THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISTIC SERVICES THROUGH INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING. STUDY CASE: ROMANIA AND SPAIN

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Abstract

The present research aims to establish and to design the development strategies for services in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that activate in the tourism field of activity (hotels and other accommodation establishments, restaurants, passenger transport, travel agencies, cultural tourism agencies).

Organizational learning is focused on the learning process in the organization which has direct influence on the goods and services produced. Learning activities, carried out individually, are not easily transferred at the organizational level.

Moreover, in order to better highlight the weaknesses and the strengths of touristic services management approaches and to define recommendations, our research theme is developed as comparative study: similarities and differences within SMEs touristic services and learning organization practices in Romania and other European Union's country members (the example of Spain was considered).

Introduction

Our goal is to identify and formulate proposals aimed to improve the SMEs activities and performances from the perspective of the touristic services, as we believe this situational context represents a scientific and practical challenge.

We have chosen the services area for our investigation as it has gained a permanent role within SMEs (Beardwell and Holden, 2001, pp.272-273), agencies and nations, increasingly not only as an academic discipline, but as a central theme in the development area (Popescu et al., 2010, p.49). Behind SMEs performances there are human resources (Vasiliu, 2009, pp.83-93). Being a combination of individual and organizational learning, in

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a broad context of adequate human resources policies (Sutherland and Canwell, 2004, pp.163-168), the development of services ensures the continual improvement and growth of both individual and organization. Furthermore, a new period of human civilization appears, a superior way of life, which involves intensive utilization of information in all areas of production and consumption, involving the human factor as producer and consumer, having an important economic and social impact (Petrescu et. al., 2010, pp.267-285).

SMEs represent the most numerous and important category of enterprises, with multiple economic, technical and social functions (Popescu et al., 2010, p. 51). SMEs are the most dynamic and vital factor of progress in the contemporary society, main generator of economic performance and substance in any country, major contributor to the national budget, and engine to improve the living standard of the population. The rights and goodwill of consumers are more and more important, especially within the present economic climate (Dinu, Marchevski, Dobrescu and Petrescu, 2010, pp.709-710), and SMEs are drawing up the main human resources agglomeration. Furthermore, SMEs generate the most of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in every country - usually 55%-95%, provide employment for most of population.

In the context of The European Union forming a group of countries with the most intense concerns and performance in supporting and encouraging SMEs, globalization involves an uniformity of managerial practices and organizational behaviors (Yamnil, McLean, 2001, pp.195-208), which are in an incipient way for SMEs in service sector (Olaru et al., 2010, pp.10-26). This is an additional a reason to adopt a comparative approach of HRD from EU countries.

Investigating the correlation between managers' approach to motivating the human resources and organizational activity performances represents the start-up of a research that could lead us to results to be developed afterwards. For instance, the influence of superior-trained and well-motivated human resources on the SMEs outcomes can be extended to the influence upon the tourism domain and the economy service sector.

The main objective of the paper: The present paper aims to analyze, the managers opinion regarding the compatibility between positively motivated employees, using individual and organizational learning, and the development of SMEs services.

Secondary objectives of the paper:

• to set-up an economic interpretation for motivated employees (positively or negatively), considering the similarities and differences between European Union's country members;

• to establish in what measure positively motivated employees can provide a competitive advantage for the Romanian and Spanish SMEs.

1. Hypothesis of the research

Three main hypotheses were formulated relevant to the role of human resources motivation and development in SMEs on one side, and sustainable economic performance on the other side. Based on the previously mentioned objectives, the research hypotheses are:

 • *Within the organization, employees represent an important, strategic resource, main creators of economic added value and economic performance.* The rise of the service economy, the increasingly flow of global information, and the growing recognition of the importance of intellectual capital are turning employees knowledge and abilities into a key resource and a source of competitive advantage for the organizations in the global economy.

