What to say about the work and health of hotel managers?

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Abstract

The job of hotel manager has not been frequently approached in the academic field, mostly in the area of human factors and ergonomics. There is a lack of bibliographies, researches and statistics related to the issues of managers, specially in the hotel industry.

The current article has a theoretical and conceptual nature and refers to part of an ongoing research in a hotel organization in the city of Natal, Brazil. It aims to discuss the work of hotel management, to understand the work of hotel managers and its relations with their health and the efficiency results expected by the upper command of the organization.

Managers have and ambivalent position in the organizations for they have to deal with the demands of higher hierarchies, which more often than not have conflicting interests. The context in which they work involves conflicting demands and interests at times, also coming from the outside world and which take place in the complex "board" of the organizational decisions taken: customers, competitions, unions, government organs, etc.

It starts from the hypothesis that the job of a hotel manager has a high density or intensity and that the time dedicated to the work by the managers normally goes beyond the regular daily and weekly working time established, which affects both their free time and social life.

Keywords: Hotel industry, managers, ergonomics

1 Tourism activity and hospitality

The World Tourist Barometer published (UNWTO, 2012), presents the tourism activity with a gradual growth every year. In their more recent studies, it has been notices that, in 2011, international tourism grew more than 4% compared to the previous year, which corresponds to 980 million international tourist arrivals (UNWTO, 2012, p.1). Observing figure 1, it is possible to see the growth in the activities besides a little drawback in the growth in 2009, as a result of an economic crisis which affected the world during that year.

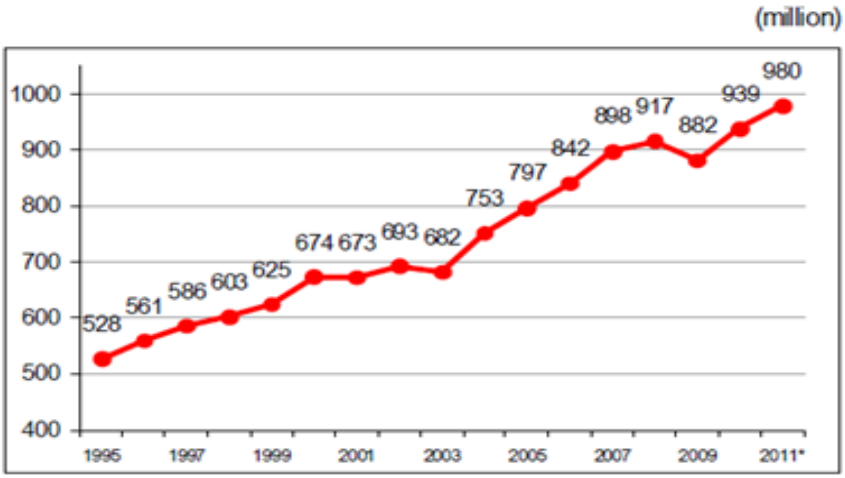

Figure 1: International Tourist Arrivals. Source: World Tourist Barometer, UNWTO, 2012, p.1.

The World Tourism Organization has positive projections for the activity in 2012. It is estimated more than 3% to 4% growth, compared to the previous year, which will help tourism reach the mark of 1 billion international tourist arrivals still in the year 2012 (UNWTO, 2012), as shown in the figure 2.

	2011	Projection 2012
World	+4.4%	+3% to +4%
Europe	+6.0%	+2% to +4%
Asia and the Pacific	+5.6%	+4% to +6%
Americas	+4.2%	+2% to +4%
Africa	+0.0%	+4% to +6%
Middle East	-8.0%	+0% to +5%

Figure 2: International Tourist: projection full year 2012. Source: World Tourist Barometer, UNWTO, 2012, p.12.

The prospect for the next years is to have an even bigger growth for the tourism industry, which according to the UNWTO, makes countries of emerging economies become more confident in terms of the development of the activity than countries of a more advanced economy, as shown in picture 3. Such confidence is due mostly to the heavy investments that such countries are doing to develop tourism activity through the production of sports mega-events and also investments in infrastructure in a more general way.

