



Ashesi University

Making people strategic assets for competitive advantage:

A case study of Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra

Thesis project

by

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### DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

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I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis was supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of theses established by Ashesi University.

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## ABSTRACT

This study bases its arguments on the Resource-based theory and the human capital theory of making people strategic assets of the company for competitive advantage in the hotel industry, using Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra as a case study. The hospitality industry in Ghana is experiencing tremendous growth as a result of the growth occurring in the tourism industry in the country. Recent research reveals that the industry in Ghana is facing severe challenges concerning scarcity of skills across a broad spectrum of roles within the industry. Having a skilled workforce that meets the needs of clients beyond their expectations is an illustration of making employees strategic assets of the company.

Using the qualitative approach to research, data was collected from 15 employees at the Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra. The data collection tools used are structured interviews. The data are analyzed by developing themes, for discussion. The results of the analysis revealed that Oak Plaza Hotel uses recruitment agencies to employ people; after which they train and develop them to make them strategic assets for the hotel. The study concludes that for a firm to have a competitive advantage over and above its competitors, employee retention strategies is a significant factor. Following these findings, the study recommends that hotels should focus on building relationships with their employees to identify what motivates explicitly in order to ensure their stay in their current jobs.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of study

In a globalized society filled with numerous firms and business opportunities, companies especially those in the service industry have to ensure that their employees are stable and working productively towards achieving their strategic goals (Crain, 2009). Most organizations have therefore decided to effectively and efficiently leverage their human capital to attain considerable success with a unique position on the market. As business opportunities increase, making people/employees strategic assets of the organization has become increasingly relevant for a firm's success in its operations.

As such, firms are strategizing towards making people strategic assets for competitive advantage (Johnson, 2009). These strategies are critical to employees because they boost their morale at work, increase their productivity, motivation and ultimately job satisfaction. The strategies are also crucial for the organization because they ensure continued success through a reduction in employee turnover rates, minimizing costs that arise from recruiting new employees and provide the firm with a unique competitive advantage (Strandskov, 2006). Primarily, the benefits of making people strategic assets for competitive advantage in an organization cannot be overemphasized.

The term competitive advantage according to Barney (1991) refers to the firm's ability to implement a value-creating strategy simultaneously not being enforced by any current or potential competitors. A more recent definition according to Ghemawat and Rivkin (2006) of competitive advantage is a firm's ability to create the willingness

among buyers to pay much more than it costs to produce the product or service. In some instances, competitive advantage is attributed to international sourcing given the increasingly changing working patterns. Samli and Browning (2003) claim that global supply is an excellent way to enhance the firm's global competitive advantage. The differences in opinions from the various authors on what competitive advantage entails provide a strong drive to explore how making people strategic assets in an organization contribute to its competitive advantage.

Research by Trawreh and Al-Rfou (2009) contends that in today's fast-paced economy, utilizing human resources to offer the best service and product needed is a significant source of competitive advantage. Hence, the sources of competitive advantage have now shifted entirely from technological and financial resources to human resources (Trawreh & Al-Rfou, 2009). It is no longer about the kinds of technologies that the firm has, but rather, its workforce. (Almada & Borges, 2018). This is the case especially in the service sector industry since employees are in direct contact with customers daily, which makes them an integral part of the company's value chain. According to Prahalad and Hamel (1990), the source of competitive advantage in organizations lies in management's ability to nurture employee skills and abilities that help the firm to adapt to the changing patterns in opportunities.

Similarly, Kefela (2010) also mentions that creating wealth through the application of human creativity and knowledge surpasses wealth creation through natural resource extraction and processing. The observations from the two authors are particularly crucial to the service industry which for most of their jobs deal with people. What this means is that, after selecting the right people for the organization, management



has to put measures in place to effectively maximize all the talents and abilities of its employees, to ensure the stability of the workforce.

However, the challenge now is that employees once employed in an organization, do not stay for an extended period. Attracting, retaining and managing the right people is one of the significant problems that organizations face in today's global environment. It can be attributed to the fact that people are not stable in their jobs because they are continually looking and shifting from one highly paid job to another. Their unstable behavior in organizations affects how well they perform in their assigned duties which in turn affects the company's competitive advantage (Sánchez-Manjavacas, Saorín-Iborra, & Willoughby, 2014). Most importantly, it affects the firm's ability to build a competitive advantage through people (Crain, 2009). Employee retention then becomes a critical aspect in helping the firm attain its competitive advantage because having an active retention policy as a company is the first step towards making people strategic assets.

Johnson (2000) defines employee retention as the firm's ability to keep its valuable employees for a longer time than its competitors. Employee retention requires that organizations come up with effective human resource management strategies that motivate their employees to stay longer in their jobs to achieve a sustained competitive advantage (Glen 2006). In coming up with these strategies, firms need to think about how they attract their employees, what kind of people they attract, how they concurrently manage and retain the right people with the skills and competencies relevant to the firm's long-term competitive advantage (Lawler, 2009). Selection and retention of the right people are guided by finding the best fit between the employees and the company's

culture and values (Crain, 2009). These arguments provide insight into the process of making people strategic assets of an organization although firms have not yet figured out how to implement them in their operations.

Even though employee retention and strategic management of people is a crucial aspect of attaining competitive advantage, organizations are still not able to retain their employees for an extended period hence affecting their efforts towards achieving competitive advantage on the market. The US Department of Labor (2015) reported that the average Labor turnover in Ghana increased from 19.2% in 2003 to 20.2% in 2010 (as cited in Conrad, 2015). According to the World Economic forum (2015), the hotel industry faces the highest employee turnover rates globally. The continuous shift of employees from one job to another implies that organizations incur high costs during the recruitment process which affects their revenue turnover. Because employee turnover is costly, it poses a problem for organizations across the world. Whenever an employee leaves his/her job for another, all their knowledge and expertise goes with them (Conrad, 2015). Sometimes, the organizations can work to compensate for the loss by employing new people, but they never get it back in full because every individual is unique in their talents and skills.

Since employee retention builds human resource capabilities that generate competitive advantage, it should be a starting point for strategic human resources management (Kamoche, 1996). It should, therefore, be every firm's desire to ensure that employee's tenure in the workplace is retained for a more extended period because it not only makes them strategic assets of the firm but also impacts the competitive advantage of the firm. The issues of making people strategic assets for competitive advantage given

the rapid increase in employee turnover rates have led many scholars to research within service fields such as education, health, and technology to address the matter. It is with these ideas in mind that the author set out to find out the various strategies Oak Plaza Hotel uses to attract, retain and manage its right people and how that contributes to their competitive advantage in the service industry.

### Overview of Oak Plaza Hotel

Oak Plaza Hotel is a hospitality company located in Accra. It offers a wide range of services ranging from contemporary guest rooms, massage, tourism in Accra, airport transfers, continental breakfast, regional and international dishes for lunch and dinner among other services (Oak Plaza Hotel, 2018). A continental breakfast is served each morning in the communal lounge. The hotel works with the mission of creating a unique identity by providing competitive world-class services and products, leaving memorable experiences for all clients (Oak Plaza Hotel, 2018).

### Why Oak Plaza Hotel?

Based on the researcher's findings from the past research conducted at the hotel, the Human Resource Manager at Oak Plaza Hotel mentioned that the hotel has a turnover rate of 5% per year. This observation prompted the researcher to explore further some of the factors that helped the hotel to have such a low turnover rate. This is because according to a report by the World Economic Forum (2017), the hospitality industry faces high turnover rates and it is estimated that the turnover rate in this industry is 30%. Hence, for Oak Plaza Hotel to have such a turnover rate was something extraordinary that the author found worthy of further exploring.

Additionally, the author set out to explore the topic of making people strategic assets for competitive advantage with a highly competitive locally owned hotel. The justification for the choice of a locally owned hotel was informed by the fact that amidst the rising penetration of multinational line of hotels into the hospitality industry, for instance, Kempinski Hotel, Marriot Hotel among others, the locally owned hotels have to keep up their standards with those of the international hotels. Oak Plaza Hotel which is a locally owned hotel has been able to keep up with these standards over the years evidenced by the two consecutive awards as the best three-star hotel of the year. The reviews that the author found on Trip Advisor which is a website where guests write their reviews about the hotels they have visited, showed that Oak Plaza Hotel is one of the best three star Hotels in Ghana with the majority of the reviews applauding the friendly nature of the employees at work (Trip Advisor, 2019). A combination of these factors informed the authors' decision to use Oak Plaza Hotel as a case study for this research.

## 1.2 Research Motivation

As part of the researcher's Human Resource Management class that she took in her third year, she worked with the Oak Plaza Hotel for her research project on job design and its impact on employee motivation. During the time of the research at the hotel, she got insights into hotel operations and some of the human resource strategies that the hotel had put in place to ensure that employees were entirely motivated at their jobs. As an aspiring Human Resource Management expert, she was driven by her interest to explore further how employees can be made strategic assets of organizations in Ghana and how firms can leverage on training and development of people for a competitive advantage on the market.

### 1.3 Research problem.

Today, people change their jobs 12 times on average in their career journey, with some industries having higher turnover rates than others. For example, according to a study by Franck (2015), the hospitality industry currently faces the most senior employee turnover rate of 26.8% followed by the technology sector at 13.2%. This places a heavy burden on firms in the industry's resources in terms of the costs involved in getting new employees. It also affects the firm's ability to make its employee's strategic assets for a competitive advantage on the market.

Several studies have been conducted in Kenya, Nigeria, India, Uganda, the United States among others, about how organizations have been able to attain competitive advantage (Campbell, Coff, & Kryscynski, 2012). However, this research paper proposes that most of the previous studies have been focused more on how employee stability affects performance in organizations. There have been no specifications on how attracting the right people and retaining them for a long time contributes to the firm's competitive advantage in the hotel industry in Accra.

Additionally, firms continue to incur costs arising from an increment in employee turnover. These costs include recruitment costs, training, and development for the new employees, time spent during the process of selecting new employees among others (Noe, 2005). When employees who were most liked by the clients leave, the customers follow them to their new jobs while other clients may stop patronizing the services/products of the company (Crain, 2009). Moreover, incase an employee leaves the firm, whatever projects they were working on are put on halt given their absence which affects organizational success. In some cases, the projects/ assignments are reassigned to the

existing employees which lower their morale because they are overworked after picking up the extra workload created when colleagues quit their jobs (Werner, Schuler & Jackson, 2009).

Furthermore, when employees leave the company for other jobs, they go with the knowledge of the organization in addition to the business contacts that they might have used to build the business which is a cost to the firm. This form of knowledge is known as tacit knowledge which refers to the individual knowledge based on their experiences in the organization. According to Noe (2005), tacit knowledge includes knowledge about the customers, the company and its business processes. If an employee leaves the firm, they leave with all this information and may sometimes use it to outcompete their previous firms. A combination of these factors illustrates a gap in the existing literature on the different strategies that firms can use to overcome the problem which is the focus of this study.

#### 1.4 Research relevance

The study of making people strategic assets of firms through employee retention has been a topic of discussion since the inception of the human resource function in the 1990s (Al-Rfou & Trawneh, 2009). Research works have attempted to present a relationship between employee retention, firm productivity and competitive advantage with much emphasis on labor productivity and motivation (Conrad, 2015). Aida (2014) argued that flexible working hours was one of the factors that contributed to employee retention in addition to job designs that gave employees a sense of accomplishments. These factors are all tailored towards making people strategic assets of the firm. With this background on the topic, this study is set out to explore the different strategies that Oak

Plaza Hotel uses to ensure that employees are made strategic assets of the firm.

Furthermore, the study seeks to understand how leveraging human capital can help firms achieve a competitive advantage on the market.

The study would also induce an appreciation of employee retention strategies on Oak Plaza Hotel's strategic goals and objectives which will establish a stable workforce as a norm in the service industry. The findings from the study will also add to the broad existing literature on strategic human resource management and achieving competitive advantage through people. However, this study does not seek to generalize the findings to the entire hotel industry but rather seeks to understand the perspectives of strategic human resource management and competitive advantage at Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra. The conclusion and recommendations from the study are therefore tailored towards Oak Plaza Hotel.

### 1.5 Research questions

- a) How does the Oak Plaza Hotel attract, employ and retain the right people?
- b) How does Oak Plaza Hotel use training and development to make employees strategic assets for competitive advantage?

