Hotel industry leadership in Greater China – a biographical comparison

The relationship between leaders and followers plays a major role in shaping organizational cultures. There is an established literature within many disciplines showing evidence of how leaders seek to influence their followers. The present paper extends this legacy by presenting a detailed investigation of two hospitality leaders in order to provide insights about the formation as of leaders in Greater China. A biographical comparison is conducted to analyse leadership traits in the hospitality industry context of an Asian leader, Mr. Stephen Ho (President for Greater China of Hyatt Global Operation) and a non-Asian (European) leader, Mr. Ricco de Blank (CEO of Sun Hung Kai Properties Hotel Section). Information about each of the two leaders is assembled, analysed, and then compared with reference to their respective backgrounds, characteristics and families as these have impacted on their leadership styles. The findings show the continuing influence of Confucian values within Asia and that leadership styles and behaviours can also be shaped by a Western cultural background. The two subjects have exercised charisma in leading their respective companies to success. The paper concludes by noting practical implications, limitations and opportunities for further research.

Keywords: leadership; culture; Asian; hospitality; China

1.0 Introduction

As business competitiveness accelerates globally, there has been a heightened expectation that leaders will achieve success for the benefit of their organization and members in the pursuit of a common goal. Though leadership is fundamental to all groups, families, organizations, and societies, there are various reasons why not all leaders are effective in dealing with their followers. This has prompted scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to investigate the phenomenon of leadership. It has been noted that the behaviors of top level leaders *"become symbols of the organization's new culture. Stories are created around the leader and mechanisms are developed to improve upward communication"* (Bass, 1999, p. 16).

A leader's background and culture impact on their attitudes, how they influence followers, and their acceptance by their followers. As has been noted by Dorfman, Howell, Hibino, Lee, Tate, and Bautista (1997), culture plays an important role in the exercise of effective management and leadership. These authors used Hofstede's cultural dimensions to compare leadership behaviors in Asia (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) and in Western countries (Mexico and the United States). The dimensions included individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and degree of industrialization (Dorfman et al., 1997). Stephan and Pathak (2016) have suggested that individual entrepreneurship is influenced by cultural values. Their study used Hofstede's theory to explore the role of culturally-endorsed implicit leadership theories. Kamisan and King (2013) compared the leadership styles of two CEOs, Tony Fernandes of AirAsia and Idris Jala of Malaysia Airlines, drawing upon the theory of Transactional and Transformational leadership. Chen and Tjosvold (2005) investigated the relationship between managers and employees in China, focusing on the relationship between Chinese employees and American, Asian, and Chinese managers. Most of the

studies have been within sociology, psychology, educational and business. To date, few scholars have compared hospitality leadership traits amongst Asian and Non-Asian leaders within the Asian environment. Besides, most recent studies of hospitality leaders have had a theoretical orientation, as noted by Boyne (2010) in his review of hospitality leadership:

> "*hospitality leadership studies with similar aims have generated contrasting findings, the use of different conceptual approaches (and the inherent nuances of context and/or method between studies) means that it is difficult to gain insights into why such contrasting findings may have been arrived at.*" (Boyne, 2010, p. 18).

This suggests that real-life examples should be examined to highlight similarities and differences, and to showcase un/successful stories. In pursuing this aim, the present paper examines the styles of two hospitality leaders across various dimensions, including their cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds; and how the subjects exercise leadership within their respective organizations.

The contribution of travel and tourism to GDP has been growing fastest in Asia (*Travel & Tourism - Global Economic Impact and Issues*, 2017). This has produced a strong Asia Pacific job market demand, particularly amongst companies seeking international expansion into Asian source markets. The two leaders that form the subject of the present comparison derive from one of these regions - one is Asian and the other is non-Asian. The paper incorporates an in-depth biographical study of the exercise of leadership style over time, through previous interviews, videos, and press releases and followed by a semi-structured interview undertaken by the current researchers. This approach has allowed the authors to identify consistencies, and/or leadership changes over time. In applying the relevant criteria, the authors have compared the leadership

traits of two leaders with similar positions and who work in the same location. One of the leaders is Asian - Mr. Stephen Ho (President Greater China Global Operations – Hyatt International); and the other is non-Asian, Mr. Ricco de Blank (CEO of Sun Hung Kai Hotel Properties). The two identified leaders have acquired experience in both Western and Eastern cultural environments and are longstanding operators within the Asian Pacific Region. Both are Hong Kong-based, a place which is known as a culture intersection of 'West meets East'.

The paper consists of four sections. The first explains the diverse definitions and types of leadership and the essential qualities of leaders; how individual and organizational culture and beliefs impact on leadership; identify research gap after presenting an overview of past studies about hospitality leadership. The second part explains the selection of these two leaders, followed by information about their respective families, backgrounds, and characteristics. The conduct of a semi-structured interview with each subject further substantiates the alignment with organizational cultures. The following section will examine the transformation of the two leaders and will examine similarities in terms of their personality, leadership styles and success within the organization. The authors will further analyse the core values of Chinese and Western organizational behaviors from the leadership perspective in the context of Greater China. Lastly, limitations are acknowledged and further studies suggested.

2.0 Literature Review

Many scholars have examined the principles of leadership and how these may be assessed. Of the various special traits, items that influence effectiveness include being empathetic, positive, 'walking the talk', openly sharing visions/values, and celebrating success with the team. Some scholars believe that a true leader not only gives clear job directions and delegates responsibility, but also influences and inspires others. In the

past decades, various definitions of leadership have been proposed and leaders have been classified into different types. Managers do not always provide leadership and tend to focus on the current situation (operational) and outcomes, whereas leaders focus on future developments over a more extended period (a strategic and big picture mindset). Lucas (2016) suggested that managers manage tasks, supervise people, set directions, and focus on results, whereas leaders lead the future, individual contribution, guide people towards success, and recognize people's hard work. Barnes (2013) interviewed 40 CEOs from different industries and identified eight essential leadership skills. The respondents often provided a clear vision (future), are customer-centric, have clear communication, act fast and are flexible to changes, take the acceptable risk, listen to different voices, trust and inspire their teams.   Referring to Forbes (2012), the top ten qualities that make a great leader are honest, delegation (knowing the team's strengths and weaknesses), good communication, being full of confidence, having a high commitment, a positive attitude, and creativity, and being inspirational (Prive, 2012). "*Leaders consider the past, evaluate the present and create the future*" according to the video from the Hospitality Educators about the Quality of Leadership (2016). It concludes that a leader tends to do 'more' than others. They set examples for others to follow and act (not by their position), and they often honor people (not by authority). Therefore, a leader can shape a healthy culture. He/she not only has the capability to work with others but also a sense of commitment and ownership. Leadership development assessment includes intrapersonal experience and learning, technical skills, personality, self-development, and interpersonal social and authentic leadership (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014).

