

# Staff Incentives and Career Development Expectations in Chinese Homegrown Hotels: Situational Overview, Determinant Analysis, Motivational Linkages, and Incentive Model Design

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**Abstract :** Given its imbalanced industry structure and faced with increasing competition from international brands, the Chinese hotel industry is facing great challenges for sustainable development. This research examined the staff incentive situation in Chinese homegrown hotels and identified factors affecting employees' career development expectations. Building on the established relationship between career expectations and work motivation, the study developed an improved incentive model based on staff career development expectations. The sample was 382 staffs who are working in H World Group in China. They was selected by stratified sampling to ensure representation from various employee levels, including management, middle, and front-line staff, to achieve a balanced and representative sample. The instrument for collecting data was a Likert 5-point scale. The data were analyzed using structural equation model to examine the relationships between factors such as self-efficacy, high-level needs, career counseling, and promotion and training with career development expectations and work motivation. The research results were found as follows: 1) Career development expectations had a significant positive impact on work motivation ( $\beta = 0.363$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). 2) Job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.223$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), turnover intention ( $\beta = -0.373$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and work engagement ( $\beta = 0.305$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) significantly mediated the relationship between career development expectations and work motivation. 3) Factors such as self-efficacy, high-level needs, career counseling, and promotion significantly influenced career development expectations, with high-level needs having the strongest effect ( $\beta = 0.281$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The development prospects of the hotel industry did not significantly affect career development expectations ( $\beta = -0.001$ ,  $p = 0.986$ ). 4) The total effect of career development expectations on work motivation was 0.628, with a direct effect of 0.317. 5) Career development expectations positively influenced job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.496$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and work engagement ( $\beta = 0.586$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and negatively influenced turnover intention ( $\beta = -0.620$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). 6) The structural equation model showed good fit indices (CFI = 0.951, TLI = 0.948, RMSEA = 0.030), indicating a valid representation of the relationships between the variables.

**Keywords:** Chinese Homegrown Hotels; Career Development Expectations; Work Motivation; H World Group in China

## INTRODUCTION

As competition intensifies, especially with the increasing presence of international hotel brands, there is a pressing need for Chinese homegrown hotels to focus on improving employee motivation and reducing turnover through more effective incentive systems and career development opportunities (Wang, 2020). The China hotel market is highly competitive, driven by the rapid expansion of both domestic and international hotel brands as well as other industry challenges. Based on the "2024 Big Data Analysis Report on the Development Scale and Current Situation of China's Hotel Industry," jointly released by the China Tourist

Hotel Association, the Tourism Science College of Beijing International Studies University, and the Tourism Education Branch of the China Tourism Association, China's hotel industry ranks first globally as of February 2024. It has a massive scale of 869,088 operating entities and 28,881,815 guest rooms. However, its imbalanced structure remains prominent, with low-end hotels accounting for a high proportion of 81.40%. This imbalance directly restricts the sustainable development of the industry. Specifically, it affects overall revenue level, average room rate competitiveness, employee salary stability, and management efficiency optimization. These challenges highlight the industry's characteristic of being "large but not strong" and underscore the urgent need for structural transformation (China Tourist Hotel Association, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors influencing hotel staff motivation, with a particular focus on career development expectations, and to propose an incentive model for hotel staff that could improve retention and performance. Two key terms are critical to understanding the scope of this research. Employee career expectations are defined as the psychological state in which employees hope to achieve certain career milestones or goals within a given timeframe (Guest, Conway, & Briner, 1996). Employee motivation involves both internal and external factors that drive an individual to pursue and achieve organizational goals (Vroom, 1964). In Chinese hotels, however, motivation challenges—such as poor managerial training, cultural factors (e.g., the stigma of “losing face” associated with service roles), and relatively low pay—often prevent employees from aligning their career expectations with actual performance (Lv, Zhang, & Liu, 2022). Reward systems are thus identified as a key factor in enhancing employee motivation, dedication, and job performance (Carolyn et al., 2020). In this study, hotel staff incentive refers to the systematic activities and strategies that hotel management employs to motivate employees by addressing their needs and aligning their personal goals with organizational objectives. Building on these definitions, this study explored aspects related to the incentive systems in Chinese homegrown hotels. First, it investigated the current state of staff incentives within these hotel brands, identifying the strategies that are currently in place and how they are perceived by employees. Second, the study examined the various factors that influence employees' career development expectations, seeking to understand how these expectations shape employees' motivation and overall job satisfaction. Third, it explored the relationship between career development expectations and work motivation, analyzing how fulfilling employees' career aspirations may contribute to their overall motivation and engagement.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the existing literature and theories, the following hypotheses are formulated to explore the relationships between employee career development expectations, motivation, self-efficacy, and turnover intention within the hotel industry. Self-efficacy has been identified as a key factor influencing job performance across various industries. It reflects an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific tasks, which in turn impacts their career expectations. Research has shown that individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to have greater career aspirations and are more likely to perform well (Lent et al., 2010; Metz et al., 2009).

