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National Culture and Management: the Greek luxury hotel GMs’ case

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interplay between managerial work and national culture. More specifically it investigates General Managers' (GMs) work in Greek luxury (4 and 5*) hotels from a contextual perspective, focused in national culture.

The wider context of the discussion in this paper revolves around the 'global-local' question from an international hospitality industry perspective. During the second half of the twentieth century, the idea for the creation of a truly global management cohort found warm support from north American multinational companies who experienced a rapid pace of internationalisation in the past four decades. Hospitality and tourism were among the first internationalised industries in the aftermath of World War Two (Nickson, 1998; Nickson and Warhust, 2001). The dominant Anglo-Saxon view for universal management practices through the employment of 'best practices' in international hotel operators, has been challenged since the advent of cross-cultural management and international human resources management (IHRM) theorists in the early 1980s. Those theorists believe that it is difficult to imagine that a single practice or set of practices would emerge as '*best*' in any sense of the word, particularly in globalised organisations (Thomas, 2008). Thus, the dynamic and complex nature of the management function in global hospitality business today and the realisation that what works effectively in one country may not be as efficient in another, has led management scholars and practicing managers in continuous efforts to enhance their understanding of this context and its effects on international (hotel) managers.

This paper focuses in the Greek context since the country is among the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Today the hospitality and tourism sector in Greece contributes approximately 15 % of the National Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P.) ranking third in the E.U. after Spain (18.38 %) and Portugal (15.40 %) according to the W.T.T.C. (2010). The hospitality and tourism sector occupies in total eight hundred eight thousand employees, 18% of the country's entire labour force (SETE, 2003). The authors of this paper argue that managerial work in Greek luxury hotels cannot be unaffected from the strong national context, despite the great pressures for standardisation and homogenisation with the international hospitality industry standards. The existing literature indicates that the Greek context influences managerial work to a certain degree (Bourantas and Papadakis, 1996; Makridakis et al. 1997; Papalexandris and Nikandrou, 2000). The high rates of "*in-group-collectivism*" (Hofstede, 1980/1991; Trompernaars, 1993; Javidan and House, 2001), the values of '*filotimo*' (Triandis et al. 1968; Broome, 1996), Trust (Fukuyama, 1995) and Humanism (Lessem and Neubauer, 1994; Hampden-Turner and Trompernaars, 1994) are characteristics that differentiate Greek GMs' behaviour comparing to the so called '*western*' management style in international hotels. This context also influences the way GMs perform their roles (Mintzberg, 1973 / 1994) and the competencies framework (Dulewicz and Herbert, 1991/1999) required to perform these roles.

A qualitative research was conducted in 16 luxury (4 & 5*) city and resort hotels in four popular destinations: Athens, Thessaloniki, Crete and Rhodes. In total 32 GMs and their assistants participated in this country case study. The research tool included in-depth semi-structured interviews, the employment of a Personal Competencies Framework (PCF) questionnaire, non participant observations and collection of company documents related to managerial work. All data were triangulated in order to enhance the validity and reliability of this study.

This research's findings indicated that the 'base requirements' of managerial work in Greek luxury hotels appear to be similar and compatible with the international industry standards. What actually changes is the level of formality exercised in managerial and HRM practices. A key theme that emerges from this study is the critical role of the hotel's ownership status. Thus, local companies (family and local chain hotels) employ a great number of managerial and HRM practices that incorporate a high level of informality, meaning the absence of written rules and procedures. On the other hand, Greek national chains and MNCs demonstrate a high level of formality, regulated by written policies and rules. The Greek context influences the hotel managers' conceptions of work roles and competencies to a great extent in family and local hotel chains, and to a moderate extent to Greek national chains. A handful (less than ten in Greece) of managed MNC hotel chains do not seem to be influenced by the Greek context; on the other hand franchised MNCs are managed in the same manner as national Greek hotel chains. Overall, the influence of the Greek context was evident to a certain degree, in all Greek owned hotels. Based on the research findings, three distinctive profiles of luxury hotel GMs were identified: the 'native' GM; the 'Glocal' GM; and the 'Greek Global' GM.

As a concluding point it can be argued that both divergence and convergence contextual forces co-exist and shape the GMs' work in Greek luxury hotels. Further research is needed to fully understand and appreciate the effects of those forces in GMs' work.

1. Introduction

Hospitality and tourism were among the first internationalised industries in the aftermath of World War Two (Nickson, 1998; Nickson and Warhust, 2001). From the early stages of internationalisation in the 1950s, a plethora of empirical studies (i.e. Nailon, 1968; Ley, 1980, Arnaldo, 1981; Ferguson and Berger, 1984; Hales and Nightingale, 1986; Shortt, 1989; Nebel and Ghei, 1993; Hales and Tamangani, 1996) suggests that work in hotels poses some unique challenges for managers, especially in luxury establishments where there are tremendous pressures for service quality, customer satisfaction, effective people management and outstanding (financial) performance. All these targets must be achieved for a 'perishable' product (Archer, 1987) that is consumed at the time and place (hotel) is produced. Hotel managers must predict and face successfully the constant external environment changes which affect to a certain degree their sensitive product.

This paper argues that local companies face ongoing HRM dilemmas in using similar (best) practices with MNCs, and simultaneously behave differently from their international competitors due to a series of contextual factors such as structure, ownership status, local and national culture. For the past three decades, universalism in management and IHRM practices was assumed as the norm from academics and practitioners. This supported the view that all firms within an industry must employ common (best) HRM practices (Hamel and Prahalad, 1993; Leonard-Barton, 1995) in order to satisfy social legitimacy factors (Oliver, 1997; Deephouse, 1999; Boselie et al., 2003; Boxall and Purcell, 2003) and adopt HRM practices that reflect their competitive and strategic positions in short and medium terms. Apparently this view concerns the majority of MNCs, who strive for standardisation or customisation across their subsidiaries' people management approaches and practices. Despite the plethora of IHRM studies in MNCs practices there is little or no research regarding the situation in local level.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The international hospitality manager

Hospitality as a modern phenomenon was shaped after World War Two and is closely linked with the development of mass tourism and the rapid growth of the airline industry. The hospitality and tourism industries together are the largest and fastest growing industry in the world (Clarke and Chen, 2007). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2009) estimated that hospitality and tourism as a global economy are directly and indirectly responsible for 11% of gross domestic product, 200 million jobs, 8% of total employment and 5.5 million new jobs per year until 2010.

