Hotel GM

The categorization of the determinants according to the Weberian-Child framework of organization context has a number of significant points. First of all, it enables a deeper understanding on the phase characteristics of the hotel GM's tenure. It also sheds light on the overarching theme of the research – the periodicity of the hotel GM's tenure in the form of a "life cycle". According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 147), there is a phenomenon of "institutional isomorphism" which makes organizations functioning in the same organizational field exhibit likeness in structures because of the compliance to the "normative and regulative requirements" (Scott, 2001: 153). Conceptually, similarity is witnessed also in the "coercive, normative and mimetic mechanisms" (Scott, 2001: 153). The structures as mentioned can range from formal structures, the "officially sanctioned offices and ways of conducting business" to informal, "patterns of behaviour and work routines" (Scott, 2001: 153). Extended from this understanding, a hotel GM working for various hotels of similar standing and positioning in subsequent tenures, is to face the same kinds of organizational contextual forces. *Ceteris paribis*, a hotel GM is likely to undergo analogous growth and performance patterns throughout his or her career path.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

There are several purposes of this concluding chapter, the first of which is to evaluate the attainment of the objectives of the research. From a theoretical perspective, the significance of the theoretical model and the determinants, as well as the major categories as derived, shall be evaluated. The managerial and industrial implications of the results obtained shall also be discussed. The limitations innate in the study and the possible directions for future research shall be presented in the last two sections of the chapter.

6.1 Attainment of the Objectives of the Research

As given in the first chapter of the research, one of the major objectives of the research is to study whether any phenomena of cyclicality are exhibited in the tenure of hotel GMs. Such cyclicality means that one tenure resembles another in the manner of a "life cycle". The subsequent objectives of the research are to explore whether there is a demonstration of time-phases within the tenure. The other objectives are to locate the presence, and the processes therewith, of the determinants and factors. Their duration and transition, if not the longevity of the tenure as a whole, are to be studied.

The purpose of the research is to generate a conceptual framework or a substantive theory for the progression of the hotel GMs' tenure within one hotel premises. According to the previous chapters, *achieving career aims*, is found to be a central category to the theoretical model, as illustrated in Chapter Five. The sub-central categories: *Familiarizing and Learning, Reforming and Responding, Stabilizing and Re-visiting* and

Declining depict the social processes involved in the achievement of career aims by the hotel GM, or, in the typology of this research, the *phases* encompassed by the advancement of the tenure of the hotel GM.

The objectives of the research have been achieved with the assertion by the data that there is a phenomenon of "life cycle" across the series of tenures of a hotel GM. The tenure is characterized by a similar procession of phases. The "life cycle" is subject to the impact of a body of determinants, akin from one tenure to another. The dominating social process in the evolvement of one "life cycle" for hotel GMs is to *achieve career aims*.

6.2   Limitations of the Study

A number of limitations of this research have been identified. The first limitation resides in the selection of the research participants. With respect to the primary substantive context of the research, the hotel industry in Hong Kong, the research participants were hotel executives currently or having had previous working experience at hotels in Hong Kong. Samples included only hotel executives working or having working experience in High Tariff A and High Tariff B hotels (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2002a) because hotel management companies are more common in these categories than others. With this purposive sampling (Coyle, 1997), the samples did not represent the entirety of the hotel GMs or hotel executives in Hong Kong.

The second limitation lies in the non-segregation of data from the different categories of samples, including namely, hotel GMs or management executives working for hotels managed by international, or local, hotel management companies. Nor is it segregated for whether the hotel management company is owned by the hotel owner or a separate corporation. While the organizational or job functional context across the relevant data from these samples may be different, it does not necessarily mean that the findings across these data carry significant differences. Conversely it may enrich the insights into the process and conditioning factors. Notably there were similarities between data from various categories of research participants. The investigation of the detailed differences

and similarities between the evolvement of hotel GM's tenure in various contexts is a possible direction for future research.

