

# **The Determinants of Career Growth: The Case Study of Spa Businesses**

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## **Abstract**

Career growth is the one of the long-term goals of all employees. Spa business in Thailand has been expanded rapidly in the past decades as health trends have led to more popularity in spa services. The current research aims to examine the relationship among employee performance and job satisfaction on the career growth in the spa industry in Thailand. The data were collected from the employees of spa companies, by using self-administered questionnaires. The results demonstrated job satisfaction has higher influence on career growth than employee performance. The study has implications for practitioners to support the career growth for their employees. In addition, academic contributions were also discussed for the future research development.

Keywords: Career Growth, Employee Performance and Job Satisfaction

## **Introduction**

With the significance and growth of tourism industry, hospitality companies strived and searched for opportunities to provide high quality services to attract the tourists to become their customers and continue to use the service in the future. It has been obvious that health-related service has become one of the most attractive elements in tourism, such as wellness and medical tourism. Health-related tourism is including of those activities that would give mental and physical beneficial for health or rejuvenation, such as spa, yoga, physical treatments and meditation (Okech, 2014). Spa industry is one of the most important hospitality industries in Thailand and Thai spa treatment is one of the main activities for tourists to experience the uniqueness of Thailand. The core of spa business and its success depends on the performance and quality of spa employees.

In the competitive business environment, employees are essential to create competitive advantage. To retain the employees to support the growth of the companies, the companies must support the employees to ensure their own career growth and career path clearly (Okurame, 2014). Chang (2016) noted that employees are the foundation of hospitality industry, including spa businesses. Despite its fast growing trend in spa services worldwide, few studies investigated in this industry to find out with its unique characteristics in order to find the appropriate guidelines for the benefit of the spa industry. To fill in the gap in employee research in the spa industry, this current study focuses on the relationship among three main factors, including career growth, job satisfaction and employee performance.

## Background of Spa Industry

Spa service has been known for human societies since ancient times (D'Angelo, 2009). In most countries around the world, spa is recognized as an important service for relaxation and rejuvenation for body and mind. For the definition of spa, International Spa Association (2012) defines “spa as places devoted to overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit.”

**Table 1. Major Categories of Spa**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
Club spa	a place where the main service is fitness and supplementary types of spa with the services completed in one day.
Day spa	a facility providing variety of spa services within one day.
Destination spa	a place to help its customers improve the good habits to take care of their health. It includes short-term and long-term programs including different types of activities, such as spa service, healthy food program, fitness program, health and wellness educational program and other tailor-made program to fit the need of the customers.
Medical spa	a place offering spa services with licensed and professional medical personnel with the main objective to provide the combination of medical, wellness and spa services.
Mineral springs spa	a destination giving hydrotherapy treatments together with natural mineral or seawater normally provided the service on the sites of natural resources.
Resort and hotel spa	a spa in a hotel or resort offering professional spa services, usually including wellness and fitness programs.

*Source: International Spa Association (2012)*

Citrinot (2012) reported that spa tourism is known as one of the important strengths in Thailand's tourism industry. Thai governments and private firms initiated the effort to promote Thailand as the spa capital of Asia. Many internationally well-known spa destinations, including Chiva-Som, Deravan Spa and Six Senses Spa, crucially help the country build the strong reputation in spa services globally, with around 1.4 million international visitors visiting the country for medical or spa services per year. The expected revenue from spa and wellness services from the year 2010-2014 were estimated around US\$2.23 billion and the sales of spa related products around US\$1.3 billion. Moreover, additional strength of Thai spa is the reasonable price, comparing to all its competitors globally. In the year 2012, there were more than 1,200 spas in Thailand with approximately 400 luxury spas and the number was expected to increase in the future.