 • *Based on the human resources management practices, SMEs managers could support the compatibility between positively motivated employees and superior performances of the enterprises they belong to.*

 • *Within the contemporary economic context, SMEs development and performance can be achieved by human resources development programs and concerns, through learning activities and knowledge-based activities, especially if we consider that learning organization:*

 - depends on the employees education level and on the facilities employees have at their work place;

 - can take place in the organization (indoor development) or outside the organization (outdoor development).

In order to test these three hypotheses, as a continuation of a research started in 2000, connected to SMEs birth rates and death rates, a number of 117 managers and entrepreneurs were interviewed. The results of these interviews were analyzed in the following empirical part of our paper.

2. Research methodology

The methodology used is a logical consequence of the research questions applied within the survey, representing a first step in choosing the qualitative/quantitative approach. For our research, the key question is: In what measure managers from the SMEs that activate in the field of tourism consider that positively motivated employees determine highly organizational performances?

We have chosen the qualitative path as it refers to managers opinion upon employees motivation-employees performance connection.

2.1 Size and structure of the sample

Acknowledging the importance of HRD and SMEs performances, we realized a study on a sample of 117 respondents that belong to SMEs from tourism domain: Accommodation, Restaurants, Passenger Transports, Travel Agencies and Cultural Tourism Organizations, from different regions of the two countries taken into consideration, measuring 19 variables. The results are based on a study performed in September and October 2010 in different regions of two EU members (Romania and Spain) and confirm the research hypothesis regarding HRD and its contribution to SMEs performances.

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Research design

In underlying the research, we have taken into consideration the numerous answers received from the 117 respondents. Each question was formulated in order to answer, directly or indirectly to the research hypothesis. The questionnaire includes general, easy-to-answer, closed questions, in order to make the tasks easier for the respondent. A second part is reserved to issues regarding the SMEs profitability and economic performances (Howell and David, 1997, 120-129) and the third part refers to human resources performances. The main purpose of the research is strongly connected to the answers received from the second and third part of the questionnaire.

The first questions (1-6) are indirect ones, related to the purpose of the research. They refer to the organization's size, tradition and other factors that may influence the basic features of the organization's dimension and activity. Their purpose is to fix the analyzed entities into a specific, determined area of investigation (Eurostat, 2011). In this context, we appreciate that, basic factors as market experience, number of employees or field of activity, may influence, in different ways, the quality and the work results of the employees.

The second part (questions 7-14) aims to get indirect answers in order to establish human resources work outcomes within the organization (expressed by the productivity evolution).

Third part of the questionnaire (questions 15-20) is directly related to human resources practices (which is the managers opinion about the motivation alternatives) and to material and non-material stimulants and facilities given to employees.

First, the authors obtained the validity of the questionnaire on core values employed in this study. The initial version of the questionnaire was sent as a pilot survey to Spain SMEs in order to ensure the accuracy of questions relative to the core values. After completing the questionnaire, feedback was asked to managers for improving questions precision. Afterwards, a revised version of the survey was sent to Spain and Romanian SMEs.

2.2 Statistical Instruments

The data was analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Scientists (SPSS) 16.0 and yielded multiple results that are presented synthetically in the present paper. Therefore, the most significant results are highlighted, with a focus on the profile characteristics, and the detailed secondary correlations (Cohen, 1988, pp.81-95).

Work method: Primary data, through structured questionnaire, were collected from a sample of 117 respondents (response rate of survey: 56,80%), randomly selected from among the SMEs engaged in tourism types of activity. The survey elaborated by the researchers group consisted of 20 items. The research adopted a survey method to collect data on the SMEs general characteristics (field of activity, form of propriety, market experience, geographical position, legal form of organization), organization performance (turnover and profit evolution, tangible assets contribution, average number of services, organization's turnover structure, first three clients and suppliers importance), human resources performance (employees level of motivation, education, average number of training days, average wage, facilities for employees) (Mintzberg, 2004, pp. 87-89*)*.