H1: Self-efficacy has a positive influence on career expectations. Individuals with higher self-efficacy generally have higher career expectations. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory emphasizes that fulfilling higher-level needs, such as self-esteem and self-actualization, can drive employee motivation and career development. Employees' career development expectations are likely to be influenced by their perception of opportunities for growth and self-fulfillment within the organization (A. Maslow, 1946; Aldag & Kuzuhara, 2002; Armstrong, 2006).

H2: There is a positive correlation between employee's high-level needs and staff's career development expectations. Career prospects within an industry significantly shape employees' career development expectations. The extent to which employees perceive opportunities for growth in the hotel industry affects their motivation to remain with the organization and strive toward career advancement (Beijing Hospitality Institute, 2022; Wan & Kong, 2012; Wan et al., 2014; Z. Wu & Xie, 2015).

H3: There is a positive correlation between the development prospect of hotel industry and staff's career development expectations. Career counseling and appraisal play a crucial role in aligning employees' career aspirations with the available opportunities in an organization. Research suggests that providing career guidance and feedback positively influences employees' career expectations, helping them chart clear career paths (Fu, 2014; Greenhaus et al., 2009; Merchant Jr, 2010; Musa et al., 2014).

H4: There is a positive correlation between the Career counseling and appraise and the staff's career development expectation. Promotion and training are key components of career development that directly affect employees' career aspirations. Employees who perceive opportunities for advancement and skill enhancement are more likely to have higher career development expectations (Luo, 2009; Musa et al., 2014; Wang H., 2019).

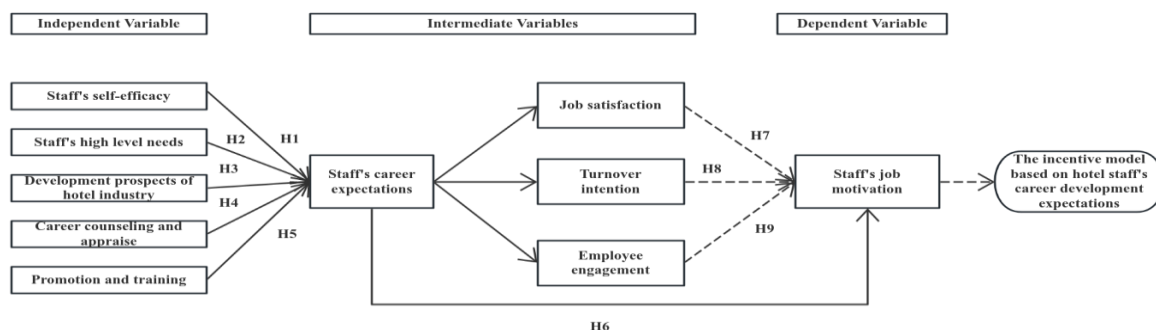
H5: There is a positive correlation between the promotion & training and staff's career development expectations. Expectancy theory suggests that employees' expectations about the outcomes of their efforts directly influence their motivation. When employees believe their efforts will lead to desired rewards, such as career advancement or skill development, they are more motivated to invest in their work and career progression (Nduka, 2016; Nimri et al., 2015; Vroom, 1964; Wu & Xu, 2005).