### 1.2 Research Objective

The study seeks:

- To find out how Oak Plaza Hotel attracts, employs and retains the right people
- To find out how Oak Plaza Hotel uses training and development to make employees strategic assets for competitive advantage.

### Overview of research methodology

The methodology explains what the author will use to collect data, the different approaches that will be used in collecting data from respondents, how the data will be analyzed, and the tools and techniques to be used for the analysis. This research seeks to identify the strategies that Oak Plaza Hotel uses to attract, manage and retain its employees. The study also seeks to explore how making people strategic assets at Oak Plaza Hotel contributes to its competitive advantage on the market. Therefore, the research mainly uses a qualitative approach to give the researcher an in-depth understanding of strategic human resource management from the varying viewpoints of employees and line managers at the Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra.

The tool for data collection is guided by structured interviews with open-ended questions. The population of the study is all employees at Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra. The sampling frame for the research participants are employees in the nine departments of the company. The data collected will be organized into themes to create a grand narrative of the findings from the research. The description will assess the responses from the research participants to answer the research questions and to offer any recommendations for improved strategies and policies for continuous success.

### Thesis outline

The study is organized as follows.

#### Chapter 1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the study conducted. It also provides a brief background of the topic under investigation by defining what competitive advantage is, the sources of competitive advantage, statistics on employee turnover in organizations, employee retention and its relevance in attaining competitive



advantage. The chapter further discusses the problem identified by the author, the purpose and significance of the research, a set of research questions the author seeks to answer and a summary of the methodology to be used in collecting and analyzing data.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Guided by theoretical frameworks, the literature review introduces some of the past research that has been undertaken on the topic in literature. It provides a context for the study and contains a detailed analysis and critique of the existing literature on the matter while relating it to this study. In so doing, the literature review presents a gap in the literature that the study will fill through further research on the matter.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The Methodology provides a detailed description of how the research question will be answered. It explains the research design, the data collection tool to be used, how collected data will be analyzed including the tools to be used in the analysis of the findings. Additionally, the chapter explains by justifying the reasons for the chosen research design, method, and tools to be used.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and discussion of findings

This chapter presents answers to the research questions in section 1 by providing the theoretical and empirical results from the research conducted. It discusses the implications of these findings on the business phenomena and policy formulation and presents the limitations faced during the research process.

## Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

This section provides a summary of the analysis undertaken during the entire research process. It also points out the limitations of the study, suggestions for further research on

the current topic and recommendations to aid in policy formulation in Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the concepts and frameworks surrounding the research topic to throw light on the background of the study. The chapter reviews concepts like *employee retention as a form of making people strategic assets of a firm, competitive advantage, contribution of employee retention to organizational growth and competitive advantage*. The theories that form the basis of this literature review are *Resource-based Theory (Barney, 1999) and Human Capital Theory (Lawler, 2014)*.

### 2.1 Employee attraction and employment

Presently, companies are facing an increase in employee turnover rates. Because of this problem, firms are looking for the biggest talent and highly trained people (Crain, 2009). Firms are expected to find answers to what kind of people they need to attract to the company and the different ways of how they are going to make that happen (Wise & Rojas-Mendizabal, 2018). Hence companies are expected to come up with strategies that are specific to identifying their needs by attracting enough qualified employees to work for them (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005). However, companies should not merely focus on attracting any qualified applicants to fill up vacancies in the firm but rather emphasize getting the right applicants for the jobs. According to Crain (2009), it is easy for firms to find good people but difficult for firms to find people who match the company core strategy. Jim Collins warns that saying that “people are the most important assets is misleading. It is only the right people who are the company’s most important asset” (Crain, 2009, P. 6). Once the firm gets the right people, it can achieve sustainable

competitive advantage, and without doubt, the employees become strategic assets for the firm (Crain, 2009).

In the process of attracting the right people for the available jobs, firms incur costs. Hence, it is in the management's interest to ensure that once the right people are found, they are retained for a more extended period in the organization (McGinley, Zhang, Mattila, & O'Neill, 2015). Such costs include time, advertising, recruiter time and travel expenses, administrative costs, interviews, reference checks among other things. With this in mind, if the process does not attract not only qualified but the right people for the job, it places a heavy burden on the firm's resources as well as the firm's efforts towards making its people strategic assets for competitive advantage (Hoye, 2013). Despite the numerous relevant literature that has been done around the subject, employee attraction still holds a special place in the success of the organization because employees have a direct effect on the firm's performance (Wise & Rojas-Mendizabal, 2018). The author further asserts that the firm's human capital accelerates its competitive advantage in the business environment. Hence firms are continuously seeking to develop strategies that will enhance the attraction of the right people.

The process of attracting the right people is the first step that firms undertake towards making their employees strategic assets (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005). Often, firms pay attention to the attitudes and intentions of the applicants with the assumption that a person's attitude is a predictor of their behavior. This is the case because attracting and retaining the right people is one of the biggest challenges that firms are facing today (Hoye, 2013). There have been several studies on what constitutes organizational attraction such as human resource strategic systems, geographic location of firms,

perception on organizational training and development, perceived quality of life at the workplace among other things (Hutchings, De Cieri, & Shea, 2011).

Similarly, employment models have been developed such as the ASA model (attraction, selection, and attrition). The model explains that most employees will be influenced by their perceptions of how they will fit within the organization. This has turned out to be a key determinant of employee attractiveness to an organization exceeding other factors like expected promotions or pay (McGinley et al., 2015). It is also important for firms to be cautious of how they portray themselves in the job listings they advertise because people want to associate with firms whose values align with their own (Barney, 1999). Crain (2009) further emphasizes the fact that attraction and retention of the right people are guided by finding the best fit between the applicant and the firm's culture and values. Accordingly, the literature seems to suggest that when attracting and employing the right people, the kind of information showcased is essential. Hence firms ought to be careful of how and what information is shared because it influences a person's attractiveness to the organization.

## 2.2 Employee retention

“Employee retention is defined as the firm's ability to retain its employees for a longer period than the competition within which the firm operates” (Johnson, 2000, P.156). In the perspective of this study, employee retention refers to the various strategies' firms employ to ensure their workforce are satisfied with their jobs, stay longer and use their knowledge, skills, and competencies to provide quality products and services that exceed clients and customers' expectation for the company to gain a competitive advantage. Employee retention is mainly concerned with workforce

satisfaction on the job (Sheehan-Smith, 2006). Job satisfaction can be achieved by implementing human resource management practices that assist and aid in the process of meeting employee needs (Hong, Hao, Kumar, Ramendran & Kadiresan, 2012).

Studies by Robbins and Judge (2007) show that firms that have more satisfied employees are likely to have low employee turnover rates than firms with unsatisfied workers. This is because employees who are happy and satisfied with their jobs are likely to be more productive than unsatisfied employees (Amissah, Gamor, Deri, & Amissah, 2016). Furthermore, Ashton (2018), found that soft human resource management that involved relationship building between staff and employees of organizations affects the job satisfaction of the employees. These authors assert that employee satisfaction relates more to the quality of life, employment security, regular training and employee traits rather than increasing remuneration. Their findings suggest that more salaries and remunerations given to employees do not improve job satisfaction (Amissah, Gamor, Deri, & Amissah, 2016; Ashton, 2018).

On the contrary, Grant, (2016) did a study on the impact of remunerations on employee satisfaction in the hospitality industry, and he found out that increasing remunerations for employees improve their motivation at work and enhances job satisfaction. These findings are most likely to influence the researcher's discoveries since the study uses a hospitality firm as a case study as well. The insights from the two groups of thoughts though different, all point to remuneration being a strategic human resource management strategy that firms like Oak Plaza Hotel that are continually working closely with customers, can either benefit from or lose depending on how they apply the strategy

in the firm. Hence, it is a collective effort between employees and management to ensure that employee needs are met.

Research by Njuguna, (2014) suggests that employee retention requires the entire organization to put in place effective human resource management strategies that will help motivate employees to remain stable in the firm. In developing these strategies and policies, Human resource managers need to consider the long-term vision of the firm and ensure that the employees' skills and talents are aligned with the firm's goals (Bartlett & Ghashal, 2002). The goal of these strategies is to reduce the employee turnover rates thereby reducing recruitment costs, training costs, and the loss of the firm's talent and knowledge about the company. Hence, companies must reject the current notion that employees have no loyalty to their companies and begin focusing on creating an environment that will attract the right people and sustain them by enabling them to stay committed to the goals of the firm (Bartlett & Ghashal, 2002). Mainly, firms should provide a conducive environment that promotes employee growth and appreciates the efforts of the workers in their interest in making employees strategic assets of the company.

Employee retention through employee growth and development, therefore, acts as an organizational capability that firms can use to reduce their employee turnover rates as well as build firm-specific knowledge, commitment and skills of their workforce (Ramlall, 2003). Hence building the firm's capabilities through equipping employees with firm knowledge is a strategic move to retaining employees not to mention its impact on workforce committed to the company vision.

According to Frazis and Loewenstein, (2013), firms can engage in some activities that will ensure that they attain a committed workforce. One of the activities is offering fringe benefits to the employees aside from the wages that they receive on an agreed period. The authors found out that an additional dollar to the fringe benefits of an employee reduced employee turnover as compared to an additional dollar to the wages of the same employee. For instance, firms use benefits such as health insurance, pensions together with family coverage to create a stable workforce in the firm. However, this is done at the industry/firm level and not on an individual worker level which raises the question of whether fringe benefits established at the industry level are a good determinant of a stable workforce.

A group of researchers analyzed the impact of the structural and individual determinants on employee commitment and retention (Arekar, Jain, Desphande, and Sherin, 2016). They found out that individual determinants such as job motivation, and meeting job expectations positively affected employee commitment and retention. However, structural determinants like promotions were negatively correlated hence did not ensure job commitment. This is because when an employee receives a promotion, they feel like they are adding value to the firm, but are not necessarily satisfied with the job they are undertaking (Arekar et al., 2016). Not only do these arguments point us to the fact that job satisfaction and motivation are vital to retaining and making people strategic assets of the firm but also provide insights into the effect of promotions on employee morale and value addition to the firm.



### 2.3 Competitive Advantage.

Researchers like Korsakiene (2004) and Pfeffer (1994) define competitive advantage as something that distinguishes the company from its competitors. However, although the above authors have come up a definition of the term competitive advantage, Stoelhorst and Bridoux (2006) argue that there is no single definition to the term. They, however, assert that throughout the various literature that defines the term competitive advantage, value creation seems to be the common theme that cuts across. Porter (1985), on the other hand, defines competitive advantage as the firm's ability to develop and implement competitive strategies within an organization.

Furthermore, Grant (2016) defines competitive advantage as the firm's ability to utilize its unique resources and capabilities and consistently earns higher profits than the competition. Competitive advantage based on Barney's Resource-based view of a firm looks at a firm's competitive advantage as the firm's ability to implement a value creating strategy not being done by other firms. In other words, other firms should not be able to duplicate what the firm is doing; its resources are immobile, valuable and rare (Barney 1999). That said, firms that seek to make their employee's strategic assets and a source of competitive advantage should ensure that the employees are valuable with rare talents that other firms in the industry cannot easily duplicate and transfer to their firms.

Similarly, Hall (2000) suggests that a firm's competitive advantage should be unique, valuable and not easy to duplicate by other firms in the same industry. Grant (2016), asserts that there are three sources of a firm's competitive advantage namely cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. Yet Lindahl and Beyers (1999) say that the sources of competitive advantage arise from firm characteristics such as creativity, innovation,

flexibility and scope of services offered which increases demand, introduces new technologies, and improves efficiency (Passemard & Kleiner 2000). Nonetheless, the two studies bring forth the various ways in which firms can achieve competitive advantage and interestingly, they both boil down to strategic management of people and resources within the firm to build its competitive advantage. They both require the support of employees who, if not strategically managed well to execute the activities, can lead to the downfall of the firm. A firm's resources include its workforce who are considered to be internal sources of competitive advantage.

According to Strandskov (2006), internal sources are firm-specific. Along these lines, Barney (1994), argues that firm-specific resources and capabilities are what helps to build a firm's competitive advantage. As companies continue striving to produce effectively and efficiently with their resources and capabilities, technology plays a crucial role in making this happen. Hall (2000) observed that the firm's workforce needs to learn and understand how to integrate the new technology at the workplace. Firms workforce should, therefore, stay motivated and satisfied to keep them committed and willing to learn how to use technology effectively and efficiently (Al-Rfou & Trawneh, 2009). Significantly, successful organizations with sustainable competitive advantage are those that understand the relationship between the firm's workforce and the business strategy of the firm.

