



Adaptive Leadership And Its Competencies For Times Of Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies the senses and meanings that the actors of the hotel sector give to the prospective managerial competencies in the companies of the hotel sector in Cúcuta, Colombia, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic, as a dichotomous process related to the hotel industry, has highlighted the fragility of this sector. It is considered that in the medium term, strong competition will be unleashed in which companies will want to position themselves at the starting line, given that whoever arrives last may pay a high price, which will even affect their survival. The question that arises is: what are the senses and meanings that the social actors give to the prospective of managerial competencies in the companies of the hotel sector registered in Cotelco in Cúcuta, in the face of the pandemic generated by Covid-19? Based on the quantitative and qualitative paradigm, the research is exploratory and relational with a field design and documentary review. Executives of the hotel sector in Cúcuta were consulted. Online surveys were applied to identify managerial competencies and subsequently the prospective relationship with the factors associated with the sector in the face of the pandemic. From the results, it is concluded that, in the hotel sector of Cúcuta, commitment and quality of work are the most relevant signifiers. The results show that, during the pandemic, a defensive strategy should be applied. It is recommended to offer differentiated services, in which customer safety is paramount, and to focus on customer loyalty to the company. From the prospective approach, it is proposed to apply a mix of competitive and growth strategies to take advantage of opportunities when the economy recovers.

Keywords: meanings, signifiers, prospective, hotel sector, Covid-19 pandemic, Cúcuta.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations, regardless of their size and sector, are focused on strengthening their capabilities to increase their market share, grow and generate profits. In this process, companies seek to improve their competitiveness and processes to meet the demands of consumers and beneficiaries, face competition, as well as the demands of the global market in an unpredictable and changing environment.

In this scenario, companies, regardless of their mission, require prepared and qualified management personnel to guide and manage processes so that they can respond quickly and assertively to the demands of the environment, in order to achieve the objectives set. In this work, the sector under study is the hotel sector. This sector contributes significantly to the country's economy; its importance in the tourism value chain is undeniable, as is its capacity to generate direct and indirect employment. This, added to the development of infrastructure, brings benefits to the sectoral chain that is formed around it. Therefore, any study and research focused on the hotel sector is relevant.

In this sense, the study of managerial capabilities is interesting, given that the hotel sector is complex due to the nature of its services, since internal processes must be optimized and the customer must be satisfied, given that the offer of this type of service is very wide and varied, which generates strong competition. On the other hand, once the company formulates the objectives within the framework of its strategic plan, people are expected to work as a team and perform effectively and efficiently. It is therefore necessary to optimize management and it is important to synchronize processes and administrative actions within the framework of the established strategy. This is where managerial competencies are of vital importance. Madrigal (2009) argues that managerial skills and competencies are particular skills resulting from knowledge, information, practice and aptitude. When managers apply these tools in their roles, they create the environment for a high-performance work team. Clearly, managers must be prepared for change.

Now, no one doubts that the 21st century will continue to be characterized by chaotic, transformational and rapid change. In fact, almost no sane person is willing to predict what the world will be like 50, 25 or even 15 years from now. Change is too rapid and pervasive (Whetten and Cameron, 2012). In this order of ideas, the pandemic caused by Covid-19 emerged in a disruptive way, radically modifying the environment and throwing out all the proposed scenarios, even the most pessimistic that could have been designed at a given time. This has led to a review of the management methods, processes and techniques applied up to now.

Faced with this reality, one of the sectors strongly affected is the tourism sector, especially the hotel industry. In Colombia, at the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020, this sector was betting on growth and promising results were expected for previous years and months. Below are some statistics on the situation published by the Chamber of Commerce of Bogota (2019):

- Between 2018 and 2019 there was a 2.7% increase in non-resident tourists to Colombia. It is expected that in the post-pandemic season these levels will be recovered and even surpassed, so it is expected to receive around 5 million non-resident visitors during the year.
- For 2019, hotel occupancy was 56.4%, an increase of 1.5% over the previous year, and one of the highest figures in the last 15 years.

