



## **The Hotel Sector Of Cúcuta Colombia In The Face Of The Covid-19 Pandemic**

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### **APA Citation:**

Solano, M.R., Pereira, H.O.L., Vladimir, D.P.M., (2021). The Hotel Sector Of Cúcuta Colombia In The Face Of The Covid-19 Pandemic , *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 3456-3474; 2021.

Submission Date: 26/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 30/12/2021

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### **Abstract**

This work identifies the meanings and significances that the sector actors rank to the prospective management skills in the companies of the hotel sector in Cucuta Colombia in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic, seen as a diatomical process related to the hotel industry, has revealed the fragility of this sector. It is considered that in the medium-term strong competition will be unleashed where companies will want to be located from now on the line of departure, since those who arrive last can pay a high price, affecting even their survival. We wonder, what are the meanings and meanings that social actors give to the prospective management skills in companies in the hotel sector registered to Cotelco in Cucuta, in the face of the pandemic generated by the Covid-19? Supported by the quantitative and qualitative paradigm, research is exploratory and relational with a field design and documentary review. Executives from the hotel sector of Cucuta were consulted. Online surveys were conducted to identify management competencies and subsequently the prospective relationship with factors associated with the sector in the pandemic. Based on the results, it is concluded that, in the hotel sector of Cucuta, commitment and quality of work are the most relevant signifiers. Findings show that, during the pandemic, a defensive strategy must be implemented. It is recommended to offer differentiated services, where customer safety prevails and focuses on loyalty with the company. From the forward-looking approach, it aims to implement a mix of competitive and growth strategies to seize opportunities when the economy revives.

**Keywords:** meanings, significant, prospective, hotel sector, Covid-19 pandemic, Cucuta

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## Introduction

Organizations regardless of their size and sector where they operate, focus on surviving, growing and generating benefits for all those related to them. In this process, companies try 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 a prepared and qualified management staff, which allows them to guide and manage processes in a way that can respond quickly and assertively to the demands of the environment, to achieve the objectives. raised. In this work, the sector under study is the hotel sector. This sector contributes significantly to the country's economy, its importance in the value chain of the tourism sector is undeniable, as well as its capacity to generate direct and indirect employment. This, added to the development in infrastructure, brings benefits to the sector chain that is formed around it. Therefore, any study and research that focuses on the hotel sector is relevant.

In this sense, the study of managerial capacities is of interest, since the hotel sector, due to its nature of services, is complex, since internal processes must be optimized and customer satisfaction provided, since the offer of this type of services It 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, it aspires that people work as a team and perform effectively and efficiently. That is why it is required to optimize management and it is important to synchronize administrative processes and actions within the framework of the established strategy. It is there, where managerial skills are of vital importance. Madrigal (2009) argues that managerial skills and competencies are particular abilities resulting from knowledge, information, practice and aptitude. When managers apply these tools to their roles, they create an environment for a high-performing team. Obviously, managers must be prepared for change.

Now, no one doubts that the 21st century will continue to be characterized by chaotic, transformative and rapid change. In fact, hardly any sane person is willing to predict what the world will be like 50, 25, or even 15 years from now. The change is too fast and pervasive (Whetten & Cameron, 2012). In this order of ideas, the pandemic caused by Covid-19 emerged disruptively, radically modifying the environment and destroying all the scenarios proposed, 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.

Given this reality, one of the sectors strongly affected is the tourism sector, particularly the hotel sector. In Colombia, at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, this sector was betting on growth and expected promising results compared to the previous years and months. Below is a summary of some of them according to what was published by the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce (2019, December):

□ From last January to October, the number of non-resident visitors in Colombia increased by 2.7 percent compared to 2018. With this premise, the goal for 2020 is to increase the number of non-resident visitors to 4.9 million

□ Travel agencies registered a growth in nominal income of 3.8 percent, compared to the same period in 2018.

□ Between January and November, the average hotel occupancy was 56.4 percent, an increase of one percentage point compared to last year's average. The Hotel and Tourism Association of Colombia (Cotelco) expects to close this year at 57 percent, that is, 1.5 points above 2018. "If we achieve this closing of 57 percent in December, we would achieve the highest occupancy in recent years." 15 years"

□ The United States Tour Operators Association (Ustoa) revealed last week that Colombia heads the list of destinations to visit next year 2020. For the first time in its history, Colombia is the leader of the top 10 recommended destinations to travel in the 2020.