Managers should put in place competitive forces that are driven by how the firm's workforce is treated (Al-Rfou & Trawneh, 2009). According to Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002), most managers of companies understand the implications of this shift because they are aware that they need flexibility, speed, and continuous self-renewal to sustain

their competitive advantage. For firms to attain competitive advantage through people, they need to rethink how to make employees strategic assets and the kind of relationship building that exists between the firms and the employees. What this means for the firms is that achieving success should be focused on working with people by seeing them as a source of competitive advantage and not just a cost that needs to be minimized (Pfeffer, 1994). The author further postulates that since other sources of competitive advantage are less critical than management of people, firms should now shift their focus to their employees by building relationships with them to ensure that they are committed to the firm. Firms that undertake these practices can successfully outcompete other firms in the industry. Competitive advantage through people cannot be achieved without making employees strategic assets of the firm.

#### 2.4 Training and development

Employee training and development is one of the most important human resource practices that firms undertake because it is treated as a critical aspect of organizational success (Kirkman and Tesluk, 2006). As the battle for top talent increases among firms, employee training and development becomes more vital than ever. However, amidst these claims, there is significant debate among human resource professionals and researchers as to the impact that training and development have on employee turnover rates. One school of thought argues that employee training and development is responsible for an increase in workforce turnover rates while the other school of thought suggests that employee training and development is the solution to turnover rates because it ensures employee retention (Bartell, 2001). Regardless of what the two schools of thoughts postulate, most human resource professionals agree that employee training and

development has a significant effect on the success of an organization and perhaps employee retention (Costen, Johanson, & Poisson, 2010).

Presently, the hiring process for top talent is costly in terms of time spent and money (Shen, 2004). Thus, how the firm engages and develops its top talent from the time they are hired influences their retention at the workplace and organizational success (Krogt & Warmerdam, 1997). Consequently, employee training and development programs that help firms attain the most significant impact are as a result of critical planning and alignment processes (Terrion, 2005). However, it is essential to note that although training and development both directly impact the bottom line of organizations which is to achieve organizational success, the two are dissimilar.

According to research by Noe (2005), training is defined as the planned effort of organizations to build and facilitate employee competencies such as knowledge, behaviors, and skills of their current jobs. Similarly, Costen, Johanson, & Poisson, (2010) explains that employee training entails specific knowledge and skills that are meant to improve the performance of the current jobs held by employees. Due to this, employees are in a position to learn new information, new methodologies, and refreshment of their already existing knowledge and skills about their jobs. Training also ensures that there is a lasting impact among employees after the end of the training as well as staying up to date about the new changes at the workplace.

On the other hand, employee development refers to the formal education, experiences, and relationships that help employees perform effectively in their current or future job in a company (Noe, 2005). According to Jacobs & Washington, (2003), rather than having a focused lens on the employee's current job, employee development is

future-oriented as it ensures that all employees have the competencies necessary for them to perform to their fullest potential in support of organizational goals and objectives. Even though Noe (2005) argues that employee development is directly linked to organizational performance, Jacobs & Washington, (2003) does not support the fore mentioned argument. The authors found out that when employee development is factored with other variables like sophisticated human resource planning and evaluation programs, there is no positive relationship between employee development and organizational success. Conversely, research by (Krogt & Warmerdam, 1997) argues that employee development poses a risk to the firm when an employee quits the firm after the end of the program. When an employee is given training and development, they become more productive due to the enhancement of their skills. As a result, they tend to look for other job opportunities that match up with their skills which poses a threat to the organization where the employee was trained. There are sunk costs involved in developing the employee, the opportunity cost of time among other costs to the firm. Nevertheless, when employees are adequately trained and developed, there is a high likelihood that they will perform exceptionally well.

According to Esteban-Lloret, Aragón-Sánchez, & Carrasco-Hernández, (2018), employee training and development are critical in achieving sustainable competitive advantage. Research by Savery and Luks (2003), shows that companies that invest in employee training and development consequently realize it improved productivity and profitability are reinforcing the common belief that investment in training and developing employees is the most valuable investment that companies make. Additionally, the two practices improve the quality of service offered by employees, but most importantly, they

both reduce turnover rates by ensuring employee retention (Noe, 2005). Mostly, training and development show employees that the company they are working for cares about their growth by investing in their skill development. This pushes employees to appreciate these efforts which make them want to come to work every day to ensure that organizational goals are achieved (Savery and Luks, 2003). Hence employees who value skill development during their career journey are willing to extend their stay at an organization that equips them with well-structured training and development programs (Ahmad, 2013).

Along these lines, Brum (2007) highlighted the fact that once employees are introduced to training and development, they portray high levels of commitment to the organization for a more extended period as compared to other employees. Indeed, employees after they have been trained and developed, gain a social relationship between the organization and themselves (Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2008). To this end, the strong relationships that employees attach to the organization influences them to continually improve their working habits hence making them strategic assets for the organization. It is of no surprise that organizations invest in having intense training and development programs as a means of making sure that employees are contented and stable at the workplace (Krogt & Warmerdam, 1997).

Therefore, the fundamental opinions from the literature emphasize strengthening of the Human Resource function to consider the fact that employees value skill development in their professional / career journey hence upgrading more opportunities for them is a great stepping stone towards reducing turnover rates, achieving retention and making employees strategic assets for competitive advantage.

## 2.5 Employee retention and competitive advantage.

Employee retention entails sustaining human resource capabilities by maintaining high performing employees as well as improving the weak employees' abilities to better meet the company's organizational objectives (Kamoche, 1996). Grant (2016) defines human resources as the internal and external capabilities of an employee to include, skills, experiences, talents, and knowledge. According to Kamoche (1996), the source of competitive advantage in the marketplace lies in these employee's expertise. Kor and Leblebici (2005) further assert that firm-specific employee expertise creates a unique and challenging to duplicate the workforce by other firms in the industry. Creating a rare and highly valuable workforce is a high starting point for making people strategic assets of the firm. According to Schatzel, Strandholm, and Callahan (2012), firm-specific skills help to reduce the effects of layoffs and improve the morale of the employees while at work.

The world is currently characterized by the globalization of product markets which calls upon the input of human capital as a resource to provide a competitive advantage to the firms in the industry (Dawson & Abbott, 2011). Competitive advantage has undeniably become a key success factor for firms in this globalized economy. According to Mamman, Kamoche, Zakaria, and Agbebi (2018), human resource professionals in organizations employ strategic human resource management strategies that are vital in empowering human capital to maintain the firm's competitive advantage (App, Merk, & Büttgen, 2012). These strategies include recruiting the right people, selection, training, networking and job motivation which are all geared towards improving skills, knowledge, and abilities of the employees. Notably, a combination of

these strategies is geared towards making people strategic assets of a firm which in turn influences its competitive advantage. In the same vain, the strategies create a unique and attractive employee who fits within the culture, vision and the objectives of the firm.

According to Dawson and Abbott (2011), hiring the right people who fit within the organizational culture and climate of the firm is key to obtaining organizational effectiveness and commitment. The authors further stress that consequently, there will be a reduction in employee turnover rates because the right people for the job fit within organizational goals and objectives. According to (Campbell et al., 2012), the link between employee retention and competitive advantage is that firm-specific human capital as the primary source of the firm's competitive advantage constrains employee mobility which allows for skills development and enhancement among employees. Chow et al. (2006) further assert that the enhancement in employee skills ensures the provision of more efficient and effective services to customers which improve customer loyalty hence building the firm's competitive advantage in addition to elongation of the employees' stay at the company.

The relationship between employee retention and competitive advantage is based on the fact that the longer an employee stays at his/her job, he /she becomes more experienced with the business practices, customer handling, and other operating systems within the firm (Chow et., 2006). Employees are in a position to serve customers with passion and enthusiasm because of their longevity advantage on the job which is one of the key expectations of an employee in the hotel industry consisting of hotels like Oak Plaza. The authors further say that employees with a longevity advantage are in a position



to build relationships with customers which continues to build customer loyalty (Chow et al., 2006).

According to Dawson and Abbott (2011), Human Resource strategies that facilitate relationship building within the hospitality climate range from the trust, communication, warmth, friendliness, and opportunity for advancement. If firms in the hospitality sector work towards implementing the five key elements, the turnover rate is likely to be low and organizational performance will increase tremendously. On the other hand, studies by Ampomah and Cudjor (2015) show that there is an increasing rate in employee turnover in the hospitality industry in Ghana which is a hindrance to firms like Oak Plaza Hotel to obtain their objectives. The authors further mention that when an organization loses one of its high performing employees, it gives rise to inconsistencies in the delivery of services to customers which affects customer morale and loyalty for the company. Consequently, employees leave their current jobs because they are not satisfied with the working conditions in the workplace.

(Amissah et al., 2016) did a study on the factors influencing job satisfaction in Ghana's Hotel industry and employee turnover effects on customer service in Ghana. The authors found that high employee turnover rates negatively affect the quality of service and consequently on the firm's competitive advantage in the hotel industry. Additionally, research by Afaq et al. (2011) that sought to understand the relationship between employee's regular training periods and their performance in the hospitality sector found out that employees with on the job training and experience performed better than employees with only formal training. It should not be forgotten that when a firm identifies ways of making its people strategic assets, its retention rate increases, and

turnover rate decreases. Hence strategies like on job training equip employees with the knowledge, enhances their personal and professional growth, increases their productivity which directly affects the firm's competitive advantage.

The above literature review indicates that there is a positive relationship between employee retention and organizational performance. It shows that when the employees of the firm are relatively stable in their jobs for an extended period, their contribution to organizational performance is positive and very high. As such, the author would expect Oak Plaza Hotel to have such structures in place. However, the literature does not explicitly illustrate how employee retention/ workforce stability in their jobs affects the competitive advantage of the firm. It does not also bring forth strategies that firms use to establish a positive contribution to organizational performance. Hence, the author will go further to address these gaps by conducting in-depth qualitative research at the Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra.

Accordingly, this study employs two theories to throw more light on the need to address the existing gap and how to go about it.

## 2.6 Theories employed.

For this study, the Resource-Based Theory and the Human Capital Theory are identified as theories that throw more light on the need for firms to make employees strategic assets for competitive advantage.

### *2.6.1 Human Capital Theory*

Human capital refers to a collection of skills, abilities, knowledge, talents, experiences, training, wisdom, intelligence that people acquire and possess to increase

their productivity and ability to create value (Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004). The authors believe that human capabilities are comparable to other resources in the firm that contributes to the production of goods and services. Hence, human capital is also a form of resource that firms possess and are a representation of the firm's wealth towards achieving its goals and objectives. Becker's 1993 study (as cited in Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004) discussed that in the 1950s, the main factors of production were believed to be land, labor, management, and physical capital. However, the revolution of economies in the 1960s revealed that there was a residual gap known as human capital that accounted for the economic growth of economies. As such there was an increase in the war for human capital among firms at the time.

According to Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002), the war for talent/ human capital among firms has intensified because firms need to be sure that the hearts and minds of the talented and capable employees are maximally utilized to maintain their competitive advantage. However, Lawler (2014) observed that only a few organizations are structured in ways that recognize the relevance of human capital. He further argued that most organizations understand how to leverage their financial capital, plant, and equipment but pay less attention to how to leverage their human capital. Most organizations control their workforce behavior rather than encourage them to be essential contributors to the firm. It is hence vital to design organizations in ways that treat human capital as a source of competitive advantage (Lawler, 2014). The arguments from the above authors stress the importance of building the firm's human capital because by doing so, employees become strategic assets of the company that helps build the firms competitive advantage.

The human capital theory states that both individuals and society derive economic benefits from investments in people (Sweetland 1996). According to Grant (2016), the stability of the firm's human capital allows firms to consider human capital as part of the resources of the firm. The theory also asserts that human capital is not only built through formal education but can also be obtained through on the job training. This is because, for most of the workers, their skills and abilities are known to increase while on the job which increases their productivity in the process. Lawler (2009) says that for an organization to create a human capital-centric organization, it requires that the firm attracts and retains the right people in addition to effective management. Company's need proper functioning corporate board members that are adequately equipped with the information to advice on human capital effectiveness in the organization.

