

# THE PERCEPTION OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING IN THE PORTUGUESE LODGING INDUSTRY

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## ABSTRACT

*The perception of management accounting (MA) in the management of Portuguese hotels is a very interesting area of research, because it is important to be aware of the needs of hoteliers. Most hotels have been changing their management, so MA has changed too. A lot of MA techniques are concerned with the preparation of specialized information. MA techniques that are currently being used by different types of Portuguese hotels have been studied, and the importance given to them was investigated. One of the conclusions of the research is that MA techniques are used in Portuguese hotels especially for decision-making. A diversified use of MA in Portuguese hotels was found. However, it should be noted that when the decisions are made with the help of the subordinates, there is a greater use of MA techniques.*

**Keywords:** Management Accounting, Decision making, Lodging Industry, Hospitality management.

## INTRODUCTION

This study aims to analyze the perception of the management accounting (MA) in the management of Portuguese hotels. There are a lot of MA techniques that are very important for all of kinds of the managers, such as break-even point, budgeting, product costing techniques. So it is imperative to be aware if managers of Portuguese hotels have the same opinion. Most hotels have been changing their MA techniques, because the environment is changing all the time. So, management accounting has also changed to provide the necessary information. According to Yalcin (2012) MA techniques differ along the countries and along the organizations. Chong (1996) thinks that accounting information reduces the uncertainty of managers in their decisions. Zounta & Bekiaris (2009) refer the necessity of using accounting information because it will improve the decisions of hotel managers. According to Mia e Patiar (2001) and Yalcin (2012), the hotel managers use MA techniques for both short-term and long-term decisions. The present research project has selected as object of the study, the Portuguese hotels. The sample includes 61 hotels, which were analyzed in the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. What the hotel managers think about the importance of MA in the management of hotel is our purpose of this study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Management accounting is an important part of information system with a key role in decision-making for all organizations (Aver & Cadez, 2009, Brewer et al., 2013 & Zare et al., 2013). In the recent years MA has seen a strong evolution. Zare et al. (2013) and William & Seaman (2002) refer that some evolution in MA allows better decision-making, because the information becomes more relevant. The use of MA improves the quality of decision-

making (Zounta & Bekiaris, 2009; Shoosmuangpak, 2011). Zounta & Bekiaris (2009) proved this through a study to Greek Luxury Hotels. MA presents some features very important for the managers like relevance, reliability, comparability (Zare et al., 2013). Taking in consideration Williams & Seaman (2002), there is a proliferation of new MA techniques, what provides value-added information for decision-making. The benefits of changes in MA are to produce relevant information to managers. Veeken and Wouters (2002) confirmed that higher-level managers used accounting information as an output measure, so they need the information to know what projects deserve their attention. Accounting information may be particularly informative for cost control during execution. Acquaah (2013) says that MA techniques help the definition of the business strategy of an organization and the performance assessment. The internal decision-making and the cause effect relationship can require a lot of specific models, where MA can answer several questions. Indeed, MA can provide detailed information about the future, and this information allows decrease costs implying an increase of the results (Faria et al., 2012 & Brewer et al., 2013). Raab et al. (2009) and Vaugh et al. (2010) corroborate saying that MA techniques are important to understand the cost structure of organization which is very useful to understand the profitability. Decision-making should be based on MA techniques or in accounting information (Williams & Seaman, 2002; Zounta & Bekiaris, 2009; Shoosmuangpak, 2011). In the opposite sense, Jawabreh (2012) analyzed the relationship between accounting information system and decision-making in four and five star Jodhpur Hotels, but they have not found any relationship between accounting information and decision-making.

The main function of MA is to provide important information for the managers, who need high quality information for decision-making. However, the utility of MA it is not only for managers but also for the employees of the organization (Aver & Cadez, 2009, Brewer et al., 2013 & Zare et al., 2013). Though Tillmann and Goddard (2008) refer the importance of MA, but the managers have to know how to use it. Teles et al. (2013) say that the controller is fundamental in the decision-making. When the hotels were analyzed in the states of Brazil like Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná, it was found that the controller make more operational decisions than strategic decisions. Contrasting, Aver & Cadez (2009) refer that contemporary management accountants participate to the strategic decision-making process. This participation changes accordingly to the organization. However, it is high in tourism and hospitality. Strategic decisions are riskier than operational decision. In Slovenia, management accounts have an active role in strategic management processes. Cadez & Guilding (2008) confirm this idea when they refer that management accountants are no longer information providers but they belong to the decision-making team. It should be noted that Alves (2002) studied the purpose of using contemporary techniques of management accounting in Portuguese manufacturing companies, presenting three possible purposes: decision-making, planning and control. He has found that most uses for the techniques of contemporary management accounting have the purpose of control. Specifically, benchmarking, activity based costing and target cost are used for control purposes. The customer profitability analysis is widely used in the monitoring and decision-making, while the product life cycle costing is used in decision-making, control and planning.