- For the first time in history, in 2020, Colombia is among the top ten tourist destinations for travelers from the United States, according to the U.S. Tour Operators Association, which means there is a great opportunity for growth.
- In the same vein, Colombia is one of the top 20 favorite destinations in the world for travel, according to the Readers' Choice Awards 2019. This information is part of the conclusions of a survey of 600,000 readers of Condé Nast Traveler magazine.

Cúcuta did not escape this reality, the Chamber of Commerce of Cúcuta (2019), published that according to Cotelco (2019), hotel occupancy in Norte de Santander ranked thirteenth in the ranking of the main departments with 45.5%. Bustamante (2020) points out that according to Cotelco information, the average occupancy in the department reached 50.42% in 2019, showing an increase of 5% over the previous year.

Unfortunately, all these expectations collapsed as a consequence of the declaration of a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020 and the quarantine measure decreed in Colombia on March 13, 2020. This new scenario led to rethinking strategies and objectives throughout the business world, without really knowing the scope and impact of this unknown “host”.

Faced with this shocking reality, the resilience of organizations, their executive and managerial train, are facing a storm that demands the maximum of their capabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to relate managerial competencies and the consequences in the hotel sector registered in Cotelco in Cúcuta, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

For the study of managerial competencies, the theoretical line exposed by Whetten & Cameron (2012) is followed, also to Barba (2011) based on the Alfa Tuning Project (2005) in Latin America, where 62 universities in Latin America participated. Regarding the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism sector, it will be guided by the work presented in April 2020 by the Spanish Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AECIT). To perform the relationship between the identified factors and regarding the studies related to the subject under study, Czajkowska (2016) and Barba (2011) are followed in “Diagnosis of managerial competencies in companies and universities in Morelos”. This research categorizes, evaluates and proposes the managerial competencies of the leaders of the 21st century, and proposes a series of recommendations to look for people who possess these qualities or who can be strengthened through continuing education.

In this descriptive work, categorization and evaluation of the managerial competencies necessary for the professional of the 21st century is carried out, as well as the methods used by employers for the selection of managerial-level personnel.

In this research, a quantitative and qualitative methodology was used, at an exploratory and relational level, with a field design and supported by a documentary review. Executives of the hotel sector registered in Cotelco in Cúcuta were consulted. Online surveys were applied to investigate their perception of managerial competencies and the prospective relationship with the factors associated with the sector in the face of the pandemic. Employing a cross-impact matrix, a prospective approximation of these competencies was obtained, because of some opportunities and threats that the hotel sector would face during and after Covid-19.

As a research question, what are the meanings and significance of the sectoral actors, regarding the prospective of management competencies in the hotel sector companies registered in Cotelco in Cúcuta during and after the Covid-19 pandemic?

The general objective is to establish the meanings and the sense is given by the actors of the hotel sector to the prospective of managerial competencies in the hotel sector companies registered in Cotelco in Cúcuta Colombia in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. The specific objectives were: a) Characterize the hotel sector registered with Cotelco in Cúcuta, b) Describe the situation of the sector before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, c) Identify the most visible managerial competencies in the sector under study, d) Determine the relationships between the selected factors from a prospective approach.

This document is structured in three parts including this introduction, followed by the body of the work where a frame of reference is presented, the method used is explained and finally the results, conclusions and recommendations are presented.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Leadership Adaptive

Faced with an unknown and uncertain scenario such as the one presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of leadership is redefined and requires facing complex and unknown situations in unprecedented contexts that go beyond the organization and touch on aspects of society and the human character of those who are part of the organization's work. In circumstances such as these, the leader must have knowledge not only in technical competencies of “know-how”, but also capacities and skills that allow him/her to relate with other people, generate synergies to achieve some kind of empowerment and appropriation regarding the business vision in circumstances of complexity, crisis and uncertainty (Arceo, 2020).

The characteristics of leaders in these conditions, must go through boldness, creativity and the ability to generate confidence in the work team so that actions are transformed into effective results, having as a reference the *raison d'être* and vision of the organization, as key guiding elements, which serve as a guide and do not allow losing the course, even in circumstances of uncertainty (Gómez et al., 2020; Mejía, 2017; Manzano et al., 2019).