The early adoption of internationalisation in the hotel industry came initially from U.S. hotel companies, who took the lead and moved across borders for supply and demand reasons; that was to satisfy the needs of American travellers as other trades internationalised (Nickson, 1998; Thompson *et al.*, 1998). Since the early 1980s a growing number of these original American operators were acquired by U.K. based companies, and simultaneously other European and Asian companies began to compete on more broadly international scales (Segal-Horn, 1994; Thompson *et al.*, 1998). The transformation of the sector in a truly globalised industry occurred after a prolonged period of mergers and acquisitions during the 1990s. This brought changes in the adopted growth strategies of many hotel companies who were now competing on a global basis (Price, 1993). While the hotel industry was traditionally dominated by individually and/or family owned properties it can be argued that it is heavily influenced by international/multinational hotel companies defined by Peng and Litteljohn (1997) as:

“Multi-unit service organizations in which units operate under a system of decision-making permitting coherent policies and a common strategy through one or more decision-making centres, and where hotel units and corporate functions are linked to add value to each other by ownership or contractual relationships.” (cited in Litteljohn, 2003, p.15)

In this globalised environment, the development of international hospitality managers is seen as being of critical importance for hospitality MNCs. Thus, since the early 1990s, the rapid growth of international hotel chains and its effects on managerial work, have drawn the attention of researchers (i.e. Gilatis and Guerrier, 1994; Nebel *et al.*, 1995; Gilbert and Guerrier, 1997; Ladkin and Juwaheer, 2000). The personality characteristics required of the international hotel managers include people and interpersonal skills, adaptability, flexibility and tolerance, cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence followed by emotional maturity, industry experience, and self-confidence (Gilatis and Guerrier, 1994; Shay and Tracey, 1997; Feng and Pearson, 1999; Kriegl, 2000). International etiquette, demonstrating an understanding of international business matters, the ability to work with limited resources and effectively manage stress were judged to be relatively important, while functional and technical skills were rated as the lowest priority for managers. Research also indicates that in an international hospitality organisation building managers' cross cultural skills may be far harder but more important than developing their functional and technical skills (Gilatis and Guerrier, 1994; Shay and Tracey, 1997; Kriegl, 2000). This is because of the high level of interpersonal and relational skills required where the host country culture and the needs of a diverse customer base must be understood and catered for. The knowledge and competences of GMs are wide-ranging and include not only the enabling capabilities (Leonard-Barton, 1995) essential for survival within the international hotel industry but also the supplemental and core capabilities specific to companies' market positions and strategies, and competitive advantage. International hospitality managers are seen as change agents who help corporations to cope with the fast changing environment. In addition, international hotel chains such as Starwood, Hilton, I.H.G. and Accor invest in the development of a cohort of international managers by using staff from both the host and parent countries they operate (Nickson, 1998; Jones *et al.*, 1998). The recruitment and selection of this management '*cadre*' is conducted in assessment centres and requires a variety of aspects such as a mix of competencies, technical skills, strong personality, cultural sensitivity and adaptability (D'Annunzio-Green, 1997). Teare (1995) provides a wide – ranging set of issues that arise from the internationalisation of the industry; the education training and development of managers, is one of the main six issues reviewed. In addition, Kriegl (2000, p.64) suggests that international hospitality operations' success '*depends largely on the availability of qualified managers who are able to export, translate and maintain their companies' operational standards and service consistency overseas*'.

A consequence of the rapid internationalisation, were the efforts to establish generic competencies frameworks for hotel managers. The competencies movement in hotels appeared in the early 1990s, when a growing number of tourism and hospitality courses aimed to meet the demands of a volatile and changing world (Umbreit, 1993) took up the challenge to prepare students by developing and enhancing the management competencies and skills needed to operate successfully. This movement has been supported by the industry's growing demand for suitable qualified managerial staff. Research conducted to identify the right mix of competencies has use a number of frameworks like Katz's hierarchical competency model or Sandwith's (1993) competency-domain model, which builds on Katz's (1974) model and groups competencies into five areas (Conceptual-Creative; Leadership; Interpersonal; Administrative; Technical). It can be argued that the vast majority of the competencies models within the hospitality context (i.e. Tas, 1988; Baum, 1991; Lockwood, 1993; Christou and Eaton, 2000; Kay and Russette, 2000; Brophy and Kiely, 2002; Chung – Herrera *et al.*,

2003) fall in the behavioural approach which assumes that those models can be universally applicable regardless the manager's background. This is no surprising as this industry is considered as 'results-oriented' and superior performance is believed to be the key to achieve organisational goals. Iversen (2000, p.12) argues that *'it is reasonable to conclude that there are some managerial competencies that are causally related to effective and /or superior performance in a job'*.

Despite the economic significance and global spread of the international hospitality industry, the majority of hospitality management literature reflects what has happened in the US and the UK since the early 1980s. The ignorance of hospitality managerial work in different contexts has created a gap in the extant literature. Dierdorff's *et al.* (2009) categorical model of work context, certainly adds value to the argument that in order to understand managerial work in hotels, researchers need to think and work outside the Anglo-American context. Only recently have studies focused on what is happening in the rest of the Europe or the world (i.e. Christou and Eaton, 2000; Agut *et al.*, 2003; Brophy and Kiely, 2002; Dimmock *et al.*, 2003; Matheson, 2004; Jauhari, 2006; Blayney, 2009). This was made possible through the contribution of a steadily growing number of overseas students in the U.S. and U.K. business schools who deliver hospitality programs. The most popular forms of research used to study the hospitality industry outside the Anglo-American context, is the use of country case studies (i.e. Kim, 1994; Christou, 1999; Agut *et al.*, 2003) and studies within the context of the international hospitality business (D'Annunzio-Green, 1997). Despite the relatively slow progress, hospitality research persistently reflects the Anglo-American universalist approach to management. Thus, it can be argued that the changes currently taking place in international hospitality management can be better understood under a cross-cultural management perspective.

