

# Profile of Human Resources and Skills Needs in the Portuguese Tourism Sector

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**Abstract:** The tourism sector has been presented as one of the most important sectors of diverse economies due to its capacity to contribute to economic growth and job creation. Being an industry of people, it directly depends on the performance of activities, skills, professionalism, quality and competitiveness, so it is essential to answer with precise planning politics which should be the most approximated ones to the real needs of the sector. In Portugal, the tourism sector continues to reinforce its importance in society and in the national economy since it remains the main exporting economic sector. On the other hand, the main challenge of this sector is qualifying and increasing the level of qualification of its workers due to their inadequate level of qualification, since 50% of the employed population in this sector has a primary education level. Therefore, it has defined, in its public policies, the goal of duplicating, in the next decade, the number of employees with high school education qualifications. In this sense, once skills are becoming the global currency of the 21st century, this study aims to feature the main *soft skills* that touristic human resources should hold, based on the importance given to them by the national entrepreneurs of the sector. This study is based on a sample of 555 answers and used a qualitative methodology throughout a profound review of the literature as well as a quantitative methodology where an online survey was implemented, expecting to develop the ideal profile of the tourism human resources. The results of the study suggest that the profile of human resources in the tourism sector should include skills such as teamwork, knowledge of market trends, ability to conduct efficient strategic processes and decisions, as well as language skills, sales skills and digital communication.

**Keywords:** skills, human capital, human resources, people management, tourism

## 1. Introduction

The tourism sector presents itself as one of the sectors of greater growth around the world given its capacity to generate jobs and to induce revenues and wealth, making possible its global contribution to the sustainable development and reduction of the economic inequalities (World Tourism Organization, 2017).

In Portugal, the sector also assumes high relevance in the national socio-economic context, mainly due to its importance in the generation of jobs and contribution to the global exports of the country. However, its main challenge is the qualification of the work force, since most of the employed population in the sector has a basic

level of school qualifications (Ministry of the Portuguese Economy, 2017). There is also a lack of digital skills and without these, the country and its population, would not be able to face the challenges of the digitization era as well as will not be benefited from its positive effects (European Commission, 2018).

Societies have experienced various economic, social and cultural changes which transformed them into increasingly knowledge-based societies (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018), so, in the tourism sector, in particular, competitiveness is associated with the creation of partnerships between all stakeholders, allowing, this way, a better identification of the real skills needs of the companies to better respond to the changes in the consumer patterns and expectations of travelers, thus ensuring an effective response to the market and consequent improvement of the qualifications of its workers (World Economic Forum, 2017).

Given the importance of human capital in tourism, the present study has as its main objective to feature the ideal profile for the Portuguese tourism collaborator and to identify the main skills that should be detained by the worker throughout collecting the importance that the tourism entrepreneurs give to the different skills.

This paper is organized as it follows. In section 2 a literature review is made about the importance of the human resources in the organizations, specifically in the tourism companies, followed by section 3 that describes the methodology and the steps of the investigation, subsequently, in section 4 we present the discussions of the results and finally, in section 5, we present the main conclusions and the profile of human resources and skills needs in the Portuguese tourism sector as well as the implications and limitations of the research.

## **2. Literature review**

Skills are the characteristics that focused on each person and can be defined by the set of knowledge, attitudes and personal characteristics that are difficult to distinguish individually, are essential for employability and are transferable to the work environment and they can and should be continually developed through education and training according to the interests and objectives of the organizations for which they work (Jeou-Shyan et al, 2011; Wagenaar, 2014). Those who have a cognitive origin are called hard skills and those that have origin in behaviours are called soft Skills (Ramlall and Ramlall, 2014; Windels, Mallia and Broyles, 2013).

Hard skills are clearly identifiable and measurable and are those necessary for the performance of a specific profession or task, they are defined as the individual detained capacities that allow the evaluation and identification of complex problems and consequently the development of creative solutions for them (Sisson and Adams, 2013; Sitompul et al, 2017; Weber, Crawford and Dennison, 2012).

Soft skills are the individual human characteristics that contribute to the success of an organization and are based on individual attitudes and personality traits acquired by professional and personal experiences (Ibrahim, Boerhannoeddin and Kayode, 2017; Rivera Jr and Lee, 2016; Sitompul et al, 2017; Truong, Laura and Shaw, 2016) and are transferable and transversal to the performance of any profession of any sector (Sisson and Adams, 2013; Tadimetri, 2014; Tsitskari et al, 2017; Weber, Crawford and Dennison, 2012).