In extreme circumstances such as those posed by the pandemic, leaders are required to help the business community face unknown challenges in which disorientation, fear and uncertainty prevail in the face of the unknown, not only from a work, but also from a family and personal point of view. The leader's skills and competencies must go beyond the ordinary and it is expected that even in these circumstances he/she will find opportunities for growth, diversification or change of direction of the organization to take advantage of the special conditions of the environment (Heifetz and Laurie, 2009).

The ability to adapt, courage in decision making, the willingness to protect the economic performance of the company in a decisive and rational way, the ability to prioritize the fulfillment of the mission and intelligent opportunism to design favorable scenarios in the future and the ability to understand all stakeholders are the fundamental characteristics that the leader must have to face situations of crisis and volatility (Mendoza, 2020). This requires other fundamental competencies

such as good communication, leading by example, the ability to remain calm in times of increased pressure and being able to generate positive synergies in the work team. The resilient and adaptive leader generates empathy taking into account the human side of difficulties where not only economic performance is prioritized but other aspects such as job security, well-being and health are taken into account.

Management Competencies

Probably the first text that refers to competencies is the Platonic dialogue *Lysis*, which referred to the ability to establish friendships or to have the ability to achieve a goal (Mulder et al., 2007). Etymologically, it comes from *competere*, which means to go to meet, or aspire to achieve some goal (Corominas & Pascual, 2007; González et al., 2022).

The concept of competency is divided into two parts: competence and performance. Competence refers to the knowledge and mastery of a specific activity or subject, that is, the ability to apply knowledge and achieve specific results, the former refers to the knowledge and mastery that a person has over a certain subject and the latter to the actual use he/she makes of it in specific situations, while mastery refers to the ability to apply knowledge and achieve specific results (Chomsky, 1957). To be competent means to have the capacity, disposition, attribute or ability to perform a task or make a decision situation in a specific context, in which knowledge and action are required at the same time (Del Pino, 1997).

To be competent is to have the individual's ability to perform activities or tasks, required by society or by organizations, for which knowledge, attitude, motivation and emotion are required (OECD, 2003).

There are several ways of classifying managerial competencies, among them the one proposed by the OECD (2003), which has four categories: a) use of physical, communication and language tools to interact with the environment; b) ability to interact in heterogeneous groups; and c) act autonomously, making decisions so that their life belongs to a wider and globalized world. A more generic taxonomy is proposed by Hellriegel, Jacson and Solum (2009), which speaks of three categories: a) knowing; b) knowing how to do; and c) knowing how to be and wanting to do.

In turn, Barba (2011), in the Alfa Tuning Project (2005) in Latin America, establishes 27 generic competencies that managers or leaders of organizations should have, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Management Competencies

Teamwork	Productivity	Integrity
Commitment	Ability to learn	Quality at work
Adaptability to change	Communication	Leadership
Entrepreneurial vision	Proactivity (initiative)	Negotiation
Flexibility	Innovation	Working under pressure
Thrust	Knowledge generation	Congruence
Creativity	Common sense	Intellectual Efficiency

Source: Barba (2011).

According to Barba (2011), these competencies contain the skills, attitudes and knowledge that an organizational leader must have, as a key tool to face the changes in the environment and as mechanisms that allow the company to face the challenges in situations of complexity, turbulence and crisis.

METHOD

The research is quantitative and qualitative, exploratory, with a field design and supported by a documentary review. The population consisted of 16 executives representing the 16 hotels registered with Cotelco in Norte de Santander (see table 2). Online surveys were applied to investigate their perception of the identification and order of importance of managerial competencies. In this phase, the taxonomy proposed by Barbas (2011) was used, in which a series of managerial competencies were proposed based on the Alfa Tuning Project (2005) in Latin America and they were asked to identify the presence or absence of each of these competencies in the organization where they work.