2.2. National Culture Vs International Management

The extremely high failure of U.S. expatriate managers in non-western countries assignment has driven the creation of research focused on national cultures and its effects in organisational context (i.e. Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Trompenaars, 1993; Tayeb, 1994). Several attempts have been made to conceptualise and measure differences in cultures among nations, and to relate cultural differences to differences in management practices. This is sought through the systematic study and exploration of management across cultures (cross cultural management); although cross-cultural management is often regarded as a discipline of international management, is not a clearly demarcated discipline of management (Soderberg and Holden, 2002). Yet for many management scholars the term is meaningful because it implies (a) procedures and policies relating to the management of workforces with different cultural backgrounds, and (b) moderating the impact of cultural differences in the execution of management tasks (*ibid.*, p.103). Adler (1991) argues that cross cultural management studies the behaviour of people and organisations in different countries and cultures around the world; he also suggests that *"cross cultural management expands the scope of domestic management and encompass the international and multicultural spheres"* (*ibid.*, p.11). The most well known examples include the international survey results reported in Hofstede (1980, 1991), Laurent (1983) and Trompenaars (1993). This body of research clearly indicates that the national culture interpretation and adaptation are a prerequisite to the comparative understanding of national management practice. Triandis (1982) observed that specific management actions could be facilitated or inhibited by culturally determined orientations. He made a distinction between Dionysian cultures, where subordinates are motivated through close interpersonal affiliation and Apollonian cultures, where there the relationship between manager and subordinate is characterised by tasks and formality. For Newman and Nollen (1996) national culture is seen as a central organising principle of employees' understanding of work, their approach to it, and the way in which they expect to be treated. National culture implies that one way of acting or one set of outcomes is preferable to

another. Thus, when management practices are inconsistent with these deeply held values, employees are likely to feel dissatisfied, distracted uncomfortable and uncommitted. As a result, they may be less able or willing to perform well. House *et al.* (2002), in their GLOBE study, separated aspects of culture into its '*etic*' and '*emic*' qualities. The former are common for all cultures and the latter are culture-specific. The authors believe that these qualities can be used to explain similarities and differences in organisational practices and leadership behaviours. In particular, culture has been shown to shape the individual's perceptions and behaviours towards job design, supervision and rewards (Ayman *et al.*, 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2001). Furthermore, national cultures differ in the degree to which they enable managers to adopt non-homegrown practices (Tayeb, 1994), although recent research suggests that some contingency-type theories may be applicable (Ralston *et al.*, 1999). Empirical evidence indicates that a variety of management practices differ by national culture, including decision making (Schneider and De Meyer, 1991), strategy (Ayoun and Moreo, 2008), leadership style (Dorfman and Howell, 1988; Puffer, 1993), and human resources management (Luthans *et al.*, 1993).

The main obstacle in the effort to understand these management differences across different countries and cultural settings is that researchers and practitioners must often rely on theory originally developed in the United States. This has resulted to the fact that management theory development has been synonymous largely with what happens in this country and its MNCs operating around the globe are responsible for the dissemination of this US-centric management knowledge. Arguably the most vocal proponent of this position, Guest has suggested that HRM is '*American, optimistic, apparently humanistic and also superficially simple*' (Guest, 1990, p.379), and has argued that HRM can be seen as a contemporary manifestation of the American dream owing to its emphases on the potential for human growth, the desire to improve opportunities for people at work, and the role of strong leadership reinforced by strong organisational culture (Guest 1990). In that respect, many management scholars argue that international and cross-cultural management studies originate in the individualistic achievement-oriented management culture of the United States (i.e. Doktor *et al.*, 1991; Jackson, 2002; Tayeb, 2005; Thomas, 2008). This body of US-centric literature also suggests (Ruigrok and van Tulder, 1995; Marschan, 1996; Mayrhofer and Brewster, 1996; Ralston *et al.*, 1997; Ferner and Quintanilla, 1998) that where a nation has a strong and distinctive culture this carries over into the nation's organisations, the most cited examples being Japanese, German and United States' organisations. Although MNCs operating independent of national borders continue to have their assets, sales, work-force, ownership and control highly concentrated in the country where their corporate headquarters are located (Ferner and Quintanilla, 1998). Thus, universality in international (hospitality) management theory, research and practice is accepted without question (Kiessling and Harvey, 2005). It can be argued however that attempts to establish a common corporate culture in an international or multi-national firm can be undermined by the strength of national cultures, and research points to the fact that the cultures of individual countries are both more stable and more powerful than those of individual organisations (Newman and Nollen, 1996; Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Pauly and Reich, 1997). Furthermore, the concept that human beings are a resource to further the executive ends of an organisation is a concept that is contrary to the values of many non-Western cultures (Thomas, 2008). Perhaps in its most instrumental conceptualisation, this may also be contrary to the values of many '*Western*' cultures. Little thought is given to the implications of the underlying concepts in people management theory, nor to its manifestations in the policies and practices that multinational corporations employ across different countries (Ferner and Quintanilla, 1998). Boyacigiller and Alder (1991) argue that this bias in theory development is the result not of an inherent belief in the superiority of U.S. management but of *parochialism* – a lack of awareness of alternative contexts, models, research and values. As a result culture is often ignored in management research and universality is assumed (Thomas, 2008).

Recently, a number of scholars have challenged the assumption that management theories formulated in one country are applicable universally, and have demonstrated in their research that management theories applicable in one country cannot be generalised directly to other countries (i.e. House *et al.*, 2004; Javidan *et al.*, 2005). Yet, progress in developing new context relevant theory in international management has been slow (Peterson, 2004; Tsui, 2004).

2.3. The global-local question in managerial work

The identification of the complexities associated with managing people from different cultural contexts when a company pursues business across national borders, has been a major aspect of IHRM research (Cullen, 1999; Evans *et al.*, 2002; Schneider and Barsoux, 2003; Dowling and Welch, 2004). IHRM is an area of research and practice that is embedded in international management, which is in turn embedded in the broad field of international business (De Cieri *et al.*, 2007). Peltonen (2006, p.523) defines IHRM as '*a branch of management studies that investigates the design and effects of organizational human resource practices in cross-cultural contexts*', and Welch (1994, p.162) advocates that '*IHRM involves moving people around the globe*'. The core difference between HRM and IHRM is premised in the fact that HRM is relevant within a single country, while IHRM seeks to explore added complexity due to a diversity of national contexts of operation and to the inclusion of different national categories of workers (Dowling, 1999; Evans *et al.*, 2002; Schuler *et al.*, 2002).