2.1 Definitions of Leadership

The definition of leadership has evolved over time and varies by industry. According to Brownell (2010), leadership has shifted from the "great man" concept to the recent "transformational leader". As early as the 1920s, Moore expressed the view that a leader should have the ability to lead and induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation amongst followers. Other scholars, notably Hershey and Blanchard (1988), characterized an effective leader's behaviors and attitudes as changing according to the needs of followers. This approach has been described as "situational leadership" (Brownell, 2010).

In 1978, Burnes introduced the concepts of "transformational" and "transactional" leadership. Bass (1999) stated that transactional leaders tend to be more focused on self-interest, whereas transformational leaders extend beyond this and are more inspirational with idealized influence. Scholars have recently taken account of societal changes and have stressed the importance of evaluating a leader's ethics and morality. Scholars including Aviolio, Gardner, Cogliser, Davis and Dickens have described authentic leadership as leaders who are *"self-aware, process positive and negative ego-relevant information in a balanced fashion, achieve relational transparency with close others, and are guided in their actions by an internalized moral perspectives"* (Dinh et al., 2014, p. 42). These leadership definitions provide insights about how the two selected CEOs may potentially be categorized according to lifetime events and activities.

2.2 The Impacts of Culture on Leadership

An organization is comprised of employees with different backgrounds and nationalities. In the hospitality industry, it is not only employees who are diverse but also travelers. Cultural understanding is essential for both individual leaders and

organizations. Munley (2011) believed that no single prototype of an effective leader exists across different nations, a view supported by Gerstner and Day. Cultural differences can explain why there are different leadership styles, employee motivations, and organization structures (Mingzheng & Xinhui, 2014; Munley, 2011). Hofstede described leadership across different dimensions including collectivism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long versus short-term oriented (Munley, 2011). Mingzheng and Xinhui (2014) mentioned in the recent studies from Gelfand, Erez, and Aycan, the cultural influences of leaders and followers, such as how a leader exercises their power and tactics to impact their followers.

2.2.1 Confucianism

It is noted that China is a populous nation within the Asia Pacific Region and has a fast-growing economy. It is important to understand Chinese leadership, with its legacy from Confucianism (Mingzheng & Xinhui, 2014; Wong, 2001). This philosophy was originally founded by Kongzi in China during the period 551 – 478 B.C. and subsequently spread throughout East Asia (Adler, 2011). Confucianism helps to explain the importance of high power distance between leaders and followers. It has a strong emphasis on 'guanxi' (relationship) and acts as a moral model, so that the followers follow their leader obediently and work hard in return for their care (Adler, 2011; Mingzheng & Xinhui, 2014). In other words, in-group (favoritism) exists and the followers will blindly follow (high loyalty) with high respect.

2.2.2 Weber's Rational Bureaucracy

In their consideration of Western society, Ogbor and Williams (2013) applied Weber's 'rational bureaucracy' as an explanation for the difference between leadership and authority. This theory is associated with an orientation towards achievement,

specificity, universalism and secular authority (Ogbor & Williams, 2003; Udy, 1959).

Weber indicates that bureaucracy involves *"a clear-cut division of integrated activities which are regarded as duties inherent in the office"* (Merton, 1940, p. 156); and structure attains precision, reliability and efficiency (Cohen, 1970; Merton, 1940; Udy, 1959). The theory posits that stated regulations, specific structures towards roles/ disciplines and avoiding in-group aggression result for positive functional outcomes. At the same time, flexibility is allowed to some extent for purposes of efficiency and to achieve organizational goals (Cohen, 1970).

Cross-cultural difference is another aspect that explains differences in behaviours, values, and attitudes as follows: it helps to explain the sovereignty of one's own interests and goals. Collectivist cultures regard individuals as *"embedded within the group, while individualist cultures place more emphasis on an individual's autonomy and independence"* (Power, Schoenherr, & Samson, 2010, p. 208). In other words, individualism enjoys competition and tends to focus on self-interest, personal goals and achievement compared to collectivism. Collectivists believe in achieving results together through cooperation (Power et al., 2010) and in-groups forms in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Asian and Western societies have different belief systems on the relationships and working attitudes towards their sub-coordinates and followers. It is interesting to see how the selected leaders exercise their powers towards followers in achieving organizational success.

2.2.3 Organizational culture & core values

The development of organizational culture is influenced by leaders' values and belief systems, which have a direct impact on the efficiency, effectiveness of daily operations, employees' motivation and willingness to commit (Clark, Hartline, & Jones, 2009). Organizational values are *"part of the organizational culture"* (Gorenak &

Ferjan, 2015, p. 67) which correlates to the leaders' ability to lead the followers towards common goals. This is an internal feature which is unique to every organization for (un)successful outcomes (Mitrovic, Grubic-Nesic, Milisavljevic, Melovic, & Babinková, 2014). It often begins with the owner's personal beliefs, values and cultures; however it may evolve due to experience and changes in leadership. Weber (1996) studied the culture fit and performance in merger and acquisitions companies. He noted the importance of culture fit between two companies, which are unique and not easily modified. Particularly in the case of the service industries, this culture fit is more critical to the effectiveness of the integration process, and impacts directly on financial and strategic outcomes. This was supported by Morgan (2017) who interviewed David Rodriguez, Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer of Marriott International about the importance of the 'people first' culture as a sustainable way of doing business and which has contributed towards the company's reputation and bottom line.

2.3 Hospitality Leadership & the Research Gap

Previous hospitality leadership studies have been theory focused, drawing heavily on earlier stages of the evolutionary development of leadership. Boyne (2010) reviewed 59 hospitality leadership papers between the 1970s and 2000s. Of the various items, 56% applied a theoretical approach (including Behavioral, Contingency, Leader-Member Exchange, Implicit Leadership Theory, Power-Influence, Discussion, and other Theoretical papers), and the rest focused on transformational leadership. Since most researchers have focused on theory, the present paper adopts a different approach. The researchers will undertake a thorough biographical comparison of an Asian and non-Asian hospitality leader. The two leaders are Hong Kong based and highly experienced in the hospitality industry.

