

The Motivational Factors Behind the Selection of Management Contracts as the Method of Supporting Strategic Alliances in the Omani Hotel Industry

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Abstract: This paper examines the motivational factors driving the adoption of management contracts to bolster strategic alliances in premium hotels across Oman. Management contracts represent a prevalent form of collaboration among international partners within Oman's hotel industry. This research aims to unveil the factors influencing partners' decisions to opt for this particular type of alliance in operating five- and four-star hotels. The study examines the subject from the perspectives of both local and Western partners, employing a qualitative approach for data collection, analysis, and discussion of findings. Interviews were conducted with a total of 25 top managers, representing both local and Western backgrounds, across premium hotels in Oman. The investigation reveals twelve key factors underlying the selection of management contracts as a method to support strategic alliances within Oman's hotel industry.

Keywords: Management contracts, premium hotels, motivational factors, Oman.

Introduction

This paper examines the factors that support partners in the Omani 4/5 star hotel industry to select a management contract (MC) as the official form of their alliance. The partners are typically the owners of the property and the owners of the hotel brand who manage the property. Harvey (2007) and Ferjani & Boudabbous (2023) suggest that hotels are characterised by their use of particular non-equity alliances to gain competitive advantage. Gulf Cooperation countries, including Oman, see growth opportunities in hotel industry alliances as important for attracting international hotel chains and developing the hospitality sector (Al Belushi 2018, pers. conv., 11 December; Harvey 2007). The hotel industry in Oman is a suitable case illustrating the influence of national cultural conditions on the implementation of MCs. Why examine the alliances between local investors and international hotel chains? The first reason is the importance given by the Omani government to the hotel industry as an integral component of developing international tourism and the jobs associated with the sector. Second, a large number of hotels in Oman are managed under an MC (Al Belushi 2021, pers.conv., 11 April ; Al Sabti 2022, pers. conv., 15 March). Third, there is a gap in studying non-equity alliances within hotel industry in the context of the Middle East (Ferjani & Boudabbous 2023).

A strategic alliance is defined as ‘a long-term cooperative arrangement between two or more independent firms that engage in business activities for mutual economic gain (Tsang 2000, p. 209). Parkhe (1991) links strategic alliances to shared goals, in which all partners strive to achieve success. Gulati and Singh (1998) define the strategic alliance based on its voluntary nature, yet in many cases the strategic alliance has showed an involuntary nature as well (Spekman 2012). An alliance is set when at least two firms pool their resources together to achieve mutual objectives that could not be achieved if either firm remained a standalone entity (Deresky 2008; Spekman 2012). Many organisations have recognised that they cannot survive alone and need to cooperate with others, sometimes internationally. The type of SA selected depends on the goals and structure of the alliance and of the parties to the agreement. Different forms of alliance include partnership frameworks, joint ventures, equity investments, licensing, subcontracting, franchising, distributions relationships, research and development consortia, clusters and innovation networks (Dos & Hamel 1998; Serrat 2009).

Strategic alliances are divided into two main types: equity alliances and non-equity alliances. An equity alliance is a hierarchical form of collaboration with sufficient contribution from different partners, whereas a non-equity alliance is a contractual collaboration that is closer in nature to a market transaction such as management contract (Reuer et al. 2016). Previous research on strategic alliances has been carried out within developed economies (e.g. UK, USA), whereas emerging markets (e.g. Oman) are relatively under-researched . This paper explored the motivational factors of forming management contract collaboration (non-equity alliance) between Omani and Western partners in hotel industry in Oman. This gives focus on those MC alliances in a neglected geographical area and in a neglected industry which is contributing to fill the gap in the body of knowledge regarding the topic under investigation.

The number and quality of hotels in Oman are increasing because of the increase in inbound European tourists visiting Oman every year (Al Sabti 2022, pers. conv., 15 March ; Daily 2010; National Center for Statistics and Information [NCSI] 2016; Winckler 2007). Four and five star hotels hotels in Oman contributed OMR 243.4 millions in 2024, compared to OMR 229.3 million in 2023. This growth was the result of the increase of hotel guests to 2, 145, 579 millions by the end of 2024 (Muscat Daily 2025). As a form of collaboration, an MC seems favoured by Omani partners, and the purpose of this paper is to provide a holistic picture of different motivational factors of forming MCs within the hotel industry in Oman from the perspectives of culturally different partners (Omani and Western).

The purpose of the paper is to examine the factors that are considered in the formation of strategic alliances in the growing Omani 4/5 star hotel sector. This objective is addressed through semi-structured interviews with key Omani and international stakeholders, supported by analysis of policy and organisational documents relevant to alliance formation.