In today's changing economies, human capital is the most important asset for organizations. Hence It involves more human resource strategies like designing organizational systems that utilize the firm's human capital to gain a sustainable competitive advantage that is hard to duplicate by competitors (Lawler, 2009). For most of the workers whose skills have been built through formal education and training, they stand high chances of not sustaining the firm's competitive advantage because the skills they have are easily imitable (Nafukho et al., 2004). The best alternative it offers to the firm is a competitive parity instead of a competitive advantage which is the central element to maximum value creation. On the other hand, experiences, skills, and abilities that employees build while on the job from a unique firm-specific point of view create unique, non-imitable human capital capabilities that are responsible for the firm's competitive advantage.

Similarly, human capital can be a source of competitive advantage but only if isolating mechanisms are used to prevent workers from transferring their knowledge and skills to a rival organization (Barney, 1991; Rumelt, 1998). According to Kor and Leblebici, (2005), Hartch and Dyer, (2004), one of the isolating mechanisms that firms can use is the firm-specific human capital which cannot be easily duplicated in other firms. Thus, unlike the general human capital theory that poses a threat of mobility among employees to rival firms, firm-specific human capital ensures that the firm's human capital is not transferable, imitable and not easy to duplicate (Campbell et al., 2012). Firm-Specific human capital is a reliable way of making people strategic assets for the firm because all their knowledge, skills and capabilities are tied to the firm and no other competing firms in the industry. Hence, it helps firms in building their competitive advantage by doing something that competing firms in the industry cannot do.

It is therefore important for a firm like Oak Plaza Hotel to ensure that its firm-specific human capital is one that builds the firms sustained competitive advantage. Given the fact that it is a service firm whose employees directly interact with customers daily, it is necessary for Oak Plaza Hotel to empower its employees with training on how to deal with customers. One of the isolating mechanisms that the firm could employ is obscuring its superior performance from its competitors though firm-specific customer handling techniques that other firms cannot easily imitate.

#### *2.6.2 The Resource-Based Theory.*

The resource-based view is a model that was initiated by Barney in 1991 that looks at the firm's resources as a key to its competitive advantage and superior performance. The theory states that a firm's competitive advantage is based on its

resources at its disposal that enables the firm to respond to the threats and exploit the available opportunities in the external environment (Barney 1991). For the firm's resources to hold sustained competitive advantage, they must be valuable in exploiting the external opportunities and responding to the threats. It must be rare among the firm's competition. It must be imperfectly imitable, and it should possess no close substitutes (Barney, 1991). Since labor/workforce is considered to be one of the resources that the firm has, the qualities that Barney mentions satisfy the strategies that firms can engage in making their employees strategic assets.

The idea behind the Resource-based theory is that firms own and develop their unique resources and capabilities that make them unique as compared to other competitors in the industry (Korsakiene, 2004; Strandkov, 2006). Therefore, a company seeking to create a distinct position on the market has to advance its available resources by continuously looking for new ones that give it an upper hand on the market (Njuguna, 2014). Grant defines resources as the productive assets that a firm has such as tangible, intangible and human resources (2016). Barney (1991) classified a firm's resources into three major categories which include organizational capital resources, physical capital resources, and human capital resources.

In today's globalized economy, the source of competitive advantage in organizations has shifted from its products and services to how the firm utilizes its internal resources and capabilities (Korsakiene, 2004). Physical capital resources, however, are not as critical as human capital resources because global markets have expanded the supply chain which has enabled firms to accumulate more physical capital.

The accumulation of more physical capital by organizations implies that the resources are easily imitable, are of less value, and there are more substitutes in the market.

Similarly, organizational capital resources such as the firm's mission and vision, principles, values, stories, culture, and norms have increasingly become duplicable by other firms. This leaves the human capital and its proper management as a critical and significant source of a firm's competitive advantage in this dynamic and knowledge-rich economy (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002). If firms can implement value creating strategies that make employees strategic assets of their organizations, the accumulation of human capital would actively build a firm's competitive advantage. According to Grant (2016), firms within the same industry might appear to be utilizing the same resources. However, each one of them employs different resource isolating mechanisms such as causal ambiguity, deterrence, social complexities, unique management strategies among others that help the firm build and sustain its competitive advantage.

Oak Plaza Hotel has a total of over 200 employees all of which are considered as part of its human capital resources. It is therefore instrumental for Oak Plaza Hotel to devise several strategies that will help make its human capital valuable, highly non-substitutable, not easily imitable skills and capabilities as well as perfect immobility of its workforce. Achievement of these strategies will make its employee's strategic assets and secure sources of competitive advantage.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The study seeks to understand the strategies that Oak Plaza Hotel uses to attract and retain its employees. The study also pursues to find out how the Oak Plaza Hotel uses training and development to make employees strategic assets for its competitive advantage. This chapter explains the methods that will be used to collect and analyze data to answer the research questions of the study. The chapter also discusses the research design, sampling techniques, data collection methods and analysis methods to make sense of the data collected. This study will employ a qualitative research approach to find answers to the following research questions.

### 3.1 Research Questions

- a) How does the Oak Plaza Hotel attract, employ and retain the right people?
- b) How does Oak Plaza Hotel use training and development to make employees strategic assets for competitive advantage?

### 3.2 Research design

The study uses a qualitative research design approach aimed at finding out line managers' understanding of employee retention strategies and the effect of training and development on the firm's competitive advantage within the hotel industry in Ghana. A qualitative research design is suitable for studies that are interested in finding out specific information about the behaviors, culture, opinions and social contexts of a particular phenomenon (Northeastern University, 2015). Hence a qualitative research approach for this study is the most appropriate. For instance, the author of this research paper seeks to understand the concept of employee turnover and retention from the employee's



perspective as well as line managers. The researcher also seeks to find out the strategies that the Oak Plaza Hotel uses to overcome this challenge in addition to using training and development as leverage to increase employee retention and to build its competitive advantage. Hence, the findings from the research do not generalize to the more significant population but instead represent the thoughts and feelings of the Oak Plaza employees. Additionally, based on the fact that all understanding is constructed, different research participants are going to have different interpretations of their own experiences within the social systems in which they interact (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009), which makes it purely qualitative research.

### 3.3 Research method

The study will employ a case study qualitative method. According to Vanderstoep & Johnston (2009), a case is specific, complex, functioning thing that operates within a bounded system like an organization, a family, a social or political group among others. Hence, this paper seeks to understand the characteristics that define Oak Plaza Hotel as a system and describe the state of employee retention, training and development, and competitive advantage. The use of a case study method seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding of the characteristics that define the research topic. For this research paper, the author seeks to explore the strategies used by Oak Plaza Hotel to ensure a stable workforce as well as how to leverage on training and development to build the firm's competitive advantage. The use of the case study will also be useful to test the theories of human capital and the resource-based view to find out how they work in the real world (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

### 3.4 Research Scope.

#### *3.4.1 Study Population*

The target population for the study is all workers at Oak Plaza hotel in Spintex, Accra – Ghana. The population was divided and narrowed down to a sample focused on line managers in the nine departments of the Hotel and regular employees. The line managers were chosen as part of the population because they directly monitor and evaluate the performance and working conditions of all employees in their respective departments. Hence, they are in the best position to provide details on how they identify the needs of their employees in order to provide the training and development. Additionally, the line managers have details on how best they have been able to ensure that the employees under their supervision are retained for a relatively more extended period at the workplace.

The employees have been chosen to be a part of the population of study because they are the main point of discussion for this research paper. Their needs if not well addressed by management may be the reason for their early leave from their jobs. Hence, getting their opinions on what influences their movement from one job to another and how training and development play a role in them staying at their current jobs is fundamental to understanding the research topic and achieving the research objective.

### 3.7 Sampling

#### *3.6.1 Sampling technique*

According to Vanderstoep & Johnston, (2009), qualitative research studies employ non-random sampling techniques because the researchers are skeptical that any

conclusions drawn from the research can be generalized to a larger population. As such, this study will employ a non-probabilistic sampling method to select research participants. The author will use a purposive non-random sampling technique to identify participants with similar characteristics. A purposive sample constitutes individuals with a particular attribute and is often designed to provide equal representation of all groups of people in the population (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Based on this analogy, the author used purposive sampling to include both employees from all the departments of the hotel and line managers of the various departments to be a part of the sample.

### *3.6.2 Sampling frame*

The sampling frame for the research study from which the sample of the research participants will be drawn will be all the line managers and employees within the working departments of the firm: Marketing, Accounting, Operations, Customer service, and Human Resource departments. The choice of all the line managers is based on the fact that they are in charge of all the employees in their departments. Hence, how they treat the employees will determine the employee retention rate to be considered as strategic assets of the company for a competitive advantage. The choice of all employees is to get their perspectives on what needs they have and how they can be met by their line managers in order to make employees strategic assets of the organization. The employees are at the center of competitive advantage; therefore if the line managers are not strategically managing their people, the turnover rates will increase. The researcher finds it interesting to explore the different perspectives of the line managers and employees on how making strategic assets of the organization contributes to competitive advantage.

### 3.6.3 *Sample size*

The researcher considers using a sample size of 15 participants for the research study. The choice for this sample size is based on the explanations offered by Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009) that qualitative research sample sizes are relatively smaller than those of quantitative study. Also, according to Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, (2013), single case studies conducting interviews for data collection generally contain 15 to 30 interviews. Since this research study employs a single case study, a sample size of 15 participants for this research is not considered as unusual but rather sufficient because it meets the redundancy criteria for a qualitative study. In order to ensure that there is representativeness in the sample size, the author will look out for saturation during the data collection process to ensure that data is not entirely repetitive.

### 3.7 Data Collection

The researcher collected primary data from the line managers and employees in the different departments at the Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra. The researcher used primary data because it helped in getting basic and up to date information around the topic of employee retention, training and development, and competitive advantage. Based on the literature review, the researcher found no specific information on Oak Plaza Hotel's employee retention and competitive advantage hence, collecting primary data for the research provided accurate and specific information relevant to the evaluation of the company as well the phenomenon under study.

### *3.7.1 Data collection instrument*

The researcher used guided interviews as an instrument to collect primary data from the research participants. The researcher chose interviews because they got research participants to talk and freely express themselves about the topic of discussion. It also gave room to the researcher to take note of the emotions, reactions, and behaviors of the research participants in responding to questions which came in handy during the data analysis stage. Using guided interviews as an instrument also gave the researcher the freedom to ask additional questions that came up during the interview based on the participant's responses.

### *3.7.2 Data collection procedure*

The data were collected within two weeks. The researcher visited Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra to conduct face to face guided interviews with the research participants. With the help of the Human Resource Manager of Oak Plaza Hotel, the researcher got a schedule of the available employees and line managers with whom to have the interviews. Before the interviews with each participant, the researcher provided a brief about the research topic and the purpose of the interviews. The researcher read out information on the consent form and informed the participant that they were free to decide whether to partake in the research or to leave. After receiving the participant's consent through signing the consent form, the researcher went ahead to conduct the interview which lasted for a maximum of one hour. After the interview with each participant, the researcher did a debrief to ensure that all the essential responses given are what the researcher had recorded and nothing else has been left out.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

After collecting data through interviews, the first step that the researcher took was to transcribe all the responses from the interviews conducted. Afterward, the researcher looked out for responses that answered the objective of the study. In the process, the researcher identified, examined and interpreted patterns and themes found in the data. After identifying the recurring themes and patterns in the data, the researcher explained how the various themes and patterns helped to answer the research question and meet the objectives of the study. This was done by categorizing data and coming up with themes that were at the center of discussion of the findings.

The process of developing themes is cyclical, and it eventually leads the researcher to more sophisticated analyses (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). It was in the interest of the researcher of this paper to look out for words and phrases that were dominant in emphasis and repetition across the participants' responses. The different themes developed from the participants' responses were used to write a grand narrative that explained the different perspectives of the research participants. Since words are a poor representation of the experiences of the research participants, the researcher accounted for tacit knowledge and authenticity by going back to the research participants to ensure that they agreed with the interpretations and representations of their lived experiences.

### 3.9 Validity and reliability

Validity looks at how accurate the research findings are while reliability looks at the consistency with which the results from the study produce the same results when the research is performed again (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). There are several ways of

validating the findings of a qualitative study; however for this study, the researcher employed the argumentative validation technique. According to Sarantakos (2005), argumentative validation is established when the findings and conclusions drawn from a current study can be tested and followed. Based on this statement, the researcher compared the findings from this study to similar studies that have been done before to validate and find out whether the results support the claims made by other studies. Additionally, the researcher performed cross-referencing with the participants from which the data was collected to ensure the validity and authenticity of the information provided.