Bass, Avolio, and Goodheim (1987) previously examined "world-class" leaders using biographical data as a measurement tool to assess qualities of leadership. They stated that "*developing reliable and construct-valid psychohistorical methods for studying world-class leadership offers all of us the opportunity to observe leaders whom we would otherwise have no opportunity to study*" (Bass et al., 1987, p. 7). Drawing upon this earlier work, the current investigation proposes the following research questions:

1. How do biographies influence leadership style and bring success?

2. What are the characteristics of an Asian and Non-Asian hotel leader within the Greater China region?

3. What are the essential characteristics and challenges for future leaders working in China?

2.4 Selection of the two leaders

Not all leaders can achieve success. This is because of many circumstances and reasons, such as timing and opportunity (e.g. available positions). In the case of hospitality, Brownell (2010) particularized the character of a global hospitality leader as playing an important role and as profoundly influencing their followers. "C-suite" managers often become symbols of the organization (Bass, 1999). Of the total population of hospitality leaders, the researchers assert the merit of comparing an Asian and a Western CEO/President, who are working in Asia, to determine similarities and differences between their leadership styles. Such "C and P level" leaders within any organization hold high responsibility for making important decisions in the pursuit of success, including shaping the company culture and communication. Following an identification of all "C and P level" hospitality leaders from different backgrounds who are employed in Asia, Ho and de Blank have been chosen as representatives of Asian

and Non-Asian leadership. Stephen Ho was CEO of Marriott International for Greater China and recently joined Hyatt International as the President of Global Operation for Greater China in April 2018. Prior to the merger of the corporation with Marriott, he was the President of Starwood Hotels & Resorts for the Asia Pacific region. His inspirational career path involved working with the same hotel group for 35 years, starting from pastry chef in 1981 (Chan, 2015). This biography demonstrates the Asian trait of 'true loyalty'. The authors have also observed the sharpness of Ricco de Blank, CEO Hotels of Sun Hung Kai Properties. De Blank had previously worked at The Walt Disney Company and various Ritz Carlton properties in the role of Hotel General Manager. He will be treated as representative of non-Asian leaders. It is notable that both Ho and de Blank are based in Hong Kong, a place which combines elements of Eastern and Western cultures. They are evidently hardworking and have had opportunities to take up different tasks and roles, leading to their current situations.

3.0 Methodology

The paper combines the case study and comparative methods. According to Platt (1992) the case study method has been widely used since the 1930s), both by qualitative and by quantitative researchers across disciplines ranging from anthropology, psychology, sociology, political science, social work, and business (Xiao & Smith, 2006). The method has sometimes been criticized as being one-time, anecdotal, single-case, and naturalistic observation. However, viewed positively it *"comprises an all-encompassing method, covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis… It is a comprehensive research strategy or framework of design"* (Xiao & Smith, 2006, p. 739). Yin (2003) proposed tactics to validate and eliminate the reliability concerns by replicating and identifying chains of factual evidence for proof. According to The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative research

(2008) the case study method is an in-depth study of a phenomenon (Blatter, 2008). It involves rigorous analysis and the research design is important since it involves a particular approach to verifying information and artifacts, validity, and reliability. These may include the use of multiple sources of evidence and pattern matching (Xiao & Smith, 2006). Data forms may involve statements, interviews, theme-related statistical data, interviews and documents. The present paper relies on both secondary data and face-to-face semi-structured interview with the subject. The secondary data are drawing from multiple sources including previous interviews, blogs, magazines, and videos. This combined method allows for the confirmation of validity, and the identification of the consistency or changes of a style of leadership over time.

A comparative approach allows for the evaluation of similarities, differences, and associations between entities. Entities or data may take various forms including interviews, statements, symbols, individual meanings, and political configurations. Undertaking a biographical comparison is one potential approach and has the benefit of comparing:

> "*the accounts or experiences of two different people who experienced the*
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> *same event or are in similar contexts to engage in analytic accounts of*
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> *why there are differences and how these two individuals' experiences are*
>
> *related to one another*" (Mills, 2008, p. 100).

Biographical comparisons typically include the documentation of life stories and life-histories involving the analysis of archived materials (such as special collection repositories, newspapers, documents, and videos); and interviewing to obtain insights about a subject of historical interest (Miller, 2008). The present analysis will develop categories and conceptualizations and then examine potential interrelationships. The data for the study were collected between September and October 2017. Later, Face-to-

face semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted during November 2018 for purposes of further investigation and confirmation of the secondary evidence. The interview with Ho was conducted at his workplace and the de Blank interview occurred in a "third space" for approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Each story provides valuable insights. The study concludes with recommendation about how future leaders may learn from these inspirational stories.

4.0 Stephen Ho

Stephen Ho assumed various key roles and proceeded to serve Starwood Hotels and Resorts for 35 years. Starwood is now a subsidiary of Marriott International. The first Sheraton Hotel, which became the originator of what later became Starwood was founded by Ernest Henderson and Robert Moore in Springfield, USA in 1937. The first Sheraton Hotel in China was opened in 1985. Subsequently - in 1998 - Sheraton was acquired by Starwood Hotel & Resorts Worldwide Inc (Starwood, 2017). Ho was an important and pioneering employee within the organization during its early expansion. He opened the first Starwood hotel in China and under his guidance the chain expanded to hundreds of Asia Pacific properties.

4.1 Career Path

A Singaporean national, Ho started his career as a pastry chef in 1981 at a Starwood operated hotel in Brunei. It is reported that he had proficiency in several languages including English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Fujianese (Chan, 2015). Ho has also worked in several supporting and operating roles including food & beverage (F&B) operations, technical service, furniture, fixture and equipment (FF&E) procurement, business development and hotel openings (Bloomberg, 2012; Chan, 2015). In 1985 Ho was part of the team that opened the first international chain in China - Sheraton Great

Wall Beijing Hotel. He subsequently joined the Starwood Acquisition and Development team in 1999, when Starwood had only 12 hotels in China. He later became the Senior Vice President of Acquisition & Development for Greater China (Bloomberg, 2012; Chan, 2015). Starwood has signed more than 200 new hotels under Ho's supervision. Prior to the Starwood acquisition by Marriott International, he was the Starwood Asia Pacific President, responsible for nine distinctive brands across 21 countries and territories (Chan, 2015). In April 2018, Ho has joined Hyatt as President of Global Operations for Greater China. Jay Pritzker, founder of Hyatt purchased Hyatt House motel in Los Angeles in 1957 and was listed as a public company in 1962 ("Hyatt - Our story," 2018). Total of 14 brands with 500 properties around the globe and about 51 hotels in China ("Hyatt - Our company," 2018).