Spa service or treatment in Thailand started around 1994, spa treatment was provided for guests mainly in the top hotels in Thailand (Thaiways, 2012) and became popular among international

visitors very quickly. Since then the greater number of spa service provided has been increasing significantly in most of the foreign tourist destinations, including Samui, Chiang Mai, Phuket and Bangkok. Together with the increasing number of the spa service providers, types and techniques of spa treatment had been introduced to the market simultaneously and rapidly, including hydrotherapy and aromatherapy. The popularity of spa treatment occurs among Thai people as well due to the changing lifestyles and intense working environments. Several spa businesses offered packages for the customers for the long-term relationship. According to Thaiways (2012), there are many factors supporting Thailand to lead in Spa business at the global level. Thai hospitality with gentle and caring attention was among the main factors. Other factors were relaxing Thai traditional atmosphere and expertise of the therapists. The roles of Thai government were also crucial to promote the Thai spa to the global travelers. Referred to in Thaiways (2012), the well-accepted quality of Thai spa was shown in the results from the Spa Industry Surveys & Spa Consumer Surveys. For potential spa-holiday destinations, Thailand ranked number 1 (22%), followed by Indonesia (19%), Malaysia (13%) and Australia (7%). Another category was for destinations for the next spa treatment, the respondents identified that 42% considered Thailand, and the other major destinations were 30% for Indonesia, Maldives (5%) and Malaysia (5%). Additional insight was about their favorite spa treatment and the findings provided that 54% for massage treatment, 14% for body scrub, 10% for body wrap, 4% for facial treatment and the rest was for other types of the spa treatment.

The employees in the spa industry are the driving force for the growth and development of the industry. The spa employees are important to the spa businesses because these employees interact directly with the customers and represent the quality of the spa service to the customers. To support the development of spa industry, the quality and performance of the employees have to be studied. Furthermore, career growth is one of the most important long term goals for the employees. In this study, career growth was studied as the dependent variable to be affected by job satisfaction and employee performance. In this area of study, little research studies had been conducted to help understanding the employee performance (Netemeyer and Maxham III, 2007) and their level of job satisfaction as well as career growth for the long-term relationship between the organization and the employees.

## **Literature Review**

### **Career Growth**

One of the goals of all employees is to continue to grow on the career path to improve both financial remuneration and job challenges. In the labor-intensive environment of hospitality industry, the competition among employees to be promoted to the higher position is intense. Employees may also encounter different stages of growth in their career from entry levels or managerial levels (McKercher et al., 1995). Career growth can be categorized into four dimensions, including career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed and remuneration growth (Weng et al., 2010).

For its definition, career growth was considered the process of growing in a person's career. In addition, career growth is measured in the aspects of a part of the work from the efforts of the employees to progress in their career goals. The growth in the employee career also included acquisition of new skills valued by the organizations and the employees are rewarded with

promotions and the increase in their pays or bonuses (Weng et al., 2010). Organizational supports are crucial to ensure the career growth opportunities, improving employee skills and greater contributions to the organizations (Aryee and Chen, 2004). Thus, to encourage employees to strive for their best and increase their likelihood for promotion, many organizations provide training, mentoring, education and promoted the deserved employees. Several empirical studies have shown that the positive career growth of the employees can increase the job effectiveness, job attendance, loyalty, involvement and willingness to adapt to the changes within the organization (Okurame, 2014). In addition, career growth signals positive job security for the employees. The career growth policy of an organization also plays a crucial role for influencing the perspective of the employees for the prospect of their career growth and their career related behavior. If the employees have favorable perception that the career development policy can fulfill their expectations, the employees become more dedicated to work and deliver higher work quality (Okurame, 2012). For this reason, when employees have good career growth, the employees build mutual trust and positive social exchange relationships with the organizations. In order to attract and retain employees, the needs of the employees should be realized by the service organizations to provide the opportunities for career progression and growth (Bharwani & Butt, 2012). Moreover, career growth demonstrates the relationship between the organization and its people. The positive relationship refers to the positive perceptions of employees towards their career growth probability in a particular organization, and the relationship between career growth and job satisfaction can be found (McElroy & Wang, 2016). In addition, an individual's life factors, such as personal and family's needs, are essential to ensure the career development in this modern society. These factors are considered circumstances that change over the life cycle of an individual, which affects the career path decision of one. Therefore, the organization must deal with the career development trend through the "whole-life" perspective approach (Litano & Major, 2016).

