Leadership styles and culture of innovation in hotels in the Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area (Colombia)

Estilos de liderazgo y cultura de la innovación en hoteles del Área Metropolitana de Bucaramanga (Colombia)

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Abstract

The objective of the article is to show the correlation between leadership and culture of innovation in hotels affiliated and not affiliated with the Colombian Hotel and Tourism Association - COTELCO. For the fulfillment of the objective, a methodology with a correlational quantitative approach was used, implementing two instruments in a sample of fifty hotels from the four municipalities that make up the Metropolitan area of Bucaramanga. The first instrument analyzed the leadership variable through the measurement of the leadership of Blake and Monton, the second, measured the culture of innovation from the questionnaire proposed by the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications of Colombia. It was concluded that In the leadership variable, they allow observing a higher trend in the people dimension and the innovation culture a trend towards two dimensions: people and strategy.

Key Words: hotels, leadership, culture, innovation, Bucaramanga, Colombia.

Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es mostrar la correlación entre liderazgo y cultura de la innovación en hoteles afiliados y no afiliados a la Asociación Hotelera y Turística de Colombia (COTELCO). Para el cumplimiento del objetivo se usó una metodología con enfoque cuantitativo de tipo correlacional, implementando dos instrumentos en una muestra de cincuenta hoteles de los cuatro municipios que integran el Area Metropolitana de Bucaramanga. El

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primer instrumento analizó la variable liderazgo a través de la medición del liderazgo de Blake y Montón, mientras que el segundo midió la cultura de la innovación desde el cuestionario propuesto por el Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones de Colombia. Se concluyó que en la variable liderazgo se observa una tendencia superior en la dimensión "personas" y en la cultura de la innovación una tendencia hacia dos dimensiones: las personas y la estrategia.

Palabras clave: hoteles, liderazgo, cultura, innovación, Bucaramanga, Colombia.

1. Introduction

As a consequence of COVID-19, the corporate sector—and particularly tourist service providers—are immersed in a context of change and uncertainty. This demands leaders to permanently adapt in order to find solutions that allow their companies to differentiate themselves and remain competitive. Both *leadership* and *innovation* are crucial for the hotel industry, where competitiveness becomes an increasingly important factor within a sector that requires significant and constant change (Rodríguez, Quezada, & Ayala, 2018).

The application of leadership and innovation elements in hotel establishments is a priority today, as they are variables that are in tight connection with market survival (Contreras & Barrera, 2020). They are even more critical today, when it is known that the hotel sector was the worst affected by COVID-19 (Corzo, 2021). In the case of Colombia, the hotel occupation rate went from 55.38% in the first semester of 2019 to 3.20% in the second semester of 2020 (COTELCO, 2020).

The leadership style adopted by managers, as well as the culture of innovation that prevails in hotels, are a fundamental pillar to reach strategic goals (Gómez, 2005; Herrera & Angulo, 2006). This is especially true when the presence of COVID-19 and the slow recovery of the economy pose new challenges for innovation, in the fight to remain relevant and competitive.

The present article aims to show the correlation between leadership and the culture of innovation in hotels that are, or are not, affiliated to the Hotel and Tourism Association of Colombia (COTELCO). Though data collection was completed before the pandemic, the results are now more relevant than ever, since there are no previous studies that explain this correlation.

The document is divided into five sections, starting with the introduction. The second section provides a definition of leadership and innovation culture, product of an ample literature review. Then, the method and instruments used in this research are described, after which comes the fourth section with a statistical analysis focused on leadership and innovation culture applied to a sample of 50 hotels. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are given.

2. Literature Review

Several studies argue that both leadership and innovation culture enable managers to design new and better processes that facilitate the adaptation to constant change in the market (Pérez 2003; Kyriakidou & Gore 2005; Gálvez 2011).

In her study on leadership and organizational innovation, Turbay (2013) poses the question of which factors allow organizations to survive the changes that arise in their environment and to be competitive. She considers that, through leadership, organizations are able to find a path through the changing environment that modifies their structures and processes. Hence, innovation is the condition to remain in the market. The author posits that leadership is a strategic factor for the development and continuity of enterprises in the market. She considers leadership to be key for driving the organization towards innovation, seeking to orient creative thinking on the part of the team, creating emotional ties between them and transmitting the sense of purpose, organizational culture, innovation and knowledge transfer.