Another limitation originated from the small sample size. Although no definitive designation concerning the estimation of sample size, and the amount of data rendering statistical significance, is defined in grounded theory (Morse, 1995; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), it is possible that a larger sample size might extend the scope of the themes and categories that emerged from the data, at least in the initial stage of data analysis.

Further to the above, the fact that the hotel GMs or hotel executives have mostly been, or are working for business hotels of certain industrial standing, dominates the determination of the central category – achieving career aims. It is envisaged that for hotel GMs working at resort hotels, or small-to-medium-sized hotels, for instance, the aims may not necessarily be focused on one's career. Hotel GMs may possibly opt for a relaxed life-style, maintaining a good balance between work and personal life, or to be an entrepreneur. The extension of the framework of growth of hotel GMs other than achieving career aims has thus to rely on future research.

The fact that the researcher is a certified public accountant by training and has been working as a hotel owner's representative with a hotel management company, an "insider" to the study, may be another source of limitation. Determinants not derived in the analysis, such as customer demands, employees' support, and so on, could arise in the analysis by a researcher of another background, such as sales and marketing, human resources and operations. Another source of limitation lies in the necessary skills in relation to these functional areas, other than accounting and finance, the "soft skills" as compared to the numerical skills.

In wake of these weaknesses, the researcher has attempted to maintain a high degree of fidelity to the accounts by the research participants. The researcher has also endeavoured to maintain a balanced perspective by means of inviting research participants of diversified job functions and backgrounds.

The cultural propensity of the research participants, noticed in the data collection and analysis processes, influences the interpretation of the evolvement of hotel GM's tenure. Yet the inclusion of research participants of different cultural backgrounds, is a technique aimed at enhancing the vigour of the data by means of increasing the "variation of occurrences" (Morse, 1995). The condensation into the major categories and themes, showed noticeable similarities between the data originating from research participants of different cultural backgrounds, affirming this technique.

The final limitation arises from the possible multi-co-linearity between the determinants on the tenure of hotel GMs. Until these determinants are subject to empirical study, such processes as variable designation, dimensionalization and validity tests that the interactive effects between these determinants can be separately investigated.

6.3   Future Research

The combination of the various phases along the evolvement of the hotel GMs' tenure and the determinants is inevitably a source of further research. Glaser (1998: 199-200) has proposed two predominant strategies as guidance for researchers in grounded theory in pursuing further research – (i) leads to future research and (ii) comebacks, which are in summary the means to extend the breadth and depth of the research context, with the ultimate aim of promoting the substantive theory to formal theory (Strauss, 1970).

6.3.1   Extending the Width of the Substantive Context – Leads to Future Research

One of the foremost possible directions of future research lies in the generalization of the applicability of the conceptual framework by extending it beyond the substantive context of the research, for instance, beyond Hong Kong. So can extension be made to industries other than the hotel industry? In short, the contextual extension can be treated as broadening the theoretical sampling, which was specifically defined for the substantive theory to emerge. Constraints incurred by finances and time in the research also justify a focused theoretical sampling strategy.

In terms of context, the significance incurred by the selected contextual settings lies in the weight of the tourism and hotel industry to the overall service industry in Hong Kong. The high concentration of hotels, and the events of recent years, such as the financial crisis, economic downturn and revival, the impact of the SARS crisis, the burgeoning number of visitors from Mainland China because of the Individual Visa Scheme (IVS), all pose high oscillation rates between challenges and chances for hotel executives. The hotel GMs are at the "frontline" witnessing these phenomena. The discussion of these macroenvironmental factors adds to the exogenous aspect of consideration of the overall effects on the hotel GM's tenure.

The contextual extrapolation can enrich the scope of determinants and moderating factors in other substantive contexts. The practice releases the constraints posed by the peculiar cultural or social contexts of the substantive environment of the present research. Beyond extending the scope of determinants, the extant conceptual model which resulted from the research can be put to the test of generalizability at least.

In other geographical areas, hotel GMs may be subject to a less volatile and dynamic environment as in the hotel industry. These propositions shed light on the possible moderating effects by the determinants in different substantive research settings. Yet it is notable that the transferability and generalizability of the substantive context to another industry may be limited because of the "unit bound" (Glaser, 1978: 109-113).