4.2 Self-Development and Education

Ho earned a technical diploma from Singapore Hotel and Catering School and won a number of culinary medals and awards. He later obtained an EMBA from the University of Ottawa, Canada. He also obtained a master's degree in Buddhism Study at Hong Kong University in 2012, indicative of his fascination with Eastern Philosophy (Bloomberg, 2012). During the interview with Ho that formed part of this investigation, he shared insights about his personal travel in India and how he followed Buddha's path and the importance of 'balance – nothing can be extreme'. He commented that "*to stay sustainable, be mindful and take a balanced view of things. This is also applicable to the business context*".

4.3 Family

Ho rarely talks in public about his family and evidently intends to keep them "low profile". The authors were unable to find any sources with insights about his

immediate family and are only aware of some basics. He is evidently married and has two daughters. His wife also works in the hotel industry and they met when they were working at Starwood hotels. In light of Ho's preference for keeping his family low profile, there will be no further disclosure in this paper about her position and related company information. However, Ho shared his '80/20' philosophy that he spent 80% effort to family and 20% of work. "*First and foremost, take care of your family which accounts for 80% of your success and all you need to do is the remaining 20% at work, or you will be even more successful as you can put in 120% ... but you must be very passionate as well…*"

In an interview conducted with Singapore Lifestyle Magazine (March 2016), Ho mentioned growing up in a poor family and having no travel opportunities. It has been reported that he flew for the first time when he won a lucky draw for a flight "ticket to nowhere" from Singapore Airlines (Kok, 2016).

4.4 An Admired Figure

During an interview with Kok (2012), Ho observed that one of the most interesting people whom he had met when traveling was Jack Sim ("Mr. Toilet"). He was an entrepreneur in building supplies and real estate development companies (Wikipedia, 2017). He quit his business when he was very successful and dedicated himself to social service. In 2001 Sim founded "World Toilet Organization", a non-profit organization that builds clean and safe toilets in developing countries (World Toilet Organization, 2017). Stephen admires Sim and finds him inspiring because of his decision to leave his career at the highest point on the ladder in order to make an unconditional return to society (Kok, 2016).

4.5 Hobbies

In contrast to his business activities, Ho prefers not to engage in advanced itinerary planning when he travels for leisure (Kok, 2016). He enjoys discovering cities by running and as a way to do his market study about the area before meetings (author's interview). "*One of the habits that I picked up was running in the morning. I run around to explore the cities or resorts, so I understand and know what is in the area, including competitors as well as help me to stay fit...*"

He turned his hobby into a charity event, as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In 2014, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Asia Pacific held its 'Run to Give' charity run in 105 locations across Asia Pacific (Mai, 2015; Starwood Press Release, 2015). According to the Company's Press Release in October 2015, Ho said: "*Run to Give underscores Starwood's Commitment to passive meaningful impact to the local communities as we recognize that the vitality of our business is directly linked to vitality of the places where we operate.*" He also emphasized the importance of learning and respecting local cultures.

4.6 Perspectives on Hospitality

According to Ho, technology cannot replace the human touch irrespective of how advanced it becomes and only brings convenience. He places the services, travel, and hotel sectors in the category of "people industries". Ho espouses people over technology. He commented that "*travel remains a key factor in connecting and bringing people together – create memories*" (Chan, 2015). Talent development is imperative, particularly in the hospitality industry – 'Mission to Win with Talents'. In leading his company to success, he views his mission as leading with passion for people. One way to identify talents is opening hotels in remote areas, so the local community (including

suppliers and venters) may benefit and indirectly create a positive imprint of 'good enterprise' about the organization.

Ho has previously shared his three life philosophies (Chan, 2015). His aspirations in life are: act on it now, not later; focus on the positive; and appreciate others' efforts and their credibility. One should, in other words, set one's goals and objectives and stay focused and act accordingly. This involves always staying optimistic and being sincere, even during difficulties "*take feedback as a gift for improvements*". During the interview, he elaborated that "*often people want to do many things at the same time, so they lose concentration and divert their attention. We only have 24 hours in a day, so we need to learn how to leverage time as well as attract talented folks who are smarter than you*". Lastly, he espouses sharing and celebrating results together, since things are down to team effort, not personal achievement.

In summary, Ho is an example of classic 'Confucianism' – hardworking and willing to embrace new challenges. The other research respondent - Ricco de Blank - represents a non-Asian leader and demonstrates how his different background and culture bring success within the Asian environment.

5.0 Ricco de Blank

Richard Cornelius (Ricco) Maria de Blank is an experienced hotelier who worked his way from a hotel operator to hotel owner's representative. He describes himself as passionate about the hospitality industry and expresses enthusiasm for his job. His wife Virginia sees his creativity and self-discipline are the key success factors of his career. He currently works at Sun Hung Kai Properties Limited, as a CEO, in charge of the Hotel division.

5.1 Career Path

De Blank began his career in 1989 with The Walt Disney Company in Orlando, USA and Paris, France. He worked in several positions (riccodeblank.com) during his time at Disney, including in the human resources and training department (The Sun, 2011). He subsequently joined Ritz Carlton in 1995 and proceeded to work for 15 years in various locations including the USA, Egypt, China, and Japan. When he was at Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt, he won the best GM of the year competing across all the Ritz Carlton hotels (Elite Traveler, 2017). The period of his success coincided with the 2nd Gulf War when hotel occupancies were about 20%. He worked proactively and closely with the sales team to find business and managed to secure the royal family to stay in the hotel for a period of a year.

In 2003, he relocated to Japan as a General Manager of Ritz Carlton Osaka, and in 2007, he opened The Ritz Carlton Tokyo. This was also the turning point of his career, when he met the Chairman of Sun Hung Kai Property (SHKP), who offered him the position of CEO of SHKP in charge of the Hotel section (Elite Traveler, 2017). At the planning stage of Ritz Carlton Tokyo, he had a vision to build the most luxurious hotel in town. His creativity helped him to fashion various marketing gimmicks, including the most expensive Presidential suite and the 'Diamond Martini' which was priced at US$15,000 with a Bulgari diamond inside (Apple Next Media Travel, 2007).

One of the guests at his hotel was the Chairman of SHKP who observed his effective leadership and performance and who proceeded to recruit him. He is currently supervising a team of eight executive members including finance, F&B, S&M, project development, purchasing, asset management, operation and Human Resources (Lin, 2012). The company has 6,000 employees. SHKP obtained 'the Best Hotel Owner'

award at the 3rd AHF International Hotel Investment Summit in 2010 (SHK Press Release, 2010).