These elements are known as "influence", which, according to many authors, directs the initial definition of leadership: to influence a group of people to achieve a set of common goals (Chiavenato,1993; Robbins & Judge, 2003; Bartol, Martin & Kromkowski, 2003; Tannenbaum, Weschler, Massarik 2013). Influence is necessary in a company in order to achieve strategic goals (Escandón & Hurtado, 2016; Quijano, Argüelles, Magaña & Aguilar, 2019).

Noriega (2018) suggests that leadership can be seen from two general perspectives: the first one conceives leadership as a personal quality, while the second one considers it as a function that organizations must perform, on which growth and efficiency will be greatly dependent. According to the first perspective, leaders are frequently perceived as playing roles that motivate or control other people's behavior with respect to team goals (Semenovich,2014). From the second perspective, leaders must conduct or orient themselves in a predetermined way and play roles that adapt to the current situation. In other words, leaders in high positions in the organization's hierarchy are representatives of the company who connect with the external environment, both the market and society (Quijano, Argüelles, Fajardo, 2017).

Estrada (2006) proposes a leadership model for changing organizations, such as those in the tourism sector, based on the integrality of the organizational director. He starts by characterizing the leader in terms of the necessary qualities, skills and attitudes for managing organizations to attain strategic goals. He therefore concludes that leaders must be trained in communication, negotiation and conflict resolution.

On the other hand, Haven-Tang & Jones (2012) consider leadership as an enabler of strategic partnerships between small tourism provider companies, which would facilitate a better market positioning. Some studies indicate that professional capacity, communication style, commitment to the organization and problem solving methods are related to leadership competencies and performance in tourism sector organizations (Zayas 2011).

It is leadership that promotes a culture of innovation, with significant impact on the internal environment of the organization. Promoting innovation means building a positive work environment, building creative and design skills while executing new effective strategies for the company (Naranjo, 2012).

A culture of innovation is defined as a way of thinking and acting that generates, develops and establishes values, convictions and attitudes that are prone to eliciting, assuming and supporting ideas and changes that improve the working and efficiency of the company—even when that implies disrupting convention or tradition (Gálvez, 2011).

It is important to keep in mind that, in order to boost innovation culture, it must be recognized that the organization is more than just an institution and that the staff are one of the key assets for growth. It is the team that holds the innovation capacity, so long as the right environment exists for motivation and support. In fact, all aspects of the organization—spaces, policy and work teams—must favor the culture of innovation.

3. Method

This study takes a quantitative approach for data collection in the hotel sector, in order to test hypotheses on the relationship between leadership and innovation culture. The method is also correlational, as it is aimed at measuring the degree of association between two or more concepts or variables. Each one is measured, then quantified and finally their correlations were analyzed based on hypotheses (Hernandez, Fernandez & Baptista, 2010).

Two variables are considered for analysis: (1) *leadership*, for which the leadership style survey developed by Robert Blake and Scientific Methods was applied, and innovation culture, for which the survey of innovation culture developed by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology of Colombia (MinTIC) was used.

A non-probabilistic, convenience-based sampling method was applied to build a sample of 50 hotels in the Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area, comprised by the municipalities of Bucaramanga, Giron, Piedecuesta and Floridablanca.

Data from the leadership and innovation culture surveys will be analyzed based on the Likert scale of the questionnaire. Leadership was measured on a scale of 0 to 5, while innovation culture was measured on a scale of 1 to 4.

Furthermore, the SPSS software was used to study the relationship between the two variables.