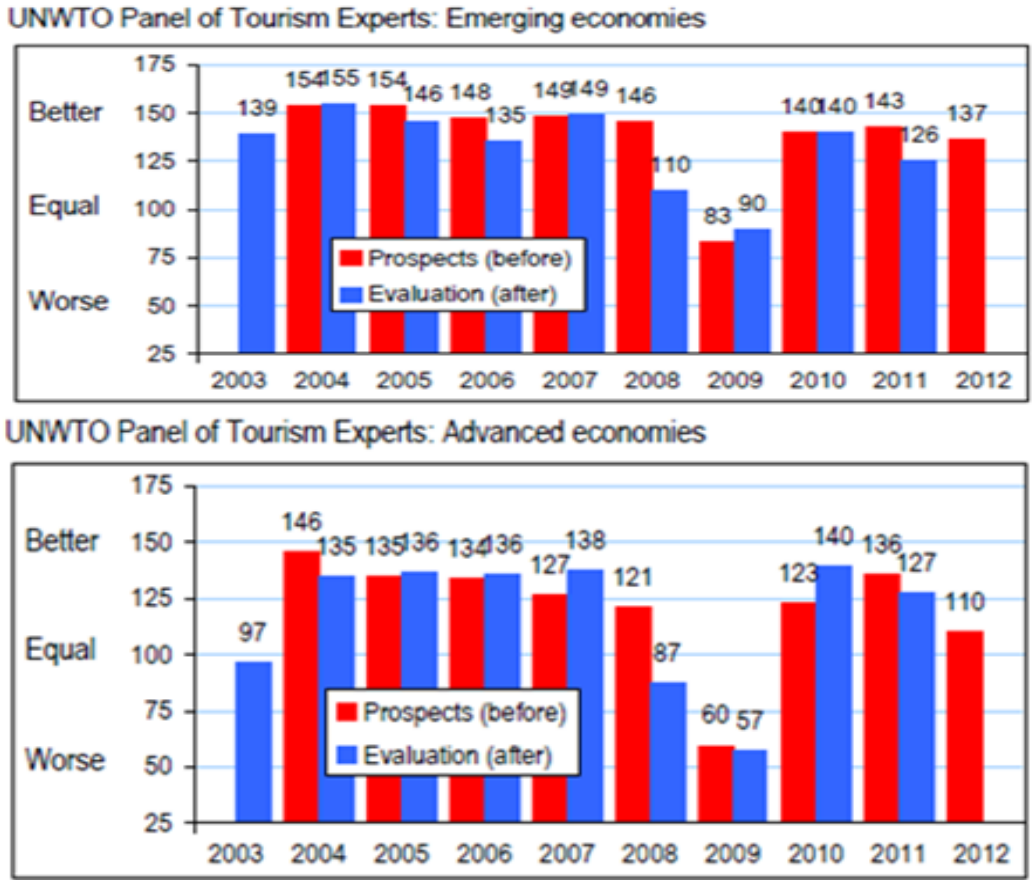

Figure 3: Confidence in emerging economies much stronger than in advanced economies. Source: World Tourist Barometer, UNWTO, 2012, p.10.

Brazil, for instance, is the 45th most competitive country in the world tourism sector, according to data from the World Economic Forum held in the 2011 in Switzerland (Switzerland, 2011). Furthermore, the Service Sector responds for the biggest growth in the job generation in the country, according to data

presented by CAGED – General File of Employees and Unemployed in Brazil (Brasil, 2012), through figure 4.

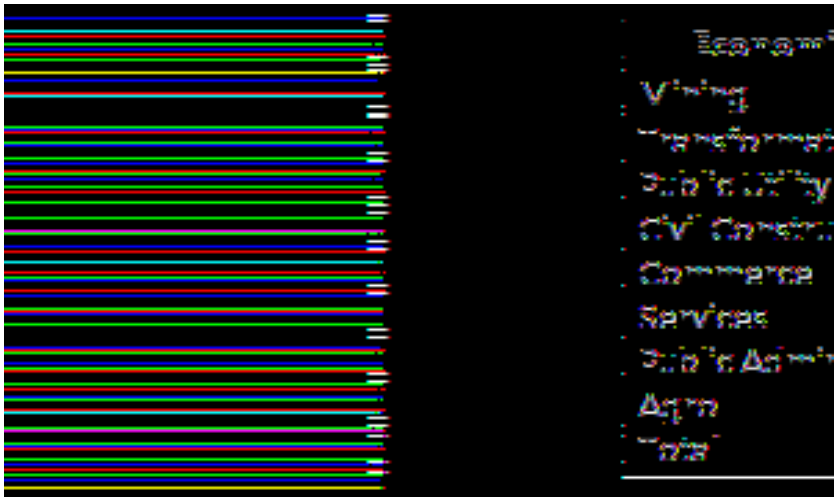

Figure 4: Employment behavior according to the Economic Activity Sectors. Source: Brasil, 2012 *apud* CAGED - Lei nº 4.923/65 - MTE.