Descriptive Mathematics

We have obtained the main values of the research by applying *the weighted mean* and by respecting the frequency distribution imposed by the questionnaire answers alternatives.

$$\overline{x} = \frac{n_1 v_1 + n_2 v_2 + \dots + n_n v_n}{n} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} n_i v_i \qquad (1)$$

Because of the SMEs classification criteria, the data obtained differs significantly, so we have calculated *partial means* for every type of collectivity. *Partial means* are also called *glisant means* or *mobile means*, used for large fluctuations in the values string, when is difficult to calculate the tendency. The calculation is made considering a number of *m* closed values (Levin, 1999, pp.35-42).

$$\overline{x_{glis,m}} = \frac{x_{i-2} + x_{i-1} + x_i + x_{i+1} + x_{i+2}}{m} \qquad (2)$$

The standard deviation (σ) is calculated as squared mean of all series elements deviations from the main value.

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{\sum \left(x_i - \overline{x}\right)^2}{n}} \qquad (3)$$

This indicator is relevant for applying the square lift. A greater importance to absolute value deviations is given, which influences, in a higher way, the deviation degree of the analyzed variables.

The variation coefficient (*v*) is calculated as a report between *the standard deviation* and *the arithmetic mean*. The values of this indicator are subunit ones (Levin, 1999, pp.50-56).

$$v = \frac{\sigma}{\overline{x}} \cdot 100 \qquad (4)$$

The closer to zero the value of *v is,* the less the value of the variance is. Furthermore, the collectivity is more homogeneous and the degree of representativeness is higher. The bigger the value of *v is,* the larger the value of the variance is. As a consequence, the collectivity is less homogeneous and the degree of representativeness is smaller.

3. Results of the study

From all 117 respondents, 86 are from Romania and 31 are from Spain. Both for countries, the micro and small enterprises (less than 49 employees) number is higher than medium ones (more than 50 employees), due to the fact that their number (as a general tendency) is smaller and, also, due to contextual barriers (the access for organizing an interview may be more reduced).

All organizations that have participated to the survey were classified into two main categories, according to the size criterion: small enterprises (0-49 employees) and medium

enterprises (more than 50 employees). As we expected, the survey demonstrated that the majority of the answers came from the small enterprises. The success for the tourism business is based on human component and, especially on the level of human involvement in providing touristic services (Costică et al., 2008, pp.136-141).

Encouraging harmony and work comfort by giving equal material advantages to employees (bonuses, prizes, professional and leisure facilities, agreeable work climate) is a management practice in SMEs (table no.1). Comparing the two set of results (Romanian and Spanish SMEs), the first information is that both Romanian and Spanish managers do not agree to identical type of motivation for different employee performances. Meanwhile, within Spanish SMEs the attitude towards this hypothesis is rather uniform distributed between neutral, agree and strongly agree alternatives, Spanish managers tend to agree (more than 60% of the respondents from all types of touristic organizations). This indicates a general concern of the managers to different approaches of personnel motivation according to distinct performance levels. The questionnaire results infirm hypothesis 1 and sustains the human resources complex approaches within SMEs from a service field of activity.

Table no. 1: Hypothesis 1 of the research (%)

ROMANIA			*Accommodation*	*Restaurants*	*Travel Agencies*	*Others*
Company size	Small enterprises	*Strongly disagree*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Disagree	1.50	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Neutral	6.70	10.72	26.00	13.00
		Agree	77.20	83.50	65.00	74.00
		Strongly agree	14.60	5.78	9.00	13.00
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*
	Medium enterprises	*Strongly disagree*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Disagree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Neutral	5.80	5.30	3.10	2.00
		Agree	86.40	91.30	88.70	98.00
		Strongly agree	7.80	3.40	8.20	0.00
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*
SPAIN			*Accommodation*	*Restaurants*	*Travel Agencies*	*Others*
Company size	Small enterprises	*Strongly disagree*	0.00	2.10	0.00	0.00
		Disagree	2.90	4.00	6.10	0.00
		Neutral	43.00	35.00	23.20	0.00
		Agree	28.40	51.30	38.30	0.00
		Strongly agree	25.70	7.60	32.40	100.00
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*
	Medium enterprises	*Strongly disagree*	1.00	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Disagree	7.40	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Neutral	39.50	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Agree	43.80	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Strongly agree	9.30	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*