H6: There is a positive correlation between staff's career development expectations and staff's work motivation. Employee job satisfaction is a crucial factor in understanding how career development expectations influence motivation. Research indicates that employees who are satisfied with their career prospects are more motivated and engaged in their work, which in turn enhances their job performance (Fu, 2014; Rigotti, 2009; Zhao et al., 2007).

H7: Employee's job satisfaction is the intermediate variables between career development expectation and staff's work motivation. Turnover intention is a critical predictor of actual employee turnover behavior. Employees with high turnover intention are less motivated to contribute to the organization and may engage in lower-quality work. Therefore, the relationship between career development expectations and motivation is likely mediated by turnover intention (Chiat & Panatik, 2019; Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Weng & McElroy, 2012).

H8: Employee turnover intention is the intermediate variable between career development expectation and staff work motivation. Employee engagement is a key factor that links career development expectations to work motivation. Employees who feel engaged are more likely to invest effort in their work and exhibit higher performance levels. Engagement can mediate the effect of career development expectations on employee motivation (Haar & Roche, 2010; Harter et al., 2002; Karatepe, 2015; Nawaz et al., 2014; Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2008). H9: Employee engagement is the intermediate variable between career development expectations and employee motivation.

## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to investigate the staff incentive models and career development expectations in Chinese homegrown hotels. Ethical approval for this study was obtained

from the Ethics Committee in Human Research at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) prior to data collection. (Protocol ID No. ECNIDA 2024/0131)

#### ***Population and Samples***

The study focuses on the high-end hotel brands of H World Group, which includes approximately 21,223 hotel rooms. Based on a ratio of 0.17 between hotel rooms and employees, there are approximately 3,608 employees working in these hotels. To minimize research costs and time, a sample is drawn from this population, as suggested by D. R. Cooper et al. (2006). The sample size was calculated using Yamane's (1973) formula, resulting in an estimated target sample of 350 employees, with a 95% confidence level and a maximum error margin of  $\pm 5\%$ . Stratified sampling was employed to ensure representation from various employee levels, including management, middle, and front-line staff, to achieve a balanced and representative sample. Only staff and interns working in high-end hotel brands who are willing to share information are included in the sample.

#### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Data for this study were collected through an online questionnaire administered to hotel staffs at H World. The questionnaire was developed in Chinese and consisted of five sections designed to meet the research objectives, using a Likert 5-point scale to measure employee responses. The survey period was September to October 2024. A total of 382 valid responses were obtained and used by the researcher. The anonymity of the responses was emphasized, and participants were informed that their data would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. The data collected for this study are processed using SPSS20.0. SPSS is used for statistical analysis, including the classification and analysis of various forms of data, which is commonly applied in social science research. Additionally, Amos will be employed for structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships and correlations between the variables.

#### ***Pilot Test***

A pilot test is conducted with approximately 100 respondents to identify any issues with the questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is calculated to assess reliability. A coefficient value of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable. Based on expert feedback and pilot results, the questionnaire is revised to ensure its validity and reliability, ensuring it measures the intended constructs accurately.

#### ***Research Results***

The questionnaire consists of 85 items: 12 demographic questions, 20 on factors affecting career development expectations, 10 on career development expectations, 17 on job satisfaction, 4 on turnover intention, 16 on work engagement, and 6 on work motivation.