Increasing attention has focused on the strategic nature of IHRM and the implications of strategy for organisational performance (De Cieri and Dowling, 2006). Schuler *et al.*, (1993, p.422) define strategic IHRM as '*human resource management issues, functions, and policies and practices that result from the strategic activities of multinational enterprises and that impact the international concerns and goals of those enterprises*'. The present level in the evolutionary process of human resource management, which complicates the human resource functions and systems that much more, is strategic global human resource management (SGHRM). Viewing the human resource functions in an SGHRM context exacerbates the international human resource issues due to the co-ordination efforts required to implement the strategy of the corporation (Kiessling and Harvey, 2005). Thus, from a SGHRM perspective, in today's global business environment, global organisations must utilise all possible sources of competitive advantage, and human assets are one of these sources (Barney, 1991; Schuler and Rogovsky, 1998). Many of the debates on the strategic nature of international and global HRM have covered similar territory to those in domestic SHRM that is whether organisations should primarily build upon their internal assets or upon assessments of the external environment to develop competitive advantage (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). MNCs typically face the conundrum of '*the dual imperatives of local responsiveness and global integration*' (Taylor *et al.*, 1996, p.962). While the former strategy allows firms to customise goods and services to better suit local laws, customs and consumer tastes the latter achieves cost reductions through economies of scale and scope (Hill, 2005, pp.395-400). Such policies are tempered by the characteristics of the industrial sector within which the MNC operates and/or the type of product or service that it produces. Similarly, the implementation of new technologies and production practices within international subsidiaries often requires the export of new management and work practices from the parent firm to the host country subsidiary. Managing people consistently within and between subsidiaries across the world suggests that companies will evaluate whether to adopt local practices and simultaneously adopt global practices (Brewster, 2001, 2006; Edwards and Kuruvilla, 2005).

The common ground between IHRM and SIHRM is premised in the fact that, managing people consistently within and between subsidiaries across the world suggests that companies will evaluate whether to adopt local practices and simultaneously adopt global practices (Brewster, 2001, 2006). There are three distinctive approaches in SIHRM: the 'best practice' approach; the 'best fit' approach; and the 'resource-based view' (RBV) approach. The best practice approach argues for a universal paradigm, which promotes the idea of convergence across countries, sees the main aim of IHRM to improve organisational performance and its arguments are based primarily on surveys of 'leading edge' companies. The emphasis is on the expectations of what happens rather than the quest for organisational improvement. It is the dominant approach within the United States of America but is also widely used in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Northern Europe (Brewster, 2001, 2006). On the other hand, Morden (1995) argues that international managers and multinational companies may need to take a best fit or contingency approach to any issues related with the management function; he also suggests (*ibid.*) that the style of management must be appropriate to the prevailing local contingencies. This approach suggests that firms should be able to take advantage of cultural diversity to help them differentiate their products and services and satisfy customers and workforces, whilst at the same time minimising the effects of cultural diversity where standardisation is prioritised. In terms of the development of key human resources this balance is seen in the use of career structures for talented managers regardless of nationality and the use of host and third country managers in senior positions (Adler and Ghadar, 1990; Paauwe and Dewe, 1995; Scullion and Paauwe, 2004). Finally the RBV SIHRM approach identifies how perpetual firm distinctiveness and 'rents' can be achieved through people, and the processes used to manage them, where such resources are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable. This suggests that certain groups of human resources achieve a privileged status within organisations due to their capacity to transfer tacit knowledge to new markets and provide sustainable competitive advantage (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Scullion and Starkey, 2000; Jacob, 2003).

The above management dilemmas and challenges have not been new; since the early 1980s a critical question has been, whether differences among management practices and national cultures matter to managerial performance. The 'global-local' question originates from the wider cultural 'convergence-divergence' debate, which is premised on the assumption that in given enough time, cultures will converge to the point that no difference in values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour exist (Kerr *et al.*, 1960; Perlmutter, 1969; Eisenhardt, 1973; Dunphy, 1987; Inglehart and Beker, 2000). As a result, societies and organisations will become similar due to the universal application of management practices (Dowling *et al.*, 1999; Schneider and Barsoux, 2003; Brewster, 2006). On the other hand, divergent theorists argue that in today's complex globalised business environment, international companies must manage, on a day-to-day basis, the national institutional and cultural differences presented in various localities, and this highlights another form of balance for enterprises where they have to achieve a judicious and effective equilibrium between some local HRM practices and elements of consistency across their subsidiaries (Brewster, 2006). While the adoption of global, 'culture-free' (convergence) or local 'culture-specific' (divergence) managerial practices may represent polar extremes, a third approach appears as a unifying model. In this respect, there are writers who argue that corporate culture can influence, but not eliminate, national culture values (Ricks *et al.*, 1990; Adler, 1997), or who argue for 'crossvergence', which is defined as a combination of organisational culture and national culture values (Ralston *et al.*, 1993). Basically, crossvergence theorists argue that as the global economy grows, countries will influence one another economically as well as culturally; in that respect crossvergence means that different management approaches are expected to converge in the middle (Vance and Paik, 2006). Regardless of whether management is converging, diverging or crossverging, culture can be seen as having an important influence on performance (Fisher and Hartel, 2003).

2.4. The Greek Context

Greece has a long tradition in tourism and hospitality mainly due to its history and ancient civilisation. The 'modern' hospitality industry has emerged in the 1950s as a response in the tourism demand. Due to the rapid growth of the tour operators in Europe and the phenomenon of the mass tourism, Greece experienced a dramatic increase of tourism flows to in the late 1970s and 1980s, facilitated by plenty of natural, cultural and environmental resources, existing airport infrastructure in major islands, and lower cost of living in comparison with most of Europe (Eurostat, 2005). In addition Buhalis (2001) argues that Greek resorts have different product and market profiles making them capable of satisfying a great diversity of tourism demand. The Greek tourism product is an amalgam of natural, cultural and heritage attractions spread throughout the country, as well as a wide variety of services offered predominantly by small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs). Moreover, 15,000 miles of coastline; 2,500 islands; an average of 300 sunny days annually; a unique fauna and flora; as well as climatic superiority with mild winters and warm summers are some of its natural attractions.

Today the Hospitality & Tourism sector in Greece contributes approximately 15.00% of the National GDP ranking third in the E.U. after Spain (18.38%) and Portugal (15.40%) according to the WTTC (2005). The sector occupies totally 808,000 employees 18% of the country's entire labour force; a total of 96,750 employees work in hotels and 24,895 in small lodges (SETE, 2003).

The Greek and International literature suggests that Greek management has hardly existed until the early 1980s; all management practices and methods were largely adoption of MNCs practices. Kanelpoulos (1990) has documented a lack of wide diffusion of modern management methods and systems such as formal structures, planning and control systems, human resource management systems, incentive systems, and management information systems. Bourantas and Papadakis (1996) argue that the salient characteristics of Greek management (in the 1980s and early 1990s) were:

1. Concentration of power and control in the hands of top management.
2. Lack of modern systems to support strategic decisions.