Conditions Supporting the Development of Strategic Alliances

Alliances are co-operation agreements between independently managed firms whereby resources and goals and capabilities are shared (Chen & Lin 2017; He et.al 2020; Spartà & Pizzi 2022). Frameworks supporting the establishment of SAs include transaction cost economics (Williamson 1981), social exchange theory (Blau 1964), eclectic paradigm theory (Dunning 1988), resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik 1978), resource-based view theory (Barney 1991), and knowledge-based theory (Grant 1996).

Researchers justify the formation of business alliances for a range of reasons. There is the need to acquire a set of capabilities that generate revenue for a business (Gan & Korsgaard 2022; Marks & Mirvis 2010), the ability to keep in touch with changing and advanced technologies (Buckley 1992; Dussauge & Garrette 1995; Parkhe 1991), the ability to access different markets and achieve corresponding resources (Dyer, Khale & Singh 2001), ability to compete in global market (Lee 2023), access capabilities of innovation, in terms of products (Buckley 1992; Dussauge & Garrette 1995; Gan & Korsgaard 2022; Parkhe 1991), acquire skills to solve the problems of global extraproductive capability (Buckley 1992; Dussauge & Garrette 1995; Parkhe 1991), and the ability to improve efficiency in the application of knowledge (Buckley 1992). Dos and Hamel (1998) suggest that forming alliances provides cooperative specialisation, improved learning, more options and more chances for internalisation. Research suggests that a business alliance generates value to the business (Marks & Mirvis 2010) and competitive advantage (Culpan 2009; Parkhe 1991; Warnar & Sullivan 2017) to the firms in the alliance.

Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1996) highlight the strategic and social reasons for forming alliances, which are concerned with the vulnerability of organisations. They argue that organisations form alliances in two situations: when they lack resources and need a partner to support them with resources, or when they have extra resources and a strong social position (well-connected, experienced top management) and want to share these with another partner to access potential advantages.

Studies have justified forming alliances, to access market power, economies of scale, synergies, tax advantages and value discrepancy (Gomes et al. 2011). For example, according to the market power theory, the main economic reason for forming an alliance is to increase the market power of firms by removing rivals, attaining efficiencies, gaining new abilities, accessing new markets, gaining market share or entering into a new business. By expanding its size and power, a firm will be able to endure adverse economic situations (Gomes et al. 2011). Also, the 'synergies' concept is presented in light of cooperation between firms, based on their performance. A synergy of effects is created when the performance of a joint unit is greater than it would have been without any collaboration. Gomes et al. (2011) argue that by combining complementary resources and economies of scale, firms try to minimise their weaknesses and increase their strengths through joint business. Conversely, they also argue that

from the economies of scale perspective, companies form alliances to decrease costs by rationalising the manufacturing process, which decreases the cost per unit and increases the output, as different partners now share the costs in such a condition.

However, cost reductions include not only production costs but also the cost of joint development, marketing and distribution. In addition, the cost reductions could be achieved in different ways, such as sharing knowledge and skills and learning through organisational units in diverse marketplaces (Gomes et al. 2011). In addition, from the value of discrepancy theory perspective, a company bids for another one only if it adds a greater value than the individual values of each partner (Gomes et al. 2011). Firms may view an alliance as a means to save tax through the carryover of net losses, growth in power, and modification in the tax-source for asset devaluation (Bishop & Kay 1993).

Strategic alliances are a means of achieving multiple objectives, not a single objective. Strategic alliances enable the acquisition of capabilities that will strengthen and generate more revenue for the business and enhance competitive advantage (Lee 2023; Marks & Mirvis 2010). They enable the organisation to keep in touch with the changing and advanced technologies (Dussauge & Garrette 1995) and support access to different markets and a wider set of resources (Dyer, Khale & Singh 2001). Other advantages include the capability of innovation, in terms of product (Dussauge & Garrette 1995; Gan & Korsgaard 2022) and access to the specialist skills to solve the problems of global extra-productive capability (Parkhe 1991), There is the ability to improve efficiency in the application of knowledge (Buckly 1992) and to share paired services without compromising the independence of the organizations (He et.al 2020). Dos and Hamel (1998) suggest that forming such strategic alliances provides more options, cooperative specialisation, better learning, and supports global access to skills, technology, resources, and markets.

The literature suggests multiple motivations for the formation of SA and multiple objectives linked to the formation of SA. This article investigates the motivations and objectives behind the formation of SA in the Oman 4/5 star hotel industry.

The 4/5 Star Hotel industry in Oman

Oman has recorded extensive growth in the travel and tourism sector. Oman is marketed as a niche destination and the number of tourists reached more than 5 million in 2024 and is increasing at over 20 percent per year (Muscat Daily, 2024). According to Oman's strategic plan of tourism—a national plan published in 2015, mapping tourism development in Oman until the year 2040 for all stakeholders—developing the tourism industry in Oman will have major socio-economic benefits (NCSI 2018; 2022).