5.2 Self-Development and Education

De Blank was raised in a Christian family in The Netherlands and his uncle, Joost de Blank was Archbishop of Cape Town in South Africa. His father worked in a real estate company and his mother was a housewife (Riccodeblank.com). He already desired to work in the hospitality industry when he was five years old. He enjoyed serving drinks to his parents' guests at home (Elite Traveler, 2017; The Sun, 2011). He left home at the age of 12 to go to a prominent boarding school Gordonstoun, in Scotland. In 1985, he went to Hotelschool The Hague in The Netherlands, one of the independent single sector Universities of Applied Science in The Netherlands (Hotelschool The Hague, 2017). Studying hotel management was a means of fulfilling his passion for hospitality. He continued to learn and grow in order to enhance his professionalism, studying Strategic Negotiation in 2011 (Riccodeblank.com) and Building and Sustaining Competitive Advantage Application in 2013 at the Harvard Business School (SHK Press Release, 2013). He has written two books that share his hospitality industry experience, "Passion for Service" in 2009, and "20 Myths". His third book is on the way (Riccodeblank.com).

5.3 Family

Though Dutch by origin, de Blank embraces Chinese culture. In one interview, he went as far as stating that he sees himself as Chinese (Lin, 2012). His wife Virginia is from Hong Kong and they have two children. They met in Shanghai and married in 2001. During our interview, he suggested the importance of celebrating his success with family, particularly his wife who supports and inspires him in many ways.

Virginia de Blank is a Co-founder and Director of HK Youth Ballet Academy (Hong Kong Youth Ballet Academy, 2017). She studied ballet and European opera singing in Shanghai, where she met her husband. During the interview with the Apple Next Media Travel in 2007 at the Ritz Carlton Tokyo, Virginia expressed pride in her husband's creative ideas. She attributed this quality to the success of his business. She described her role as a wife who provides a home where Ricco can relax after a long day of work.

5.4 Hobbies

De Blank was an invited speaker at the inaugural TEDx Conference in Tokyo in 2003 and shared that he enjoyed running or walking because it helps him to think (riccodeblank.com). On another occasion, he mentioned that he swims at least 30 minutes every day which helps him to think and to clear his mind. Another reason that he chooses to swim is because of his health due to his weight (The Sun, 2011). In fact, during our interview in November 2018, he mentioned that he had suffered from cancer 5 years previously (2013), prompting an urgent need to change his lifestyle and eating habits.

5.5 Perspectives on hospitality

He sees retention as a key contemporary challenge and this makes it important to inspire and train staff (CNBC, 2012). He avoids micro-managing because the business owners do not micro-manage him. He believes there should be a mutual trust which allows employees to operate efficiently (Lin, 2012). Nevertheless, he sets clear measures to identify improvements. On several occasions, he has emphasized 'happiness,' as a secret of good service, corresponding to consistent quality outputs. According to de Blank, happy employees equal happy guests (Lin, 2012, 2014). He

shared with a Sun Newspaper interviewer that when he was 18, he had a summer job working at the snack bar at a beach. He won the best weekly smile in the community. He believed that when employees feel proud of their work, their sincere smiles and attitude will in turn serve the guests (The Sun, 2011).

De Blank's advice to the younger generation is that you must have a 'can-do' attitude, love what you do and work hard so you may stand out among the team (Lin, 2012). He also advocated being humble and confident, not arrogant. He suggested that finding a mentor can help and you can learn how to mentor others in the future. He further added that 'luck' is a key element of success. Always remember that when one first started, someone gave you the opportunity, so you also need to give others the chance to grow and groom themselves. He emphasizes the importance of 'luck' as follows:

> "*you control some things in life and not others. You control the decisions that you make and the options that you have … but sometimes you encounter aspects of life that you don't control, like someone whom you meet, someone to whom you give you an opportunity and these experiences drive where you are today… but you have to be open to the possibility. You need to go out of your way, to be proactive and increase the percentage of hopefully being adopted….*"

6.0 Findings and Discussion

De Blank and Ho are models of corporate success from whom we can learn. Their respective stories are motivating and inspirational. They have some common features, though their personalities and characteristics differ. Appendix A provides a summary of their education, career paths, and characteristics.

There are some similarities between the two subjects. Both have occupied diverse roles and scopes, and these have helped the development of in-depth industry knowledge to bring organizational success. Neither are afraid to take up additional responsibilities. Both enjoy their jobs and are self-evidently motivators of others. Daily exercise (i.e. running) can help to clear their minds and reduce stress. Nowadays everyone talks about the importance of technology and innovation and how it is disrupting the hospitality industry. The two subjects view technology as simply a means of bringing convenience and note that hospitality as a people industry and that the human touch cannot be replaced as a medium to create memories. Their next step is to give back to society.

6.1 Individual Backgrounds and Characteristics

De Blank is a goal-achiever. Since the age of five, he had already set a goal for himself to work in hospitality. On this basis he may be judged as having remained focused on his path. Having grown up in a wealthy family, he could afford to study at the top-tier elite schools (Gordonstoun) in Scotland from 12 years old. He also enjoys competition and displays self-possession characteristics. During his assignment to open the Ritz Carlton Tokyo, there were various other luxury hotel brands opening (including Mandarin Oriental, Four Seasons, Conrad and Peninsula). In response he stated that "*it won't be a war, it will be a party*" (Foster, 2006). During the confirmation, he explained that wants to provide positive aspects and he commented that there is enough demand to cater all these luxury hotels, even until now, therefore there is no need to have price war among these hotels. He further added about the importance of positioning well at the opening stage. In a way, he demonstrated his confidence and eagerness to be the best and proved able to differentiate himself amongst the other strong leaders.

Ho, on the other hand, grew up in a poor family and had no opportunity to travel until he was an adult. He had to work hard to earn a diploma. He started in a junior position (as a pastry chef) and was given the opportunity to take up different new roles. These opportunities did not come by chance, but his willingness to 'do extra' in helping other and his curiosity. In his early stage of career as a chef, he had some free time, so he took the opportunity to learn by helping other departments including housekeeping, front office, banquet, engineering and procurement. Unintentionally, he learned a lot which provided him the opportunity to transfer from food and beverage (F&B) into procurement and technical service later. With his hard work, confidence, and strong interpersonal competence, he proved his ability to successfully scale the ladder of his career. Since he worked in F&B, Sales and Marketing (S&M), operational departments (including engineering), asset development, and branding as well as the experience gained from the Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A) with Marriott International, there is no doubt about his competencies and in-depth knowledge across all aspects and all levels.

6.2 Family

It is interesting to see how the two subjects manage their families and personal public relations. Family is one of the important components of success for both. Both emphasise taking care of family before business.

