

## **THE IMPACTS OF MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE HOTEL PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF HOTEL WESTIN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA.**

**Chung Jee Fenn**

*BERJAYA University College, Malaysia.*  
[chung.jeefenn@berjaya.edu.m](mailto:chung.jeefenn@berjaya.edu.m)

**Akram Abdulraqueeb Sultan Al-Khaled**

*BERJAYA University College, Malaysia.*  
[akram.abdulraqueeb@berjaya.edu.my](mailto:akram.abdulraqueeb@berjaya.edu.my)

### **ABSTRACT**

*COVID-19 outbreak has posed unprecedented circumstances before the fragile tourism and hospitality industry. The highly infectious novel coronavirus continues to thwart the sector and raises serious questions about the present and future survival of the sector. The research addresses two important concerns, first, pertains to the major challenges that hospitality and tourism industry faces amid current conditions; and second relates to the vital learnings for the industry. The present coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has led the world toward severe socioeconomic crisis and psychological distress. It has severely hit the economy; but the service sector, particularly the hospitality industry, is hard hit by it. It increases the sense of insecurity among the employees and their perception of being unemployed, adversely affecting their mental health. This research aims to contribute to the emerging debate by investigating the effect of economic crisis and non-employability on employees' mental health through perceived job insecurity under the pandemic situation. Results indicate that perceived job insecurity mediates the relationship of fear of economic crisis, non-employability, and mental health. Furthermore, the contingency of fear of COVID-19 strengthens the indirect relationship of fear of economic crisis on mental health through perceived job insecurity. The findings will provide a new dimension to the managers to deal with the psychological factors associated with the employees' mental health and add to the emerging literature of behavioral sciences. The study also highlights the increasing need for investment in the digital infrastructure and smart technologies for the hospitality industry.*

**Keywords:** *Fear of economic crisis, fear of COVID-19, perceived job insecurity, the impacts of management functions.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Westin Hotel Kuala Lumpur is a hotel located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A place that allows guests to enjoy direct access to the shopping center and the city's lively and fashionable nightlife as

well. This hotel has 38 floors with a total of 443 rooms which includes 356 guest rooms and 87 suites with views that are sure to spoil the eyes of the visitors (Yap, 2003).



(The picture shows the location of Westin Kuala Lumpur).

(Westin Kuala Lumpur)

According to Yap (2003), Hotel Westin Kuala Lumpur is known for having the most contemporary amenities and facilities for guests to enjoy their stay at the hotel. Then, the hotel also provides a smoking or non-smoking area with express check-in service for guests who are in a hurry.

Visitors can also enjoy other facilities such as a barbecue grill, bar or lounge, a very beautiful poolside bar, fitness center, spa and free WIFI. Business people are also welcomed because The Westin Hotel Kuala Lumpur has a business center, conference rooms, porters, express check-out, and also a meeting room for business meetings. Families with children can also visit because this hotel is also equipped with a children's swimming pool, babysitting or childcare, a playground and an outdoor swimming pool.

The Westin Kuala Lumpur was chosen for this task, this report will focus mainly on POLC, namely Planning, Organizing, Leadership and Controlling of the Hotel.

## **Objective**

The main objectives of this paper are to provide a perspective of the essential issues and challenges experienced by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Malaysian tourism and hospitality industry, lessons learned from its devastating effects on the industry, and to contemplate possible solutions as post-pandemic recovery. Eventually, to posit possible directions for future research. In doing so, a comprehensive review of the most recent selected literature was gathered from academic and online news portal and relevant online platforms to extract the current state of the art knowledge. Theoretically, this paper postulates an urge to the tourism scholars, educators, and students to ponder on what has caused this pandemic and the substantial contributing factors involved. With this view, the emphasis should be given to study, teach and engage with current tourism-related concepts and theories to provide a holistic pedagogy to rebuild and transform rather than maintaining the current tourism and hospitality trajectory in the post-pandemic age. The managerial implications of this paper are to assist the tourism and hospitality managers by providing a glimpse of the current and forthcoming challenges in the industry. Furthermore, to provide critical recovery strategies in the post-pandemic phase so that beneficial business strategies and policies can be attained.