The travel and tourism sector consists of four major sectors: accommodation (e.g. hotels and hotel apartments), airlines, travel agencies, and food and beverage establishments. In 2024 around 800 thousand tourists stayed in 3 to

5star hotels (Muscat Daily, 2024). This sector generates around n R.O. 200 million in sales yearly. This sector is crucial for developing the tourism industry in Oman because 46.6% of inbound tourists in Oman used hotels and hotel apartments for their accommodation (NCSI 2018; 2022). Compared with other forms of accommodation such as furnished flats and staying with friends or relatives, hotels and hotel apartments have the largest accommodation share (NCSI 2018; 2022).

According to the Oman Tourism Strategy 2016–2040, the total public and private investment in the accommodation sector through the years 2016 to 2040 is estimated to be R.O. 10.354 billion. The investment’s goal is to increase the number of hotel establishments to 50,000 in 2040. The largest share of the total hotel revenue in Oman was generated by five- and four-star hotels, accounting for 46.5% of the total revenue (NCSI 2022). The majority of these premium hotels are operated under MC collaboration with Western hotel chains that include Hilton, Marriot, and Western. This research investigated 41 five and four star hotels in Oman from the international hotel chains and which employed around 800 Omani workers and 2000 non-Omanis.

National cultural differences affect all strategic alliances across all regions and industries, and the hotel industry in Oman is no exception (Pizam et al. 1997). The selection of alliance in the hotel industry varies across different regions; with differences in national culture playing an important role in the selection of the form of alliance (Pizam,et al. 1997), especially in the Middle East as these countries are considered to have a unique cultural context (Ferjani & Boudabbous, 2023), especially compared to the mainly US origins of the major international hotel chains.

Many of the global hotel chains use non-equity alliances to gain competitive advantage (Checkitan & Klein 1993; Dunning & McQueen 1981; Ferjani & Boudabbous, 2023). Gulf Cooperation countries, including Oman, see growth opportunities in hotel industry alliances (Al Sabti 2022, pers. conv., 11 December; Harvey 2007) and the hotel industry in Oman is a suitable case illustrating the influence of national culture on the motivation of implementing MCs.

Hotel Management through Alliances with International Hotel Chains

Researchers identify several key motivations for forming business alliances. Firstly, alliances help firms acquire vital capabilities such as enhanced flexibility, technological advancements, market access, innovation, problem-solving skills, and improved efficiency. This cooperation allows businesses to address global challenges and integrate systems for better financial performance (Marks & Mirvis 2010; Buckley 1992; Dussauge & Garrette 1995; Parkhe 1991; Dyer, Khale & Singh 2001; Geleilate, Parente, & Talay 2021). Additionally, alliances offer cooperative specialization, improved learning, and increased internalization opportunities (Dos and Hamel 1998). They also add value and competitive advantages by leveraging resources from government, private, and

civil sectors, contributing to the growing number of global strategic alliances (Culpan 2009; Warners & Sullivan 2017; Parkhe 1991; Sirmon & Lane 2004).

Secondly, economic theories provide further justifications for alliances. Market power theory suggests alliances increase firms' market power by removing rivals and accessing new markets, while synergy theory highlights that collaborative performance often exceeds the sum of individual efforts (Gomes et al. 2011). Alliances also offer economies of scale by reducing production costs and sharing expenses (Gomes et al. 2011). The value discrepancy theory posits that firms form alliances to enhance value beyond what current owners can achieve, addressing information and uncertainty issues (Gomes et al. 2011). Tax considerations can also motivate alliances, as firms seek to leverage tax benefits through strategic partnerships (Bishop & Kay 1993). Despite these benefits, managing alliances involves navigating various types and stages, each with its own complexities.

In terms of the management agreement, some alliances have formal, strict conditions, whereas others have more flexible arrangements. A suitable way to differentiate between alliance types is to decide whether they involve equity linkages or not (Gomes et al. 2011). Alliances are classified into two main types: non-equity alliance (contractual alliance) and equity alliance. Both types include several sub-types. Contractual alliances (such as contract management) are non-equity alliances, characterised by low task integration (the closeness of partners' working together), low degree of uncertainty of expected results, and low urgency of decision making. In contrast, equity strategic alliances (such as joint ventures) have a higher degree of task integration, a high degree of uncertainty of the expected results, and higher urgency of decision making (Gomes et al. 2011).

An equity alliance is where two or more firms come together to form an alliance. Equity alliances involve sharing the ownership of the firm (Chen & Lin 2017). According to Blodgett (1991), an equity alliance provides more chances to practice greater control over the alliance. Equity ownership gives the owner more power to act. Compared with non-equity alliances, equity alliances allow partners to practice greater managerial control (Hennart 1991).