**Table 1** Demographic Overview  
(n=382)

Demographic	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	187	49.000
	Female	195	51.000
Age	20 and under	5	1.300
	21-30	90	23.600
	31-40	163	42.700
	41-50	96	25.100
	51+	28	7.300

Demographic	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Highest Level of Education	High school	56	14.700
	Vocational Schools	112	29.3
	Junior College	135	35.300
	Bachelor's Degree	77	20.200
	Master's degree and above	2	0.500
Gross income (CNY)	3000 and under	4	1.000
	3001-5000	120	31.400
	5001-7000	171	44.700
	7001-10000	48	12.500
	10001-20000	28	7.300
	20001 and above	11	2.800

Table 1 presents demographic overview of 382 respondents shows a slightly higher representation of females (51.0%) compared to males (49.0%). The age distribution is widest between 31-40 years (42.7%) and narrowest for those 20 and under (1.3%). The largest portion of respondents reported a gross income between 5001-7000 CNY (44.7%), while the smallest groups were those with three or more children (0.5%), a master's degree or above (0.5%), and a gross income of 3000 CNY and under (1.0%).

**Table 2** Factors Affecting Employee Career Development Expectations

Affects relationships			<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-efficacy	→	career expectations development	0.134	0.182	2.987	0.003
High-level needs	→	career expectations development	0.198	0.290	4.752	<0.001
Prospects of the hotel industry	→	career expectations development	0.000	0.001	0.010	0.992
Career counseling and appraisal	→	career expectations development	0.101	0.147	2.835	0.005
Promotion and training	→	career expectations development	0.159	0.221	3.581	<0.001

Table 2 presents the results of the variable regression analysis. Self-efficacy shows a significant positive regression effect on career development expectations, with a standardized regression coefficient of  $\beta = 0.182$  and a significance level of  $p = 0.003$  ( $< 0.01$ ). High-level needs also exhibit a significant positive regression effect on career development expectations, with a standardized regression coefficient

of  $\beta = 0.290$  and a significance level of  $p < 0.001$ . However, the development prospects of the hotel industry do not have a significant regression effect on career development expectations, as indicated by a standardized regression coefficient of  $\beta = -0.001$  and a significance level of  $p = 0.992 (> 0.05)$ . Career development counseling and appraisal demonstrate a significant positive regression effect on career development expectations, with a standardized regression coefficient of  $\beta = 0.147$  and a significance level of  $p = 0.005 (< 0.01)$ . Finally, promotion and training have a significant positive regression effect on career development expectations, with a standardized regression coefficient of  $\beta = 0.221$  and a significance level of  $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 3** The Impact of Staff's Career Development Expectation on Work Motivation

Impact On			<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Career development expectation	→	Work Motivation	0.645	0.749	0.071	9.043	<0.001

As shown in Table 3, in the variable regression relationship calculation results, staff's career development expectations have a significant positive regression effect on work motivation, the standardized regression coefficient  $\beta=0.749$ , the significance test result  $p<0.001$ , and the total effect of the model is established.

**Table 4** Results of Mediation Effect Analysis

Independent Variables	Job Satisfaction		Turnover Intention		Work Engagement		Work Motivation				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Gender	-0.048	-0.071	-0.015	0.013	-0.011	-0.037	0.019	-0.015	0.001	-0.010	-0.003
Age	0.034	0.052	0.069	0.048	0.004	0.025	-0.040	-0.013	-0.025	0.004	-0.021
Marital Status	0.025	0.013	-0.084	-0.069	0.020	0.006	0.010	-0.008	-0.011	-0.034	-0.010
Children to be raised	0.028	0.020	-0.037	-0.027	0.062	0.053	0.036	0.024	0.020	0.014	0.008
Origin of birth	0.007	0.016	-0.013	-0.024	-0.083	-0.073	0.017	0.030	0.027	0.021	0.053
Highest Level of Education	0.079	0.074	0.031	0.037	0.040	0.034	0.007	0.000	-0.016	0.014	-0.010