## **PLANNING**

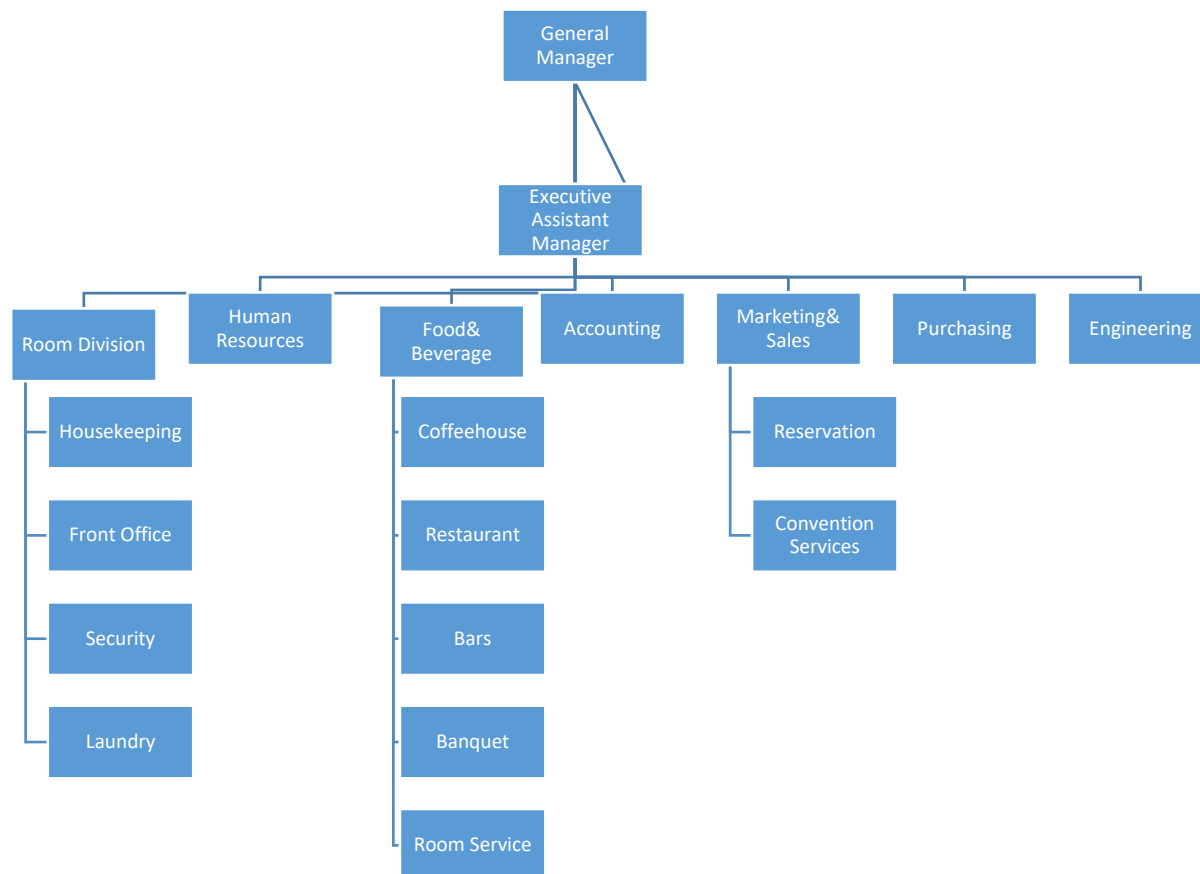
Mission statement are used by a business or organization to explain, in simple and concise term, and the purpose of a business for being. Having a mission statement help to trace an organization goals and its position in the industry for the customer and the stakeholder. It also helps the business to focus and stay on track to follow the right path to achieve the goals. Westin Kuala Lumpur mission are “To become a fully compliant Westin Hotel by delivering the three core values personal, instinctive and renewal through a well-trained team with passion for excellent”. As Westin Kuala Lumpur believes that the core value are the things that make them who they are. As they change and grow, the beliefs that are most important to them to stay the same by putting people first, pursuing excellence, embracing change, acting with integrity.

Different than the mission statement that define the company business, its objectives and their approach to reach the objectives. Vision statement describes the future position wanted for the company. The vision of Westin Kuala Lumpur is “To be a leading modern luxury hotel in the Asia Pacific region delivering personalized and instinctive services, as well as providing a renewing experience in an environment where guests and associate can be at their best”.

Westin Kuala Lumpur are using some hotel market strategy to ensure that are well prepared for the long-term development. First, Westin always done a good job in their website as it was one of the most important distribution for the business since the website are the place where the potential customer can learn more about the hotel before proceeding to make a stay at the hotel. Secondly, stay alert on the reviews and recommendation as the positive review could get you new customer and poor

review could lose you any potential customer.