Non-equity alliances tend to be contractual agreements that normally do not involve shared equity or specified managerial structures (Oxley 1997; Pisano 1989). In contrast to equity alliance, firms collaborating in non-equity alliances are not obligated by ownership shares (Chen & Lin 2017). The non-equity mode of alliance is preferable in some industries, such as the international hotel market (Contractor & Kundu 1998). According to Nooteboom (2000), non-equity alliances involve diverse collaborations, with a widespread range of organisational focal points, starting from franchising and ending with contractual agreements.

For some industrial activities such as research and development, the likelihood of selecting less integrated or contractual alliances (such as MCs) increases when the cultural distance between partners increases (Choi &

Contractor 2016). This indicates that selecting contractual alliances as a form of collaboration is a more likely option in international alliances where partners are from different countries with an embodied cultural distance. This is also applicable to other activities within different industries (such as the hotel industry); hence, more research is needed in this field. During the normal life of the alliance, partners become increasingly aware of the best ways to collaborate in a more professional manner (Spekman 2012). However, different national cultures between partners often threaten the alliance (Ferjani & Boudabbous, 2023; Spekman 2012). Li et al. (2016) suggested that although the effects of national culture differences are strong in equity alliances, the same effects might be stronger in non-equity alliances. Cultural differences were found to contribute to hindering the success of non-equity alliances in globalized sectors such as the hotel sector (Ferjani & Boudabbous 2023). Therefore, non-equity alliances in the 4 and 5-star hotel sector in an emerging market context like Oman, provide an opportunity to examine the conditions supporting MCs and the extent to which MCs accommodate cultural distance between international hotel chains and local investors (Ferjani & Boudabbous, 2023).

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative approach to investigate the factors motivating the choice of management contracts (MC) as a strategic alliance in the Omani 4/5 star hotel industry. Qualitative methods are especially useful for gaining a deep and comprehensive understanding of individual experiences and behaviors in real-world settings (Padgett, 2016). This study aims to capture the subjective experiences and opinions of participants to provide a clear, descriptive account of the current landscape of MC partnerships.

The approach is grounded in the belief that understanding and exploring a topic from the perspectives of those directly involved in MCs can offer valuable insights (Malcolm, 2012). By focusing on participants' lived experiences, qualitative research offers detailed descriptions that reveal how individuals interact with and perceive their contexts. This method is widely accepted across various research disciplines for its ability to provide rich, nuanced data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Huberman & Miles, 2002).

The following steps were followed to collect the information. These were as follows: a) developing interview questions; b) creating an interview protocol; c) selecting participants d) refining the interview through pilot testing; e) carrying out the interviews.

In this study 25 interviews were undertaken with staff and managers in Omani hotels. All hotels involved in the study operate under an MC arrangement. The sample of participants was selected through judgemental selection to identify a core of participants followed up by the selection of subsequent groups of interviewees selected through snowball sampling. The criteria for interview selection was that they had direct managerial experience with the operation of MCs in the Omani hotel industry.

Marshall (1996) stated that, if there is a lack of information about participants, a judgement sample could be used to select a ‘key informant sample’, which would then be used to generate a snowball sample. The criteria for participant selection was that they were directly involved in the management and operation of MCs in the hotel sector, they had at least 5 years experience in the sector, and they were either an Omani citizen or an international employee of the Western chain hotel. Judgmental sampling was used to initially identify five personnel in the Omani 4/5 star hotel sector who met the selection criteria. These five interviewees were asked to suggest other potential participants who met the participant selection criteria. Through successive iterations and recommendations, the interview cohort was established. Snowball sampling is an efficient way to bring respondents to the semi-structured interviews (Handcock & Gile 2011).

Two distinct groups of participants were interviewed. The first were Omani employees with managerial duties and at least 5 years experience in the hotel sector. The second group were international managers from the global MC hotel partner with at least 5 years experience in the sector.

The purpose of the research is to identify the motivational factors of forming MCs from two different cultural perspectives. Data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews of around 30 minutes. Depending on the participant, the interviews were conducted in Arabic or English, were recorded and transcribed, and analysed thematically through NVivo software. After the transcription of interviews was undertaken, the raw data were organised and divided into local participants’ interviews and Western participants’ interviews. The interviews were conducted in 2020-22 in hotels where interviewees work.