In this promising scenario, the hotel sector in Brazil is preparing itself for the predictable and important increase in the demands of hospitality and service quality, moved by the demands of certification organs in the sector and the Federal Government as well. Hence, hotel managers stand on a singular position in a scenario of economic expansion and high competition in the sector. It is their duty to plan, implement and promote hotel governance, for the excellence in the quality of hotel service provision makes the difference for hotels in the growing competitive context of capitalism. Such competitive strategy has been followed by the demand of better qualified workers, including managers. That requires the master of social skills such as initiative, leadership, management and interpersonal relation – among workers and between themselves and the clients; also, technical skills are required, for instance, the operation of technologies so that the job becomes more fluid and presents better quality.

The investment in Information Technology shortens time and space in the hotel organizations, thus giving tasks more speed and work density (Wisner, 1994). In the case of the managers, the tasks they perform tend to increase as well as the impersonality of work operations: booking rooms and payments, once performed through interpersonal procedures now can be fully made online.

Such issue may be understood through organizational ergonomics, more precisely by macroergonomics in the sense of attempting to analyze managers' activities, the existing relationships between functional hierarchies, the hospitality demands in hotels, the departmentalization, work density, the job rotativity, managerial performance, quality and productivity criteria required and the impacts on the manager's health.

As a sub-discipline of ergonomics, macro-ergonomics deals with the human-organization interface. As an empiric science, macro-ergonomics has as its scope the technological subsystem, the personal subsystem, the external ambient, the organizational architecture and its interactions. Macroergonomics is guided by the Sociotechnical Theory of Systems. As a methodology, macro-ergonomics uses socio technical analysis of the work system and the project of work system. As a perspective, macro-ergonomics provides certain principles and guidelines to help the ergonomist, such as *participation, flexibility, combined optimization, combined project, continuous improvement of processes and systems harmonization* (Hendrick and Kleiner, 2006, p. 17).

Macroergonomics aims to design systems of work to be compatible with the characteristics of sociotechnical systems and also to assure that the very project enables the ideal interaction of humans and their occupations, machines and systems (Hendrick and Kleiner, 2006, p.20), therefore, to establish a

set of measures to improve the efficiency of the sociotechnical system (of the hotel industry) in terms of health, safety, quality and productivity.

2 Ergonomics, organization and service sector

To insert ergonomics in the productive world of organization promotes the construction of solutions for a wide range of problems which are part of managers' routine in the organizations because of its interdisciplinary character. The efficiency at work is such a desired goal of capitalist companies in general, mostly service companies which are always aware of their productivity and quality in the provision of services. This very efficiency will come as a consequence, a result of the comfort and well-being at work, which is provided by ergonomics.

Therefore, similarly to the complexity of understanding the study of "work" as a subject, there is complexity in the study of ergonomics, according to Maggi and Tersaac (2004, p.88) "Ergonomics, like every subject, has in itself the marks of its origins, which insert it in the scientific fields, the social formations and the institutions and scientific communities" Because of that, it is possible to understand that ergonomics is knowledge and action, i.e., it uses scientific knowledge to find actions aiming the adaptation of work to workers.

Regarding concerns about production in the organizational environment to achieve maximum performance production with the balance of health and safety at work, NR 17, item 17.1 and item 17.1.2, establishes the Ergonomic Work Analysis - AET as a requirement to be adopted by the employer in the organization of production, emphasizing primarily the adjustment of working conditions to the psychophysiological characteristics of workers. As a methodology of implementation, AET combines interactional and observational methods to understand and to adopt positive changes in work situations, according Wisner (1994) and Vidal (2008).

To understand the ergonomics approaches promotes a better understanding of the managerial activity and the existing relations between the demands of production and/or services, which in the case of the hotel industry presents a constant search for hospitality with productivity and the quality of services in hotels, besides the concern to improve the efficiency of the socio technical system of hotels aiming to promote health aspects, safety, quality and productivity.