**ORGANIZING**



**Figure 1: The Organization Chart of Westin Kuala Lumpur**

Chain of command are an official hierarchy that show that who are in charge and who need to report to who. As shown in the organizational structure (Figure 1) of Westin Kuala Lumpur, the head of department of each department will reported to the Executive Assistant Manager before he proceeds to report to the General Manager.

Span of control means that the manager might be connected to few or more subordinates. The quantity of people reporting to the manager are called span of control. Manager with a lot of subordinates could inspect the activity of his worker all the time, employee under such administrative have greater power to perform their job and even make decision.

Westin Kuala Lumpur are using function departmentalization as their type of departmentalization. In functional departmentalization, an organization are divided into department such as Room Division, Human Resource, Food & Beverage, Accounting, Marketing & Sale, Purchasing and

Engineering. The advantage of departmentalization are employee could develop their skill into more depth and progress within a department as their master more skills.

## **LEADING**

Leading will be the third stage within the 4-stage functions of management. Leading and controlling are traditionally being look as the more important role of management. Leading can be commonly understand as role of manager to motivate the team moving towards the organization goal efficiently. External environment of business might be uncertain all the time, in order to ensure the team, act fast, managers should always be the first one to react and to give out command in order to lead the team respond fast towards changes. Understand the operation and external environment well is not all a manager need to lead the team well, instead he needs to know the people well by understanding subordinates' personalities, attitudes, capabilities and emotions. Different industry will value different aspects of the staffs and this is the reason different leadership styles suits in different industry.

### **Autocratic Leadership Style**

Autocratic leadership is the most commonly implemented leadership style in hotel industry (Mukhles, 2013). According to Al-khaled and Fenn (2020), autocratic leadership styles are not a famous leadership style to be implemented as most of the business emphasis in employee involvement and empowerment recently but autocratic leadership style appear to be a common leadership style in hotel industry due to the nature of business. Hotel industry comes with a complicated organization structure, as it was a large scale of service line thus there are huge numbers of entry level staffs involve in daily operation. In order to ensure better operation and more effective leadership, order should be noticed to all entry level staffs consistently. Excess empowerment and involvement of staff in decision making will actually delay the whole service process as the chain of command from executive level to entry level will required long time. More comments or idea given towards the decision the longer time the direction reached to the entry level staff.

Based on the research done by Mukhles (2013) which look into Leadership Style of Managers in Five-Star Hotels and its Relationship with Employee's Job Satisfaction, among the three-leadership style (democratic, laissez-faire and autocratic) autocratic leadership style is the least prevalent leadership style among managers and autocratic leadership style lead to least job satisfaction (Al-Khaled & Fenn, 2020). The reason which make autocratic style not prevalent among managers was due to the low job satisfaction as job satisfaction play an important role in smooth daily operation. However, it is inverse in hotel industry taking excessive opinion from employees in decision making will actually delay the whole service process or even cause lost towards the business. Westin Hotel as a big scale hotel with complicated organization structure and big numbers of entry level staffs, leadership style in Westin Kuala Lumpur will derived from autocratic leadership style as they need to ensure chain of command can be reached in the shortest time period and accurately.

However there still some exception in terms of implementation of autocratic leadership style. Sometimes the higher level of management within the organization structure of Westin Hotel Kuala Lumpur might choose to be democratic sometimes but mostly during time to developing new strategic plan for the hotel. As entry level staff are the one dealing with guest directly all the time, thus feedbacks from these staffs can be said to be most accurate, thus the higher management might consider to ask for the feedbacks or suggestion in the service from all these entry level staff. However, the feedbacks and suggestion will be collected and discuss only within higher management, which it goes same to the decision-making process.

## **CONTROLLING**

The main task of this stage is basically to ensure performance of the team working towards organization goal along with standards. There are basically three components involve in this stage which are establishment of standard operation procedure, determining gaps within performance and standard and lastly implementing corrective action towards gaps (Pratap, 2020).

Performance often been evaluated in terms of monetary such as profits earning, revenue or other standards such as quality or quantity of products produced. In hotel industry, performance of the operation can be evaluated from different perspective such as service quality, room sales, guest satisfaction and food and beverage sales. As an industry heavily focus in service, guest satisfaction plays an important role as it led to willingness to pay and to purchase. While guest satisfaction can be inspecting from different way such as word of mouth, online review and guest loyalty. Satisfied service will motivate the guest to have the intention to stay again with the hotel in future. As the technology became more advance, it brings innovation in the hotel industry from different aspects, more and more online channel was developed for guest to leave their feedbacks on the stays such as Online Travel Agent or third-party reservation website, as example TripAdvisor, Agoda, Trivago or more (De Klerk, 2021). In order to have better control over the operation, hotel management should often overview the feedbacks from different channel to spot any negative feedback from the guest.