Source: exploratory survey performed in September-October 2010

Not offering any supplementary advantage to employees, except the wage could generate the same organizational performances, as no employee would have the tendency to leave his working places, given the difficult present economical and social conditions (table no.2). The global economic crisis also affected the tourism domain. This fact is confirmed by the managers' answers related to supplementary motivation elements for their employees: as for Romania and Spain, most of the answers correspond to neutral, agree and strongly agree alternatives. Being aware of the lack of alternatives of their employees, managers do not concern seriously about special types of motivation and act mostly guided by predetermined arguments: employees do not have any alternatives for leaving the job, so there is no need for management to make special effort in human resources motivation. This types of managerial behavior confirms hypothesis 2.

In order to achieve a competitive advantage, SMEs need to be able to learn faster than their competitors and also develop a responsive culture (Richman-Hirsh, 2001, pp. 105-120). In light of these pressures, modern organizations need to maintain knowledge about new products and processes (Wells and Schminke, 2001, pp. 135-158), understand what is happening in the outside environment and produce creative using the knowledge and skills of all employed within the organization. This requires co-operation between individuals and groups, free and reliable communication, and a culture of trust (Yamnil and McLean, 2001, pp.73-84).

Table no. 2: Hypothesis 2 of the research (%)

ROMANIA			*Accommodation*	*Restaurants*	*Travel Agencies*	*Others*
Company size	Small enterprises	*Strongly disagree*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Disagree	18.20	32.80	29.70	0.00
		Neutral	19.80	8.70	11.30	0.00
		Agree	34.20	25.80	30.00	0.00
		Strongly agree	27.80	32.70	29.00	100.00
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*
	Medium enterprises	*Strongly disagree*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Disagree	8.30	5.40	6.50	34.60
		Neutral	12.40	14.00	23.00	13.00
		Agree	56.30	45.60	57.00	20.00
		Strongly agree	23.00	35.00	13.50	32.40
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*
SPAIN			*Accommodation*	*Restaurants*	*Travel Agencies*	*Others*
Company size	Small enterprises	*Strongly disagree*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Disagree	3.90	13.40	20.00	0.00
		Neutral	45.00	23.00	29.00	0.00
		Agree	23.00	36.00	34.00	80.00
		Strongly agree	28.10	27.60	17.00	20.00
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*

Medium enterprises	*Strongly disagree*	0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Disagree	9.2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Neutral	16.1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Agree	29.4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Strongly agree	45.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*

Source: exploratory survey performed in September-October 2010

Stimulating competition between employees and giving them material and immaterial advantages, according to their work results is the best way to high organizational performances (table no.3). Answers to questions related to hypothesis three of the research, indicates a active preoccupation of managers for rewarding employees after the work effort was made and economic performances were registered. According to the managers' answers, more than 85% of all types of the questioned enterprises choose to motivate their employees according to their previous performances. Hypothesis 3 is confirmed.

Table no. 3: Hypothesis 3 of the research (%)

ROMANIA			*Accommodation*	*Restaurants*	*Travel Agencies*	*Others*
Company size	Small enterprises	*All Equal*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Almost Equal	1.20	4.00	3.00	0.00
		Neutral	0.60	3.80	0.50	0.00
		Depends on performances	95.30	89.20	92.50	100.00
		Different	2.90	3.00	4.00	0.00
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*
	Medium enterprises	*All Equal*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Almost Equal	2.00	3.70	0.20	0.00
		Neutral	5.00	4.00	4.00	0.00
		Depends on performances	91.00	88.00	94.00	100.00
		Different	2.00	4.30	1.80	0.00
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*
SPAIN			*Accommodation*	*Restaurants*	*Travel Agencies*	*Others*
Company size	Small enterprises	*All Equal*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Almost Equal	0.00	2.00	2.00	0.00
		Neutral	1.00	1.00	5.00	0.00
		Depends on performances	96.00	94.00	87.00	98.00
		Different	3.00	3.00	6.00	2.00
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*
	Medium enterprises	*All Equal*	0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Almost Equal	0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Neutral	0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Depends on performances	96	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Different	4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*