Independent Variables	Job Satisfaction		Turnover Intention		Work Engagement		Work Motivation				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Majors in the school/university	-0.028	-0.046	-0.010	0.012	0.006	-0.015	0.056	0.030	0.040	0.034	0.034
Gross income (CNY)	0.029	-0.012	0.009	0.058	-0.010	-0.056	-0.018	-0.078	-0.075	-0.056	-0.061
Main Effect											
Career Development Expectations		0.437***		-0.525**		0.496***		0.641***	0.544***	0.445***	0.490***
Mediating effect											
Job Satisfaction									0.223***		
Turnover Intention										-0.373***	
Work Engagement											0.305***
R2	0.014	0.202	0.017	0.288	0.011	0.254	0.007	0.411	0.450	0.510	0.480
Adjust R2	-0.007	0.182	-0.004	0.271	-0.01	0.235	-0.015	0.397	0.436	0.497	0.466
F	0.668	10.450**	0.8	16.731***	0.529	14.038**	0.313	28.814**	30.407**	38.572**	34.297**

Table 4 presents the results of the mediation effect analysis, examining how career development expectations influence job satisfaction, turnover intention, work engagement, and work motivation. The analysis shows that career development expectations positively impact job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.437$ ), reduce turnover intention ( $\beta = -0.525$ ), and enhance work engagement ( $\beta = 0.496$ ). The mediation effects of job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.223$ ), turnover intention ( $\beta = -0.373$ ), and work engagement ( $\beta = 0.305$ ) on work motivation are significant, with  $R^2$  values ranging from 0.254 to 0.480, indicating varying degrees of

explanatory power across models. The results confirm the importance of career development expectations in shaping employees' work motivation through multiple mediators.

**Table 5** Multiple Mediation Effect Test Results

Effect	Pathway	Effect Value	95% Confidence Interval		Effect Size
Total effect	Career Development Expectations → Work Motivation	0.628	0.551	0.705	100.0 %
Direct effect	Career Development Expectations → Work Motivation	0.317	0.231	0.404	50.6%
Mediating effect	Career Development Expectations → Job Satisfaction → Work Motivation	0.063	0.025	0.103	10.0%
	Career Development Expectations → Turnover Intention → Work Motivation	0.147	0.099	0.199	23.4%
	Career Development Expectations → Work Engagement → Work Motivation	0.101	0.057	0.151	16.0%

Table 5 presents the results of the multiple mediation effect test. The total effect of career development expectations (CDE) on work motivation (WM) is 0.628, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.551 to 0.705, indicating a significant impact. The direct effect of CDE on WM is 0.317 (50.6% effect size). The mediating effects are as follows: job satisfaction (CDE→JS→WM) contributes 10.0% to the effect (0.063), turnover intention (CDE→TI→WM) contributes 23.4% (0.147), and employee engagement (CDE→EE→WM) contributes 16.0% (0.101). The confidence intervals for all mediating effects do not include zero, confirming their statistical significance.

**Table 6** Significance Test of the Overall Influence of Variables

Impact On			<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-efficacy	→	Career Development Expectations	0.134	0.181	0.045	3.003	0.003
High-level needs	→	Career Development Expectations	0.193	0.281	0.041	4.669	<0.001
Development prospects of the hotel industry	→	Career Development Expectations	0.001	0.001	0.039	0.017	0.986
Career counseling and appraisal	→	Career Development Expectations	0.105	0.152	0.036	2.955	0.003

Impact On			<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Promotion and training	→	Career Development Expectations	0.165	0.229	0.044	3.737	<0.001
Career Development Expectations	→	Job satisfaction	0.504	0.496	0.068	7.444	<0.001
Career Development Expectations	→	Turnover intention	-0.888	-0.620	0.093	-9.579	<0.001
Career Development Expectations	→	Work engagement	0.697	0.586	0.081	8.654	<0.001
Career Development Expectations	→	Work motivation	0.308	0.363	0.068	4.546	<0.001
Job satisfaction	→	Work motivation	0.124	0.149	0.043	2.917	0.004
Turnover intention	→	Work motivation	-0.204	-0.344	0.037	-5.485	<0.001
Work engagement	→	Work motivation	0.144	0.202	0.041	3.533	<0.001