6.3.2 Extending the Depth of the Substantive Context – Comebacks

The substantive context can be deepened by means of locating the properties, or sub-central categories, as the mechanisms in the phase progression, which are "an interest area of their own" (Glaser, 1998: 199-200). In other words, these properties are those the "density" (Glaser, 1978: 153) which has not been exhausted because of the pragmatic limitations.

Illustrations of the non-densified properties or sub-central categories include the processes of familiarization, learning (from a personal perspective) and responding,

which are more of a cognitive nature, rather than of a behavioural and pragmatic nature. Such interesting phenomena include when and how hotel GM s determine when familiarization is complete; the internalization of the learning, the relationship between the personal and organizational aspects of learning, how the perception of the issue and requirements, for instance, is translated into the responding process by the hotel GM, and so on. The psychological investigation of the above sub-central categories is, however, beyond the scope and interest of the present research.

In spite of the proposition that the phase transition of the tenure originated from the reversal of the extent of the major determinants therein, the exact nature and mechanism of the transition is still unknown. Such issues as prioritization, in case of concurrent exhibition of extent reversal, and so on, will be subject to future research.

6.3.3 The Generation of Formal Theory

The ultimate direction of further research is to generate a formal theory from the substantive theory in the current research. Compared to substantive theory, formal theory has a higher degree of generality, and is a "formal conceptual area of sociological inquiry" (Glaser, 1978: 144). The extension of the width and depth of the substantive context serves as a first step of generation by "expanding a single, existing substantive theory with comparative data of other areas" (studies with various substantive context). This is in addition to the other two means – "one substantive area formal theory which uses "re-writing up" techniques" and "direct formulation from data from diverse substantive areas when no substantive theory exists" (Glaser, 1978: 143-144).

A step towards generating a formal theory from the current research is to expand beyond the industrial substantive context. The specificity of the organizational structure and the presence of the hotel management company and hotel owner are expected to be contingent determinants on which the present substantive theory depends. Comparative studies with various industrial contextual settings would lead to the study of the

progression and determinants of the life cycles of top executives' tenure (versus hotel GMs in a substantive context).

Another possible methodological direction of future research lies in subjecting the determinants to the vigour of quantitative research so that their validity and reliability can be tested. The grouping of the determinants into four properties, or sub-central categories – (i) relationship building; (ii) hotel structures and systems; (iii) institutional culture and others, and (iv) the personal characteristics of the hotel GM, has indeed paved the way for the future research as a first step of dimensionalisation. Subsequent statistical steps in delineating individual dimensions from the determinants would be useful. Tests for multi-collinearity, for example, can be used. The relative extent of impact dimensions and sub-dimensions in empirical studies, can then constitute an early picture of the correlation between the core and sub-central categories. Eventually these work towards the generation of research constructs. In quantitative methodological terms, it is likely that some sorts of predictor-outcome, or moderating and mediating, relationships between the determinants and the phases, or amongst the determinants would be found. Certainly, complex modelling techniques, such as structural equation modelling, can be employed in demarcating a wholesome model of the social process of the evolvement of hotel GM's tenure.

6.4   Chapter Summary and Conclusion

In this final chapter of the dissertation, the objectives and aims of the research – the generation of a substantive theory concerning the evolvement of the tenure of hotel GMs in Hong Kong and the affirmation of the exhibition of "life cycle" across the tenures of hotel GMs, have been briefly reviewed. The substantive purpose of *achieving career aims*, of such diverse nature from remuneration to career prospects, is found to be the backbone process linking the different phases within a tenure and between different tenures.

The significance of the research, in both the academic and managerial perspectives, has been examined. Taking into account the limitations of the research, possible directions for future research have been evaluated so as to enrich the understanding and applicability of the substantive theory as obtained. They should extend beyond the substantive agenda so that the theory can pave a way for a deeper understanding of the advancement of tenure of hotel GMs in a formal theory.

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