In hotel, standard operation procedure acts a very important roles to ensure all the staff delivered best service qualities. With a complicated organization structure standard operation procedure give a better control in the daily operations. To illustrate, Standard Operation Procedure for Housekeeping staff when they deal with luxurious items left in the room will ensure all the staffs handle guests' item ethically. However, monitor is still needed as not all of the staffs understand or willing to follow the standard operation procedure all the time.

In order to ensure all staff over the best services and products in terms of food and room to guests all the time, the upper management commonly like to have spot check during daily operation. As example, during the low season of hotel, duty managers or even director of operations will be had role play as a customer to experienced service in reception without advance notice. While in the Food and Beverage Outlets, any internal staffs such as upper level management or sales and marketing staffs of Westin Kuala Lumpur will need to record down their experience of dining in terms of service quality and food quality together with food, they order a date in a recork book for future evaluate.

Besides review from internal staff' experience, review of external guest regardless in-house or food outlets guests will be collected from different channel such as hotel website, Trip Advisor, third part website for example Agoda and Booking.com or even social media. Review are collected from duty manager and review further send to related department regardless is compliment or complaint. During the morning briefing of operation head, department head will be mentioned and discuss if any complaint was made in the pass one day and what is the future action should be taken. This matter will further be taken to the briefing within every department, where services gaps or complaint made and corrective actions discussed in the operation head meeting will further transmit to all the entry level staffs to ensure all staff on duty know what to be done or improve in order to provide high quality service and products all the time.

## **Political**

### ***Restricted movement order***

Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) chief executive officer Yap Lip Seng announced a total of 170,085 room reservations that worth RM68 million have been cancelled in March 2020 (BERNAMA, 2020). These cancellations represent the current impact of Covid-19 but the government is more worried about the decline in demand in the coming months. MAH expects that the loss will be doubled by the end of this year. Besides that, Malaysian government imposed the restricted movement will also influence the operation of hotels as the hotels can only provide limited services until approved by the Malaysian National Security Council. Therefore, these prohibitions will affect the operation of the Westin Hotel Kuala Lumpur because the hotel cannot provide complete services to the guests. At the same time, some rules and orders such as 1 meter away from each customer, and the hotel must regularly disinfect and limit the number of customers in a room or restaurant must be followed to ensure the safety of guests. The Westin Kuala Lumpur not only reduces customer demand but also pays some extra fees, so it will indirectly affect the hotel's revenue.

### ***Political instability and uncertainty***

Political instability and the ensuing uncertainty of government policies are key factors that determine the confidence of investors in Malaysia. Political instability is also part of democratic life when an election government come and go. The main concern of the business communities and economic sectors is the policy changes. It has nothing to do with whether the election takes place or the change of government, but it will cause major policy uncertainty (Ayisy, 2020). The impact of political instability and uncertainty will affect the business and operation of The Westin Kuala Lumpur. For example, the hotel may have cooperated with a company to carry out a project, but the project may be delayed or changed due to the political instability as the change of partners of investors.

## **Environmental**

### *Sustainable development*

Environmental factors help hotels to present a human side to guests and encourage the hotels to develop sustainable development strategies. Factors such as pollution prevention procedures and green regulations can make sure the wellbeing of the environment. Hotels and restaurants are required to develop recycling plans and all employees must be aware of toxic waste management to prevent the harmful hazards to the environment. Nowadays, Hotels and customers are inclined to green hotels and this factor has led many competitors advocated and practiced environmental protection due to this development may attract some customers with high environment protection but it is more about protecting the environment. Hotels around The Westin Hotel Kuala Lumpur practice environmental protection actively. Even the Westin Kuala Lumpur has developed and practiced this program but due to each hotel has its own set of environmental protection and marketing plans so the result will be also different between each hotel.