In tourism, human resources are part of the service provided to the tourists and are an element whose value for the organization is difficult to quantify, but in which the soft skills play a key and decisive role in the relationship and quality of the consumer experience, so developing strategies that value and enhance the qualifications of human resources and also identify the skills needs, provide a competitive advantage and better operational results to the companies (Jeou-Shyan et al, 2011; Lu et al, 2015; Weinland, Gregory and Petrick, 2016).

## **3. Methodology**

For this study, a mixed methodology was applied, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, throughout the collection of primary and secondary data. The qualitative approach was based on the literature review of 112 selected documents that allowed the creation of a document base that served as a groundwork for the questionnaire to be implemented, divided into four dimensions and 92 different skills. On the other hand, the quantitative approach returned primary data, collected through an online survey implemented and sent to national tourist entrepreneurs, accessible in the professional platform Lime Survey and whose main

objective was to measure, what skills were most valued in the workers of the tourism sector by the tourism entrepreneurs.

### **3.1 Sample**

The universe of this study is composed of 46.951 active companies of the Portuguese tourism sector on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018, listed in the Iberian Balance-Sheet Analysis System Database (SABI), which correspond approximately to 80% of the total sector companies (Bank of Portugal, 2016), containing companies whose main economic activity (CAE) integrates the subsegments of Transport and Logistics (TS), Hotels and Restaurants (AR) and Recreational and Cultural Activities (ARC), according to the classification followed by Bank of Portugal (2016). The target population of this investigation was composed of the 13.992 companies that had an email contact in the database and uses a simple probabilistic sampling technique. 1.137 answers were collected between 15 November 2018 and 11 January 2019 covering the characteristics of the total national business structure both in the CAE and the region where they are located with a confidence level of 95%, according to the Raosoft instrument.

Characterizing the answers received by economic activity, we observed 27.3% of the responses belonging to the AR subsegment, 14% to the ARC subsegment and 6.2% belonging to the TS subsegment. Regarding to the regional distribution NUT II, 15% of the answers were located in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, 11.9% in the North region, 8.1% in the region of the Center, 3.7% in the Algarve region, 3.3% in the Alentejo region, 3.2% in the Autonomous Region of the Azores and 2.6% in the Autonomous Region of Madeira.

### **3.2 Procedures**

Having as support the conceptual study resulting from the analysis of the documental basis and due to the lack of inexistent similar instruments created that evaluate the object under study, a new measure instrument was elaborated that aims to respond to the investigation problem and implicit objective of this research, concretely by identifying the ideal profile of human capital in the tourism sector, in the perception of employers. Based on a literature review, the studied skills obtained allowed the formulation of the questionnaire in four dimensions (i) soft skills; ii) hard skills; iii) management skills; iv) transversal skills) and uses simple multiple choice questions, through a seven-point Likert scale, applied to all dimensions, since it is easy to build, intuitive in its filling and simple for the application statistical tests (Thayer-Hart et al, 2010). The instrument and the collected data were submitted to analysis of the content as well as a validation of the reliability and construct, using a statistical software treatment, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program, Version 24.0, for Windows.

Firstly, using the series mean method, we replaced the missing values that were equal to or inferior to 3% (Marôco and Garcia-Marques, 2006), returning a sample study with 555 valid answers for the remaining statistical analyses ( $N= 555$ ; 48.8% of the total data collected). Subsequently, we proceeded to the observation of possible outliers, using Mahalanobis distance (Daneshgadeh et al, 2018) and the analysis of the kurtosis and skewness of the sample. That analysis returned no need for additional adjustment to the sample of the study.

Secondly, an exploratory factorial analysis by dimension was conducted, with the main objective of reduction of the items to study throughout the extraction of factors that are possible with this statistical analysis (Lovik et al, 2017). The adequacy of the sample for this analysis was verified through the analysis of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and the Bartlett's test, since they are the most appropriate tests for this type of analysis It was choose the Varimax rotation method and accepting factor saturations with values greater than 0.4 and that clearly discriminate only in one factor (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013).

