

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN ROMANIA BY THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

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The hotel industry, one of the top job-creating sectors worldwide, has come to researchers' attention especially in the last 30 years. Being one of the extremely labour intensive areas, research on the human resources in this industry has focused mainly on identifying the particularities of working in this sector and on establishing the best human resource management practices. Despite the progress made in identifying the best ways of enhancing employees' potential, the hotel industry continues to face issues such as low work satisfaction and staff turnover, problems that can adversely influence the quality of the services delivered, customer satisfaction and, consequently, companies' financial performance.

Moreover, excluding the large hotel groups, this industry continues to have a traditionalist culture, the employees still not being fully treated as an asset of the organization, on whose quality and training depend the fulfilment of organizational goals and strategies. Given the fact that currently, the competition between organizations and nations is conducted according to the innovation capacity, the year 2009 even being declared the "European year for creativity and innovation", it would be interesting to analyse the role of innovation in determining the competitive advantage in the hotel industry, as well as the ways of stimulating the creativity of hotel personnel.

How can the staff in this activity sector (characterized by low salaries, poor working conditions and low work satisfaction) be determined to be creative and implement successful innovations? Or can maybe exactly the possibility of working in an environment where creativity is assessed to become a work motivating factor? Moreover, how could creativity be stimulated in the current business environment, when more organizations enforce standardized working procedures that ensure goals achievement? In the hotel industry, especially in the case of establishments with hundreds of employees, efficiency and service quality can only be achieved by imposing standardized practices, by imposing a routine in following a set of procedures that ensure that all the operations are conducted at the time and the quality promised to the client. Considering these conditions, the dilemma arises again: how can employees be encouraged to be creative? All these questions have drew the author's interest, determining the motivation to investigate the main human resource management practices that have an impact on creativity and innovation in the hotel industry.

The subject is topical and yet not fully studied, especially in Romania. It was assumed that outstanding hotel facilities and services or even human resources can only be fully enhanced and exploited through creativity. Moreover, the growing heterogeneity of customers, their constantly changing needs, as well as the constant emergence of new client segments put hotel managers in the position of confronting unprecedented situations and problems whose solutions require creativity. Moreover, it seems to be generally accepted, both in the business and scientific or academic environment, the fact that innovation is essential for gaining competitive advantage, the current market conditions accepting in the race for survival only the companies that are able to innovate. However, despite these considerations and despite its continuous growth, at an increasingly alert pace, the innovation activity is still not fully understood, the economic literature on this subject beginning to develop in the second half of the XX century. Specialists' interest to the innovation process in the hotel industry arose even more recently, traditionally this activity being closely linked to technological development and to the manufacturing industries. Mainly developed after the year 2000, studies on

innovation in tourism and in the hotel industry are still relatively few in number, the research conducted so far primarily aiming at identifying the factors that influence this process, as well as the impact of the innovation activity on hotels' financial performance. The importance of the human resources in the innovation process in the hotel industry continues to be a subject that has been little discussed and researched.

As a result, the purpose of the doctoral research was to understand how Romanian hotel staff can be stimulated to be creative and to contribute to the implementation of innovations. To achieve this purpose, several goals have been formulated: to identify the extent to which hoteliers consider innovation important for gaining success in the hotel industry; to identify the types of innovation implemented by hotels; to identify the aspects of the organizational culture that have an impact on the level of creativity of employees in the hotel industry.

In order to attain these goals, the author decided to use primary information sources (population employed in Romanian hotels), the primary data collection being conducted by means of 2 direct research (in-depth interviews with hotel general managers and a survey among hotel employees), the two studies having, in turn, specific goals aimed at contributing to achieving the overall purpose of the doctoral research.

The following section will briefly present the way in which the two direct studies have been conducted. Since the studies on the innovative behavior of Romanian hotels are still emerging, it was considered appropriate to conduct an exploratory research, aimed to enable a better understanding of the studied phenomenon. Thus, it was decided to conduct a qualitative research, through an in-depth semi-conducted interview, using an interview guide. The target group of the qualitative research was represented by hotel general managers, and the interview, conducted using an interview guide, aimed to facilitate a better understanding of: managers' perception on the importance of the innovation activity in the hotel industry; the types of innovation implemented in hotels; the frequency with which innovations are implemented in hotels; the way hotel staff is encouraged and stimulated to be creative and to have an innovative spirit; managers' perception on the elements of organizational culture (climate) with impact on the level of creativity of hotel employees.

The second direct research was a survey based on a questionnaire. It was decided to conduct a personal survey in Romanian hotels. The main goal of the survey was to identify the level of creativity of hotel staff and the cultural (organizational) elements with impact on employees' creativity. Based on the conclusions of several studies identified in the literature review process, a prime objective of the survey was to determine, among the hotel staff in Romania, 3 of the socio-cultural work related values identified by Geert Hofstede (individualism, power distance and long term orientation) for which it was proven to have a direct impact on the innovation performance of hotels (by influencing employees' creativity). In addition, in order to identify the influence of the organizational culture on employees' creativity there were considered the following aspects: the relationship with co-workers, the relationship with the immediate superior and organizational support. Employees' level of creativity was determined based on their perception of the extent to which they manage to be creative by: finding new ways of solving current task of their job; suggesting new ways of achieving organizational goals; offering ideas for improving the quality of the products/services offered by the organization; suggesting the introduction of new products/services in the organization.

Moreover, since the successful implementation of hotel innovations requires customer orientation, the author decided to conduct a research on customers of hotel services in Romania, whose purpose was to reveal the determinant factors of customer satisfaction and the importance of the innovative behaviour in this industry. Once again, in order to achieve the purpose of the research, several goals have been formulated: identifying customer satisfaction with the quality of services offered by Romanian hotels; identifying customer perception of the importance of Romanian hotels' innovation capacity; identifying customer satisfaction regarding Romanian hotels' innovation capacity; identifying the types of hotel innovations considered important by customers. The information collection was based on a direct research method – structured, undisguised, personal survey, the data collection instrument being a questionnaire.

All these being considered, the Ph.D. thesis was divided into 5 chapters, each chapter gradually contributing to achieve the purpose of the research. The first part of the thesis (chapters 1-3) is devoted to substantiating the state of knowledge on the issue investigated, while the second part (chapters 4-5) is reserved for the presentation of the personal contributions in studying and developing the subject brought to attention. Based on the survey's conclusions and the correlations found between variables, the author designed a new conceptual model of influencing employees' creativity in the hotel industry in Romania, indicating the impact of cultural values and of organizational environment (considering the support of the immediate superior, the support of co-workers and organizational support) on the creative performances in four main directions. Thus, the Ph.D. thesis, by its degree of novelty and originality, has brought a number of relevant results both theoretically and practical, offering a new vision on the working environment in the Romanian hotel industry and on the ways of improving the working relationships in this activity sector, in order to foster creativity and innovation.