Table 2. Cotelco card hotels in Norte de Santander

Hotel Amaruc Yadir	Arizona Suites Hotel
Arrival Hotel	Arthur Brich Hotel
Hotel B'Quin Plaza Boutique	Casa Blanca Hotel
Hotel Casino Internacional	Hotel Chucarima
Hotel Excelsior	Hotel HB Boutique Colombia
Holiday Inn Hotel	Luxor Hotel
Hotel Savac	Hotel Saraya
Hotel Tonchalá	Victoria Plaza Millenium Hotel

Source: Cotelco

Once the information was collected, it was consolidated and the frequency was calculated for each of the proposed competencies. To select the factors to be related, the managerial competencies were initially categorized into Strengths and Weaknesses according to the perception of the executives interviewed. To do this, the statistical range was taken according to the frequency of responses, 50% of the range was taken and added to the lower limit to define the midpoint of the table. Competencies above the midpoint obtained were considered Strengths. Regarding the elements related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the work was based on the document of the Spanish Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AECIT) (2020); Hosteltur Latam and PwC Colombia, among others. These elements were classified as potential Threats and Opportunities.

Subsequently, the prospective relationship with factors associated with the sector in the face of the pandemic was investigated. Through a cross-impact matrix, a prospective approach of these competencies was obtained, because of some opportunities and threats that the hotel sector would face during and after Covid-19.

RESULTS

Norte de Santander is a department located in the northeast of Colombia with an enormous potential for the exploitation of sustainable tourism since it has a diversity and cultural, environmental, religious and business richness that makes it a very attractive area for locals and foreigners. In this territory there are resources of great interest such as cultural assets of national interest, folkloric and

religious festivals, natural wealth such as moorlands, lagoons, waterfalls, hot springs, scenic viewpoints, thermal waters, etc. (Gobernación de Norte de Santander, 2020).

Some tourist attractions of great recognition in the region are the city of Pamplona with its temples and religious festivals, the national part of the Estoraques, the Tamá National Park, the Historic Temple of Villa del Rosario where the first political constitution of the Republic of Colombia was promulgated and the Bagatela which was the first newspaper in the country (González-Mendoza & Fonseca-Vigoya, 2016).

In this context and with these potentialities, the authorities and society seek to turn the region into a world-class tourist destination, so in various documents such as the development plan seeks to have “a destination with a regional brand”, to make tourism a profitable and sustainable industry, taking advantage of the proximity of the border and the always attractive and commercial city of Cúcuta (Government of Norte de Santander, 2020).

The hotel industry has its largest presence in the cities of Cúcuta, Pamplona, Chinácota and Ocaña, where a large number of hotels and residences operate, with an approximate capacity of 14,804 beds and 10,164 rooms, employing about 1,700 people (CITUR, 2021). The hotel occupancy rate ranged from 42% in 2015 to 53% in 2019 before the pandemic, but in the midst of the health, emergency dropped to 2% in 2020% (Figure 1).

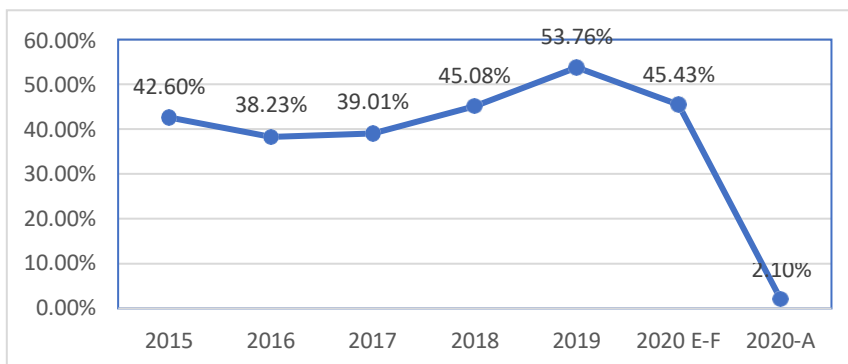


Figure 1. Percentage of occupancy in the hotel sector in Cúcuta.

Source: the author with data from CITUR and DANE (EMA, 2020 August).

The department of Norte de Santander ranks 13th among all departments in terms of hotel occupancy, with an average rate of approximately \$141,446. Other Colombian regions such as Cartagena have occupancy rates of around 76% (CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF CUCUTA, 2019).