### 3.10 Ethical Considerations

To ensure that there are confidentiality and respect for research participants, appropriate measures were taken. For instance, research participants were allowed to withdraw from the study in case they wished to leave because their participation in this research was strictly voluntary. In this regard, consent forms were given to research participants before their participation in the research. The consent forms informed the research participants about the benefits and risks that they were to encounter for participating in this research. The consent forms also clearly assured the research participants that their responses would strictly be confidential hence would not be shared with anyone other than the researcher of the study. The researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board that granted this study the required level of reliability.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND ANALYSIS

### Introduction

Unquestionably, the success of any company especially those that operate within the service industry depends on how well the employees of the firm meet customer needs. Consequently, firms within the service industry tend to empower their employees in such a way that they can provide the best services to their customers (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002). However, with the background information on the continuous increase in employee turnover rates, it places a heavy burden on companies to find strategic ways of ensuring that employees are retained and managed well in order to provide the best services in a unique manner that distinguishes the company from other firms in the same industry (Conrad, 2015).

This chapter presents findings from the primary data that was collected through face to face semi-structured interviews with fifteen employees that are currently working at Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra (See Appendix A for the interview questions). The chapter goes further to use content analysis to come up with universal themes that will be described in detail individually. The author follows up with the provision of a linkage of the findings to the literature review and evaluates how the data findings provide answers to the research questions of this study.

### 4.1 Data Analysis process

In analyzing the data, the process required the researcher to first of all understand how to make sense of the volume of data she had collected from the interviews she had conducted and observations she had made. This meant that she had to acquaint herself



with the data by separating her attitude and knowledge of the topic from the experiences of the research participants. This realization gave the researcher some form of flexibility and open-mindedness about the different responses that were given by the research participants. As such, the author's analysis of the data transformed into the realization of insights by bringing meaning, order, and structure of the large mass of data to address the research objective.

According to de Vos et al., (2005), the analytical process of qualitative research is cyclical meaning it does not follow a linear pattern. It involves reducing large volumes of data to relevant facts and patterns that communicate the insights from the data collected. As the researcher transcribed and translated the data, she identified patterns of expressions and experiences shared by participants to which she became more aware as more data was being transcribed and analyzed. It is from these patterns identified that the researcher was able to interpret and make sense of the data. According to Kruger, de Vos, Fouché & Venter, (2005), interpretation of data involves an ongoing process of explaining and making sense of the collected data. Hence, the usage of a combined process of collecting data and analyzing it in an organized and coherent manner is what gave rise to the interpretations provided in the next section of this chapter.

#### 4.2 Demographic characteristics of participants in terms of Length of stay at Oak Plaza Hotel

The researcher conducted interviews with 15 employees chosen from different departments at the Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra. For instance, Sales, Information Technology, Front desk office, Security, Finance, Food, and Beverages as well as Maintenance departments. The participants were randomly chosen, and the researcher

further divided the participants based on the number of years at the hotel, and line managers versus employees. Five line managers were interviewed, and their working experience at Oak Plaza Hotel ranged from 2 to 9 years whereas the remaining nine were regular employees in the various departments as earlier stated. The researcher conducted the interviews in person on two different days of the week based on the availability of the research participants at the time. The table below shows a breakdown of the length of stay of the participants at Oak Plaza Hotel together with their coded names. The use of coded names implies that the actual names of the participants are not revealed because according to the confidentiality terms in the consent form, their identity was never to be revealed.

**Table 4.1: Research participants and their length of stay at the oak plaza hotel.**

Respondent Coded Name	Period of stay at Oak Plaza Hotel
Line Managers	
Nana (Respondent 1)	One year, seven months
Kofi Respondent 2	Nine year, seven months
Araba (Respondent 3)	Six years
Kwame (Respondent 4)	Two years
Tabi (Respondent 5)	Six years
Regular employees	
Mark (Respondent 6)	Two years, two months
Angel (Respondent 7)	Four years
Sally (Respondent 8)	Three years
Priscilla (Respondent 9)	2 Years
Jose (Respondent 10)	Two years
Steven (Respondent 11)	One year, eight months
Daniella (Respondent 12)	
Kobby (Respondent 13)	Seven years, two months
Ama (Respondent 14)	Six years

### Generating themes

After conducting the interviews with the participants, the researcher transcribed each interview onto a word document as the first part of analyzing and making meaning out of the participant's responses. After the transcription, the researcher carefully read through each one of them to gain an understanding of each participant's responses. The researcher was trying to get a sense of the interview responses before dividing it into parts. The researcher went on to identify patterns and common themes that were reflected in the participant's responses. According to Vanderstoep and Johnston, (2009), identifying patterns, themes and recurring ideas that cut across all the research participants is one of the most challenging stages for qualitative research. Based on this statement, the researcher devoted a considerable amount of time to ensure that the process was smooth and that every critical information was not left out. In order to get the various themes that are later discussed in this chapter, The researcher used a process of coding. She started with open coding which allowed the researcher to break down responses into categories and examining them to obtain meaning out of them. The researcher followed up with selective coding which gave rise to the themes being discussed below.

### Themes developed

After several rounds of analyzing data through open coding, the researcher came out with four major themes namely:

- Employee motivation/ Employee Retention Strategies
- Sources of competitive advantage
- Stable workforce for competitive advantage

➤ Staff turnover rates

During the process of selective coding, the researcher identified overlapping themes which will be later explored in this chapter because of the fact that some of the responses from employees were synonymous to what the line managers said. However, the researcher identified some differences in what the employees and line managers said about the same issue which increased the researcher's interest to uncover these differences by finding out why they existed and how the gap between line managers and employees can be covered. Below is a tabulated illustration of the different themes together with the sub-themes and categories under each since a description of one theme would refer to another.

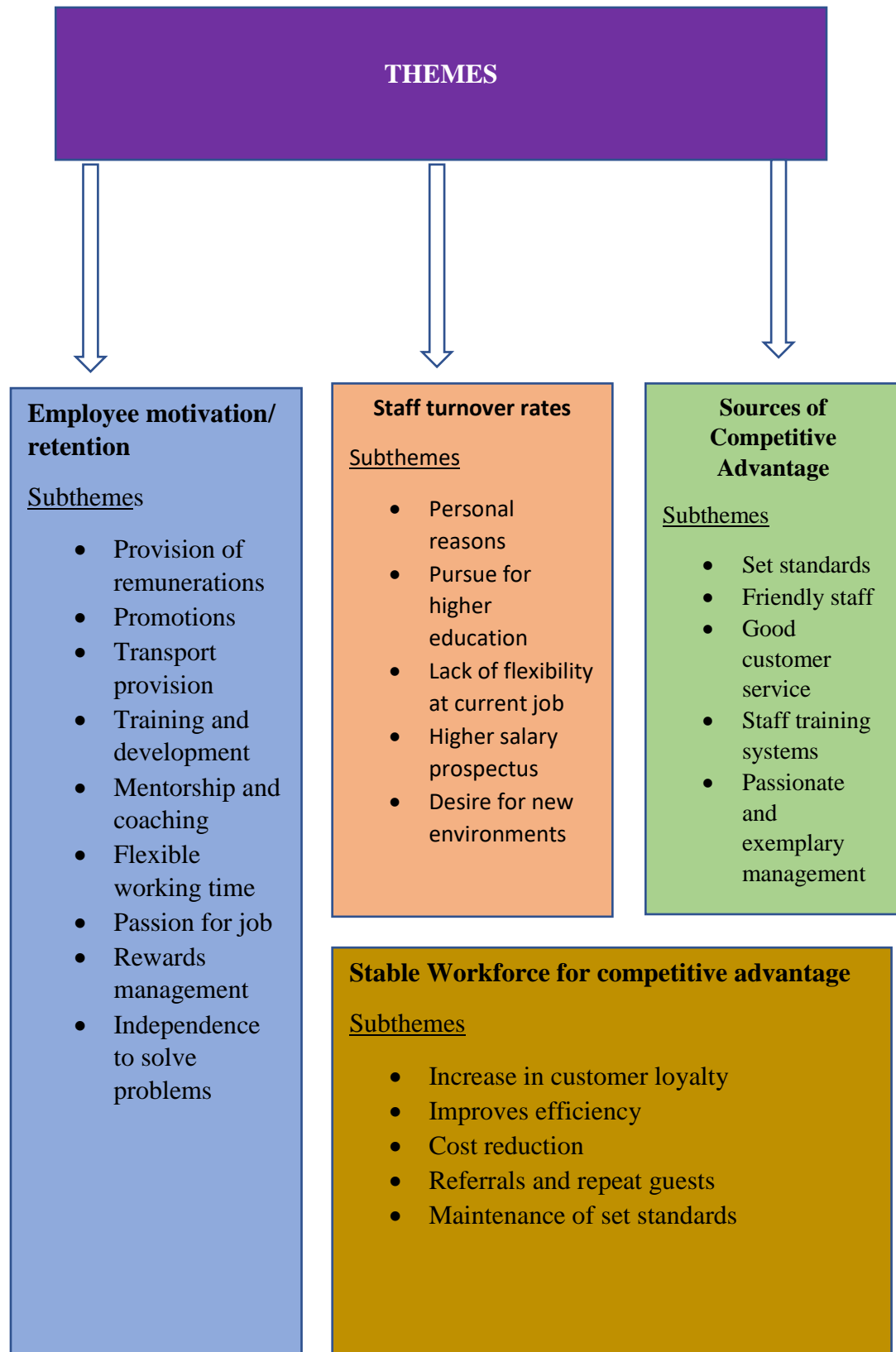


Figure 1: Themes and Themes

### 4.3 Concerns around employee motivation factors at the current job

The author set out to find out what factors cause employees to enjoy their current jobs. This was done in order to ascertain whether an employee's interest to stay at their current jobs was because of something they found to be engaging in their current jobs. The intention of this question was finding out from employees some of the things that they consider as important aspects in their current job such that they are not prompted to look elsewhere for other opportunities. In order to find the motivation factors behind why employees at Oak Plaza Hotel enjoy what they do, the following question was asked; *What factors cause you to enjoy your current job?* There were a varied range of responses, but the author identified four significant themes as will be discussed in the next section below

#### 4.3.1. *Strong support system*

When it comes to teamwork, the respondents applauded the staff at Oak Plaza for their continued support in what everyone does. For some, it was support from the fellow employees within the departments they operated, and for others, it was from their line managers as well as the top management. Ten out of the fifteen respondents said that the support they received from their fellow employees was a good motivation factor for them to enjoy their job because it showed togetherness in making Oak Plaza Hotel a successful and competitive hotel within the hospitality industry in Ghana. For some, Oak Plaza is like a second family away from their biological families such that when they come in every morning, they are happy to work with the people they meet in their offices. Notably, the support system does not only apply to their professional lives but also their social lives which give employees a strong sense of belonging and oneness in both their

professional and social lives outside their workplaces. Below are some of the excerpts from respondents' responses.

Respondent two: "I love the teamwork from the staff I work with. We support and work together to get the job done. They are supportive both professionally and personally in getting solutions for our engagement with the business."

Respondent seven: "The staff that is around are very helpful sometimes they make things in my job much easier for me."

Respondent eight: "The people I work with, the staff are very helpful. There is this kind of relationship, it's like a family. It makes it easier to wake up and want to come to the job because you know you are leaving your home and when you come here, you find another family. I personally had family issues, and the manager was able to help me out. I am not looking for a job elsewhere because I see Oak Plaza as a family."

#### *4.3.2 Passion for job*

From the interviews that the researcher conducted, the author found out that for some respondents, it is not about what the company does or what it offers the employees but rather the self-drive that people have enhanced by their passion for the jobs they do. According to some of the respondents, the reason why they are still in their jobs is that they have a passion for their jobs. Holding other factors constant, passion has been a highly motivating factor in the jobs that the majority of the respondents do. In as much as there might be circumstances when the needs of the employees are not adequately met, for some, they can compromise for the sake of fulfilling and building their passion for

what they do. One respondent referred to the fact that what he does is a fulfillment of his purpose on earth. Hence, it is not about the motivation factors that management puts in place that will make him enjoy his job. Four respondents also mentioned that they enjoy what they do because they studied it in school and are now practicing everything they did in school. Hence, it gives them the joy that they are doing things they studied in school. Below are some of the responses captured by the researcher.