The hotels have characteristics that may influence MA such as perishable services intangibility, production and use at the same time, heterogeneity and intensity of labor (Downie, 1997; Faria et al., 2012). The hotels have been changing their management, because the environment is changing as well. During the last years, the hotel industry expanded and offered new services/products like rent conference facilities (Field, 2006). Zounta & Bekiaris (2009) refer a list of tourism products: lodging service, food service and beverage service, telecommunications service, laundry service, swimming pool service, safe deposit service and health service. Lamminmaki (2008) and Faria et al. (2012) refers that hotels face competition in different levels, such as brand image, market segment and price. It should be noted, that the competition depends of the location of the hotel, for example if there is some hotel nearby. Pavlatos and Paggios (2008) made a research in Greece, concerning the accounting techniques adopted by hotel units, concluding that traditional techniques have a greater use. Gomes et al. (2011) and Santos et al. (2013) reached the same conclusion regarding the Portuguese hotels, and Faria et al. (2012) when analyzed Algarve's hotels. The organizations give more importance to traditional MA techniques than to contemporary MA techniques. For several authors traditional MA techniques have a greater use if compare with contemporary MA techniques (Uyar and Bilgins, 2011). According to Faria et al. (2012) Budget is the technique with a higher utilization. However, there is poor use of Activity-Based Costing, Customer Profitability Analysis and Balanced Scorecard.

For the hotels that compete in a market of new services, the use of the new MA techniques is greater (Zounta & Bekiaris, 2009). According to Mia & Patiar (2001) there is not a big relationship between level of competition and

the use of MA techniques. However there are exceptions, such as for the pricing, customer satisfaction and profitability. In these cases the managers use MA techniques for obtaining information. The managers use the MA techniques for long term decisions. They use more financial indicators for the evaluation of employee performance. Jawabreh (2012) refers that the use of accounting information it is more important in environments surrounded by uncertainty, but, Williams & Seaman (2002) and Veecken and Wouters (2002) say that the uncertainty of the task does not influence the use of MA. According to Lamminmaki (2008), the relationship between accounting system and outsourcing decision depends of several factors. Some authors consider there is a relationship between organizational practices and the MA (Tillmann and Godard, 2008; Mouritson et al., 2009). Proponents of decentralization argue that companies adopt the MA techniques when the decision-making is held by different people within the organization (Gunasekaran et al., 1999). Sugijanto & Priyono (2013) refer that the increased of decentralization will be influence positively the decision-making. According to Cadez & Guilding (2008) strategy influences the success of MA. There are some MA techniques that exhibit a strategic orientation like costing, planning, performance measures, control and customer accounting. A prospector strategy and a market orientation become MA more important.