A question that was raised here is whether Greek management possessed any unique characteristics that distinguish it from other European management styles (e.g., the institutionalised participation of employees in Germany or Sweden and the informal network relationships among small and medium-sized enterprises in Italy). The answer came during the 1990s and the early 2000s through the participation of the country in two international surveys: the Price Waterhouse Cranfield Project (CRANET) concerning Human Resources strategies and policies across Europe (Papalexandris and Chalikias, 2002); and the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness) project which provided useful insights for each participative country cultural perspectives in relation to management and leadership (Javidan & House, 2001). The findings of these significant surveys indicated the country's differentiation in management practices, due to the existing socio-cultural context.

The results from the CRANET survey revealed that in Greece, as in other European countries, there is evidence of both convergence and divergence in HRM policies and the overall work context (Myloni *et al.*, 2004). On the one hand the introduction of common legislation and agreements between countries of the E.U., will eventually lead to harmonisation of the Industrial Relations (I.R.) and H.R.M. systems across different national contexts (Brewster, 1994). In addition, globalisation forces multinational companies (MNCs) to adopt common H.R. practices in their overseas subsidiaries. On the other hand, there is still a persistent belief that social and cultural differences

between countries will continue to supersede the forces of globalisation emanating from technologically driven markets or supranational agreements (Sparrow & Hiltrop, 1997). Moreover, Myloni *et al.* (ibid.) have found that for the range of H.R. issues examined in CRANET survey (Business Policy and Evaluation, Industrial Relation, Recruitment and Selection, Management Training and Development, Employee Benefits and Reward, Performance Evaluation) MNC subsidiaries have adapted parent company H.R.M. practices to the local ones, up to a point. These practices might be characterised by high levels of cultural susceptibility and to certain degree sensitivity to cultural differences. On the contrary Greek firms seem to adapt less H.R. 'Best Practices' and continue to follow the local patterns and norms. According to the above, it is possible that Greek firms still have some way to go in terms of facing direct competition in the global market. Myloni *et al.* (ibid.) conclude that Greek companies are still embedded to their cultural environment to a considerable extent.

The GLOBE project has provided a better insight of the relation between management practices and national culture in Greece. Perhaps the most important finding is the country's score to the "*In-Group collectivism*" dimension (also referred as "*family collectivism*") that reflects the extent to which a society's institutions favour autonomy versus collectivism. This dimension refers to the extent to which members of a society take pride in membership in small groups such as their family and circle of close friends, and the organisations in which they are employed. In Greece being a member of a family and of a close group of friends, an in-group, is very important to people. Papalexandris *et al.* (2002) indicate that one of the Greek culture's main characteristics is '*strong family bonds*', even though in big cities there might have been a recent change in this respect. The father is the centre of the family; he is responsible for all its members and the one who makes the final decision. There is a strict hierarchy and younger members are expected to show respect to the older. Power is concentrated in a few hands, which is usually accepted although it does not go unquestioned. Family members and close friends tend to have strong expectations from each other. Taking care of their needs and satisfying their expectations is critical to each individual. It is not unusual to forego due diligence, or equal employment opportunity, and to favour a close friend or family member in recruiting or in allocating rewards and promotions. Making regular references to one's family and especially one's father is quite acceptable and can go a long way in opening doors.

Despite the paternalistic family oriented management style there are indications for a strong will to change. Figures from the GLOBE project (House *et al.*, 2002) show that Greece has low mean scores in '*society as is*' and higher scores in '*society should be*'; these results confirm the existence of a culture gap found also in previous research studies in Greek organisational culture. According to Bourantas and Papadakis (1996), there is a discrepancy between general organisational culture as perceived by managers and their personally preferred culture. This is considered to be an indication of the desire for change within organisations. The greatest pressures for convergence are coming from the obligations of Greece as a member of the E.U. and several other organisations that require planning ahead and efficient management of the various projects. While this affects mostly the public sector, globalisation put pressures for uniform management practices and policies in private sector organisations. Thus, a slow but steady movement towards harmonisation of management practices at least with the rest of the E.U. members is observed.

3. RESEARCH PROFILE, DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. The Research Profile

The research that conducted as part of a PhD Thesis, served mainly two aims: first to explore the GMs' roles and competencies profile in Greek 4 and 5* hotels; and second to investigate the role of culture and the level of influence in GMs' work.

In total 16 hotel case studies with 32 participant senior managers (16 GMs and their immediate assistants) were chosen – representing 4 and 5* 1 in Athens, Thessaloniki, Rhodes and Crete. The 16 establishments selected for this research, represent two broad hotel types operating in Greece – city and resort. Basic prerequisite for the participant hotels was to be holders of 4 or 5* official rating that is accredited by the Greek Chamber of Hotels. The ownership status of each hotel (family; local chain; national chain; multinational chain) was also considered. The luxury hotels in the selected geographical regions were then shorted / filtered by using the following two criteria (Table 1):

Table 1: Case Selection Process

Region	Initial No. of 4 & 5* hotels	Short by Criterion No.1	Short by Criterion No.2	Final No. of Hotels
City Hotels				
Athens	49	26	15	15
Thessaloniki	28	20	6	6
Resort Hotels				
Crete	250	141	66	66
→ Region criteria narrowed in the area of Chania				6
Dodecanese	171	70	56	56
→ Region criteria narrowed in Faliraki & Ixia, Rhodes				26

- I. As a minimum standard the city hotels should provide TV and air conditioning in room and, restaurant and parking facilities. Additionally for resort hotels they should have outdoor swimming pool.
- II. All participant hotels should have more than 150 rooms. This happened in order to ensure that only medium to big companies would be researched. This aimed to a) compare hotels with similar organisational structure, and b) allow replication in other European countries with similar size and structure hotels.

The case selection process followed in this research was dictated by the structure of the luxury hotel industry in Greece: given its nature and geographical spread (approximately 1,150 establishments all over Greece) a decision was made to limit the destinations in the most representative and popular places for city and resort hotels respectively.

A three-part tool followed by a cover letter explaining the aim of the interview was used, in order to serve the needs of the research. The first part examined demographic data of the company and the participant; the second part was a 14 question semi-structured in-depth interview; and the third part was the Personal Competencies Framework (PCF) Questionnaire, originally developed by Dulewicz

and Herbert (1991/99). Additional qualitative data sources derived from non-participant observation (field notes) and company documents.