Respondent 11: “I have passion for my job because I love it and it is what I studied in school.

Respondent six: “With a smile; One thing is that I like my job. It is my passion. Right from Senior High School to University, What I am currently doing is something I have always been passionate about, it doesn’t matter what industry I am working in or where I find myself, as long its I line with my passion, I am good to go.”

Respondent five: “I have always believed that in life whatever you do, you put in your best. I have a passion for what I do, and that is why I joined the company in the position that I work. So, I am here not because of the favorable working conditions but because I can exhibit my purpose and passion for what I do”.

#### *4.3.3 Overcoming Challenges*

The participants at Oak Plaza Hotel expressed their interest in finding solutions to the various challenges brought by their jobs as one of the things they enjoy most about their jobs. Their ability to find solutions to the problems gives them a sense of independence and makes them understand that management trusts them to deliver the



results irrespective of the challenges that they face. One respondent in particular who is one of the line managers in the organization mentioned that the hospitality industry faces the highest turnover rates above other industries and so, it places a heavy responsibility on the managers to ensure that the employees in their departments are happy and willing to remain stable in their positions. For some, since Oak Plaza is a hotel which means that there is much human interaction going on, it is a challenge for them because of the different human behaviors and personalities but the fact that they are able to learn how to manage people and how to achieve self-control gives them a reason to enjoy what they do. Respondent eight was however contrary to the challenges brought about by the job she does. She complained that her job is very stressful hence makes it hard for her to enjoy her job.

For Respondent nine, the high turnover rates in the company burden her with much work. Hence it becomes a challenge on her side to do her work as well that of the employees who have resigned. What frustrates her the most is the fact when an employee leaves and their tasks are assigned to those that are left in the department within which the person worked, there is no pay for it, and yet the manager expects you to finish it and on time. The expression of this negative contrast might be a demonstration of the anger and frustration that rises among existing employees when some of their peers leave for other jobs. In effect, what the participants were dealing with at the Oak Plaza Hotel was problem-solving of the various challenges they encounter on their jobs and the issue of being overworked associated with employees resigning for other jobs. Below are the excerpts from respondents to further assert the point of overcoming challenges as a motivation factor for why they enjoy their current jobs.

Respondent six: “The challenges that come with the work is one of the things that has broadened my horizon. Getting ways of solving problems basically challenges me and it is a good thing for me. It is zero work done if I come from a home in the morning and sit behind my desk and then go home without a challenge and continue doing this every day, with a challenge, I have to think, and thinking makes me good at what I do.”

Respondent one: “I think I enjoy this current job because it is challenging. I love the challenges because I am always finding ways to overcome the challenges which makes it good for me.”

Respondent eight: “The work is stressful but being time conscious and balancing out my work helps me enjoy what I do.”

#### 4.4 Actions were taken to show appreciation

This section explains what the research participants have seen and felt about how well the management team at Oak Plaza shows appreciation for the work they do. The researcher asked this question because she wanted to find out whether management's efforts in showing appreciation to the employees for the work they do is recognized by the employees. Moreover, if not, to get the employees perspectives on how they would want to be further recognized by management for the work they do. The literature revealed that when employees in a company feel that their efforts are not being appreciated, they feel abandoned and have no sense of belonging hence are likely to resign from their jobs to find places that will appreciate what they do. The researcher asked a question; *Tell me about actions taken to show appreciation for your contributions*

*towards the achievement of Oak Plaza's vision?* Here are some of the themes that the author developed from the responses given by the participants.

#### *4.4.1. Recognition*

The participants especially those who had spent a relatively long time at Oak Plaza Hotel informed me that the hotel has a policy of recognizing employees for excellent performance and longevity at work. Oak Plaza Hotel has three leading nominations that they do each year namely, an employee of the month, an employee of the quarter and employee of the year. These nominations are done by line managers, and the nominees are voted for by top management. For some of the respondents, this is the right way of recognizing excellent performance. One of the managers mentioned that often, guests would commend certain employees for providing them with good customer service. They do this from the company website or Trip Advisor where as part of their reviews for the company mention an employee's name. This line manager says that they go further to recognize the employee whose name has been mentioned. Another respondent mentioned that upon being recognized; she was given a certificate, an award, a parcel of gifts, some amount of money and the person's picture was displayed on the wall of the second floor as an employee of the quarter. According to her, it was a significant way of showing appreciation for the work she does at the Oak Plaza Hotel. Indeed, on the day of the interview, the researcher went ahead to see if the second floor had any pictures of well deserving employees for the month that she conducted her interviews and there it was. Two frames full of led lights with pictures of employees hanging on the walls of the second floor were on display. As one of the respondents had said, it is a gesture by management to recognize excellent performance and longevity of

employees in the hotel. One of the managers mentioned that it is also a right way of encouraging hard work among employees such that they also get displayed for excellent performance.

Additionally, some of the respondents had received several promotions during their stay at Oak Plaza Hotel, and to them, that was one way of seeing that Oak Plaza recognizes their efforts and appreciates them for the work they do. Most of the respondents who had several promotions during their stay are long-serving employees which means that if an employee stays at Oak Plaza Hotel for a little longer, they have higher chances of being promoted to higher positions given that they remain focused and deliver excellent performance over time.

However, some respondents mentioned that they received no form of appreciation for the work they do at Oak Plaza Hotel. They felt like management can do more to recognize them as employees. One of the respondents mentioned that most of the things that he does go unnoticed and his rationale for this was because of the department he works in. He mentioned that departments like the front office are easily seen because they directly interact with clients but departments that do not often go unnoticed. The attention that the employees in the departments that can easily be seen get is what allows them to get nominated which leaves out potential employees for these nominations but are left out because they are not easily seen. From the researchers' observation, the respondent spoke with emotions of concern, neglect, and sadness which showed that it was something that the respondent was very happy about.

Two of the respondents said that apart from their monthly salary, they have never received any form of appreciation for the work they do neither from their line managers

or top management. The researcher observed that those that complained that they were not being appreciated for what they do have spent a lesser period than those who have been at the Oak Plaza Hotel for a relatively more extended period. Below are some of the excerpts of the responses given by the research participants.

Respondent six: “Laughs; let me see appreciation to me. I remember one time I was nominated. There is a platform where management nominates hardworking staff, and I was nominated because they found me to be worthy of nomination amongst other staff.”

Respondent three: “Normally we do nominate staff for good performance, and I happen to get the quarter award and half of the year award. I was given some amount of money; a parcel and my picture were pasted on the second floor for some time I have received a certificate too which is given to well-working staff and long-serving staff.”

Respondent seven: “Sometimes, they give you an award let us say Christmas. I had a token for hitting my target.”

#### *4.4.2. Words of encouragement*

Talking to the research participants revealed to the researcher that sometimes, it is not the monetary things that the company does that will ensure that employees feel appreciated for the work they do. However, also, a word of encouragement to show appreciation is good enough for some employees to feel loved, appreciated and cared for within the organization. One of the respondents mentioned that it's not about the monetary rewards that my manager does that keep me motivated, it's the little things he

says to me like “you have done well today, keep up the good work”, a tap at my back and shoulder commending me for good work done is enough.

Another respondent mentioned that sometimes, the manager calls to say thank you for the good work done and further applauds the respondent for being a hardworking employee. On top of that, the respondent mentioned that through this, the relationship with the manager has tremendously improved, and her efforts towards accomplishing all the tasks assigned are being boosted each day. This goes further to assert that verbal appreciation is also a good way of showing employees that you appreciate the work they do because it strengthens them and makes them see that their efforts are being applauded.

#### 4.5 Unique set standards as Oak Plaza’s competitive advantage.

As part of this papers’ objectives, the author set out to find out what makes Oak Plaza Hotel unique from other hotels in the industry. Essentially, the author wanted to know from the management of Oak Plaza Hotel what they consider to be Oak Plaza’s competitive advantage. The author asked this question; *what would you say makes Oak Plaza Hotel unique for people to always want to patronize its services?* The Human Resource manager of Oak Plaza Hotel mentioned that Oak Plaza Hotel’s uniqueness lies in the set standards adopted by the hotel. She mentioned that the Oak Plaza Hotel is a three-star hotel that gives a five-star hotel experience. This quotation from the respondent illustrates how well Oak Plaza Hotel has managed to climb the ranks of five-star hotels by merely setting a certain standard for itself. In the industry with five-star hotels like Kempinski Hotel and Movenpick Hotel, Oak Plaza Hotel has managed to outcompete them because it continually gets clients who prefer them to other five star hotels. The kind of customer service provided by the staff plays a key role in building this

competitive advantage because guests will only come back if the service, they received from the employees was up to and beyond their expectation.

According to the managers of Oak Plaza Hotel, clients feel much more at home when they visit the Oak Plaza Hotel because their needs are well taken care of. The Hotel has had instances where a guest can comfortably afford a five-star hotel, but they opt to come to Oak Plaza Hotel because of the standard they have set. Some of the activities that illustrate the kind of standard that Oak Plaza Hotel has set for itself include airport pickup of clients in the hotel shuttle, provision of clients with water that is up to the right temperature depending on the time of day that they have arrived, provision of warm towels at the reception to clean their hands from the long journeys they are from, provision of either a cup of tea/ coffee or juice at the reception depending on the time of arrival, shortened time of waiting at the reception of up to five minutes to avoid frustrations arising from waiting for long, Calling repeat customers by their names among other things.

A combination of these practices sets Oak Plaza apart, and this can only be achieved with the right kind of staff available to meet client needs. On the day of the interviews, the researcher spent up to 30 minutes seated at the front desk of the Hotel waiting for the contact person in the hotel to start the interviews. She made observations of the kind of service that the front desk personnel offered to customers. During her 30 minutes waiting time, a client arrived from the airport. The warmlines that the front desk staff offered was very special with broad, beautiful smiles on their faces as they welcomed the client in. There was a gentleman at the entrance who opened the door for the client and afterward picked his luggage for him and straight away took it to the cart to be delivered to the

client's room. This was an illustration of the set standards that Oak Plaza Hotel has set for itself. However, the managers mentioned that this kind of set standard could only be made possible if the employees are stable as is explained in detail in the next theme.

#### 4.6 Consistency in the provision of set standards

A stable workforce means that the staff/ employees are contented in their positions and are not looking elsewhere for other job offers. In other words, there is employee immobility to other places. The researcher asked this question to line managers; *How does having a stable workforce make you a leader in the hospitality industry?* The researcher wanted to find out the benefits of sustainable employee retention towards building the company's competitive advantage.

According to the managers at Oak Plaza Hotel, having a stable workforce is the key to the sustainability of the hotel's competitive advantage. They further cautioned the researcher that the hospitality industry faces much competition because there is the free entry of new firms in the industry. Most importantly, there is a rising entry of multinational five-star hotels in the industry in Ghana which creates intense competition among the existing hotels. However, if the existing hotels have a stable workforce, they can be sure of outcompeting the new and existing firms in the industry because a stable workforce ensures consistency in the provision of the set standards of the hotel. One of the managers mentioned that there was a guest who used to come to the Oak Plaza Hotel because of the taste of the jollof at the place. This means that if a previous employee who used to make this jollof leaves, the guest will come and find a different recipe for Jollof which will affect their decision to return to the hotel the next time they are in Accra.



Furthermore, having a stable workforce ensures that the hotel gets repeat customers, referrals from those who have enjoyed the services provided by the staff as well new clients who come after reading the reviews they find on the internet. According to one of the managers, for the hotel to have an increase in the number of clients, the hotel has to maintain the standards and that standard can only be maintained if the hotel has old staff who have been retained and have been able to at least inculcate Oak Plaza's practices into their daily activities. When the staff can continuously provide the same quality service to the clients, they become strategic assets of the organization because once they are not in a position to do so, the company loses.

According to the HR Manager of Oak Plaza Hotel, when there are staff turnovers, it takes time for the hotel to get new employees and even when the right people are found, it takes time to get them to the level of providing the set Oak Plaza standard like the old staff. Seemingly, it costs the hotel much money to even do the recruitment if they have to engage a recruitment agency because of the caliber of employees they want. Looking for a replacement is also time-consuming. Thus, if the hotel can have a stable workforce, these costs are not incurred, and it ensures consistency in the provision of the set standards to clients. In order to ensure that there are discrepancies in the provision of Oak Plaza's set standards to clients, training and development have to be done as discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter. Below are some of the excerpts of the responses given by participants on having a stable workforce.