□ Additionally, Colombia was chosen as one of the 20 preferred countries in the world to travel in the Readers' Choice Awards 2019, a survey carried out among 600,000 readers of the specialized magazine Condé Nast Traveler.

For its part, Hosteltur Latam. (2019, December 16) reports that Cotelco reported that hotel occupancy in 2019 was 56.50%, the highest since this measurement was made. In 2019, the Colombian hotel industry managed to recover, and inc

For its part, Hosteltur Latam. (2019, December 16) reports that Cotelco reported that hotel occupancy in 2019 was 56.50%, the highest since this measurement was made. In 2019, the Colombian hotel industry managed to recover, and even exceed, the occupancy records of 2006, the year of the best performance so far. During 2019, Colombia managed to have its best second semester in terms of hotel occupancy, with the expectation of exceeding those historical maximums in 2020.

Cúcuta did not escape this reality, the Cúcuta Chamber of Commerce (2019), published that according to Cotelco, in March 2019, the hotel occupancy of Norte de Santander was ranked thirteenth in the ranking of the main departments with 45, 5%. In fact, Bustamante (2020, February 18), reported that the figures compiled by the Hotel and Tourism Association of Colombia (Cotelco), revealed that the average occupancy in the department was 50.42%. This result was five percentage points above the 45.08% reported as average occupancy during 2018.

Unfortunately, all this expectation collapsed as a result 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 rethink strategies and objectives throughout the business environment, without really knowing the scope and impact of this unknown "guest".

Faced with this shocking reality, the resilience capacity of organizations, their leadership and managerial train are facing a storm that demands their capabilities to the fullest. For this reason, the purpose of this research is to relate the managerial skills and the consequences in the hotel sector registered with Cotelco in Cúcuta, at the times: during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

For the study of managerial competencies, the theoretical line exposed by Whetten & Cameron (2012) is followed, as well as Barba (2011) based on the Alfa Tuning Project (2005) of Latin America, where 62 Latin American universities participated. Regarding the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in 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 make the relationship between the identified factors, Czajkowska (2016) will be followed. Regarding studies related to the subject under study, Barba (2011) is followed. "Diagnosis of management skills in companies and universities of Morelos". Doctoral Thesis. Iberoamerican University. Mexico. In the descriptive work, a categorization and evaluation of the managerial competencies necessary for the 21st century professional is carried out, as well as the methods used by employers for the selection of managerial level personnel.

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

As a research question, what are the meanings and signifiers in the sectoral actors, given the prospect of managerial skills in companies in the hotel sector registered with Cotelco in Cúcuta in the presence during and after the mCovid-19 pandemic?

The general objective is to establish the meanings and signifiers that the actors of the hotel sector rank in the prospective of managerial skills in the companies of the hotel sector registered with Cotelco in Cúcuta Colombia in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. The specific objectives set 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 management skills in the sector under study, d) Determine the relationships between the selected factors from a prospective approach.

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

### **Conceptual framework**

Management skills: Solorzano (2008) defines them as personal characteristics of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which lead to adaptive performance in healthy environments. managerial skills

Management skills are those that facilitate the way how to do things to solve problems and make decisions within the process of organizational development. In this sense, the manager must integrate external components that will be visible to his collaborators and internal components, his own that will allow them to guide their actions, behaviors and attitudes towards work and their environment.

Meanings and Signifiers: while the signifier refers to the way of naming or referring to a certain something, the meaning refers to the concept, object or entity that we intend to refer to with the signifier. The signifier of a linguistic sign is the image we have in our mind of a certain chain of sounds. This phonic image allows, for example, that we can think words without pronouncing them: l-á-p-i-z. While the meaning of a linguistic

sign is the concept or image that we associate in our minds with a concrete signifier. So, any Spanish speaker associates an already known image with the chain of sounds l-á-p-i-z. However, existing variations based on culture or location must be taken into account. Thus, the same concept will have very different ways of expressing itself in different countries and in different languages. (Castillero, 2020).