A major methodological concern for this study was to produce valid and reliable outcomes. A research protocol was used as recommended by Yin (1994, 2003). The case study protocol contains procedures and general rules that should be followed in using the research instrument/s and is considered essential in a multiple-case study (Yin, *ibid.*). It was created prior to the data collection phase. In addition, during the data collection tests for the quality of research were employed (Construct and External Validity, Reliability); these tests were followed by the use of two different triangulation methods namely *Data* and *Methodological* triangulation. Data triangulation involves the use of a variety of data sources in a study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Thus, for this research different types of material was collected. Next to primary data from the thirty-two interviews, secondary data were also an important source of information. Multiple types of documents were collected for each case and included the following: applications for employment, company vision / mission statement, promotional material (including audiovisual material like DVDs), company newspapers, performance evaluation forms and any other printed material that could provide information for this study. A second way to triangulate data was to write field notes during and immediately after each interview session. These notes were especially useful as they shed additional light on the textual content or indicated specific questions that do not directly appear in the interview transcripts. In this context it can be argued that recording the meaning of what is being said rather than the exact words of the respondent is more important in this context (Stake, 1995; Perry, 1998). On the other hand Method triangulation entails the use of multiple methods to study a single problem (Decrop, 1999). This can be different qualitative methods or a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques (but not in hierarchical order like qualitative exploration and quantitative inference). Since each method has its own limits and biases, and single methodologies result in personal biases, using multiple methods paves the way for more credible and dependable information. As already mentioned above, this research employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews supported by the PCF questionnaire measuring the participants' perceptions. Additional information for each case was retrieved from demographics – statistical data referring to the luxury hotel industry and the managers as well.

3.2. The research findings

The research findings showed that a Greek GM in his/her career is likely to work in both city and resort hotels, so the roles performed and competencies framework adopted are changing according to the case (*best fit approach*) in order to cope with the position's demands. '*What, why and how*' each GM does in the work context, is the result of a complex process which integrates elements such as personality, roles, competencies, organisational and national context (culture). Since the City hotel type was introduced in Greece quite recently – just prior to the Olympic Games in 2004 – it would be unfair to build the profile of the GMs in Greece based on the "*City-Resort*" hotel distinction. This research has identified significant differences and similarities of the hotel GMs, when comparisons are based on the ownership status of the company they work.

The first category identified is the *Family/Local Hotel Chain*, which represent the vast majority of the Greek 4 and 5* hotels (Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, 2007). This is a typical SMTE (small-medium tourism enterprise) owned and essentially co-managed by the leader of the family surrounded by relatives in various positions (*In-Group Collectivism*). The following category, the *National Greek Hotel Chain* is a former family business – led very often by a charismatic founder –

which expanded gradually its operations nation wide. This type of hotel has adapted to a certain degree the organisational structure and standards of a multinational hotel chain; there is still however moderate involvement of the owner (or his family) to the management of the company. Finally, the *Multinational Hotel Chain* is a foreign brand name, franchised in most of the cases by a Greek businessman. There are only a few cases that the management of the company belongs to the parent company. This type follows the organisation, structure and standards dictated by the parent company; there are however some variations / deviations due to the Greek socio-cultural context. For example, the standard operating procedures are adapted to the local working patterns and legislation.

The GMs working in a 4* or 5* family/local chain hotel are male between 55-65 years old, speaking in average two foreign languages and have at least a hospitality first degree. Employers in this category are in favour of the “*old school*” for two main reasons: they value more the experience, reputation and seniority than qualifications; in addition “*near retirement*” GMs may cost less in the payroll. The recruitment is conducted mainly through recommendations and “*word of mouth*”, and rarely with internal recruits; the selection process is usually conducted by the owner and in most of the cases is based in subjective criteria (i.e. personal references, reputation and salary). There are limited options for training and development in this type of hotel, and very often is up to the GMs’ discretion to recommend which programme to attend. In most of the cases, there is no time allocated for training and development activities, in the GMs daily schedule. The job roles performed by the GMs are focused in what Mintzberg (1973) describes as “*figurehead*”, the person who is there to inspire and lead the staff; they also find the time to communicate with customers and listen carefully to their views. The communication competencies cluster is perceived as the most valuable for successful operations and management. GMs in family hotels have an informal performance evaluation – in most of the cases conducted by the hotel owner – based primarily in the financial performance, and secondarily the levels of customer satisfaction and quality. This type of GMs put great emphasis in networking, and they work very hard to build a good reputation in the market. Their overall relations with the owners can be described as “*tolerable*” since the GMs are often faced with unrealistic demands on behalf of the owners. On the other hand there are average performers (GMs) who promise more than can deliver; these individuals sooner or later are marginalised and are forced to relocate or work in lower hotel categories (usually 3* hotels). Overall, the level of the owner’s involvement (and his family) in the GMs’ work in most of the cases is high. The Greek context is dominant here, with the “*in-group collectivism*” dimension to dictate the relationships between the owner, the GM and their subordinates.

The second type of GMs, those working in *Greek National Hotel Chains* are males between 45-55 years old, speaking in average two foreign languages and have very good educational background including a hospitality first degree and postgraduate studies. Their professional background shows experience from the ‘*primary*’ departments of a medium/big size hotel (Food and Beverage, Front Office - Reservations); in addition, sales and contracting background is a prerequisite for this type of GMs. Recruitment is conducted through personal recommendations or internal candidates with experience in various hotels of the chain; ‘*head hunters*’ are rarely used for high profile candidates. Since the recruitment process does not involve a lot of candidates, two or three selection interviews take place with senior managers from/in the Head Office; during the final interview the owner is also present. Throughout the year there are moderate opportunities for training and development; the GMs are free to choose between in-house or outsourced programmes, in Greece and/or abroad. Their job roles are focused in leadership (employee motivation / inspiration) and entrepreneurship (help business grow). The *results orientation* competencies cluster is their primary concern, they value however the remaining managerial competencies as integral parts of their competencies framework. This is reflected in their performance evaluation, a formal procedure which takes place one or two

times a year depending on the type of the hotel unit (city-resort). The primary targets are mainly financial and the maintenance of quality standards; there is however a reference to the '*performance*' of the GMs in areas such as communication, leadership and inter-personal relations. The GMs '*secondary*' competencies are evaluated through peer reviews, customer satisfaction questionnaires and '*mystery guest*' audits. Although there is intense networking activity within the corporate limits, GMs maintain their contacts outside the company; in addition, their reputation is mostly heard within the corporate limits. The owners – who in most of the cases occupy the position of the managing director or chairman of the board – have a moderate involvement in the GMs' work, mainly at strategic level. There are however cases that intervene in GMs' work when they have personal interest, i.e. '*strongly recommend*' the selection of a particular candidate. It is important to note here that the owners know personally all of their GMs, and maintain regular communication. Finally, in this type of business the Greek culture meets the corporate culture: the Greek hotel national chains are structured and managed according to the multinational hotel chain model; the Greek culture is however evident everywhere and it is very often the case that '*favours*' and deviations from the standards occur when is about relatives or friends. On the other hand, it can be argued that this type of business has embodied the Greek context characteristics in the best way, so their GMs can use it in a beneficial manner.