Respondent one: "If we can retain the older workforce that is on board, who have been able to at least understand Oak Plaza's uniqueness, you expect that no matter which guest is coming, they will get the same services. For us to have repeat guests, who would

also make referrals means that we have to maintain the standard and this can only be maintained if we have a stable workforce.

Respondent two: “When employees are stable, they can sell to clients, they can wow the guest when they are checking in because they know the job very well which makes the guest experience stand out.”

The question now becomes, how does Oak Plaza ensure that they have a stable workforce. In other words, the researcher went further to find out what strategies Oak Plaza Hotel uses to manage and retain its people, and the next section gives a detailed overview of what the hotel does.

#### 4.7 Alignment of company goals with personal values

Speaking to the HR Manager who is in charge of recruiting people at the hotel, she mentioned that when it comes to the retention of employees, it starts from the time of recruitment. During the interviews that she conducts with potential employees of the company, she looks out for the person’s values and tries to understand how they align with the company goals. Additionally, she would want to know the person’s short and long term career plan because if the person has no sense of direction in their career journey, most times they do not know what they want. She wants to employ someone with whom the hotel will grow. The people who apply to jobs because they have seen a good remuneration and not because they want the job and are passionate about it. This explains why for most of the respondents that the researcher spoke with concerning what factors cause them to enjoy their job, they mentioned passion.

According to the HR Manager, sometimes people may lie about their intentions at the hotel during the interview because they are at their best behavior during the interview but then it comes out once they join the hotel. The researcher finds this to be interesting and insightful because it could be an explanation for why people who have just joined the company tend to leave earlier simply because they were not the right people for the positions they applied for. Hence, in retaining employees for a long period in the organization, the HR manager emphasized the alignment of personal values with those of the company in addition to one's passion for the job they are applying for. It ensures the sustainability of the companies' competitive advantage as well as cuts costs involved in the recruitment process. According to the HR Manager, after the right people have been found, it does not end there, what follows is what is being discussed in the next section of this chapter.

#### 4.8 Training and development

The researcher noticed that all the fifteen participants expressed their appreciation for the training and development programs organized by Oak Plaza Hotel. This informed the researcher that the hotel invests heavily in ensuring that the staff is appropriately trained and receive development in every aspect of what they do. The researcher asked these questions and the responses all boiled down to training and development: *Tell me about actions taken to enhance your personal growth, how do you ensure that employees are motivated and stable? How do you ensure the sustainability of the unique aspect of Oak Plaza Hotel?* Based on the responses provided by the respondents, Oak Plaza has invested in an online course called Lobster Ink that is accessible to all employees at the Oak Plaza Hotel. The course is specifically designed for the hospitality industry, and it is

internationally recognized. During the interviews, the respondents kept on saying that Oak Plaza was the first hotel in Ghana to subscribe to this course which shows that it took a fast move advantage in procuring this course for its staff. The researcher went ahead to search online, and just like the respondents had said it, the author found an article on Peace Fm Online written by Chris Joe that stated that Oak Plaza had become the first to run the Lobster Ink Training Program in Ghana. One of the respondents commended the training program because it has equipped him with a holistic understanding of the hospitality industry in general which is something he would never have received if he were at a different place. One of the managers mentioned that training of employees is key because it gives them the leverage to be able to have a wealth of experience required to meet client needs.

Furthermore, the HR Manager mentioned that Oak Plaza does this training for its employees because the hotel wants to make sure that the staff can give the five-star experience even though Oak Plaza is a three-star hotel. If employees are adequately trained, it also ensures retention because the staff can work effortlessly since they know what they are doing. It also affirms that the employees become strategic assets of the firm which helps the hotel to build its competitive advantage because after the training is done and the employees are able to transfer all they have learned to their jobs, it makes them very important people of the hotel but also ensures sustainability of the competitive advantage of Oak Plaza's unique set standards. One respondent said that even though there are staff turnovers in the hotel, the hotel never ceases to train and develop its employees. Twice a year, health and safety training are provided to employees which for one of the respondents, enhances her personal development. The line managers

mentioned that the training programs organized by the hotel had enhanced the skills of the employees under them, it has improved their confidence when it comes to handling people and increased their knowledge about the dynamics of the hospitality industry in general.

Oak Plaza Hotel also provided managerial and supervisory training programs. These programs are a long term investment in the company's employees for when a manager resigns from their position or a supervisor leaves for another job. It is like a succession plan that the hotel has put in place to ensure that the hotel does not run short of managers and supervisors for when the existing managers decide to quit or resign from their positions. According to the HR Manager, the employees first go through cross-training with other departments which equips them with knowledge of the various departments that they will need when they become managers one day in the hotel. For some of the responses given by the participants, this was a good move towards ensuring that the people who have just joined the hotel stay for longer period with the hope that one day, they would be in management or supervisory position. Majority of the respondents that the researcher spoke to had received several promotions in their journey at Oak Plaza Hotel, and some were already on the managerial training program. The managers also have training provided by external personnel with expertise in the field of managing people. Below are some of the responses from the participants on training and development.

Respondent two: "As managers, we have inhouse training from resource persons twice a year where new managers come in to give us training in our fields especially on the soft skills like emotional intelligence. Individuals and group trainers

like AMSCO Come in. We also subscribe to the top training programs in hospitality called lobster Ink which empowers us with knowledge of the hospitality industry.”

Respondent one: “Usually, there are external training programs organized. In this case, I know that I am not only working but there is also an opportunity to go out there and enhance my skills, and these costs of training are covered by the hotel.”

Respondent 11: “We have had in-house training and I find them to be very effective. One is about hygiene because we handle food a lot and another was on hygiene.”

Respondent seven: “When it comes to training and development, Oak Plaza is doing very well. We are enrolled on Lobster Ink which is an online hospitality training course which has courses about every department. I can learn everything from every department. Sometimes too, quarterly we enroll in short training. I am a trainer; I was put on the train the trainer program (laughs). There have been more skill development for me.”

#### 4.9 Rewards and benefits

At Oak Plaza Hotel, there is something called PF Which for Problem Fund. This fund is an investment fund set up by the hotel for its employees as a savings and investment plan. It is a part of the employee’s pension, but it is like in Tier 3 of the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) Payment. The employee contributes a percentage as well as the company and it's saved with a Trustee somewhere. It is invested and earns interest on it. This fund can only happen if you have worked with Oak Plaza for two years. According to the HR Manager, this policy is a retention strategy for employees

who value saving and investing for their future. It is given out when the employee decides to leave the hotel. So, if at any point, the employee quits their job, they do not get to enjoy the benefits arising from the Problem Fund. However, other benefits in kind are provided.

According to the responses provided by the line managers, the hotel provides benefits like transportation to and from the workplace, provides end of year parcels, finances further education for staff that are interested which is on a case by case basis among other things. However, amid management's efforts to provide training and development and rewards management for its employees, the turnover rates are still high. The next section provided details on the state of employee turnover at the Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra.

#### 4.10 High Staff turnover rates.

In order to find out the state of employee turnover rates at Oak Plaza Hotel, the following questions were asked: How often do employees resign and leave the hotel? Moreover, *what are some of the reasons for staff turnover?* Majority of the respondents (line managers and employees) at Oak Plaza Hotel made it clear that the rate at which employees leave the hotel was high. However, there were variations in the rates depending on the department within the hotel. Some departments experience more staff turnover rates than other departments. Additionally, out of the five line managers interviewed, all of them gave a relatively lower turnover rate as compared to the rates provided by the employees. This illustrates a discrepancy in what the two groups of people had to say about employee turnover rates.

From the researcher's observation of the reactions of the line managers when asked the question of how often employees leave the hotel, the researcher observed that the line managers were more skeptical and very thoughtful of the kind of response they ought to give. However, with the employees, their facial reactions were free from any kind of thoughts because they were fully aware of what was happening in their departments as most of their colleagues had left the hotel. To most of them, the response to this question came with simple laughter and winks in their eyes. On the last day that the researcher conducted the interviews at the hotel, the author found two former employees at the finance department of the hotel filing in their resignation letters. The researcher took it upon herself to conduct interviews with them to find out why they had resigned and more information about their working conditions as will later be discussed in this chapter.

**Table 4. 2: Excepts on staff turnover rates**

Respondent	Quotation
Respondent eight	"I know that our turnover is not good, the rate at which people come in and go is very high. Sometimes you employ someone in January and in February they tender to leave, and about 60% of the old employees have left."
Respondent three	"Scarcely does the front office department see people leave for other jobs. Mostly it's low. On average, 40-50% of the employees leave"
Respondent five	"When I came in initially, the turnover rate was very high; it became stable for a year, and then it sharpened up. People started resigning left, right and center."
Respondent two	"On an average of 10, about one person leaves the organization on an annual basis."



Respondent four	“Before I joined the company, the labor turnover was just too much. It was too much that it became routine. Six out of ten people would leave within a year.
Respondent nine	“Last year, we had four people leave in the department. Half of the team resigned, so yeah, the turnover rate is quite high.”
Respondent seven	“The turnover is so bad. Even just this year we are in into February, and I can count already five staff have left. The turnover is too bad.”

When asked the question: “*what are some of the reasons for the high staff turnover rates?*”, There was a varied range of reasons provided by both the employees and line managers. However, what stood out the most from the various reasons given was monetary issues, further education, personal related issues, lack of flexibility at the current job and need for a new environment. Below are some of the responses provided by the respondents.

**Table 4. 3: Excepts on reasons for staff turnover rates**

Respondents	Quotations
Respondent nine	“People look at different things; they look at money, they look at goals as well the working environment. If the remuneration is better, of course, you would want to move up and make more money for probably the same work being done.
Respondent seven	“I think it is the salary structure. A few of them that you get that it is health reasons, but the majority of them are getting better opportunities and good payout there so they would rather go for that.”
Respondent one	“Interestingly, January turnover was high. I believe people going into the new year are looking for either a job change or a salary may be higher prospectus. Some exit reasons are personal reasons

	<p>but there are some who would want to pursue maybe higher education, and they think that they will not get the flexibility out of a job to be able to pursue. A better offer elsewhere probably from an international chain of hotels, people will find it more attractive than working for a Ghanaian Chain.”</p>
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#### 4.11 Discussion of results

This section of the chapter presents a discussion of the main findings that relate to existing literature and how the findings answered the two research questions that the author wanted to find answers to.

##### *4.11.1 Discussion of results for research objective one*

The first research objective for this study investigated how Oak Plaza Hotel attracts, employs and retains the right people. Based on the results presented earlier on in this chapter, numerous conclusions can be obtained which provide answers to the first research objective. The findings from the study demonstrate that getting the right people in an organization is not an easy task because it requires extra vigilance and expertise about the behaviors of people during the interview process. According to the Human Resource Manager, the hotel hires recruitment agencies to ensure that only the right people are employed in the organization. However, that is not always the case because the hotel still faces high staff turnover rates. Irrespective of what the situation is with regards to employee turnover rates, the author saw the value that the hotel placed on getting the right people because they consider the right people as the source of sustainable provision of their competitive advantage. This finding supports Barney

(2009) theory on understanding the sources of sustained competitive advantage in an organization.

When it comes to employment and retention of employees, the findings suggest that getting passionate employees whose values align with the company goals is key to retaining and managing staff. This is an important finding in understanding some of the rationales behind why people continuously move from one job to another because whatever they do, they are not passionate about it. Oak Plaza Hotel's employees showed passion in what they did and what they said. The responses such as my passion keep me at my job were evidence of this proclamation. This result goes beyond previous reports like Chow et al. (2006) that show that people mostly quit their jobs because of related monetary issues. It also goes further to highlight that little is known about the relationship between a person's passion and their intention to leave their current job.

Respondents during the interviews revealed that showing appreciation for the work well done is very instrumental in attaining employee satisfaction which translates into employee management and retention. The execution of this action lies in the hands of the line managers to continuously talk to their employees with words of appreciation, and not necessary focusing their attention on monetary rewards because that is not all they can do. The author found out that for some employees, money is important, but it is not everything. Show of care and concern towards the employee from top management and line management is enough to put a smile on employee's faces. A phone call is asking how the employees are doing, a tap on the back whenever a milestone is achieved them the confidence to continue working hard in a harmonious manner. The findings from the study reveal that the majority of the employees received this kind of appreciation from

their line managers. However, for the minority group that claimed that they do not receive anything from their line managers other than their monthly salary, the researcher is of a view that Oak Plaza instills in the line managers the culture of verbally appreciating their employees.