Source: exploratory survey performed in September-October 2010

All these considered key-changes involving the transition to a competitive SMEs sector should take into consideration the following: creating and implementing human resources development strategies of SMEs, as a prerequisite to increase their performance in the new socio-economic context (Campo-Martinez et al., 2010, pp. 862-870). SMEs tend to give greater importance to human resources than larger organizations, because of the simplified hierarchical structure, which promotes greater interaction between management and execution personnel, and, furthermore, higher interest and commitment of organization employees. In our opinion, another solution represents innovation support within SMEs, fact also sustained by development and implementation of the scientific progress.

The variables used within the research, respectively the organization's economic performance (OEP), human resources material motivation (HRMM), human resources immaterial motivation (HRUM) are presented in table no. 4, while the results are presented in table no. 5.

Table no. 4: Main variables of the research

Variable name	Measurement scale	Variable type	Definition
OEP	Numerical (1-10)	Endogenous	*Organization economic performance*
HRMM	Numerical (1-5)	Explanatory	*Human resources material motivation*
HRUM	Numerical (1-5)	Explanatory	*Human resources immaterial motivation*

Table no. 5: Values of main variables of the research

Explanatory variables	Total sample 117	Medium Romania	Medium Spain	Small Romania	Small Spain
Mean value for OEP	*8,33*	9	8,30	7,25	8,05
Standard deviation	*1,1413*	1,1265	1,396	2,527	1,322
Variance	*1,996*	1,600	1,949	6,385	1,748
Mean value for HRMM	*3,95*	4,30	4,38	3,93	3,92
Standard deviation	*0,760*	0,825	0,707	0,704	0,688
Variance	*0,578*	0,678	0,500	0,495	0,474
Mean value for HRUM	*3,14*	3,13	3,14	5,50	1,67
Standard deviation	*3,185*	2,031	2,167	8,296	1,029
Variance	*10,142*	4,125	4,695	68,818	1,059

Some of the significant findings of the study tested under the standard deviations and variance assumptions are given below.

The importance given by managers of tourism enterprises to organizational performance tends to increase as the size of the firm becomes larger (from small to medium enterprises).

The importance given to Human resources material motivation is not distributed similarly across small and medium enterprises; managers are more likely give importance to employees' material motivation than to immaterial forms of motivation. The use of immaterial motivation is not correlated with the main variable – organization economical performance –fact sustained to the extremely high variance value (10,142). The dependent variable Human resources material motivation proved to be associated with the independent variable Organization economic performance. The standard deviation measures the error of the supposed association between the independent variable Organization economic

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performance and the dependent variable Human resources material motivation, with result less than 1 (0,760) – the error is accepted.

Conclusions

The results of the study demonstrate that managers' opinion regarding the way employees should be motivated corresponds with the research hypothesis: a different type and form of motivation should be applied for every employee, according to his/hers work results and performances. Furthermore, the learning capacity and knowledge sharing within SMEs consists of maintaining levels of innovation and remaining competitive, being better prepared to respond to external pressures, improving corporate image by becoming more people orientated. At the organizational level, a successful human resources development program will prepare the individual to undertake a higher level of work. Hypothesis 1 and 2 are confirmed.

Our research results confirm hypothesis 3: learning organization for services area has gained a permanent role within SMEs and ensures the continual improvement and growth of both individual and organization.

As part of the overall development strategy, learning organization for services area mainly refers to skilful provision and organization of learning experiences, in order that business goals and organizational growth can be achieved.

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