The last type of GMs, are those working in multinational companies. They are middle aged (45-55 years old) enthusiastic males with impeccable educational background. They speak in average two languages - including the parent country's (in case it is not English). Their professional background has a sales and finance orientation, although they understand very well hotel operations. The recruitment is conducted internally or through the use of '*head hunters*' who are aiming at high profile recruits. In the case of franchised brands the personal recommendation is also used. The selection process is rigorous and involves at least three interviews. There are many opportunities for training and development in Greece and abroad on a regular basis. The GMs' roles in this type of hotels are focused in entrepreneurship and finance. Their annual performance evaluation is multi-dimensional, lots of emphasis is put however in achieving agreed (financial) targets. This corresponds to their preference in the *results-orientation* competencies cluster. Networking is very important within the corporate limits; outside these limits the GMs maintain only those contacts necessary to '*do the job*'. Their reputation is synonymous with hard work and what is actually on their resume. The Greek culture is something that they cannot ignore –especially in the case of foreigners – the corporate culture however is this, which determines their behaviour. It should be noted here that there are less than 10 foreign GMs in 4 and 5* hotels in Greece (most of them in Athens); they are not represented in this study because it was not possible (politely rejected) to reach them. The above profile refers to Greek nationals working in Multinational hotel chains. The fact that a so small number of foreign nationals work as luxury hotel GMs in Greece may lead in the following arguments: first that there are very good Greek GMs who satisfy the high standards of the multinational hotel chains; and second that the Greek context is presenting difficulties that foreign nationals cannot cope with.

Table 2 (next page) summarises the findings of this research; the three different profiles identified for Greek luxury hotel GMs are not exclusive and provide a generic context for discussion in this field.

Table 2: The GMs' profiles in Greek 4 and 5* hotels

Company Type	Family /Local Chain 'The Native GM'	Greek National Chain 'The Glocal GM'	Multinational Chain 'The Greek - Global GM'
GMs' Characteristics			
Average Age	55-65	45-55	45-55
Sex	Male	Male	Male
Education	HE Graduates	HE Graduates & Postgraduate Edu.	HE Graduates & Postgraduate Edu.
Professional Background	All Departments (Emphasis in F&B)	All Departments (Emphasis in Sales & Contracting)	All Departments (Emphasis in Sales & Contracting)
Recruitment & Selection	Recommendations	Recommendations & Internally	Head Hunters & Internally
Training & Development	Sporadic – GMs' own discretion	Moderate to High Opportunities	High Opportunities
Job Roles	"Figurehead"	Entrepreneur & Leader	Entrepreneur
Competencies	Emphasis in Communication	Results Orientation	Results Orientation
Performance Evaluation	Informal Annual	Formal Annual (1 or 2 times)	Formal Annual (1 or 2 times)
Role of Networking	High	Moderate outside High inside	Low outside High inside
Role of reputation	High in local /national market	High in national marker	High in regional / international market
Ownership level of involvement	High to Moderate	Moderate	Low
Role of Culture	High	Moderate	Moderate to low

3.3. Emerging themes

In total five themes emerged as contextual factors that influence the shape, development and application of the GMs' roles and competencies in luxury hotels in Greece. To start with *management mobility*, GMs are expected to follow certain career paths that eventually lead to the position of the hotel unit's GM. This research showed limited career path options in Greek hotels with the F&B and the Front Office departments to appear as the only options for career progression. The situation in MNCs and more recently in national hotel chains is different, with career paths being available from finance, sales and marketing. Then, *contact intensity* poses as the most important theme that influences the managerial roles and competencies in luxury hotels in Greece. GMs communicate daily with a broad spectrum of 'stakeholders' (owners, ownership representatives, subordinates, staff, customers, local authorities officers/public servants); the contact intensity with each stakeholder category determines to a certain degree the managerial roles and competencies adopted. Thus for instance, in family hotels the high level of contact intensity with all stakeholders is deemed important for the survival of the hotel manager, whereas this is not the case for MNC hotel GMs. *Hierarchy demarcation* is the following emerging theme with two contrasting situations emerging from this research. Family and local chain hotel GMs experience difficulties in identifying

the limits of their status and authority; the frequent owner interventions and the appointment of family members or friends as members of staff coupled with high levels of informality, influence to a large extent managerial work in Greek hotels and result very often to political behaviour. On the other hand hierarchical demarcation in Greek and MNC hotel chains is strictly orientated and communicated throughout the organisation. There are however 'unseen' relationships between the hotel unit GMs, superiors and immediate subordinates that determine managerial work to a certain degree. Another theme emerging from the Greek context, is the manager's *integrity* in relation to the high levels of corruption in the Greek public sector. Although this was considered a sensitive issue, all hotel managers acknowledged the existing problems; in the case of family and local chain hotels GMs contact intensity with public servants and local authorities was reported to be high, so managers are responsible to 'find their own ways' to deal with bureaucracy and corruption. On the other hand national and MNC hotel chain GMs reported that although they have personally no transactions with the public sector, they have contacts to ask for help if needed. Finally the hotel GMs' *reputation and networking* was valued very high from the vast majority of participant managers. There were however variations in the way each type of hotel manager participates in networks and builds up his/her own reputation. Thus, managers in family and local chain hotels work very hard to build a good reputation in local, regional or national market; the key in this effort is the participation in the 'right' networks. On the other hand national and MNC chains encourage the participation in managerial networks within the company limits; nevertheless managers in national chains were found to maintain a large number of contacts outside the company limits. Reputation in hotel chains is not valued high, since GMs are appointed based on performance and qualifications.