Still, in line with managing people, the researcher uncovered a novel finding which relates to communication of matters in the organization. One of the respondents who is a manager in the hotel mentioned that he gave an assignment to one of the employees with no explanation of why it was important for her to finish the assignment given. After a while, the manager went asking for the reports to the assignment he had assigned her, but she claimed that he had not shown interest in the assignment and so she stopped. This is an illustration of negligence among employees brought about by lack of proper flow of information in the system. The researcher is of the view that it is important that management involves employees in understanding the vision of the company from the time they join the company to every assignment they get in order to facilitate the implementation process of the hotel's competitive advantage.

The results from the research about the first objective of the study show that Oak Plaza has systems in place charged with a responsibility to ensure that the right people are attracted to the hotel, for instance, outsourcing an external recruitment agency to find the right people for the positions advertised by the hotel. The hotel has also subscribed to an online training course called Lobster Ink which is meant to equip employees with knowledge around the dynamics of the hospitality industry. These results demonstrate that an increase in employee knowledge about the industry in which they work enhances their personal growth, passion for the industry as well as reduced employee mobility.

These findings tie well with a previous study by Bartell, (2001) that mentions that training and development is one of the most common practices that firms employ to reduce turnover rates in their organizations. The hotel also uses rewards management as a means of retaining its employees; for instance the problem Fund set up by the company as a form of investment for its employees. What makes this fund stand out is the fact that the organization contributes 50% in addition to the 50% contributed by the employee. That way, the employees are prompted to stay at the job in order to benefit from the problem fund.

#### *14.11.2 Discussion of findings for research objective two*

They are moving on to the second research objective which is *to find out how Oak Plaza Hotel uses training and development to make employees strategic assets for competitive advantage*. Both the line managers and employees agreed to the fact that Oak Plaza Hotel invests heavily in training and development programs for all staff in the hotel. Respondents clearly stated the hotel secured Lobster Ink, which is an online training on everything there is to know in the hospitality industry for all its employees to log onto and learn about the hotel industry. There are management training programs as well as supervisory training programs all provided to employees to enhance their skills as well prepare them for future positions in the hotel. One of the respondents mentioned that once they receive training, they can deliver clients' needs to the best of their ability. Hence, when employees are in a position to transfer the knowledge from the training and development programs organized by the hotel, they can provide quality service to the clients which makes them strategic assets for the hotel.

In terms of competitive advantage, the respondents mentioned that Oak Plaza Hotel's competitive advantage is its set standards that are unique from those of other hotels. For instance, provision of warm towels to guests once they arrive at the hotel, integration of technology into reducing the waiting time for clients to approximately 5 minutes among others. Managers mentioned that training and development of employees ensure the sustainability of the unique practices provided by Oak Plaza Hotel. This is because once the employees are well trained, they become independent, knowledgeable about what is expected and consistent in what they provide to the clients. This, in turn, builds the firms competitive advantage in addition to sustaining it. Once the hotel can get repeat guests, referrals and more new clients, then credit goes to the employees who would then be considered as strategic assets for the company because, without them, the good quality service cannot be delivered.

Overall, these findings are in accordance with the results provided by the resource-based theory (Barney 1996) which says that sustained competitive advantage is achieved through having unique, rare, highly imitable and non-substitutable resources as well as the human capital theory (Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004) which says that human capital is the center of the firms success hence organizations should be organized in ways that nurture human capabilities. However, some respondents felt that their training needs are not being met given the changing trends in their department and therefore strongly recommended that the hotel makes provision for them as well.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction to the chapter

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of the study, conclusions, and recommendations that the researcher has identified based on the analysis of the data presented in chapter 4. In other words, this chapter concludes this research paper.

#### 5.1 Summary of the research.

The purpose of this study was intended to explore the different ways that Oak Plaza Hotel uses to attract, manage and retain the right people. Additionally, the study set out to explore how training and development can be used as a leverage to build a firm's competitive advantage. This research bridges the gap on the topic of how making people strategic assets of the firm builds its competitive advantage by using Oak Plaza Hotel as a case study. The research used a single case study analysis of Oak Plaza Hotel to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of how making people strategic assets helps build a competitive advantage. After researching to understand the phenomenon under study, recommendations were provided on policy formulation that can be adopted by hotels in the hospitality industry to leverage their human capital to build their competitiveness on the market.

#### 5.2 Summary of findings and implications

One of the major findings from the study revealed that Oak Plaza Hotel has a high turnover rate which rhymes with what the literature said about turnover rates in the hospitality industry. However, the Hotel has structures in place to ensure that employees are retained at the workplace and remain motivated to ensure that they perform to the best

of their ability. From the data collected and analyzed by the researcher, below are the conclusions deduced from the study.

1. 95% of the respondents from the research indicated that Oak Plaza Hotel is facing high turnover rates. This result is consistent with the findings by the World Economic Forum (2017) that revealed that the hospitality industry faces the highest turnover rates of 30% in Ghana as compared to other industries. According to the employees that were interviewed, when fellow staff leaves, it places a heavy workload on the existing employees because they have to take on additional responsibilities for the employees who have left the organization. This resonates with the findings by Werner, Schuler & Jackson, (2009) where they concluded that when an employee leaves, it places a heavy burden on the existing employees.
2. The responses given by the line managers of Oak Plaza Hotel showed that the company is aware of the turnover rates and as a result, they try to use recruitment agencies to ensure that they attract and employ the right people. They do this with the belief that the right people would possess values that align with those of the company. They would be passionate, and willing to work with the organization for a relatively more extended period. These results support the arguments presented by Crain, (2009) that attracting and retaining the right people is guided by finding the best fit of employees whose values align with the company's vision and mission. This result is however superior in terms of how the company arrives at whom the right people are by using recruitment agencies.



3. The findings also revealed how much importance Oak Plaza Hotel attached to the training and development of its employees. The hotel has invested in an online training and development program called Lobster Ink which equips all employees with knowledge of the hospitality industry. All the employees that were interviewed proved that training and development of staff is one of the key ways that the hotel can maintain its set standards. These findings tie well with previous studies by Crain (2009), Barney (1999) and Kirkman and Tesluk, (2006) who suggested that after hiring the right people, firms need to engage in training and development of their employees to ensure they provide quality service to customers.
4. Results also showed that people are the most essential people in delivering the quality service that the Hotel upholds. In other words, employees at the Oak Plaza Hotel have been made strategic assets of the hotel in order to ensure that they can satisfy client needs. According to employees, training and development help them to deliver a unique experience to every client.
5. The findings also revealed that Oak Plaza's competitive advantage is its unique set of standards. Moreover, based on the results obtained, employees are very key to ensuring that this unique element is sustained. These findings go further to prove the Resource-Based theory developed by Barney (1999) which says that for firms to achieve sustained competitive advantage, they should strengthen how they manage their people in a way that makes them unique, immobile, and non-substitutable.

6. Results from the research also revealed that employees appreciate incentives that the hotel provides. However, they mentioned that more could be done in terms of salary increments, verbal appreciation, travel packages, among others could also be implemented. These results resonate with the economics theory that states that people respond to incentives to get them to perform to their best.

### 5.3 Policy, industry and practice recommendations

The conclusions of this study have shown the importance of making people strategic assets to build a firm's competitive advantage. The study tried to articulate that having a stable workforce that is trained and developed to provide and enhance the firm's competitive advantage. Therefore, hotel managers should devise ways of ensuring employee retention to encourage employees to stay within the organization for a long period.

1. The researcher recommends that Oak Plaza and hotels in the industry should focus on the motivation factors of staff without necessarily focusing on monetary incentives because money is one of the many reasons that motivate employees at their jobs.
2. Based on the responses collected by the researcher, this paper suggests that Oak Plaza Hotel management should work on establishing good working relationships with the employees to create a sense of belonging for all.
3. This study also recommends that the hotel, in a case of when an employee quits the firm, there should be a replacement within a reasonable amount of time because it would cost the hotel more money if even the existing employees decide to leave due to the workload, they have arising from the employees who have left.

### 5.5 Limitations and recommendations for further study

One of the limitations of this study stem from the methodology that the researcher used. The use of a single case study provided a lot of the details of the phenomenon under study but checking for validity to generalize a problem. Hence the researcher recommends that for purposes of further study, the researchers should engage more than one hotel in Accra to get a representation of the hospitality industry in its totality. Additionally, the use of a single data collection method was a limitation to the study. The use of multiple methods in collecting data like focus groups would have given the researcher more insights into the phenomenon under study.

For further study, the researcher recommends that authors focus more on hotels with the same ratings/standards because such a study would narrow down the dependence of building a competitive advantage to human capital. It would also be interesting to explore hotels and safaris in other regions of the country because the caliber of customers they attract are different. That is to say business and conference tourists in Accra as opposed to travelers and explorers in the safaris and other regions of Ghana. These studies would be in a position to provide a clear picture of the state of the entire industry.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview questions

#### **Interview questions for employees at Oak Plaza Hotel on employee retention strategies and its impact on the competitive advantage of the firm.**

This interview would collect information about employee retention strategies and competitive advantage. All information provided by you will be kept highly confidential. You are free to participate or stop at any time if you so wish. This survey will be solely used for academic purposes. This interview will take approximately an hour to complete.

Thank you.

#### **For Employees**

1. How long have you been working at Oak Plaza Hotel?
2. What factors cause you to enjoy your current job?
3. How much have these factors contributed to your staying at Oak Plaza Hotel?
4. Tell me actions taken to show appreciation for your contributions towards the achievement of Oak Plaza's vision?
5. What actions would you want to be taken further to recognize you as an employee?
6. Tell me about actions taken to enhance your personal growth
7. Where would you like to be in the next two years in this organization?
8. What things can your manager do differently to help you put in your best at work?

#### **For Line Managers**

1. What strategies have you put in place to attract and manage the right people?
2. What is the turnover rate in your department?
3. How do you ensure that employees are motivated and stable at their jobs?
4. How does having a stable workforce make you a leader in your industry?
5. What would you say makes Oak Plaza unique for people to want to always patronize its services?
6. How do you ensure that this unique attribute is sustained?
7. How do you determine which employee needs training in your department?
8. How useful has the training of employees been?
9. What strategies have you put in place for employees to transfer knowledge gained from training onto the job
10. How do you use training and development to make employees strategic assets (important people so that without them, the organization won't thrive) of the firm?

## **Appendix B: CONSENT FORM**

I would like to ask your permission to be part of a research conducted by Angella Nantambi a final year student enrolled at Ashesi University.

### **The purpose of this study:**

- To find out the different strategies that Oak Plaza Hotel has put in place to attract, retain and manage the right people. The study will also explore the effect of employee retention on the competitive advantage for Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra.

### **Your participation in this study will:**

- Include a voluntary participation meaning that at any point of the interview that you wish not to respond or withdraw from the research process, you are free to do so
- Include an interview an hour-long interview with each participant.

### **Risk involved:**

Participating in this research presents no risk to your life or job. However, you may find some questions about your job conditions to be very sensitive.

### **The benefits of this study include:**

- Providing various strategies that can be used by organization to attract, retail and manage the right people.
- Providing an effect of employee retention on the competitive advantage of Oak Plaza Hotel in Accra.
- Uncover gaps if at all they exist in the human resource management strategies employed at Oak Plaza Hotel.

### **Confidentiality:**

All information shared will be confidentially held and kept in a safe place where nobody can find it. All hard copies of the information collected will be sealed off and kept far from public access. Audios recorded and any other information in soft copy form will be saved in files and locked with passwords that will be only be known to the researcher. All participant names and any information that would disclose off the identity of the participants will not be included in this study.

If you have any questions, you can contact the researcher at [angella.nantambi@ashesi.edu.gh](mailto:angella.nantambi@ashesi.edu.gh) +233269279649 or my supervisor at [ekudonoo@ashesi.edu.gh](mailto:ekudonoo@ashesi.edu.gh)

This study and consent form has been reviewed by Ashesi IRB for Human Subjects Research. For further information contact the committee through the [irb@ashesi.edu.gh](mailto:irb@ashesi.edu.gh)

### **Consent:**

**I have read this informed consent and have agreed to participate in this study.**

**Participant's signature.....**