For Dul and Neumann(2008) ergonomics can not only create opportunities for safe and healthy work but can also improve the performance of the production system, which in the case of service providing companies, as highlighted by the authors- the well-being of the employee does reflect in the client's satisfaction. The authors understand ergonomics as a market strategy known as Profit Chain Service (Profit Chain Service - SPC), in which the prevailing belief is "a happy worker is a productive one". "Ergonomics, with its capacity of support and employee retention, may help give companies a sustainable competitive advantage in the formation of experienced and qualified employees who can do their best for the company" (Dul and Neumann, 2008, p.18).

In their studies, Seligmann-Silva et al (2010), found that the workloads of the type of work organization and psychosocial impact much more wear / illness compared to physical-environmental and postural / furniture. With this same understanding, Duarte and Benoit-Gonin (2006, p. 6 *apud* Gollac Volkoff, 2000) add that "(...) the intensification of work will particularly undermine the commitment built by each worker between the goals of production skills that he has and the zeal to preserve their health. Working in emergency restricts the room for maneuver and makes the least avoidable difficulties. When it is necessary do something, the employee works the fastest and not the most comfortable"

For Wisner (1994), the notion of workload comprises the outcome of regulatory processes of variables present in the activity undertaken by workers. The load increases to the extent that decreases the front to the surgical variables work situations. That same understanding, Wisner (1987) adds that the worker is the same person who comes into their lives and many ordinary activities during the 24 hours per day that has. The work is an organized activity, often in extreme form, where the contract work is heavily imposed by

controlling the arrival and departure from work, cadences and working procedures, attitudes toward management and clientele. The organization of these activities is established for workers in general and often do not take into account the individual characteristics of each and variations of its possibilities. Although the work can become a dangerous element to the mental health of the worker when it opposes its free activity, it can also become a source of pleasure for the individual when the work favors a discharge of psychic energy to the task permits and thus the individual can be refreshed by it (Dejours, 2006).

Following that understanding, it is imposed to ergonomics the assessment of human work organization in a broader way that inserts the individual in a social context which causes impact in the life and well-being of the individual and which may take him to situations with higher or lower physical and/or mental stress.

Ergonomics may also contribute in the service sector for defining the work situations in terms of the required organization and competences (Boucheix *et al*, 2007) and also through the analysis of the activity performed by the worker, aiming to understand the organization according to its execution conditions (internal and subjective or external and linked to the task itself), subjected to the variables and regulations inherent to each work activity analyzed. Therefore, the work situation is presented as mutable, variable and active. "[...] It is possible to consider that, effectively, organization changes, it is not a fixed datum. It is mentioned as 'new organizations' or "new ways of organization'" (Maggi and Tersaac, 2004, p.108).

3 The work of manager

For Davel and Melo (2005) the manager is an "agent" who acts in systems of representation of reality and does not simply play a role – which is necessary and derives from the growing bureaucratization of organizations -, but he is also part of a process in which more and more frequently are involved *influence, interaction, schemes of symbolization* (organizational culture management, identity), domination (control and persuasion) and *assimilation* (capacity to continuously learn)

The role of managers facing their staff is to break paradigms from the past and the traditional way of doing the job in an efficient way in order to obtain bigger productive profits (Zamora and Poriet, 2011). Therefore, the manager is responsible for controlling the work of the employees and for representing them in the internal power structures. He also needs to coordinate the dynamism and the specificities of each work sector, aiming to reach goals, satisfy customer's demands and reach minimal levels of quality in the provision of hotel services, besides being submitted to control parameters imposed by the higher administration staff of the company.

The productive system is dynamic and because of that requires the supervision of the manager in a prement way, due to its variability and diversity. The activity of supervision of the manager comprises aspects which are not always conciliable (Lacomblez and Teiger, 2007; Dwyer, 2006).

For Dwyer (2006), the relations of people with the job happen through social relationships established between workers and employees, which are conflicting most times due to the way tasks are managed in the organization. Dwyer (2006) adds that the existing social conflicts between the superior members of an organization and their subordinates are understood in three levels of social relationships named: reward, command and organizational, as shown in figure 4.