Table 6 presents the results of the significance test for the overall influence of variables. Career development expectations (CDE) are significantly influenced by self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.181$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), high-level needs ( $\beta = 0.281$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), career counseling and appraisal ( $\beta = 0.152$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), and promotion and training ( $\beta = 0.229$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, the development prospects of the hotel industry do not significantly impact career development expectations ( $\beta = 0.001$ ,  $p = 0.986$ ). Career development expectations also significantly affect job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.496$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), turnover intention ( $\beta = -0.620$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), work engagement ( $\beta = 0.586$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and work motivation ( $\beta = 0.363$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.149$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), turnover intention ( $\beta = -0.344$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and work engagement ( $\beta = 0.202$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) all significantly affect work motivation.

In conclusion, all hypotheses in this study were supported, except for H3. H1, H2, H4, H5, and H6 all showed significant positive relationships, with self-efficacy, high-level needs, career counseling, and promotion opportunities all positively influencing career development expectations. However, H3, which hypothesized a positive correlation between the development prospects of the hotel industry and career development expectations, was not supported, as no significant relationship was found.

## DISCUSSIONS

Career development expectations in Chinese homegrown hotels are influenced by various factors, with significant differences based on work experience but not demographic characteristics. Employees with moderate work experience (4-6 years) tend to have higher career aspirations, reflecting their anticipation of career advancement opportunities, while those with less experience focus on adaptation, and those with extensive experience may prioritize job stability over progression (Super, 1990; Greenhaus et al., 2009; Lent et al., 2010). This finding supports the notion that career expectations evolve with career stages. Additionally, self-efficacy and high-level needs significantly impact career development expectations. Employees with higher self-belief tend to have stronger career aspirations, while fulfilling higher-level needs, such as self-actualization, also enhances these expectations (Bandura, 1977;

Maslow, 1946). Career counseling and promotion opportunities further strengthen career development expectations (Merchant Jr, 2010; Wu & Xie, 2015). Furthermore, the study finds a direct positive relationship between career development expectations and work motivation (Vroom, 1964), with job satisfaction, turnover intention, and work engagement acting as mediators. Employees who perceive their career development needs being met exhibit greater job satisfaction, lower turnover intention, and higher work engagement, which, in turn, boost motivation (Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Schaufeli et al., 2002). This study emphasizes the importance of aligning employee incentives with career development expectations and suggests that hotels can enhance work motivation by fostering self-efficacy, offering career counseling, and providing clear promotion pathways.

## CONCLUSION

First, self-efficacy and high-level needs were found to significantly enhance career development expectations. Employees who believed in their abilities and had their higher-order needs satisfied showed stronger career aspirations. Conversely, the development prospects of the hotel industry did not significantly affect career expectations, which suggested that internal organizational factors may have a more direct influence on employee expectations than external industry conditions. Second, career counseling and appraisal, as well as promotion and training opportunities, were also identified as key drivers of career expectations. These factors provide employees with the necessary guidance and pathways to career progression, further reinforcing their motivation to excel in their roles. Third, career development expectations were shown to significantly influence work motivation, with job satisfaction, turnover intention, and work engagement mediating this relationship. Last, the study further emphasized that job satisfaction and turnover intention are significant mediators in the relationship between career development expectations and work motivation. That means employees who are satisfied with their career prospects are less likely to leave their jobs and show greater work motivation.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study's sample is restricted to staff members from H World Group's Chengdu operations in China, which limits the generalizability of findings to other hotel groups, branches, or geographical regions. The factors influencing employee motivation may differ under varying corporate cultures, management practices, or regional socioeconomic conditions. Future research should expand the research scope to encompass H World Group operations in various Chinese cities and conduct comparative analyses across regions with different economic situations. Such expansion would not only improve the generalizability of findings but also provide valuable insights into how regional economic disparities affect employee motivation patterns within the same hotel group.

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