Table 1 Omani Participants

Respondent code	Gender	Age	Work experience
OP1	Female	30–39	11–20 years
OP2	Female	20–29	6 years 6–10
OP3	Male	(38) 30–39	17 years 11–20
OP4	Female	40–49	20 years
OP5	Female	30–39	6–10 years
OP6	Male	30–39	6–10 years
OP7	Female	30–39	11–20 years
OP8	Male	30–39 (35)	11–20 years
OP9	Male	30–39 (30)	11–20 years
OP10	Male	30–39 (36)	11–20 years
OP11	Male	30–39	6–10 years (8years)
OP12	Female	30–39	6–10 years
OP13	Male	30–39	6–10 years
OP14	Male	30–39	6–10 years
OP21	Male	30–39	11–20 years
OP22	Male	30–39	11–20 years

Table 2 International participants

Respondent code	Gender	Age	Work experience
NOP13	Male	+50	20 years and above (49 years)
NOP14	Male	+50	30–40
NOP15	Male	20–30	6–10
NOP16	Male	40–50	20 years and above (25 years)
NOP17	Male	40–50	20 years and above (26 years)
NOP18	Male	30–40 (39)	11–20
NOP19	Male	+50	20 years and above (35 years)
NOP20	Male	40–50	11–20 years
NOP21	Male	+50	20 years and above
NOP22	Male	40–50	11–20 years

Interviewing is a crucial technique for exploring subjective views on specific phenomena within a business setting (Cooper, Schindler, & Sun, 2006; DiCiccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Fontana & Frey, 2005). Consequently, this study utilized semi-structured interviews to collect information from participants. These interviews featured questions aligned with the research objectives, yet the flexible format permitted the interviewer to delve deeper into and probe the responses (Gill et al., 2008). The semi-structured interviews covered the following topics:

- Demographic information of the interviewees
- Type and nature of the strategic alliance used in the hotel
- The motivational factors of forming an alliance in general and MCs in particular in hotel industry in Oman.

In data analysis, a process of repeated manual reading and taking memos was followed to highlight the main findings. NVivo 11 software was then used to provide more description and connection between main findings, main themes, and the main codes. The raw data were interpreted later and presented in a visual form (Creswell 2013). The key findings are discussed below.

Findings

The study identified fourteen conditions that motivate Western and Omani partners to select MC as form of collaboration between them. Nine of these factors were identified in the prior literature and five were new conditions identified by the research.

Determinants of the Selection of Management Contracts

Participants' responses revealed different motivations and reasons for the partners selecting MC as an arrangement to establish a hotel in Oman. Table 3 lists motivators for forming strategic alliances, suggested by participants. These factors are: 1) using national resources without the burden of ownership; 2) developing cooperative specialities; 3) the ability to access markets; 4) exercising control over management; 5) accessing skills to solve problems; 6) achieving performance efficiencies; 7) access to local partners who are familiar

with national rules and regulations; 8) the ability to keep in touch with changes, marketing schemes and new technologies; 9) learning through collaboration; 10) the opportunity to form international links (chances for internalisation); 11) the opportunity for product innovation; and 12) the opportunity to develop options for local investment. The table (3) indicates the number of participants who identified the listed factor, together with the number of literature sources that identify the factor as being relevant for using an MC to support a partnership. Each of the individual motivators is discussed in the following sections. The identified findings are in accordance with the prior literature, and the importance of the factors accords with the prior literature. Motivational factors one and two were seen to be significant across all participants. Factors eight to twelve were not regarded as being significant in driving the selection of an MC.

Table 3: Key Motivational factors for MC selection

	Sources	References coded
1: Using national resources without the burden of ownership	17	28
2: Developing cooperative specialities	15	28
3: Ability to access markets	8	12
4: Exercising control over management	7	10
5: Accessing skills to solve problems	5	6
6: Achieve performance efficiencies	5	7
7: Access local partners who are familiar with national rules & regulations	4	4
8: Ability to keep in touch with changes, marketing schemes and new technologies	3	3
9: Learning through collaboration	3	4
10: Chances for internalisation	3	3
11: Develop product innovation	2	2
12: Develop options for local investment	1	1

Using National Resources without the Burden of Ownership

The first factor is the Western partners’ ability to fully utilise and invest without being forced to buy or build a new building for the hotel, as suggested by 17 participants and supported by 28 cited references. Participants viewed this being decisive for the Western partner when they can establish a hotel under their brand without the need to invest in real estate. Several participants view the MC as the best way to obtain this advantage. For instance, OP3 noted:

Well, I think Omani businessmen will first have the building, which most of the time will be in a strategic location and with a unique design like our hotel here. The building is great and could be very attractive to many hotel chains to operate it as a hotel without the need to buy it under this contract.

Entering into an MC with owners of buildings allows them to fully take advantage of the national resources without the burden of owning the asset.

Consequently, when the contract ends (usually after 15 to 25 years), the global hotel chain has the freedom to withdraw from the local market.

Developing Cooperative Specialities

Fifteen participants indicated that the local partner is motivated to sign a contract of management with a global Western hotel chain to access their specialisation and expertise in the hospitality industry, whereas the Western partner is motivated to have a contract with the local partners for their expertise in the local business environment.