#### Referential framework

In the academic field, various investigations analyze the relationships between managerial competencies. For example, Gómez (2014) is mentioned in *Competencies and managerial skills that a good leader must develop*. Also to Hernández (2010) with *Profile of the Executive according to his Management Competences and Intellectual Abilities*. Regarding studies related to the subject under study, Ramírez et al. (2017), "Administrative management in business development"; Lombana et al. (2014) "Training in management skills. A look from the philosophical foundations of the administration"; Useche et al. (2019) "Management competencies in the Zulian business environment", in the framework of the economic crisis that Venezuela is experiencing, in this evolution the managerial competencies that are required of the economically active population have not remained stable. Riaño M and Luna H. (2019) "Personnel management and attitude towards organizational commitment in companies in the hotel sector of Cúcuta Colombia". The cited studies provide empirical evidence related to the topic.

Regarding the impacts of Covid-19 in the tourism sector, the work of the Spanish Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AECIT) (2020) is brought. *Tourism after the global pandemic analysis, perspectives and recovery paths*. The works that are presented analyze the new scenario where tourism activity takes place, the need for adaptation and the profound transformation in this sector as a result of the pandemic. It is necessary to mention that, at the national and local levels, scientific production on this specific topic is under development. Hence the exploratory nature of this research.

#### Theoretical framework

##### Management Competencies

Maldonado (2007, cited in Riaño and Luna, 2019) in his work points out that workers with greater knowledge and skills are currently required. This is due to the fact that in each profession and for each function that is performed, different skills are required and this will require the ability to adapt to new areas and tasks. In the study of skills there are various approaches, including: technical and operational skills aimed at perfecting the workforce in productive institutions, and mid-level managerial or labor skills, aimed at developing mechanisms for knowledge management. Tobón (2006) classifies the competencies in: Labor: Those that are typical of qualified workers and are formed through technical studies of education for work. He considers that they are applicable in very specific tasks.

Professionals: In this section he includes those that are exclusive to people with higher education studies. He considers that they are characterized by their high flexibility and breadth to face unforeseen events and problems of a high level of complexity.

Generic competences: Here it includes those that are common to several professions or occupations. For example, the ability to negotiate or interpersonal communication.

Following Barba (2011), the author states that according to the Alfa Tuning Project (2005) of Latin America, where 62 Latin American universities participated, 27 generic competences were identified for the region, these were:

1. Capacity for abstraction, analysis and synthesis
2. Ability to apply knowledge in practice
3. Ability to organize and plan time

4. Knowledge about the area of study and the profession
5. Social responsibility and citizen commitment
6. Capacity
7. Ability to communicate in a second language.
  
8. Skills in the use of information and communication technologies
  
9. Research capacity
  
10. Ability to learn and constantly update
  
11. Abilities to search, process and analyze information coming from diverse forces
  
12. Critical and self-critical capacity
  
13. Ability to act in new situations
  
14. Ability to identify, pose and solve problems
  
15. -Ability to make decisions
  
16. Ability to work in a team
  
17. Interpersonal skills
  
18. Ability to motivate and lead towards common goals.
  
19. Commitment to preserving the environment.
  
20. Commitment to their sociocultural environment
  
21. Appreciation and respect for diversity and multiculturalism
  
22. Ability to work in international contexts
  
23. Ability to work autonomously
  
24. Ability to formulate and manage projects.
  
25. Ethical commitment
  
26. Commitment to quality
  
27. -Creative capacity

For his part, Tobón (2006) points out the following generic skills as the main ones required by companies: entrepreneurship, resource management, teamwork, information management, systemic understanding, problem solving and work planning. Among the basic skills, he points out teamwork and conflict resolution.

## **Method**

The research is quantitative and qualitative, exploratory and relational, with a field design and is supported by documentary review. The population was made up of 16 executives representing the 16 hotels registered with Cotelco in the city of Cúcuta. Online surveys were applied to investigate their perception regarding the identification and presence of managerial skills. In this phase, the methodology proposed by Barbas (2011) was followed. A series of managerial competencies were proposed based on the Alfa Tuning Project (2005) of Latin America and they were asked to identify the presence or not of each of these in the organization they lead. Once the information was collected, it was consolidated and the frequency for each of the proposed competencies was calculated.