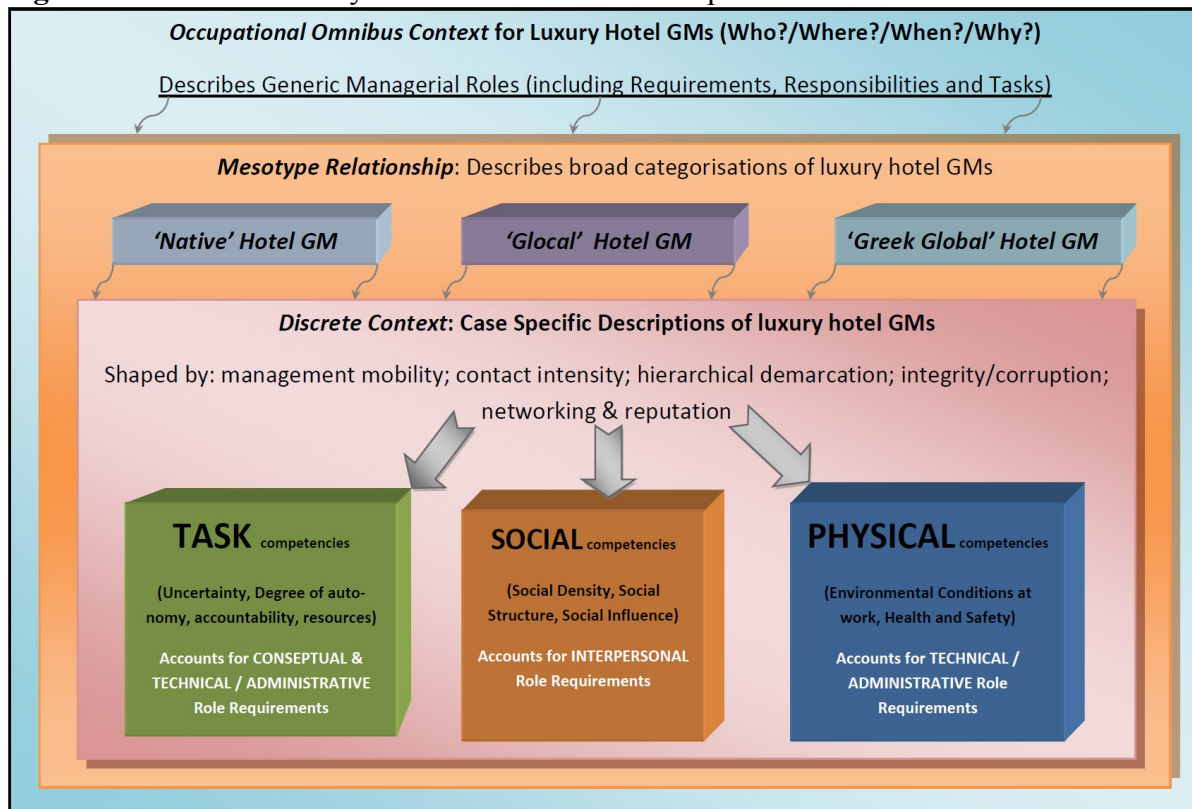
3.4. Conceptual Framework

In this research, findings have revealed several contextual influences in the luxury hotel GMs' work. Based on Johns (2006) and Dierdorff's *et al.* (2009) categorical model of work context, managerial work roles and role requirements (competencies) are conceptualised in three levels: occupational omnibus context; a mesotype relationship context; and discrete context (Figure 1). The first level (omnibus context) provides information about the broad essential elements of a given context and describes managerial roles' moderating influences collectively in a non-differentiated manner (Johns, 2006). The research findings indicate that, managerial work in luxury hotels is drawn through generic profiles and job descriptions that include the minimum job requirements of any luxury hotel. These 'base' requirements are taught in 'western' hospitality curricula, so prospective hotel GMs are socialised with these generic conceptions of management. The reason for the existence of these managerial 'base requirements' can be traced under the globalisation pressures for product and service standardisation on behalf the tour operators and customers. Thus, it can be argued that luxury hotel GMs must meet certain generic job requirements (i.e. knowledge of foreign languages, computer literacy, and interpersonal skills), regardless of the existence of contextual differences such as ownership status or the organisational structure of the hotel. The second level (mesotype relationship context) provides the explanatory link between the more descriptive and general omnibus context and the specific discrete context (Dierdorff *et al.*, 2009). The findings of this research have emerged three different luxury hotel GM work profiles in Greece: the 'Native' GM; the 'Glocal' GM; and the 'Greek Global' GM. The need for this categorisation was created from the existence of different managerial work variables in different hotel types: i.e. the employment of different practices in GMs' recruitment and selection process. These broad occupational groupings allowed the creation of more specific accounts of managerial work in hotels in Greece, as discussed in the previous section (3.2.). The third and last level (discrete context) seeks to identify specific situational variables that impact behavior directly or indirectly (Dierdorff *et al.*, 2009). Three important components compose the discrete context (Johns, 2006): task context which accounts for

conceptual and technical/administrative role requirements; social context which accounts for interpersonal role requirements; and physical context which accounts for technical/administrative role requirements. The sum of these components is equivalent to the managerial competencies framework, in this research PCF (Sandberg, 2000; Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2007). The personal competencies framework is unique for each hotel manager and it would be meaningless to attempt any effort for the construction of generic typologies. What is important here though is to identify the contextual variables that shape this framework.

As already discussed in 3.3. this research identified five different variables that influence to a certain degree the shape, development and application of the managerial roles and competencies in luxury hotels in Greece, namely: management mobility; contact intensity; hierarchical demarcation; integrity/corruption; networking and reputation. These variables are constantly changing throughout the manager's career advancement, who adapts each time to the new situation. Neff (1987) argues that the enactment of work roles necessarily encompasses behaviour that is the product of personal characteristics and characteristics of the work situation. Thus, it can be argued that context and processes involved in role enactment are definitely intertwined.

Figure 1: The Greek luxury hotel GMs' roles and competencies context



The above discussion provides very strong indications for the interplay between managerial work roles, competencies and context, in luxury hotels in Greece. What is needed here is more research in different cultural contexts (i.e. other E.U. countries) in order to test the applicability of Dierdorff's *et al.* (2009) categorical model of work context.

4. CONCLUSION

This research paper has discussed the effects of the Greek cultural context, in the roles and competencies of the GMs' working in 4 and 5* hotels. Previous research related to management and culture in Greece (CRANET survey; GLOBE project), managerial work (Mintzberg, 1973, 1994), and managerial competencies (the 'behavioural' approach), have provided the theoretical framework. The findings of this research identified three different types/profiles of luxury hotel GMs, according to the ownership status of the hotel (family/local hotel chain; national hotel chain; multi-national hotel chain); each one is affected to a certain degree by the strong Greek national culture and this is reflected in their generic profiles. Since research in this topic is still in early stages, the above findings can provide a basis for future research in Greece and/or other European countries.

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