## **HYPOTHESES**

According to the literature, for most companies, the main objective of MA techniques is the decision-making process. It also is necessary to find out if adoption of MA has a relationship with the management of hotel. The hotel managers use MA information accordingly with their needs or purposes. However, there are several determinants that influence the relationship between MA and decision-making. In this study we analyzed the competition intensity, the perceived environmental uncertainty, the decentralization, the prospector strategy and the market orientation. The following hypotheses were formulated with these five variables: H1: The main objective of MA is the decision-making process; H2: MA is appropriate for the management functions; H3: The biggest users of MA techniques are the hotels where MA is considered important for a specify purpose; H4: The competition influences the use of MA techniques for decision-making; H5: The environments surrounded by uncertainty influences the use of MA techniques for decision-making; H6: The decentralization influences the use of MA techniques for decision-making; H7: The prospector strategy influences the use of MA techniques for decision-making; H8: The market orientation influences the use of MA techniques for decision-making.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The researchers use personal interviews for developing a questionnaire. It was adopted a quantitative approach (Yin, 2009). The interviews were conducted to the responsible of MA from the Portuguese Hotels through all over the country. The questionnaire structure was adopted from Gomes (2007) and it was used in our previous studies (Gomes et al. 2011; Santos et al. 2013). The sample includes 61 hotels from different categories and regions from Portugal, which were analyzed in the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. From these, 5 are foreign hotels, 54 are national hotels and 2 have some percentage of foreign capital. The annual turnover ranges from 16,000€ to 60,000,000€. Most hotels belong to Leiria (50.8%) and Lisbon (37.7%). In the statistical analysis, descriptive analysis, such as frequency and percentage, was used. Mann-Whitney test and Kruskal-Wallis test were performed to identify the relationship among hotel groups (Pestana and Gageiro, 2008). The variables used in the empirical study are nominal and ordinal (measured on a seven-point scale). The factor analysis was carried out and the reliability analysis conducted to ensure the internal consistency of the variables (Kaiser-Meyer-Olking (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Cronbach alpha coefficient and the Bartlett test of Sphericity).

## **FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

In this study, of the 61 hotels, 78.7% (48) have implemented and use MA. The 13 units that do not use this practice are small hotels and work a long time ago. The MA techniques most used by inquiries are Budgeting, Budget Deviation Analysis and Strategic Planning, with 81.3%, 68.7% and 69.3% respectively. This corroborates with what is described in the literature review. The hotels use MA mainly with the purpose of supporting their decision-making process (79.2%), the budgeting process (70.8%), elaboration of income and loss statements (64,6%), support management information systems (62.5%), estimate cost of products/services (54.2%) and calculate gross margin per

product/service (52.1%). So the **H1** is not rejected. The decision-making process is a priority. However it is important to highlight that hotel managers consider important MA beyond the decision-making. The hotel managers (more than 50%) have chosen other alternatives. It should be emphasized that MA is not considered very important for pricing. This corroborates with the literature which states that the price information comes from the market.

Is MA appropriate to several management functions? The conclusion is that the functions to which this information is more appropriate are to support the decision-making process and to estimate cost of products/services, with a mean score of 5.87 and 5.66 respectively. However, for all of the management functions the mean is greater than 4, except for the evaluation of human resources, where MA is inadequate. Through the Mann-Whitney test, it was defined H0: The distribution of adequate MA is the same across the categories of users of MA for purpose of using MA. Ha: The distribution of adequate is different across the categories of users of MA for purpose of using MA. The opinion of the managers is the same about the suitability of MA, because H0 it is not reject. Regardless of the chosen purpose, the managers have the same opinion about the suitable of MA. However there are some minor exceptions. When the purpose is Elaboration of Income and loss statement, the MA is more suitable for the profitability of customers for the hotel managers that have chosen this purpose. When the purpose is Decision-making, the MA is more suitable for the Profitability of products and services for the hotel managers that have not chosen this purpose. So it is not reject **H2**.

Then it was analyzed if the use of the techniques changes according to the purpose chosen (over 50% of responses). The Mann-Whitney test was chosen with the following Hypothesis: Ho: The distribution of use MA techniques is the same across the categories of purpose of using MA. Ha: The distribution of use MA techniques is different across the categories of purpose of using MA, with a significance level of 0.05. The H0 for the purpose of Estimate cost of products/services and Calculate gross margin per product/service is not rejected. The use of MA is the same in the hotels that use MA for these purposes or not. However, when Elaboration of Income and loss statement is chosen, some differences were found in the use of Tableau de Bord, Return on Investment, Activity-Based Costing and Product Life Cycle Costing. In hotels which have chosen this purpose, there is a greater use of these techniques with a significance level of 0.05. When Decision-making is chosen, it was found some differences of use in Customer Profitability Analysis. In hotels which have chosen this purpose, there is a greater use of this technique with a significance level of 0.05. When Support management information systems is chosen, it was found some differences of use in Budgeting, Budget Deviation Analysis, Product Profitability techniques, Tableau de Bord, Return on Investment Benchmarking. In hotels which have chosen this purpose, there is a greater use of this technique with a significance level of 0.05. In other words the differences are not significant for some purposes. However for some purposes and MA techniques there are significant differences. So it was rejected partly **H3**.