> "*Executives are often not successful after the first six months or year after they have arrived. One is because their spouse is unhappy… Two, they cannot adjust to the local culture, whatever their habits and working relationships and they cannot get their message across as a leader…and get people to buy in…*" said by De Blank (November 2018).

Ho's 80/20+ Family-business philosophy ensures his focus and efforts to business, given that family must be well cared for. He tends not to make strong statements about his own success due to his life philosophy of not taking credit or feeling proud of his achievements because it should be the team's accomplishment. This is the clear indication of a collectivist who believes in achieving results through cooperation. De Blank sees the importance of celebrating his success with his family. For example, he promoted the hotel's event management when he was at the Ritz Carlton Tokyo through his daughter Christiana's themed birthday party (Magazine, 2009), and advertised the diamond martini along with his wife.   This was a smart and effective marketing ploy to gain awareness by promoting his personal image. He grabs opportunities to share his success stories, including create a personal website (www.riccodeblank.com), listing all his accomplishments including his background, education, awards, and publications, to highlight his competencies to gain public awareness. He may be more aligned to Burnes' (1978) definition of a transactional leader or to Hofstede's individualist, who enjoy competition and ego-centric.

6.3 Impacts of culture on their leadership styles

Cultures and backgrounds lead to different leadership styles. Both subjects have their charm and ways of managing colleagues. As was previously mentioned, Asians are heavily impacted by Confucianism and this leads to different behaviors from their non-Asian counterparts. De Blank emphasizes loyalty and believes that "deep down" he is Chinese. During his interview with Lin (2012), he said "*I am Chinese (well, practically!). I just have a Dutch passport (and a Western face!*)". He worked with Disney four years, was with Ritz Carlton for 15 years, has now been with SHK for eight years. Although he has 25 years of Asia experience (working in Asia and now for the Chinese owners) and support from his Chinese wife, he understands Chinese needs.

However, de Blank ultimately moved from a Ritz Carlton GM position to be the CEO of SHK because of better career development prospects. By way of comparison, Ho attests to true loyalty. He maintains the good fundamentals of humbleness, passion for hospitality, and loyalty by working for 35 years for one company. Many opportunities arose during his employment with Starwood and he felt happy and appreciated the opportunities that the company provided. He has demonstrated a traditional Chinese 'Confucian' mentality of being loyal to your respected company/leader (Mingzheng & Xinhui, 2014; Wong, 2001).

De Blank seems more directive and shares his vision openly using the conventions of rational bureaucracy as was originally defined by Weber. He avoids micro-management and gives his subordinates the flexibility to achieve their goals. In other words, he may be considered as an 'individualist' for whom the focus is results, self-interest and personal goals. This supports Hofstede's finding that Western cultures are more individualistic *(Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Power et al., 2010).* Ho is collectivist, as described by Hofstede as Asian cultures. Ho seems more of an advocacy and people type of person, aligned to the Confucian relationship philosophy. He often emphasizes team efforts. Either style may lead the team to success, depending on the prevailing environment, the team dynamic and their acceptance of colleagues. It is evident however that both have achieved considerable success within their respective organizations.

6.4 Impacts of roles changes on leadership

There are constant changes and challenges in today's competitive world and continuity is important for building sustainable success. As previously mentioned, Ho started his career as a pastry chef in the development team and grew Starwood properties in China from 12 to 300 hotels across the Asia Pacific region. This is a factual success

in his career as well as the organization's success. He is also practical and unafraid to take up additional tasks to strengthen his skills and ladder his career with confidence. During his position of developer, he felt the lack of hotel operational experience before taking up the Asia Pacific President position. He decided to oversee the opening of the 4,000 room Sheraton Macau in 2012 as an additional responsibility beyond his formal duties. He stresses the importance of leveraging good talents and of having a 'good team' to bring success. With the acquisition by Marriott of Starwood, Ho became more reactive and demonstrated his ability to survive because Marriott saw his value to the Company. This led him to became CEO for Marriott China. He played an important role during the transformation process of merging and integrating, to escalate the company to the next level as a mega global organization to manage Marriott stakeholders and owners (Hamdi, 2015). To achieve the best interests of the organizations and continue the building of respect and trust from his followers, his leadership style changed in accordance with situational leadership. Although it was announced that the acquisition had been completed last year (Marriott International News, 2016), changes are still on-going. It was necessary for Ho to demonstrate his competence and effective leadership, to be motivated and also to motivate others through such constant vicissitudes. Ho describes his leadership style evolved from a more traditional (conservative) and hands-on towards a more open and innovative. This is associated with the changes in roles, increases in confidence and knowledge level.

Relative to Marriott or Hyatt International, SHK Hotel properties are on a much smaller scale, with about 13 hotels (excluding upcoming properties), mainly in Hong Kong and China. As was mentioned by Ricco, 'luck' is also another success factor. He grew up in a wealthy family, went to a top school, and worked in one of the best companies. His high profile and sharing of his success stories helped him to gain public

attention and the opportunity to meet the SHK Chairman who believed in his ability to bring success to the company. His scope of activities has now changed from maximizing RevPAR (revenue per available room) to revenue per square meter (Elite Traveler, 2017). His role has changed from a hotel operator focusing on only one property, to become the owner's representative for all hotels with various brands. Hence, he needs to have stronger leadership skills to manage these hotel operators and to lead his team, reporting to the Chairman directly. Unlike his previous GM position opening hotel which allows him to select his staffs knowing what quality and commitment he can get. His style has changed to be more delegative and to placing more trust in his employees, as explained by de Blank "*it is similar for a politican; if you want to make things happen you have to be relentless…*"

6.6 Difference between Asian and Non-Asian Companies

Context seems more situational for East Asians compared with Western leaders. English and Chen (2007) suggested that cultural differences can explain an individual interaction and behaviour towards a situation. East Asians are more considerate to the situation and view personality as open to change; whereas Westerners place more emphasis on the rational and on analytical thinking (English & Chen, 2007). Other than the influence of individual culture and background on their leadership styles, it is also essential to consider the difference between Asian and non-Asian organizational cultures. Interestingly Ho, as an Asian working in a non-Asian company within Asia; whereas de Blank (non-Asian) works at an Asian company and is able to provide insights on how it is viewed in a Western context.

Company core values are the fundamental beliefs that reflect the organizational culture for which leaders are responsible. Both leaders acknowledge the importance of acting as role models and of setting an example. Most hotels including Marriott,

Starwood and Hyatt focus their core values on business (integrity) and on people (respect, humility and empathy) components. The first core value is a people-centric strategy and often involves referring to 'associates' rather than staff. SHKP's core values are 'quality, speed and efficiency' with a greater focus on effectiveness (Sun Hung Kai Properties' Value, 2018). SHKP is a Hong Kong based company and therefore their values are mostly associated with the local Hong Kong culture. It is to maximize productivity within the shortest feasible time and making the most efficient use of resources. This can be associated with their different business focuses, as a property developer, with the hotel business representing only 10% of the revenue (Interview with de Blank, Nov 2018).