Several participants stated that while the hospitality industry is new in the region, it is growing fast. Local partners usually own buildings, and they want to invest in them as hotels to keep up with the growth of the hospitality industry in the country, yet they do not have the necessary expertise to run a four- or five-star hotel. They prefer to collaborate with a global hotel chain. Local partners view an MC as the easiest way to invest in a hotel since they do not have the time or expertise to run it. For instance, having the ‘know-how’ of the Western side pushes local partners to enter into an MC with these global hotel chains, as stated by OP5:

I think tourism industry is not that old investment in Oman. Omani businessmen are lacking in term of managing in this field and particularly in hotel field, so they need some guidance from a professional hotel chain who has the ‘know-how’ and are used to run many similar hotels.

The Western partner is motivated to form an MC with the local partner for their access to finance and their understanding of regulations and the market environment. Having a local partner makes the operation of the hotel more manageable for the Western partner, as OP3 said:

They will look for Omani partner because always collaboration with a local partner will make it easier for them to operate here.

Ability to Access a New/Emerging Market

Western global hotel chains are looking for new tourist destinations in regions that offer growth potential. Having a local partner in the new market provides access to the emerging market (OP1, OP2, OP4, OP5, O10, NOP3 and NOP10). For example, OP2 stated:

[Name of the hotel chain] is also, of course, benefiting from this collaboration; this collaboration gave them access to Oman as one of the aggressively emerging destinations for tourism.

Many Western partners are not familiar with the regulations and rules of Oman, such as labour regulations, planning guidelines, licensing and gambling regulations, and environmental codes.

Exercising Control over Management

MCs are viewed by the Western hotel chains as the most effective form of collaboration to provide control over the operation of the hotel. The global hotel chains require high control over management because they want to have uniform global standards throughout the chain and to protect their global brand. Maintaining global standards will not compromise the reputation of the chain. MCs, as a form of collaboration, ensure control over service quality and service delivery. NOP5 stated:

Yeah, can you see another contract rather than [a] management contract for 20 years [that] will give the hotel chains that level of control over the services' quality and services' delivery?

Access to Specialist Skills

The local partner is motivated to make an MC with the Western global hotel chain because of their skills and expertise derived from operating over long periods of time and in many countries. Local partners generally have no experience in the industry but require access to the skills and expertise to operate a quality hotel that meets international standards to attract tourists (OP2, OP3, OP5, NOP4, and NOP5). OP5 stated:

[The] hospitality industry is a susceptible sector. It [is] impacted by any incident around the world, which could impact negatively or positively. Many Omani businessmen will not wish to be involved in these hassles, especially if they do not have the experience, so they will prefer these big hotel chains to fully operate the hotel under a contract of 15 or 20 years.

Product Innovation

Innovation and new product access are crucial in the hotel sector, both globally and locally. Further, when global chains enter new markets, they bring with them new products and services that represent best practice programs in the hotel sector. Local investors are motivated to have an MC with them to run their establishments (NOP8). For example, OP5 declared:

[T]hese chains are not only able to deliver the service but they [are] also able to innovate and add new attractive services, which in terms of the high competition nowadays is very important.

Achieving Performance Efficiencies

The desire of partners to achieve performance efficiency was also mentioned by participants as a motivational factor to select the MC as a form of alliance. Participants found the MC to be the most beneficial type of partnership

concerning performance efficiency for both local and Western partners. For example, NOP6 said:

I think this contract is just more beneficial from the financial side for both of them as the performance, of course, will be better with less cost.

Under a contract, the local partner saves money, effort, and time and secures a steady profit for 20 or 25 years (OP2 and NOP5). Local partners view the processes of learning how to run a four- or five-star hotel to be complicated and time-consuming. For this reason, they look for a Western hotel chain to operate the hotel and avoid problems encountered with becoming familiar with the challenges present in the sector. Western partners view this contract as more beneficial in terms of costs and making decisions (OP2 and NOP5). MCs involve less time consumed in making decisions for the Western partner, especially in addressing local customs and regulations. NOP7 argued that a MC provides more flexibility for operators of the hotel to change the direction of management when necessary, without the involvement of the local partner.

Accessing Local Partners' Knowledge of National Rules and Regulations

Where legal and regulatory differ from those of the home country of the international hotel chain an MC offers the opportunity for the local partner to address local laws and regulations. One of the leading challenges that hotels faced in Oman was over the serving of alcoholic beverages.

The local partner's experience and contacts was viewed by the Western operator as being important in addressing local regulations and cultural norms impacting on hotel operations (NOP2 and NOP7). NOP7 stated:

Of course, these people are also benefiting a lot from making such a contract with this young Omani man who learned it the hard way and knows everything about the business rules and regulations. I mean by that national rules of Oman such as Omanisation, licenses issuing, taxation and other governmental laws, which they know nothing about.