In order to analyze the intensity of competition, taking into account the importance that is given to management accounting for decision-making, it was compared the levels of competition (price, labor force, buying of goods, promotion) between the two groups. It was chosen the Mann-Whitney test, where it was defined the following Hypothesis: Ho: The distribution of intensity of competition is the same across the categories of decision-making. Ha: The distribution of intensity of competition is different across the categories of decision-making. It was not rejected the H0. The intensity of competition is the same in the hotels that use MA for decision-making or not. So it was rejected **H4**.

The perceived environmental uncertainty can be measure by several variables. The power of the forces affecting the industry from Porter (1985), the external environment faced by the company in terms of homogeneity and heterogeneity, the degree of expansion of the main market where the company operates, it was the variables chosen. These last two issues have already been used by Ferreira (2002). It was created the variable power forces, through of the six items (rivalry among existing competitors, threat of new entrants, threat of substitute products or services, power of suppliers, power of buyers, government). So it was analyzed, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olking (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.66 and the Bartlett test of Sphericity was 82.068,  $p < 0,001$ . The Cronbach alpha coefficients were 0.725 for the power (power forces), which indicates satisfactory internal reliability for the variable. So, it was constructed the variable power, calculated by the arithmetic mean of the six individual variables that characterize the power of the forces affecting the industry. It was created the variable environment, through of the three items (customers, competitors and market). So it was analyzed, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olking (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.566 (it is bad but allowable) and the Bartlett test of Sphericity was 50.066,  $p < 0,001$ . The

Cronbach alpha coefficients were 0.736 for the environment (homogeneity and heterogeneity of the environment), which indicates satisfactory internal reliability for the variable. So, it was constructed the variable environment, calculated by the arithmetic mean of the three individual variables that characterize the environment of the industry. The third variable (the degree of expansion of the main market) it was a taking account the question that it was made to the hotel managers. If the two groups (the users of MA for decision-making and the not users of MA for decision-making) were compared about the power, environment and expansion, it was found that the mean is higher in the users of MA in the case of environment and expansion. Regarding the variable power, the situation is reversed. It was chosen the Mann-Whitney test, to confirm, if there any difference between the two groups. Thus, with the following Hypothesis: Ho: The distribution of power/environment/expansion is the same across the categories of use MA for decision-making. Ha: The distribution of power/environment/expansion is different across the categories of use of MA for decision-making. It is not rejected the H0 with a significance of 5%, because there is not a significantly difference between the two groups. So **H5** is rejected.

On the variable that study the hierarchical level to which the decision is made, when the value is near of seven, it means that the decision made is done at the level of top management. According to the use of MA for decision-making, the use of MA in decision-making is higher when the decisions are decentralized, for example, they are taken at the level of operational management. However the difference is not significant, through the Mann-Whitney test. The kind of decisions was analyzed: makes decisions quickly and communicates to his subordinates firmly (43.8%), makes decisions quickly but tries to explain all the reasons before moving (33.3%) do not make decisions before consulting their subordinates (10.4%) and presents the problem to the group and try to get a consensus (12.5%). The Kruskal-Wallis test was chosen, which is used to test the equality hypothesis (Pestana and Gageiro, 2008) with the following hypothesis: H0: The distribution of the use of MA techniques among all types of decisions is equal in central tendency, and Ha: The distribution of the use of MA techniques among all types of decisions is not equal in central tendency. According to the Kruskal-Wallis test, the null hypothesis is not rejected, except for the techniques Budgeting, Budget Deviation Analysis, Product Life Cycle Costing and Activity based budgeting, where the null hypothesis is rejected to a significance level of 0.05. In the four groups considered, these techniques have a different central tendency. It was identified that the management accounting techniques are most effective when the decision is taking only after consulting their subordinates. So H6 is not rejected.

In order to analyze the prospector strategy, four variables were chosen: Changes in the product portfolio, Technological changes, Changes in the information systems and Changes in the diversity of products. When the value is near of 7, it means there is a prospector strategy in the hotel. So taking into account the importance that is given to management accounting for decision-making, the mean of the four variables was compared between the two groups. The hotels in the sample have a slight prospector strategy, whereas those do not use MA for decision-making have biggest Changes in the product portfolio, Technological changes, Changes in the information systems and Changes in the diversity of products. In order to verify if the differences were significant, the Mann-Whitney test was chosen, with the following Hypothesis: Ho: The distribution of variables of prospector strategy is the same across the categories of decision-making. Ha: The distribution of variables of prospector strategy is different across the categories of decision-making. H0 is not rejected. The prospector strategy is the same in the hotels that use MA for decision-making or not. So H7 is rejected.