Regarding the managerial competencies of the managers of the hotel sector in Norte de Santander, affiliated with Cotelco, the executives of these organizations were asked to identify and qualify the importance of the managerial competencies required in the industry, according to the taxonomy presented by (Barba, 2011).

The result of the rating made by the interviewees shows that the most important competencies according to the order of rating are: Commitment with 39.8%; Quality at work and Communication with 33.7%; Teamwork 32.7%; Leadership 27.6%; Initiative 26.5%. The competencies that received the lowest scores were: Knowledge generation 10.2%; Flexibility 8.7% and Work under pressure 7.1% (Figure 2).

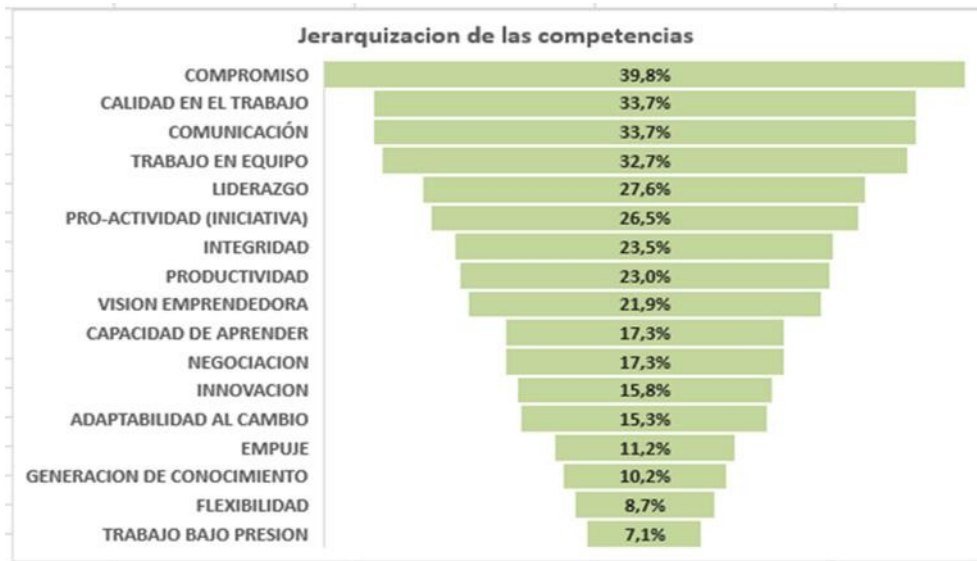


Figure 2. Hierarchy of managerial competencies in the hotel sector of Cúcuta registered with Cotelco.
Source: Author with data from field work

Taking into account the results found, it can be affirmed that the competencies of greatest interest in the hotel industry in Norte de Santander refer to collective attitudes and skills in which the work of each individual should generate synergy with the rest of the team, more than the skills or abilities that each worker may have in particular. Table 4 describes the meaning of the most important competencies found, which allows understanding the attitude, ability, knowledge or skill of each one of them and at the same time gives light on how to take advantage of them or design strategies to strengthen them.

Table 1. Significance and Significance in the hotel sector of Cúcuta in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Management Competence (Significant)	Meaning
Commitment	Take ownership of the company's objectives. Make decisions or support them by giving their best effort to achieve the proposed goals. To be able to overcome obstacles that impede the fulfillment of the organization's mission. Create mechanisms and monitor their application to evaluating the fulfillment of the established goals. To be able to align their commitments with those of the organization, committing themselves personally and professionally to achieve them.
Quality at work	Always strive for excellence. Possess the knowledge and have the attitude to do the job. Have the ability to understand the complexity and transform it into simple and easy-to-understand solutions. To be able to share knowledge and experience with the work team. To be in a permanent disposition to learn and renew knowledge.