Ability to Track Industry Developments

For the local partner, an MC enabled them to remain informed about global trends in the hospitality industry, such as the application of new technologies impacting booking systems and brand-established marketing strategies (OP1, OP4, and OP6). Participant OP4 stated that:

[T]hese chains are having their booking systems and their marketing strategies, which many Omanis avoid getting involved with, but they will also learn from.

Opportunities for Learning

The desire of the local partner to learn about managing the hotel industry was also an important factor supporting the MC (OP2, OP7, NOP1). The local partners receive access to skills in managing the building, services, HR, marketing, and other related issues by forming this collaboration. OP2 stated:

Chain will run the hotel where the Omani owner can learn from them about managing the service, staffs and doing promotion in case, after the end of the contract, maybe after 15 or 20 years, maybe the Omani partner will be able to establish his brand name.

International Linkages

The collaboration between the Western hotel chain and the local partner under the MC gives them a chance to be recognised globally (OP2, OP4, and OP9). MCs provides the Western hotel chains with more channels to distribute their services that enhances their reputation (OP2 and OP4).

Providing Options for Local Investors

The entrance of the global hotel chain to the market through an MC with a local partner viewed by Omani partners as an opportunity to provide more investment options for domestic investors. The hotel establishment nourishes local small and medium enterprises, one of sectors encouraged by the Omani government, and provides collaboration chances for them in the future. As OP10 proposed:

Well, it is an opportunity for local investors and SMEs in Oman. The sector is very encouraged in Oman and these contracts will bring better chances for us.

Discussion

The most cited determinant for forming an MC involved ‘the use of national resources without the burden of ownership’, which aligns with the resource dependency theory (Dunning 1988) and the relational view of the firm (Dyer and Singh, 1998). The findings suggest that the Western hotel chains are motivated to form an MC with an Omani partner because of their accessibility to needed resources, as suggested by Chen and Lin (2017) and Mulet-Forteza et al. (2024). Findings suggest that international hotel chains require access to strategic assets such as the buildings and local expertise and contacts. In Oman there are restrictions on land or property ownership by foreigners in Oman based on Royal Decree 5/80 (Land Law Royal Decree 1980) and the Ministerial Decree 41/2017 (Restrictions of Foreigners’ Companies’ Ownership of Properties 2017). This is a way to overcome the barriers to international ownership (Fatehi & Choi 2019) linked to the host countries’ rules and regulations.

The second most cited determinant for forming a MC is developing cooperative specialties through MC agreements. Cooperative specialties mean

that a firm forms a collaboration agreement to achieve competitive advantage through the partner's specialty in a vital business aspect (e.g. learning know-how). This finding is in line with studies such as and Hamel (1998) Fatehi and Choi (2019) and Gan and Korsgaard (2022). Findings suggest that an MC provides skills lacking on each side of the partnership. In particular, the skills of operating hospitality establishments are provided to the local partner and the expertise of the local market environment is provided to the Western partner. This finding corroborates the idea of Dos and Hamel (1998) of 'cospecialised', where combining specialties of different firms through alliances creates greater value, which cannot be achieved without the alliance. Combined specialties the current finding which is a new contribution to Dos and Hamel (1998) 'cospecialised' concept goes beyond the usual context of such studies of Western countries (Eisnhardt & Schoonhoven 1996; Fatehi & Choi 2019) and equity-based research by indicating this motivation factor for MCs in service-based industries in an Arab country.

The above two conditions dominated the responses given by participants. The following five were seen as less important, but potentially influential. The third most cited determinant is the ability to access the local market. This determinant suggests that MCs provide easy access to the Omani market for the global hotel chain. Forming an alliance provides effective access to the local market (Khale & Singh 2001; Killing 2012) and flexibility over operations (Mulet-Forteza et al. 2024). This finding is in line with Killing (2012), who suggested that international joint venture provides access to partners to new countries, and Mulet-Forteza (2024), who suggested that non-ownership contracts, such as MCs, provide flexibility in terms of accessing a new market.

Further, access to the market could be linked to another determinant suggested by the finding, which is providing opportunities for the internationalisation of operations. This provides the global hotel with a chance to be recognised in a variety of different markets, especially in the Middle East. These findings substantiate the eclectic paradigm theory that proposes that the production of multinational collaboration (e.g. hotel chains) can be in the best interest of the collaborating firms when these firms keep the ownership within their organisational boundaries (Dunning 1988). In this case of MC collaboration, the global hotel chains are not forced to sell their intangible assets (such as brand name) to enter the market and the local partner does not need to sell tangible assets (such as the building) to invest in the hotel sector (Mulet-Forteza, 2024).