The internal consistency of the dimensions and factors were analyzed by the calculation of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, considered by the authors as the most common statistical test in the validation of the scales (Najafabadi and Najafabadi, 2016; Taber, 2018; Trinchera, Marie and Marcoulides, 2018) allowing the measurement of the consistency and reliability of the responses obtained in relation to the construct they intend to explain (Bonett and Wright, 2015; Türkel, Özdemir and Akbulut, 2017; Vaske, Beaman and Sponarski, 2017), accepting values above 0.7 as an indicator of high reliability of the implemented scales and developed instrument (Demirci and Ozyurek, 2018; Taber, 2018; Trinchera, Marie and Marcoulides, 2018).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Soft skills scale (CC)

The soft skills scale (CC) was composed of a total of 27 items. The initial factorial extraction, with free extraction of factors, returned 4 factors that showed inconstant results leading to the removal of 16 items of the analysis. A new factorial analysis was performed on the remaining 11 items, this time forced to two factors, which returned two factors explaining 55.487% of the total variance (see table 1).

Factor 1, which gathers seven items, refers to the skills related to the predisposition of employees in performing tasks and/or functions that go beyond what is requested and will be designated as "organizational citizenship". Factor 2, consisting in four items, refers to the skills related to the ability of influence and motivation of others to join new projects and will be called "transformational leadership" (see table 1).

The values obtained with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient demonstrate high internal consistency of the global scale as well as the extracted factors (see table 1).

**Table 1:** Factorial extraction of the soft skills scale

Items	F1- Organizational citizenship	F2-Transformational leadership	<i>h2</i>
CC12- Availability to perform tasks that are not planned	.753	.067	.571
CC18- Responsibility	.704	.262	.564
CC20- Autonomy	.690	.279	.554
CC25-Multitask	.669	.213	.493
CC15-Teamwork	.647	.310	.515
CC24- Assiduity and Punctuality	.638	.247	.468
CC21- Motivation	.628	.387	.545
CC7- Personal image	.129	.816	.683
CC6- Charisma	.226	.778	.656
CC8- Self-confidence	.367	.734	.674
CC2- Oral communication	.284	.547	.380
<i>Eigenvalues</i>	4.979	1.124	
% total variance explained	45.265	10.222	
<i>Cronbach alpha</i>	.839	.771	

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output (24.0)

The extracted factors indicate that workers should develop soft skills that allow them to go beyond the functions they are destined for as well as ability to influence and motivate others to attach to new projects and objectives, that is to say, skills that allow a greater and faster willingness to adapt to the changes that occur in the business environment.

### 4.2 Hard skills scale (CT)

The hard skills scale (CC) was composed of a total of 26 items. The initial factorial solution, with free factors extraction, returned 4 factors that showed incongruent results leading to the removal of 14 items of the analysis. A new factorial analysis was performed to the remaining 17 items, with free factors extraction, returning three factors explaining 70,712% of the total variance (see table 2).

Factor 1 gathers 5 items and refers to the skills related to the business processes and activities and will be designated as "commercial management". Factor 2, containing 4 items, refers to the skills related to the activities linked to experiences that return higher added value for the tourists and will be named "tourist animation". Factor 3, consisting of 3 items, refers to the skills related to the professional norms and will be called "professional ethics and deontology" (see table 2).

The values obtained with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient demonstrate high internal consistency of the global scale as well as the extracted factors (see table 2).

The extraction of these factors highlighted skills that allow companies to be aware and follow the new market trends that could add greater added value to the sold products/services and that lead to ethical and professional conduct in all professional relations.

**Table 2:** Factorial extraction of the hard skills scale (CT)

Items	F1- Commercial Management	F2- Tourist animation	F3- Professional ethics and Deontology	h2
CT4-Knowledge of the area of economics and finance	.807	.283	.134	.749
CT1-Knowledge of the commercial area	.807	.198	.186	.724
CT2-Knowledge of the marketing area	.794	.333	.151	.764
CT3-Knowledge of the area of law and legislation of the sector	.758	.342	.175	.722
CT17-Knowledge of sales techniques	.640	.161	.362	.566
CT7-Knowledge about recreational and cultural activities	.204	.837	.146	.764
CT25- Knowledge about tourism guide	.245	.790	.262	.753
CT18-Knowledge about route delineation	.31	.744	.275	.725
CT12- Knowledge of the area of health and well-being	.379	.720	.118	.676
CT20-Knowledge of products/services	.068	.095	.836	.713
CT22-Knowledge of etiquette and protocol	.287	.255	.706	.646
CT23-Knowledge of industry technical language	.322	.319	.691	.683
<i>Eigenvalues</i>	6.22	1.175	1.09	
% total variance explained	51.83%	9.79%	9.09%	
<i>Cronbach alpha</i>	.886	.87	.748	