To select the factors to relate, the managerial competencies were initially categorized into Strengths and Weaknesses according to their level of hierarchy. 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 to these competencies was obtained, given some opportunities and threats that the hotel sector would face during and after Covid-19. The impact matrix was based on the proposal of Czajkowska (2016). The strength of the relationship must be evaluated between strengths/weaknesses and opportunities/threats. The two analyzes must be carried out: Analysis of the effect of strengths and weaknesses on opportunities and threats. Analysis of the effect of opportunities and threats on the strengths and weaknesses of the company. according to the following coding: 0 No Impact; 1 Medium Impact; 2 High Impact. With the results of the matrix, some referential strategic positions were identified, which allowed proposing some recommendations for the sector.

## **Results**

Next, the results of the investigation are presented based on the analysis of the information collected in the field work and in the documentary review.

1. A brief outline of the hotel sector between January and August 2020 is shown to contextualize the impact on the sector. According to figures from Cotelco, in Norte de Santander, 16 hotels are registered with an availability of 1,612 beds. Table 1 presents the list of hotels registered with Cotelco in Cúcuta.

Table 1. Cotelco card hotels in Cúcuta

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

Source: Cotelco

2. Figure 1 shows the impact on the occupancy percentage

. En la figura 1, se presenta el impacto en el porcentaje de ocupación

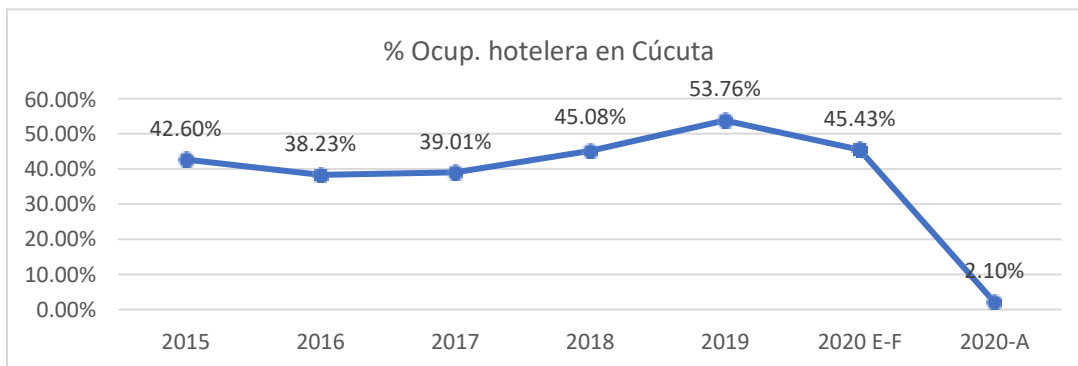


Figure 1. Percentage of Occupancy in the hotel sector in Cúcuta

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

According to DANE (2020, August), the varia

3. The result of the consultation made to the executives of the hotel sector registered with Cotelco to identify and categorize managerial competencies is presented below. Respondents were presented with the following managerial competencies (Barba, 2011), and were asked to rank them in the sector.



Teamwork Productivity Integrity

Commitment Ability to learn Quality at work

Adaptability to change Communication Leadership

Entrepreneurial vision Proactivity (initiative) Negotiation

Flexibility Innovation Work under pressure

Push Generation of knowledge

The result is shown in Figure 2. The most valued were in that order: Commitment with 39.8%; Quality at work and Communication both with 33.7%. It was followed by Teamwork 32.7%; Leadership received 27.6%; Initiative 26.5%. The skills that received the lowest score were: Knowledge generation 10.2%; Flexibility 8.7% and closed Work under pressure 7.1%.