## **Job Satisfaction**

The concept of job satisfaction has been in the center of organizational behavior topics. One of the early works in this field (Locke, 1969) provided the definition of job satisfaction in that it was defined and measured in terms of how employees like their jobs. Job satisfaction can be detailed as the feelings, attitudes or preferences of the employees towards works or their jobs. Historically the model for job satisfaction emphasizes all aspects of the employees' feeling toward their jobs (Lu et al., 2012). In addition, the expectation of the employees on the jobs highly affects their job satisfaction. An empirical research by Zaidi & Iqbal (2012) demonstrated that career selection is an important factor that increases the level of job satisfaction. Selecting the right career matching with the motivational factors of an individual for a specific job can enhance the motivation to work, resulted in higher level of job satisfaction. Another aspect for explaining the job satisfaction is known as the global and facet approach. The global approach focuses on the sum of all attitudes of the employees' concerns about their jobs and facet approach is to highlight the aspects of the jobs generating job satisfaction. To understand job satisfaction, external factors or working environment, such as work structures in the organization, can also affect job satisfaction (Mulinge and Mueller, 1998). Job satisfaction can be categorized into four levels of job satisfactions, which are career self-related (individual's value and expectations towards that particular career), career content related (matching skills and personalities of the particular job), organizational/industry related (opportunities for growth, job

stability and job security within an organization), and job related (work environment, corporate culture, salary and management of an organization) (Zaidi & Iqbal, 2012).

In the aspect of service industry, studies of hotel firms demonstrate that the service quality and performance of frontline employees, showing that satisfied employees lead to high quality service delivery and satisfied customers (Yeh, 2013). The dimensions of hospitality job including of the irregular work schedule, regular work shift and time for rest, affecting the level job satisfactions (Zhao, Ghiselli, Law & Ma, 2016).

For measuring job satisfaction, Spector (1997) demonstrated that job satisfaction dimensions can be measured from the followings; appreciation, communication, co-workers, fringe benefits, job conditions, nature of the work itself, the nature of the organization itself, an organization's policies and procedures, pay, personal growth, promotion opportunities, recognition, security and supervision. All these dimensions can be applied to help measure the job satisfaction. Many scholars have investigated that there is a positive relationship between the career growth and the level of job satisfactions (Zopiatis, Constanti & Theocharous, 2014; Lu, Lu, Gursoy, & Neale, 2016).

## **Employee Performance**

Employee performance is known to be crucial for the organization in many ways. In general, the employee performance is the indicator for organization's success. It refers to the financial and non-financial results from the action of employees, having a direct effect on company's performance and success (Anitha, 2014). For service industry, employee performance directly affects the perception of service quality of the service firms (Bitner, 1990). The implication is that improving employee performance can enhance the level of service quality perceived by customers (Hartline and Jones, 1996). Thus, to deliver positive performance to the customers for the service industry, attitudes and behaviors of the service employees are the key determinants. In the aspect of health-related service, effective employee performance is when the best possible service delivers to the customers through the effort and focus of employee's energy, meeting the requirements and pre-determined goals of each individual customer (Sharma & Dhar, 2016). For categories of employee performance, there are two classifications, including core task and socio-emotional dimensions. Firstly, employee performance can be evaluated from product knowledge, facilitating to satisfy customer needs, supporting customers to attain their service goals. The second dimension is about socio-emotional one. In this aspect, the performance of the employees can be evaluated from interpersonal skills, the degree of friendliness, attentiveness, and having sympathy for customers (van Dolen et al., 2002).

Furthermore, the career growth is influenced through effective training when the employees can improve their performance (Dhar, 2015). For the hospitality sector, service quality training helps increase the level of performance of employees. At the same time it raised the awareness of company's commitment to induce the employee's competency and develop career growth opportunity.

## Research Methodology

The sample was the employees from staff to senior management levels from spa service providers in Bangkok, Thailand. As a capital of Thailand, Bangkok is one of the most competitive and wide-spread types of spa service providers, representing the suitable location for the study. The questionnaires were distributed to all types of spa services, including club spa, day spa and resort and hotel spa. The usable sample was 350. For data analysis, in order to assess the relationship of all the constructs, structural equation modeling was chosen as the most appropriate technique for hypothesis testing.

## Results

The questionnaires were distributed to spa companies located in Bangkok, Thailand. 350 usable questionnaires with no missing values were used for the next step in data analysis. The results included demographic characteristics, validity tests, and model testing with fit indices.