Regardless of cultural or business differences, whether Chinese or non-Chinese, Ho suggested two keys components for success in any environment. These are to learn and respect differences; and to build trust. Given de Blank's background and upbringing in the West, he shares this observational difference between Asian and non-Asian owners. De Blank observed that Chinese need 'lots of face', so leadership styles need to be adjusted delicately according to the local culture and people. Asian companies are often run by family members. Westerners often choose the best people to run the company for them. He elaborated as follows:

> "*taking Marriott as an example, Mr. Marriott retired and chose an outsider to take over because he/she is the best available to do the job. Unlike in Asia, where they choose their son/daughter to run the business, keeping management within the family. This is similar to Jewish people who also choose a family member or someone from the Jewish community (within their religious faith)*".

Chinese unique characteristics are 'humble, nibble, and hardworking' as are traditional Asian working behaviours. These descriptions of grounded-ness and of working hard are also found in Ho's Asianess.

7.0 Conclusions

Leadership comprises factors that may be understood from the perspective of multiple disciplines, including sociology, psychology, business, and education. These allow for the study of how leaders and followers shape organizational cultures. Not everyone can be a leader and not all leaders are effective and successful. In discussion with industry representatives, Lin (2014) concluded that the key success factors are passion (enjoy your work), hard work (willing to take on more responsibilities), courage (not being afraid to fail and try new things), luck, and the team must see your value. Furthermore, she commented that to train a talented individual to develop a flagship hotel in a major city requires 10 to 20 years.

Previous studies have mainly using a conceptual or theory-focused approach to identify the essential features of a leader and/or leader relationship. There has been limited explanation of how such individuals become contemporary leaders. In the present paper, the authors have used "real-life" example of two leaders based on the reporting of past events, interviews, videos, and press releases; and a face-to-face interview. This approach has provided an in-depth analysis of how their beliefs/ cultures have shaped today's successful leaders. Asia is the fastest growing region for the hospitality and tourism industry and it is important for companies to understand cultural differences and how leaders can cope. This prompted the authors to select one Asian leader and one non-Asian leader for comparison purposes. Stephen Ho has represented an Asian leader who is heavily influenced by Confucianism with its emphasis on 'guanxi' (relationship) and for whom others will follow and work hard in return for their care.

Although Ricco de Blank views himself as "Chinese", the background to his leadership style lends more support to Weber's concept of Rational Bureaucracy. He is more direct in his approach with secular authority, results-oriented and ego-centric.

Ho is a classic example of a company's investment in cultivating talents, associates' training initiatives, encouraging internal advancement, and nurturing rewards and long-term careers. This relates to his belief in hospitality talent development of "Mission to Win with Talent". Being impulsive, humble, and low-profile are Ho's key characteristics. He remains optimistic and confident when facing challenges. His philosophy connects the Chinese culture of working hard and being loyal in return for the company's care and opportunities (Mingzheng & Xinhui, 2014). During the acquisition of Starwood and Marriott, he had strong adaptability and was effective in his performance and motivating his followers due to the changing situation, whereas de Blank, of Dutch nationality but seeing himself as Chinese, who married a Hong Kong wife and lived in Asia for a while, understands how Asian society works. His privileged education, background, and creativity, together with luck have enabled him to be triumphant in his chosen career today. He is intelligent, knows what he wants and achieves his goals with confidence. He sets clear goals and visions, enjoys competitions, and often tries to stay ahead of others.

To be a leader, the biggest challenge is to keep up with the changes in generations and technology advancement. In the case of China, it is particularly important to overcome cultural difference with a global mindset, and to stay abreast of new technologies and challenges in recruiting talents due to high turnover rate (Cheung, King, & Wong, 2018). Ho suggests not to stereotype but to segment different talents based on their desires and to provide them with succession plans. He advises future leaders to keep trying and to have a backup plan; to enhance skills and not limit oneself;

and to focus on the positive and take action. De Blank recommends educators not only teaching languages but also the soft skills and culture difference at early stages.

7.1 Implications

The backgrounds, experience, personality, strengths, and weaknesses of every leader are unique. It takes time to acquire and learn from experience. Nevertheless, periodic self-evaluation can help to improve competencies. Luck plays a part in achieving success though it must be accompanied by hard work. Although the two leaders have different backgrounds, both are passionate about their work. Each appreciates the value of having human connections which cannot be replaced by technology. Both are admired for their willingness to adapt to changing environments. They demonstrate an ability to lead change and to bring success to their organizations in their different ways.

A leader represents a company's reputation. He/She has the capability to work with others with commitment and ownership, and the ability to shape a healthy organizational culture and to bring optimal financial results. There are theoretical implications for scholars though understanding the real-life example in profiling Asian and non-Asian leadership within the Asian environment. This paper has elaborated on the differences between Chinese and Western organizational (ie: owner) behaviors in running businesses with respect to the management control and the reflection of core values. A practical implication for the organization, is hiring a CEO/president that fits their organizational culture and addresses potential challenges in this ever-changing environment. One educational implication for future leaders is the importance of learning from admired leaders. This is more about being inspired by their stories, rather than "following their footsteps" hence the merit of the current research approach.

7.2 Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

The findings of this case study have built upon secondary data collection including interviews, blogs, magazines, and videos, followed by semi-structured interviews with the two subjects. Since the interpretation is based on the views and experience of the authors, it is challenging to be objective. However, such concerns can be lessened by conducting further in-depth assessments including a 360-degree dimension of evaluation could be undertaken by interviewing the respondents' peers, staff, family, and friends, regarding life events and occasions. Furthermore, this case study is specifically for the Asia Pacific region and thus may not be applicable to Western settings due to local cultural differences regarding the acceptability of different leadership styles. It may not be generalized to female leaders.

Few researchers have focused on what influences or shapes leadership skills and it is suggested that this topic merits further investigation. Educational institutions may add or design specific curriculum to develop the essential leadership skills that will groom future leaders. Lolli (2013) commented that schools are only able to provide the theory and not experience; experience is a key factor for acquiring and developing interpersonal skills. He further stated that there is no "one-size-fits-all" communication strategy when dealing with individual differences in education, culture, race, generation, and gender (Lolli, 2013). Therefore, it is important to create a dynamic conversation so that employees will feel more comfortable about speaking out. These skills may be provided through institutional education and training from an early age. In sum, with the growth and increasing globalization of hospitality, both companies and education institutions can collaborate to develop leadership training programs for young people to become successful and effective leaders, particularly in fast-growing economies such as China and other Asian countries.