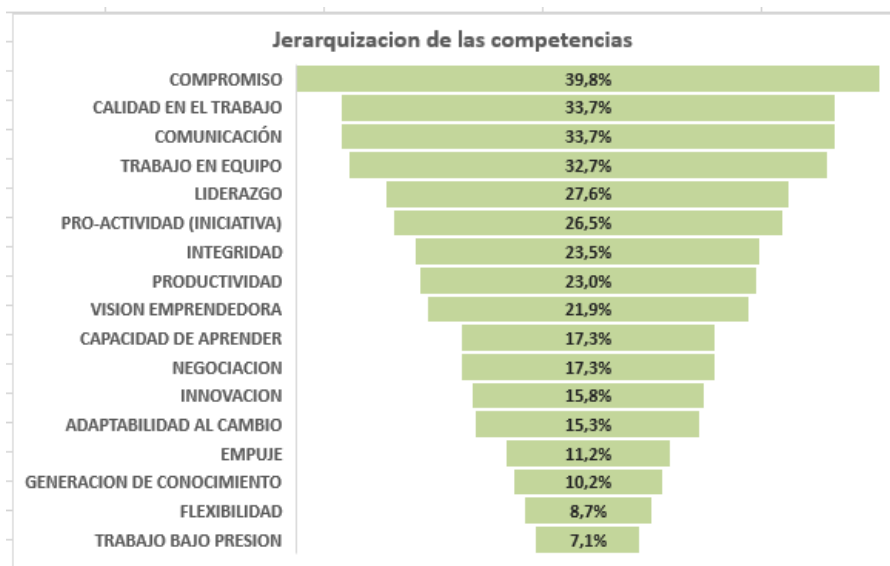


Figure 2. Hierarchy of managerial competencies in the hotel sector of Cúcuta registered with Cotelco  
Source: The author with data from the field work

### 3. Relationships between the factors selected for the cross-impact analysis

The managerial competencies were classified into Strengths and Weaknesses according to the categorization resulting from the field work. (Table 2)

Table 2. Strengths and Weaknesses identified in the hotel sector registered with Cotelco in Cúcuta

Fortalezas	Debilidades
Capacidad gerencial	Capacidad de aprender

Nivel de compromiso	Negociación
Calidad en el trabajo	Innovación
Comunicación	Adaptabilidad al cambio
Trabajo en equipo	Empuje
Liderazgo	Generación de conocimiento
Proactividad (iniciativa)	Flexibilidad
Integridad	Trabajo bajo presión
Productividad	
Visión emprendedora	

As a result of the documentary review, the classification in Opportunities and Threats of the factors associated with the Covid-19 pandemic was made.

Table 3. Opportunities and Threats identified in the hotel sector registered with Cotelco in Cúcuta

Oportunidades	Amenazas
Aumento de la demanda	Caída de la demanda
Apoyo del gobierno	Aumento de costos de operación
Mejora de las condiciones de seguridad e higiene	Guerra de precios
Sello de seguridad Covid-19	Falta de liquidez
Reforzamiento del Branding	Deterioro del Flujo de Caja
Mejoramiento de la Resiliencia	Incremento de los Pasivos
Relación y conocimiento del cliente	Regulaciones Gubernamentales
Reestructuración de pasivos	Cambios en las exigencias de los clientes
Nuevos negocios relacionados con la infraestructura existente	

Source: The author with data from the field work

When relating the selected variables through the cross-impact matrix, it was found that the Strengths and Opportunities analysis was the most valued, followed by the Weaknesses and Opportunities analysis. In other words, the Opportunities are expected to be the guide of the sector.

FO+OF 294

OD+OD 267

FA+AF 231

AD+AD 235

In the evaluation of factors, the most outstanding managerial competencies were: Commitment with 39.8%; Quality at work as well as Communication with 33.7%. It was followed by Teamwork 32.7%;

Leadership received 27.6%. According to these results, the signifiers and meanings associated with the prospective of managerial skills in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic are presented.