International hotel chains select MCs to collaborate with Omani partners to exercise control over the daily operations of the hotel. This ensures less involvement of the Omani side, which safeguards the uniformity of the standard quality of the brand. In emerging markets such as Oman, few local investors have experience in operating hotels. This finding validates the research of Kruesi, Hemmington and Kim (2018) who suggested that the control over the

intangible assets and resources (e.g. service quality, the brand standards) of the hotel is the most important factor in determining the choice of an MC.

Access to specialised skills plays a role in determining the choice of an MC as a collaboration agreement in the hotel industry. Forming an alliance helps partners to access specialist expertise and operational skills (Buckley 1992; Dussauge & Garrette 1995; Chen, Li, & Zhang 2021; Parkhe 1991). This finding supports research of Ge, Chen and Chen (2018), Chen, Li, & Zhang (2021) and Wang & Okumus (2022) who suggested that hotels select MC as a form of collaboration when they need skills to immediately solve problems and when they wish to acquire special operational skills.

Achieving performance efficiencies was found to be important for the local partners to choose MCs as an alliance. The Omani partners save time in learning how to run a luxury hotel while the Western hotel chains save cost in terms of addressing local regulations and laws. This finding validates the concept of 'synergies', which is created when the performance efficiency of an alliance is superior to what it would have been without the cooperation (Gomes et al. 2011). Oman is an Islamic country and enforces Islamic Sharia laws where alcoholic drinks are forbidden, yet alcohol is served in hotels (Tourism Law Decree 2002). Global hotel chains prefer less involvement of the local partner in management, yet they need local partners to sort out the start-up processes of the hotel, including licenses, and to satisfy legal conditions around serving alcoholic beverages. The benefit of performance efficiency in MCs hotels is also suggested by Espino-Rodríguez & Rodríguez-Díaz (2018).

The following identified factors were seen as important by a small number of participants (three or less). The ability to keep in touch with changes, marketing and technologies is also found to be a motivational factor for partners to select an MC for their collaboration. This finding is in line with findings of previous studies such as Buckley (1992), Dussauge and Garrette (1995), and Parkhe (1991) which were mainly focused on equity alliances. This finding adds the MC non-equity alliances to those alliances that are encouraged by capabilities of partners to be constantly updated with changes. Examples of these changes are developments in marketing schemes and technologies in the hotel industry worldwide. The work of Wang & Okumus (2022) also supports this finding and suggests that MCs can also enhance the alliance with ability to keep up with market advancements.

Learning opportunities was also cited by participants as a factor in selecting an MC to form an alliance. Alliances are generally considered a way to develop learning in terms of operating business among partners (Dos & Hamel 1998; Inkpen 2008). The findings suggest that local partners prefer to start their careers in the hotel industry by forming an MC with a Western hotel chain to learn from them how to manage a hotel. In international hotel management without an alliance, access to the needed expertise may be restricted and thus limits opportunities for partners to learn (Inkpen 2008). MCs appear to be the way for local partners to access an international hotel's operational expertise and learn

from Western experts. This finding aligns with previous studies (Dussauge, Garrette & Mitchel 2000; Inkpen 2008; Park, Vertinsky & Lee 2012) who investigated the advantage of learning through international strategic alliances.

Local partners are motivated to sign an MC with a Western hotel chain because of their abilities to develop new hospitality services suitable to the Omani market. One benefit gained from forming a strategic alliance is access to product innovation (Buckley 1992; Bustinza, Vendrell-Herrero & Gomes 2019; Dussauge & Garrette 1995; He et.al 2023). Successfully acquiring product innovation might be achieved by networking with firms that have the related management expertise (Harris, Coles & Dickson 2000) as is the case with global hotel chains. The potential result of this is that the less experienced partners (Omani partners) seek a contractual collaboration through an MC with the most experienced partners (international hotel chains) to develop their abilities to innovate services provided in the hotel.

Conclusion

The research identified 12 motivational conditions that supported the use of MCs to support alliances between local investors and international hotel chains in Oman. The findings were supported by earlier research, and the importance assigned to the motivational factors is in accord with prior research. For Oman, the tourism sector is growing and is an important source of investment and employment. As such, it is important to examine the underlying arrangements supporting the investment in the sector and the participation of international hotel chains. Overall, the findings suggest that for Man, the motivational factors supporting MCs to attract international hotel chains align with findings elsewhere. The study was limited by the small number of participants that were interviewed, the limited stakeholder coverage (for example, public officials were omitted), and by being undertaken at one point in time, which was just after the COVID-19 pandemic. Further research could investigate a wider selection of hotels and participants and stakeholders, examine cross-country comparisons within the region, and seek participant feedback on retrospective views of the effectiveness of MCSs in supporting investment and international hotel participation in the sector.

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