Appendix A: Comparison chart

	Stephen Ho	Ricco de Blank
Nationality	Singaporean	Dutch
Title	President - Global Operations, Greater China	CEO, Hotel Division
Company	Hyatt International (Hotel Operator)	Sun Hung Kai Properties (Hotel Owner)
Company Profile	International hotel chain — 700+ properties globally — China has 51 properties	Owned 'Royal' hotel brand and other international hotel brands, including Four Seasons, Ritz Carlton, W, Holiday Inn and etc… Total 19 hotels in Hong Kong and China
Education	Lifelong learning attitude: - Obtained a diploma in Singapore hotel & catering school. - Continue to learn and obtain EMBA at U of Ottawa and another Master degree in Buddhism Study at HKU	Lifelong learning attitude: - Studied hotel school at Hague University (The Netherland) - Continue to learn from Harvard Business School: Strategic Negotiation in 2011 Building & Sustaining Comp Advantage Application in 2013
Family	Married with 2 children Keep them in low-profile Make sure family is taken care of before business	Married with 2 children High Profile - sharing success with family (interviewed with his wife and wisely promote his hotel via his daughter's birthday celebration)
Hobby	Run daily - help to clear his mind; a way to explore the city and do market study	Run or swim daily - help to clear his mind and help him to think; and health concerns
Career Path	Various positions at different levels & functions, including F&B, S&M, Business Strategy Development & Acquisitions. Focus on company expansion & growing, particularly China market.	Operational positions, mainly Hotel GM, then become Owning company's representative. Focus on identifying opportunity to increase revenue per sqare meter (real estate company).
Impression Management	Comfortable	Friendly
Charisma	Positive & focus, collectivism, share success with people	Positive & expressive, high expectation, share success with family
Characteristics	Sincere & "Win with talent" Humble Hard Working Loyal Low Profile Strong interpersonal competence Not to be afraid taking up challenges Inspirational Confidence Eager to Learn Focus on positive & share results Practical - Do extra	Goal-achiever & self-evaluation Believe in 'luck' & give other people chance Self-interest Always happy & enjoy what you do High Profile Strong interpersonal competence Not to be afraid taking up challenges Ego-centric Confidence Eager to Learn Focus on quality with consistency Strategical
Believe in People	Believes technology only bring convenience but cannot replace human touch	Believes technology cannot replace business travelling
Next Step	Give back to the society (charity)	Give back to the society (charity)
	Photo source: Marriott News Letter	Photo source: Hospitality Net

Company Profiles:

Marriott & Starwood History and Acquisition

Marriott International is one of the largest international hotel chains globally, with over 6,000 properties in 122 countries, and USD $17 billion of revenue in 2016 .   Mr. J Willard and Alice Marriott founded the company 90 years ago. It began with their first "Hot Shoppes" restaurant in Washington, USA.

The original of Starwood Hotels & Resorts was Starwood Capital Partners back in 1991, it was a real estate company in USA ("Starwood Hotels & Resorts History," 2017). They bought the first hotel in 1993 and expanded to over 1500 properties and 11 brands worldwide in 2015 ("Starwood Hotels & Resorts Brands," 2017) before it became part of the Marriott's family.

In November 2015, an announcement of Marriott's plan in acquiring Starwood Hotels & Resorts ("Marriott International Competes Acquisition of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide," 2016). This acquisition was completed in September 2016, which brings them to have a total of 30 brands and becoming the 'best-in-class' loyalty programs.

Their 30 brands are classified as Luxury, Premium, Select, Long Stays and Collections ("Marriott History," 2017). Each category has divided into Classic and Distinctive category. In China, there are a total of 261 hotels (composition of 115 Marriott hotels and 146 Starwood hotels).

Corporate Core Values

Marriott is listed as one of the "100 best companies to work for" in Fortune magazine since 1998 (Hospitality Net, 2015; Ting, 2016). Marriott's core values are 'putting people first, pursuing excellence, embracing change, acting with integrity and serving one world resonates with its associates' (Hospitality Net, 2015; "Marriott International core values," 2018).   Bill Marriott believed "a happy workforce is a cost-saving strategy" due to low turnover rate. Therefore, their first core value is "taking care of associates and they will take care of the customers" ("Marriott International core values," 2018). Combining both Marriott and Starwood together, it is bringing the different cultures to create values, to learn from one another, and

increasing the competitive advantages (ie: better bargaining powers to the OTAs and increasing clienteles through SPG & Marriott Rewards programmes) (Pallister, 2016; Ting, 2016).   Not only financial values but as well as the corporate culture which is part of the company's DNA which Ricca (2016) emphasis Starwood's unique 'culture of cool'. In one of the interviews with David Rodriguez, Marriott's Global Chief Human Resources Officers, he stresses Marriott's 'people first' culture for Starwood associates to understand and create values together through listening (Ting, 2016).

Sun Hung Kai Corporate Profile:

Sun Hung Kai Property (SHKP) core business is related to the real estate including selling and developing properties, hotels, constructions, and insurance & mortgage services ("Sun Hung Kai Properties," 2017). They are also diversified to other industries such as insurance, financial service, telecommunications, Information technology and infrastructures. According to the group's website, as of June 2017, they owned 51.8 million square feet of land. Hotel is one of their property related businesses. There are approximately 6,000 employees in total.

SHKP Hotels have its own "Royal Hotel" brands, all 4 properties are in Hong Kong. They also have 9 international brand hotels, covering different markets and segments, mainly in Hong Kong and China. They include Four Seasons, Ritz Carlton, W Hotels, Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn, Novotel, St. Regis, and Park Hyatt. There are 6 more hotels under development, 4 in China and 2 in Hong Kong ("Sun Hung Kai Properties Hotel," 2017).

Corporate Core Values

SHKP's "core values include 'quality, speed, and efficiency' so that top-quality products and services are produced within the shortest feasible time and with the most efficient use of resources" (Sun Hung Kai Properties' Value, 2018).   They also emphasize on good team works to satisfy or exceed the customers' expectations. They support their staffs in continuous improvement through education and training to enhance their professional knowledge and skills.

SHKP has named as one of the caring employers for the past 12 years (SHK Properties, 2018). They have won twice the family-friendly award given by the Family Councils due to their effort to provide the work-life balance culture.

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