## **Social**

### *Change of customer's preference*

Same as economic trends, social trends also impacted the tourism industry. The effect can be as deep as it is. In recent years, consumer preferences for accommodation have changed. The preference of consumers have turned to private residences and the rise of Airbnb is a challenge for the hospitality industry. As more and more Airbnb's appear, customers will have more choices to choose as the accommodations (Abhijeet, 2017). However, customers will be more inclined to choose Airbnb because Airbnb will be cheaper than the rate of hotels and some locations of Airbnb will be more convenient than hotels. The Westin Kuala Lumpur is located in the center of Kuala Lumpur, there are many competitors such as Grand Millennium Kuala Lumpur, The Ritz-Carlton Kuala Lumpur, Pavilion Hotel Kuala Lumpur, Pullman Kuala Lumpur and others around The Westin Kuala Lumpur. So, The Westin Hotel not only has to compete with the surrounding competitors but also compete with Airbnb for market demand. Besides that, This COVID-19 pandemic has also changed people' habits because Malaysia government implemented the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) to ensure the safety of Malaysian. Malaysian does not encourage or cannot travel anywhere which lead to the decline of demand and revenue of The Westin Kuala Lumpur.

### *Multiracial*

Malaysia is a multiracial population, predominantly defined by three major ethnic groups which are Malay, Chinese and Indian races with different cultural backgrounds. This factor affected the customer's consideration when choosing a hotel. For example, Malays can only go to restaurants with halal certificates or hotels that provide surau for them to have praying rituals. So, the executives or managers of The Westin Kuala Lumpur should focus on this factor before making any decision. While



considering Malay population, the upper managers should include other races in the planning process. For example, the chef not only considered the Malay population when planning or creating a new menu but also included other races in that process to achieve a balance between races.

## **Technological**

### *Use of kiosk and digital check-ins*

The main change in technology is online bookings. The emergence of more and more travel sites like Expedia, Agoda, Booking.com and of course Airbnb are making it even easier for consumers to find the very best deals, the best adventures and the greatest experiences. These sites are great news for travelers but present stiff competition for hotel operators, who are turning to technology to innovate and differentiate themselves. Next is automatic check-ins and check outs kiosk has become the new trend for the hotel. In an effort to improve efficiencies, hotels are looking to automate the check-in and check-out process. Mobile hotel check-in and check-outs may soon become the norm, enabling staff to focus more on creating a unique guest experience.

### *Online Review*

Nowadays, customers have become very savvy as customers are taking every communication with caution. Besides that, there are also many third-party platforms that cooperate with hotels such as TripAdvisor, Agoda, and Booking.com and others can easily find hotel reviews and comments. These comments can directly lead to the customer's first impression of the hotel and the decision of the customers, so online comments are very important to the hotel. The power of peer review is that most people will search for hotel recommendations on social media. Thus, the hotels are investing in increasing the media influence and appointing brand ambassadors. So positive reviews on social media can mean the difference between low occupancy rates and full occupancy rates (EHL Insights, 2019).

## **Legal**

### *Tourism Tax*

Based on the law implemented by Royal Malaysian Customs Department, all foreign tourists staying in any types of lodging facilities will required to pay 10-ringgit tourism tax per room per night starting from 1 September 2017. While this 10ringgit tourism tax will only implemented on main tourism spots and causeways in Malaysia which are Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor and Langkawi. This tourism tax is collected for the purpose of gaining funds for promotional activities for the states. Westin Kuala Lumpur which located in Kuala Lumpur will need to follow the implementation of this legislation and assist the government to charge this tourism tax in the bill. To ensure this tax will be implement smoothly, the management should ensure all the staffs especially the one dealing with them, the receptionist understand reason of implementation thus they will be able to explain if guest question.

### ***Malaysia to cut foreign workers***

The Malaysian government has reformed the labour laws to reduce the 'over-dependence' on foreign workers. Currently, there are more than 7 million foreign workers (46%) as part of 15.5 million labour force in Malaysia (Rasfan, 2019). This is not a favorable situation as highly rely on foreign worker will lead to many negative impacts such as unemployment, slow wage growth, and graduate underemployment. According to the ex-Prime Minister Dr Tun Mahatir Mohammad, the government are working out policy to provide more job opportunity to locals. Hotel as an industry who required high amount of manpower, most of the hotel will choose to employed big portion of foreign workers as entry level to save cost as most of the entry level foreign workers required lower wages. Westin Kuala Lumpur will be affected in this enforcement as they required to ensure they provide enough job opportunity to locals in future.

### ***Liquor sales restrictions***

Recently, Kuala Lumpur City Halls (DBKL) had announced a new enforcement regarding the liquor license. The Star (2020) stated that starting from 1 Oct 2021, business such as convenience stores or grocery shops are not allowed to sell hard liquor. While food and beverage business such as pubs or restaurant are allowed to sell liquor and alcohol but within guided time. This enforcement will definitely affect the operation of Westin Kuala Lumpur as it owned food and beverage outlets which offers liquor and alcoholic drink as well as convenience store.