**Table 2. Demographic Characteristics**

Classification	Variable	N	%
Gender	Female	180	51.43
	Male	170	48.57
Education	High school or below	120	34.29
	Bachelor's degree	180	51.43
	Master's	50	14.28
	degree/Ph.D.		
Age(year)	25 or younger	120	34.29
	26–30	90	25.71
	31–45	80	22.86
	Older than 45	60	17.14
Position held	Senior management	40	11.43
	Middle management	100	28.57
	Staff	210	60.00

Female employees represented slightly more than half of the respondents. Most of the respondents had Bachelor's degrees, accounted for 51.43% or 180 out of 350 samples. The majority of the samples aged 25 years old or younger, which was 34.29%. There were three

levels of position investigated and 60% were staff, 28.57% were middle management and the rest were senior management level.

### Tests of Validity

To ensure that the data from the samples meet the required assumptions of structural equation modeling technique, reliability and validity tests were conducted. Convergent validity and discriminant validity were assessed prior to further model testing as shown in Table 4. The results indicated that convergent validity has achieved because all the AVE values were greater than 0.5(Fornell and Larcker, 1981) for all the constructs. For discriminant validity, all AVE values of two constructs were higher than their squared correlation (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In addition, Cronbach’s alpha of all constructs exceeded the acceptable level of 0.8.

**Table 3. Factor Items**

Measurement or factor items of all three constructs were shown in Table 3. These items were developed based on the past studies discussed in the literature review. The reliability test of the factors was reported in Table 4, by Cronbach’s alpha.

<b>Factors/Constructs</b>	<b>Items</b>
<b>Career Growth (CG)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I can grow my responsibility in this company.</li> <li>2. I have improved my knowledge and skills to better do my work.</li> <li>3. My remuneration has been appropriate increased.</li> <li>4. I can see my career path clearly in this company.</li> </ol>
<b>Employee Performance (EP)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I have received positive evaluation about my performance.</li> <li>2. I can perform my work at the expected quality.</li> <li>3. I can perform my work at the expected time.</li> <li>4. I can perform my work to meet with the expectation of the organization.</li> <li>5. I have good knowledge about the product and service to satisfy the needs of customers.</li> <li>6. I am always ready to perform my work.</li> </ol>
<b>Job Satisfaction (JS)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I enjoy my working environment.</li> <li>2. I have good colleagues.</li> <li>3. I am proud to perform my job for this organization.</li> <li>4. My skills match with the demand of my job.</li> <li>5. The policy of the company supports me to do my job.</li> <li>6. I have the right personality to do my job.</li> <li>7. I am satisfied with the scope of my job.</li> </ol>

**Table 4. Constructs, Correlation Coefficients and Measure Validation**

Factor	Number of Items	CG	EP	JS	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
<b>CG</b>	4	1.00			.854	.765
<b>EP</b>	6	.601	1.00		.89	.759
<b>JS</b>	7	.625	.711	1.00	.922	.795