4. Results

Leadership

Results on the leadership variable generally show high averages, similarly to those perceived by respondents in the two dimensions, that is, people orientation and task orientation. Therefore, it can be inferred that people oriented leadership is associated with a notable teamwork development. Also, it is noted that the task oriented dimension, with a similar result, suggests a division of labour in small tasks. In conclusion, there are positive results with regard to leadership and sector dimensions, with satisfactory perceptions from the employees and directors in general.
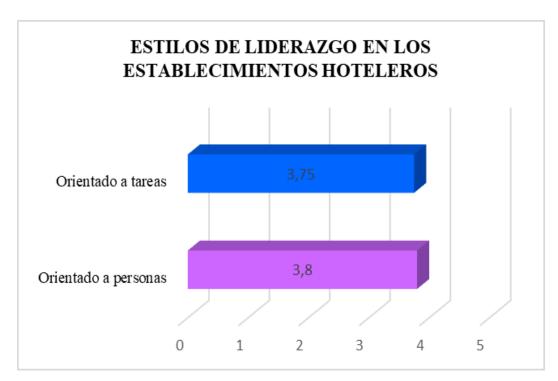
Figure 1. Leadership in hotel establishments

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At a more particular level, it can be seen that, primarily in the units affiliated with COTELCO, there is a smaller difference between dimensions. People oriented leadership stands out, reflecting a sense of respect for the boundaries between workmates and proactive teamwork. With regard to the task oriented dimension, it is valid to say that managing multiple complicated tasks at the same time can be improved. There is no negative perception, but a point for improvement.

On the other hand, similar behaviour is seen in non affiliated hotels, where collaborative work is notable. However, there is an unrecognised need for promoting the habit of reading about leadership, both as a subject of study and as a tool for developing human talent, in an effort to develop a stronger hotel sector in these regards.

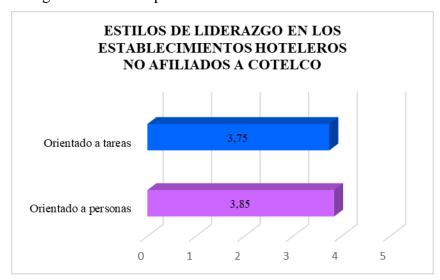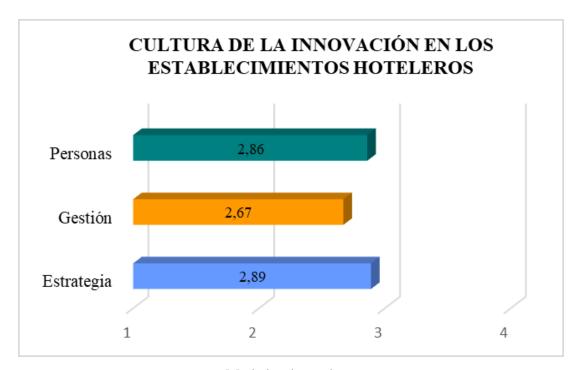Figure 2. Leadership in hotels affiliated with COTELCO

ESTILOS DE LIDERAZGO EN LOS ESTABLECIMIENTOS HOTELEROS AFILIADOS A COTELCO

Orientado a tareas	3,75
Orientado a personas	3,91

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Figure 3. Leadership in hotels not affiliated with COTELCO

ESTILOS DE LIDERAZGO EN LOS ESTABLECIMIENTOS HOTELEROS NO AFILIADOS A COTELCO

Orientado a tareas	3,75
Orientado a personas	3,85

Made by the authors

Culture of innovation

The following figure displays the three dimensions studied in the culture of innovation variable, where scores lie within the mid-high range. This shows that hotels are generally distributing work with regard to the three mentioned areas. Strategy has the highest score, which demonstrates there is a vision aligned with organizational objectives, indicating teamwork. Nonetheless, it is also correct to say that there is room for improvement, since the score for management suggests little support for research and low citizen involvement in new processes.