### ***Smoke-free policy***

According to Health Ministry Malaysia, smoking will be ban at all food and beverage outlet in Malaysia starting from 1 January 2020 (Suresh, 2019). This policy will be implemented with 12 months education enforcement. Based on the law, smokers will only be allowed to light up the cigarette at least 3 meters away from the eateries. Highest fine for any smokers caught for the offence will be 350 Ringgits. Such policy will definitely affect Westin Kuala Lumpur since it owned numbers of food and beverage outlets. To ensure this law can be successfully enforce in the hotel, management should educate the staffs and make necessary notification materials to be display in all eateries.

## **Economic**

### ***Fall in currency***

In year 2019, Ringgits were said to drops against major currencies. This unfavorable situation was said to cause by reduce in investment from foreign country. According to Bank Negara Malaysia, in this few year's foreign company started to reduce their investment steadily in Malaysia government debt. This make the government has low fund to develop and promote the country. Situation went even worse when it comes to year 2020. According to New Straits Times (2020), Ringgits falls against all major

currencies in year 2020. This is assumed to be due to the Covid-19 outbreak and also the drop in global oil prices. Drop in currency might bring both negative and positive impact towards hotel industry. From the perspective of negative impact, drops in currency will lead the loss of revenue. But drop in currency will also attract big amount of foreign guest take Malaysia as their tourist spot as they can spend more here. However, when it comes to year 2020, it only brings negative impact to the industry as there are restriction on travelling from foreign country to Malaysia.

### ***Impact of covid-19 towards economic***

It is obvious that most of the industry affected by this Covid-19 pandemic, but the impact was even significance in the tourism industry which link tightly with hotel industry. Outbreak of this disease lead to restrictions in travelling and social distancing as it is a transmitting virus. People are not allowed to travel regardless within local or foreign country, thus its cause a rapid and significant drop in demand of rooms. According to, over 180,000 rooms reservation was cancelled just within 3 months starting from January to March which the Covid-19 outbreak not consider as very serious in the country, which we can presume that situation definitely went even worst in the following months. Approximately 70 million Ringgits was loss just within these three months, many hotels that experienced this huge loss had end the business. Westin Kuala Lumpur which located in Kuala Lumpur which affected in the early stage of this COVID-19 outbreak and continuously stated as red zone within this whole year will definitely be affected by this pandemic.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Westin Hotel Kuala Lumpur is a 5-star hotel located on Jalan Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Location of Westin Kuala Lumpur make it famous within business and leisure travelers and at the same time higher quality service proven by 5-star rating given to this hotel makes the business more success. In order to retain the success of business, the management of Westin Kuala Lumpur maintain it's the operation by following the four principles of management (POLC) which are Planning, Organizing, Leading and Controlling. Autocratic Leadership Style was used in this business in order to give better control on high numbers of entry level staff and enable the operation to act fast. Besides, the business also faced certain influencing factors such as economic, environmental, social, legal matters or in accordance with applicable regulations, as well as politics. All these factors will affect the business internally and externally, Westin need to continually look into those factors and find solution for it in order to make the operation properly.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Management training***

Following the development of times, more and more innovative technology and idea was introduced in the market. To stay competitive, hotel industry needs to keep up with up-to-date trend and technology

implementation. It will definitely an advantage for the business to have a balance in management team from different age layer. Young generation might not have strong leadership but have high acceptance level in technology and they are closer to the trend. With the assist from more experience senior in the management, idea from the young management will able to be adopt and further generate into strategy which can help the business. However, to retain the young talent in the business, training and career growth is needed in order to attract them work with the team. Management Training is one of the good strategies to build capability of young talent in order to be with the management while at the same time to provide future career growth which was valuable for the young talents.

### ***Focus on leadership not management***

Leader is not about a title is about how perform as a leader, a good leader should step out before the group members. Leader job is not only giving command and overview performance, instead leader need to know personalities and capabilities of each personal in the team. This is to ensure the right job was distributed to the right person. By putting selves in a higher status will never help the leader to approach and know the team well. Instead of rejecting and giving command without explanation, leader should guide the members step by step. Rewards and complement act as an important factor in motivating the staff, thus leader should not hesitate in giving complement and rewarding staff who are capable.

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