Notes: CG= Career Growth; EP= Employee Performance; JS= Job Satisfaction

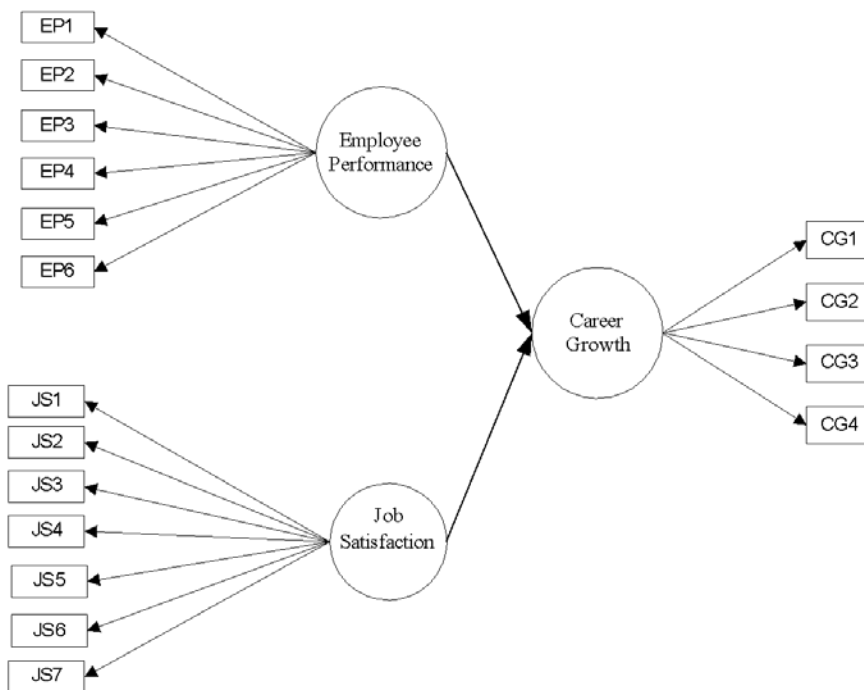
**Research Hypotheses**

In this exploratory study in the context of spa companies, the author focused on three major factors and there were two research hypotheses proposed in this study as follows;

H1: Employee performance is positively related to career growth.

H2: Job satisfaction is positively related to career growth.

**Figure 1. The Proposed Model**





Structural equation modeling was applied to test the relationship among the constructs. The overall fit indices of the model were good: NFI = .968, NNFI= .976, CFI = .979, IFI =.979 and RMSEA =.073. In addition, the results from the test supported the two hypotheses.

**Table 5. The Relation of Parameters and Parameter Estimates of Proposed Model**

From Table 5, both job satisfaction and employee performance had significant relationship with career growth. With the coefficients, Job satisfaction has greater positive influence on career growth than employee performance.

<b>The Relation of Parameters</b>	<b>Standardized Estimates</b>
Job satisfaction→ Career growth	.488* (8.970)
Employee performance → Career growth	.464* (7.208)

\* indicated statistical significance at .05 and t-values are shown in parentheses.

## **Discussion**

The findings pointed out that job satisfaction and employee performance had positive effects on career growth. The relationship between employee performance and career growth were recognized in past studies (Campion et al., 1994, Weng and McElroy, 2012). As employees perceive the chance of growth in the organization, they become motivated. Motivation can lead to increase the employee productivity and performance (Oduma & Were, 2014). Meanwhile, the better the performance the employee deliver would also resulted in promotion and reward, such as career development. Job satisfaction and career growth were also discussed in past research works (Orpen, 1979); (Orpen, 1998);(Barnett and Bradley, 2007). Prior studies showed the correlation between job satisfaction and career growth. For example, career growth is driven by the overall job satisfaction (Yang, Liu, Liu & Zhang, 2015). Job satisfaction affects how individual react and feel about their job, which with high job satisfaction, employees tend to look for ways to develop themselves (Rajesh, 2012; Sangaran & Jeetesh, 2015). In addition, job satisfaction indicated stronger influence on career growth, comparing to employee performance. This highlights the highly important impact of job satisfaction on career growth. Job satisfaction broadly demonstrated how employees like their jobs and with this empirical investigation, it provided the significant link between their satisfaction on their jobs and the growth in their profession. Another relationship was between employee performance and career growth. Good performance employees have high tendency to have positive career growths. However, the

findings implied as well that positive emotional attitude towards their jobs or job satisfaction together with good performance can support the employees to improve their career growth.

### **Conclusion and Directions for further Studies**

The present study has provided the detailed investigation of quantitative research of factors affecting career growth of the employees in hospitality industry. The author achieved the objectives by showing the significant relationships of the constructs. Moreover, practical implications from the study included that companies should provide the clear policy for their employees to understand the career growth opportunities so that the employees can feel that they have great job securities and potential long-term employment with the organizations (Aryee and Chen, 2004). Additionally, managers should focus on supporting the employees to improve their performance and should create the positive working environment leading to higher job satisfaction. It is interesting to find that job satisfaction has slightly higher effects on career growth than employee performance.

Further research studies can emphasize the long term relationship among these constructs and cross-industry studies (e.g. service and manufacturing industries) can also be conducted to enhance the knowledge about the constructs. In addition, career growth can present the opportunity for long-term study of the employees in the organization for the researchers to conduct longitudinal study on the topic. On another note, in the future qualitative approaches may be adopted to investigate the perceptions of employees in terms of the speed of their career growth will help the organizations to understand more about their process of promoting growth in the organizational context.

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