Figure 4. Culture of innovation in hotels

CULTURA DE LA INNOVACIÓN EN LOS ESTABLECIMIENTOS HOTELEROS

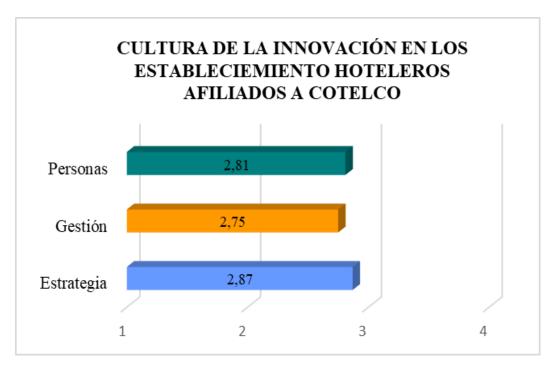| Dimensión	Valor
Personas	2,86
Gestión	2,67
Estrategia	2,89

Made by the authors

On the other hand, it can be noted that results tend to be similar for the three dimensions, regardless of the hotel's affiliation. In COTELCO affiliated hotels, strategy is the most relevant dimension, indicating that the team includes staff that are committed to making an impact by contributing to innovation through their actions. However, management is the less advanced dimension of the team, which supposes a need for reinforcing ideation and prototyping activities in projects that hotels can generate.
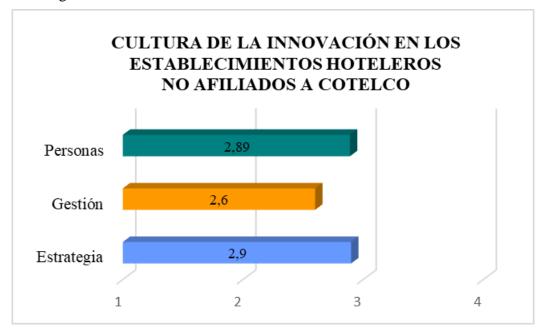
In non affiliated hotels, the strategy dimension reveals a shared vision that motivates new, inspiring ideas. Since management obtained the lowest score in both affiliated and non affiliated hotels, involvement in research and crowdsourcing ideas from the population would be a great step forward.

Figure 5. Culture of innovation in hotels affiliated with COTELCO

Made by the authors

Figure 6. Culture of innovation in hotels not affiliated with COTELCO

Made by the authors

Leadership and culture of innovation

The correlation process of the dimensions inherent to leadership and innovation culture was developed through a Spearman correlation, considering that a Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that all measured constructs have a non normal behaviour.

Table 1. Correlation between leadership and a culture of innovation

State	Variable	Dimensions	People	Tasks	Strategy	Management	People_1
Affiliates	Leadership	People	1				
		Tasks	,839**	1			
	Culture of innovation	Strategy	0,211	0,246	1		
		Management	,537*	,560*	,619**	1	
		People	-0,014	0,035	,612**	,610**	1
Non affiliates	Leadership	People	1				
		Tasks	,823**	1			
	Culture of innovation	Strategy	0,134	0,133	1		
		Management	0,118	0,133	,852**	1	
		People	0,104	0,094	,428*	,467**	1
**. The correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (bilateral)							
*. The correlation is significant at the 0,05 level (bilateral).							

Made by the authors

Results allow to identify that there is no significant correlation between the variables considered in the study. However, the leadership and culture of innovation dimensions, when observed independently, have a moderately positive relationship.

5. Conclusions

The definition of leadership is, more than a subject of debate or controversy, one of constant learning through research. In general terms, the concept is defined as the "capacity" of influencing on people's actions and goal accomplishment. People, influenced by a guide who provides a vision and sets a mechanism for motivation and/or solving a given problem. It is mostly associated to organizational growth and regarded as an asset that every organization must take hold of in the process of work.

Results from the leadership variable show a greater level in the people dimension, suggesting a tendency of the hotel sector to orient employees, monitor their behaviour and aid or guide the public, rather than to be task oriented leaders, where action is motivated by personal growth in the face of organizational activities and challenges. This approaches Mendoza, Murillo & García's (2020) thesis surrounding the relevance of flexible authority styles, with the aim of promoting ideal work environments.

The culture of innovation in hotels studied in the present project has a tendency towards two dimensions: people and strategy, where human beings possess the right values, competencies and work environment, and have a clear vision and solid structures for work. This leads to anticipate a positive growth projection for business units, which may directly leverage destination management, a key element in tourism competitiveness in the territories (Corzo & García, 2020).

The variables studied in this paper do not have a significant Spearman correlation. For that reason, future research is recommended to be conducted about constructs other than those studied, with the purpose of defining competitive working lines for companies in the hospitality sector value chain.

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