Table 4. Significants and Meanings in the hotel sector of Cúcuta in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic

Competencia Gerencial (Significante)	Significado
Compromiso	Sentir como propios los objetivos de la organización. Apoyar e instrumentar decisiones comprometido por completo con el logro de objetivos comunes. Prevenir y superar obstáculos que interfieren con el logro de los objetivos del negocio. Controlar la puesta en marcha de las acciones acordadas. Cumplir con sus compromisos, tanto personales como profesionales.
Calidad en el trabajo	Excelencia en el trabajo a realizar. Implica tener amplios conocimientos en los temas del área del cual se es responsable. Poseer la capacidad de comprender la esencia de los aspectos complejos para transformarlos en soluciones prácticas y operables para la organización, tanto en su propio beneficio como en el de los clientes y otros involucrados. Poseer buena capacidad de discernimiento (juicio). Compartir el conocimiento profesional y la experticia. Basarse en los hechos y en la razón (equilibrio). Demostrar constantemente el interés de aprender.
Comunicación	Es la capacidad de escuchar, hacer preguntas, expresar conceptos e ideas en forma efectiva y exponer aspectos positivos. La habilidad de saber cuándo y a quién preguntar para llevar adelante un propósito. Es la capacidad de escuchar al otro y entenderlo. Comprender la dinámica de grupos y el diseño efectivo de reuniones. Incluye la capacidad de comunicar por escrito con concisión y claridad.
Trabajo en equipo	Implica la capacidad de colaborar y cooperar con los demás, de formar parte de un grupo y de trabajar juntos; lo opuesto a hacerlo individual y competitivamente. Para que esta competencia sea efectiva, la actitud debe ser genuina. Es conveniente que el ocupante del puesto sea miembro de un grupo que funcione en equipo. Equipo, en su definición más amplia, es un grupo de personas que trabaja en procesos, tareas u objetivos compartidos.

Liderazgo	Es la habilidad necesaria para orientar la acción de los grupos humanos en una dirección determinada, inspirando valores de acción y anticipando escenarios de desarrollo de la acción de ese grupo. Tener energía y transmitirla a otros. Motivar e inspirar confianza. Tener valor para defender o encarnar creencias, ideas y asociaciones. Manejar el cambio para asegurar competitividad y efectividad a largo plazo. Plantear abiertamente los conflictos para optimizar la calidad de las decisiones y la efectividad de la organización. Proveer coaching y feedback para el desarrollo de los colaboradores.
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Fuente: Alles (2005, citado en Barbas, 2011, pp174-177)

## Conclusions

Once the study related to establishing the meanings and signifiers that rank the actors in the hotel sector to the prospective of managerial skills in companies in the hotel sector registered with Cotelco in Cúcuta Colombia in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the following are presented conclusions.

The evident negative impact on economic indicators as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic is strongly affecting the tourism sector and particularly the hotel sector. This has generated, as in other sectors of the economy: a drop in demand, closure of companies, unemployment, and indebtedness, compromising the continuity of operations, if the closure of the tourism sector continues for longer. In addition to this panorama, it is estimated that the tourism sector, as well as transport, will have a significant slowdown in demand and income, which further compromises the sector.

When identifying the managerial competencies by the executives of the hotel sector registered with Cotelco, it was found that the managerial competency "working under pressure" was precisely the least valued. This is understood because the sector was presenting favorable indicators with projections that predicted excellent results. However, it should be noted that, in Cúcuta, the hotel management had already been working under different conditions than the rest of the country, given that its majority market was the Venezuelan visitor and as a result of the crises between the central governments, several times it faced falls in the demand for services and employment.

The prospective analysis between the variables showed that the sector is confident that the opportunities will allow the sector to resurface and resume growth. However, it is considered that in the medium term a strong competition will be unleashed where companies will want to be located in the starting line, since whoever arrives last can pay a high price, even affecting their survival.

## Recommendations

At the moment during the crisis, it is convenient 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 industry that are established in the vicinity of the hotel.

As a result of the analysis, it is recommended in the medium term to implement a mix of competitive and growth strategies in the sector to take advantage of the opportunities when the economy reactivates. For this, following Ballarín (2020), it is imperative that the priorities in managerial competencies be redefined, it will be necessary to understand and know the client. The client will continue to be there, but with different motivations, different needs, they will focus more on safety and hygiene, and this will be a success factor in management.

Probably, interests will change, the loss of purchasing power will lead to spending priorities changing, 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, it must be a reality and not a slogan. This includes both the external client and the internal client, given that in the post-Covid-19 stage the team must restart its work and it is important to integrate them into the recovery of the sector.

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