In order to analyze the market orientation, taking into account the importance that is given to management accounting for decision-making, the mean of levels of market orientation was compared between the two groups. When the value is close to 7 it means that the hotel has a market orientation. The mean is equal to 4.61 when MA is used for decision-making, while the mean is equal to 4.8 when MA not for decision-making. The hotels in the sample present a market orientation, whereas those do not use MA for decision making have a biggest market orientation. In order to verify if the differences were significant, the Mann-Whitney test was chosen with the following Hypothesis: Ho: The distribution of market orientation is the same across the categories of decision-making. Ha: The distribution of market orientation is different across the categories of decision-making. H0 is rejected. The market orientation is the same in the hotels that use MA for decision-making or not. So H8 is rejected.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is a relationship between the management accounting (MA) and the hotels management, as well as there are several MA techniques that are very important for the managers. It is important the use of MA information to allow the optimization of the decision-making processes, due to the fact of them facing different kinds of competition and environments of uncertainty. The MA techniques used frequently in the hotels studied are Budgeting, Budget Deviation Analysis and Strategic planning. This corroborates with several authors cited in the literature. MA techniques are used in Portuguese hotels especially for decision-making and the budgeting process. However, there are other MA purposes considered very important for Portuguese hoteliers like elaboration of income and loss statement, support management information systems, estimate cost of products/services and calculate gross margin per product/service. Taking into account if the information supplied by management accounting would be adequate to several management functions, Support the decision process and Estimate cost of products/services had more adequacies. There was not adequacy for evaluation of human resources. It was tested if the use of the MA techniques changes according to the MA purpose chosen. In general, according to the tests done, there are not significant differences. Despite the fact that for some MA purposes significant differences occur - in other words, when Support management information systems is chosen, there are some differences of use in Budgeting, Budget Deviation Analysis, Product Profitability techniques, Tableau de Bord, Return on Investment and Benchmarking. In hotels which have chosen this purpose, there is a greater use of these techniques. However, the situation will be different if the kinds of decisions realized by the hoteliers are analyzed - if the hotel managers only make decisions after consulting their subordinates, there are significant differences. This kind of decision uses more MA techniques (Budgeting, Budget Deviation Analysis, Product Life Cycle Costing and Activity based budgeting). It is important to refer that when the decision is made at the operational management level the use of MA techniques is higher.

Several hypotheses were tested for finding determinants that influence the use of MA techniques for decision-making, such as competition, environment surround by uncertainty, decentralization of the decisions, prospector strategy and market orientation. Based on Mann-Whitney test, there is not relationship between these determinants and the use of MA techniques for the decision-making. Thus, it was confirmed that there is not a strong relationship between level of competition and the use of MA techniques, an idea previously transmitted by Mia & Patiar (2001). It was also confirmed that the uncertainty of a task does not imply the use of MA, an idea already mentioned by William & Seaman (2002) and Veeken and Wouters (2002). There is not an agreement with Cadez & Guilding (2008) in respect to the relationship between prospector strategy and market orientation with the use of MA for decision-making.

In conclusion, when the decision is made with the help of the subordinates, there is a greater use of MA techniques. This corroborates with the idea of Aver & Cadez (2009), Brewer et al. (2013) & Zare et al. (2013), the utility of MA it is not only for managers but for all the employees of the organization.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is clear from this investigation that management accounting is very important to hoteliers, because it is a source of information for their decision-making, budgeting process and support management information systems. The hotel managers must optimize the process by choosing MA techniques according to the employees that will use them. When the decision is made with the help of the subordinates, there is a greater use of MA techniques.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was done for three years, so our answers are not in the same cyclical period. It was studied a few determinants, but according with the contingency theory there are more factors that can influence the management accounting techniques. There is an opportunity of analyzing in more details these findings in future research projects and extended this research to others countries. This study could also help academic institutions to define their research orientation.

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