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output (24.0)

### 4.3 Management skills scale (CG)

The management skills scale (CG) was composed of a total of 26 items. The initial factorial solution, with free factors extraction, returned 3 factors that showed unsatisfactory results leading to the removal of 10 items of the analysis. A new factorial analysis was performed to the remaining 16 items, with free factors extraction, returning two factors explaining 69,086% of the total variance (see table 3).

Factor 1 gathers 13 items and refers us to the skills that enable to make better strategic decisions and will be and will be designated as "strategic management". Factor 2, containing 3 items, refers us to the skills that allow influencing positive team behaviours in the pursuit of the objectives of the organizations and will be called as "leadership" (see table 3).

The values obtained with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient demonstrate high internal consistency of the global scale as well as the extracted factors (see table 3).

**Table 3:** Factorial extraction of the management skills scale (CG)

Items	F1- Strategic management	F2- Leadership	h2
CG25-Innovation	.854	.145	.749
CG22-Market analysis	.825	.153	.706
CG21-Networking	.822	.202	.718
CG20-Organizational environment management	.817	.296	.756
CG18-Analytical thinking	.812	.232	.713
CG19-Change management	.800	.304	.698
CG26-Entrepreneurship	.796	.151	.658
CG16-Strategic management	.792	.268	.732
CG14-Economic-financial management	.754	.233	.624
CG17-Planning	.737	.348	.581
CG24-Creativity	.735	.205	.588

Items	F1- Strategic management	F2- Leadership	h2
CG23-Social responsibility and sustainability	.729	.239	.673
CG6-Human resources management	.714	.339	.624
CG4-Ability to take decisions	.239	.845	.717
CG2-Organization	.200	.837	.700
CG8-Problem solving	.248	.820	.713
<i>Eigenvalues</i>	9.517	1.537	
% total variance explained	59.48%	9.61%	
<i>Cronbach alpha</i>	.959	.837	

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output (24.0)

The extraction of these factors allowed us to identify the importance of skills that allow strategic thinking and planning of the business as well as the leadership capacity in decision-making to the challenges that daily arise to the companies.

#### 4.4 Transversal skills scale (CTR)

The transversal skills scale (CG) was composed of a total of 13 items. The initial factorial solution, with free factors extraction, returned 2 factors that showed insufficient results leading to the removal of 4 items of the analysis. A new factorial analysis was performed to the remaining 9 items, with free factors extraction, returning two factors explaining 73,576% of the total variance (see table 4).

Factor 1 gathers 6 items and refers us to the skills related to the integration of various digital platforms in the management of the business and will be called "E-Business". Factor 2 gathers 3 items and refers us to the communication in foreign languages skills and it will be named as "foreign languages". The values obtained with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient demonstrate high internal consistency of the global scale as well as the extracted factors (see table 4).

**Table 4:** Factorial extraction of the transversal skills scale (CTR)

Items	F1- E-business	F2-Foreign languages	h2
CTR3-Marketing	.883	.186	0,814
CTR7-Knowledge of global distribution systems	.879	.121	0,788
CTR6-Knowledge of financial systems	.872	.102	0,772
CTR8-Knowledge of revenue management systems	.851	.194	0,762
CTR2-Digital Marketing	.842	.209	0,753
CTR5-Knowledge of customer management system	.814	.205	0,705
CTR11-Knowledge of the French language	.164	.831	0,718
CTR13-Knowledge of the Spanish language	.195	.821	0,712
CTR10-Knowledge of the English language	.117	.765	0,598
<i>Eigenvalues</i>	5.031	1.59	
% total variance explained	55.91%	17.67%	
<i>Cronbach alpha</i>	.938	.752	

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output (24.0)

The extraction of these factors indicates the need for digital skills in tourism workers, from a commercial or communicational point of view as well as the knowledge of the foreign language, namely the languages of the main tourist markets that visit the Portuguese destination.