Communication	Have the ability to listen and understand. Be able to convey an idea assertively. Have the ability to understand when and to whom to convey an idea and listen to their perspective. Have the ability to manage groups and convey information orally and in writing.
Teamwork	Have the ability and willingness to cooperate, learn and help others. There must be a genuine attitude to work collaboratively. Be able to influence team members and be influenced by those with greater experience and expertise.
Leadership	Have the ability to guide human groups by inspiring them with their work and life example. Anticipate feasible scenarios that place the organization in an advantageous position. Have enough positive energy to motivate colleagues to give their best effort. Have empathy and build trust. Have the courage to defend their approaches, ideas and beliefs. Resolve conflicts that may arise and affect organizational development.

Source: Barbas (2011)

The second phase of the study refers to categorizing the competencies between weaknesses and strengths according to the perception of the executives interviewed in each of the organizations in which they work. In this sense, competencies such as management capacity, level of commitment, quality of work, communication, teamwork, leadership, etc., are competencies that workers in the hotel industry perform adequately and sufficiently, and therefore constitute a strength for the sector (see Table 5).

Table 52. Strengths and Weaknesses identified in the hotel sector registered with Cotelco in Cúcuta.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Management capacity	Ability to learn
Level of Commitment	Negotiation
Quality at work	Innovation
Communication	Adaptability to change
Teamwork	Thrust
Leadership	Knowledge generation
Proactivity (initiative)	Flexibility
Integrity	Working under pressure
Productivity	
Entrepreneurial vision	

Source: Author with data from fieldwork

In contrast, competencies such as the ability to learn, Negotiation, Innovation, Adaptability to change, Generation of new knowledge, Flexibility and Work under pressure are considered competencies that are not properly appropriated and learned and therefore represent a weakness for the sector. However, these competencies can be learned, so organizational strategies are required to turn these weaknesses into strengths and to make the most of the strengths to consolidate a competitive advantage.

CONCLUSIONS

Once the study related to the establishment of the meanings and significance that the actors of the hotel sector give to the prospective of the managerial competences in the companies of the hotel sector registered in Cotelco in Cúcuta Colombia in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic has been concluded, the following conclusions are presented.

The evident negative impact on economic indicators as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic is strongly affecting the tourism sector and in particular the hotel sector. This has generated, as in other sectors of the economy, a drop in demand, business closures, unemployment and indebtedness, endangering the continuity of operations, if the closure of the tourism sector is prolonged for a longer period of time. In addition to this scenario, it is estimated that the tourism sector, like the transportation sector, will experience a major slowdown in demand and revenues, further compromising the sector.

When identifying the managerial competencies of hotel sector managers registered with Cotelco, it was found that the managerial competency “working under pressure” was precisely the least valued. This is understandable because the sector presented favorable indicators with projections that augured excellent results. However, it should be taken into account that, in Cúcuta, hotel management had already been working under different conditions than in the rest of the country, given that its main market was the Venezuelan visitor, and as a consequence of the crises between the central governments, it faced several falls in the demand for services and occupancy.

The prospective analysis among the variables showed that the sector is confident that opportunities will allow it to re-emerge and resume growth. However, it is considered that in the medium term there will be fierce competition in which companies will want to position themselves at the starting line, since whoever comes in last may pay a high price, even affecting their survival.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In these times of crisis, it is advisable to assimilate and propose to local authorities strategies that are being implemented in other countries to study their feasibility of application. Among them, the opening of idle facilities such as kitchens, dining rooms, laundries and lounges, where services can be provided within a limited radius that does not affect the businesses in the sector that are established in the vicinity of the hotel.

As a result of the analysis, it is recommended that in the medium term a mix of competitive and growth strategies be implemented in the sector to take advantage of opportunities when the economy is reactivated. According to Ballarín (2020), it is essential to redefine priorities in management skills, it will be necessary to understand and know the customer. The customer will still be there, but with different motivations, different needs, will focus more on safety and hygiene, and this will be a success factor in management.

Interests will probably change, the loss of purchasing power will cause a change in spending priorities, it will be necessary to offer quality services adjusted to the new reality. It will be important to achieve customer loyalty, the customer as the center, must be a reality and not a slogan. This includes both the external and the internal customer since in the post-Covid-19 stage the team must restart its work and it is important to integrate it into the recovery of the sector.

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