#### 4.5 Global scales

Comparing the results of the global scales obtained, we can observe that the best average score belongs to the scale soft skills (CC), followed by the management skills (CG), transversal skills (CTR) and, lastly the hard skills (see table 5).

These results reflect what the authors consulted in the literature review, specifically that the global changes felt in the economy changed the behaviour of the consumers, being more and more necessary a focus on the workers' soft skills since these allow a better satisfaction of the clients' expectations as well as better answers

to the market needs since they allow better adaptation to the changes that companies live every day (Baum, 2007).

**Table 5:** Analysis of the responses by scale

Scale	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
CC- soft skills	555	6.2736	6.3636	.59419	1.27	7.00
CG - management skills	555	5.7489	5.8750	.88058	1.25	7.00
CTR - transversal skills	555	5.2216	5.3333	1.01730	1.44	7.00
CT - hard skills	555	5.2091	5.3333	.96772	1.42	7.00

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output (24.0)

## 5. Conclusions

One of the greatest assets of the organizations are human resources and, in this sense, there is a need of a strategic and fundamental response not only to globalization but also to the transition to the knowledge-based economies, ensuring the personal and professional development of the citizens, by creating opportunities that allow them to develop and update key skills throughout life, in particular in the tourism sector since it crosses constant challenges and changes (Kim, Park and Choi, 2017) and also the access to employment will increasingly depend more on the individual capacity of learning and the adaptation to new skills, rather than on the skills already seized and held by the worker (ManpowerGroup, 2017).

The main objective of the present study was to present the ideal profile of the human capital in the tourism sector, through the perception of employers, resulting from the survey implemented and, according to the results, we can conclude that having soft skills is essential to the national entrepreneurs of the tourism sector when compared to the other skills (see table 5) .

As far as soft skills are concerned, the Portuguese tourism workers should have skills that allow them a greater and faster adaptation to the organizational changes, namely: i) skills of "organizational citizenship", allowing workers to go beyond what is expectable and also have altruistic behaviours that contribute to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the organization; as well as ii) skills of "transformational leadership", which allow them to have a vision oriented towards innovation and change where, through motivation and leading by example, improves the performance and the behaviour of the work team.

With respect to the hard skill, the most valued ones are those that allow the worker to have a general view of the functioning of the business and contribute to the increase of productivity of the company, particularly: i) skills of "commercial management" that allow a deep knowledge of the market behaviour besides skills that contribute to an efficiency resource management and greater customer satisfaction, ii) "tourist animation" skills that allow to respond to the evolution of the behaviour of the consumers that seek more and more for unique experiences and greater added value in them, and also iii) skills of "ethics and professional deontology" that enable the development of positive behaviours and attitudes in professional relationships, contributing, this way, to the creation of a harmonious professional environment.

Regarding to the management skills, the ones that were most highlighted by the entrepreneurs were those related to the capacity of taking strategic decisions as well as the ability to influence the team in order to optimize the overall performance of the organization, specifically: i) "leadership" skills that allow to influence in a positive way the overall behaviours and mentalities of the team, in a formal or informal way, to achieve and pursue the common objectives of the organization, as well as ii) skills of "strategic management" that enables better decisions that lead to a better optimization of the processes and resources of the organizations.

Lastly, the "transversal skills" to which entrepreneurs gave a greater importance were those that allow a greater and better digital communication of their business, especially i) "E-business" skills that allow the application and creation of digital systems that enable a better management, promotion and revenue of the products or services commercialized by the companies and grant a better presence and notoriety of the company image in the various existing digital channels and ii) skills of "foreign languages" that allow the correct oral and written communication in foreign languages in the principal Portuguese inbound tourism markets.

Concluding, the profile of human resources in the Portuguese tourism sector should focus on acquiring skills that create harmonious teamwork professional environments, those ones that contribute to a better understanding of the market trends, skills that lead to efficient processes and strategic decisions that allow a better management of the organization resources as well as language skills and digital skills that allow the improvement of the online image, communication and sales of the tourism companies and mainly those which allow companies to face future challenges.

In future research lines, it would be appropriate to replicate the study at a national level, seeking to identify the necessary qualifications for each subsector of economic activity and the respective regional differences as well as to apply it to the various types of professions.

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