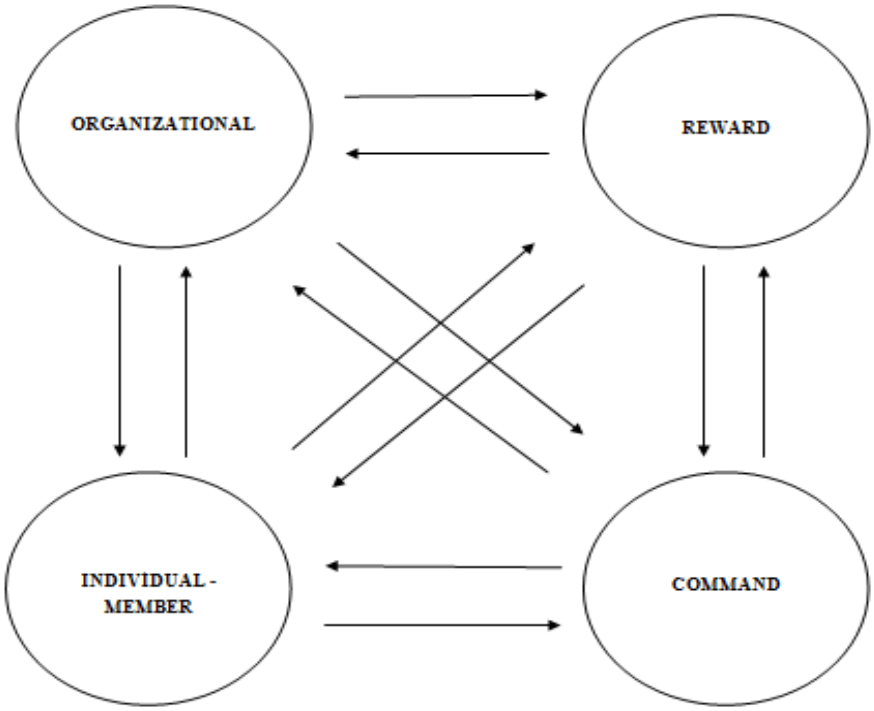

Figure 4: The workplace and the relation between the levels. Source: Dwyer, 2006, p.142.

Figure 4 shows that there is no hierarchy between the levels of social conflicts that exist at work, though they are defined by the term "level". The level of reward refers itself to the use of financial stimulus or organizational stimulus to encourage the performance of workers at the job. The organizational level is related to the stage of knowledge of the workers on the tasks which are given to them, so it's demanded from the manager's the adequate coordination concerning the division of work, structure and interaction of tasks by the work sectors. The command level is identified by both workers and managers in the attempt to control one behavior to be considered undesirable for the job. Another level of reality may be identified in picture 4, known as the individual-member, which is considered by some psychologists as responsible for everything concerning the job itself, due to the psychological, cognitive and physiological autonomy each individual possesses to behave in a desirable or undesirable way for the employers (Dwyer, 2006).

Dwyer (2006, p.141) states that the importance each one of the levels has "is not given *a priori;* on the contrary, it is constructed in the workplace and may vary from one moment to the other, and through these variations, any or all of the levels may play a role in the management of the relations between workers and their work". Therefore, the social relation of work may be understood by the way the relations between workers and their work are managed and also the organizational conflicts and/or work accidents are a result of the social relations of work, and accordingly, are produced because of the functioning of the levels aforementioned (Dwyer, 2006).

The manager activity is presented by (2002) as inserted in aspects of ergonomics, once the decisions taken by the high administration of the company are also affected by the perception and experience of managers concerning the changes that occur in the ambient outside the company and which cause some impact to the organization. On that aspect, ergonomics presents itself as an element that contributes to an improved conception of work and a guidance for a better organizational development.

To Petrocchi (2002), is a major challenge for managers in the contemporary organization the task of managing people in hotel companies because of assignments related to the execution and administration of a company marked by the seasonality of the sector itself, while it requires from the hotel manager the performance of their own skills to cope with reduced turnover, reduced costs, maintenance of service quality, motivated employees, and promote attitudes that emphasize interpersonal relationships with courtesy and kindness among workers and primarily to guests (Petrocchi, 2002).

4 Conclusions

The service sector has progressively incorporating managerial technologies and models similar to the ones developed in industry. The choice of Service Sector as an object of study is justified, among other reasons, by the gradual growth of the sector in recent years, besides representing the economic sector which employs most people in Brazil, the country where the study is developed.

The ergonomics approach, from a macroergonomics perspective, is herein used aiming to understand the work of managers and assess the impacts of the job on their health and in the quality and productivity of the lodging service in a hotel.

The current article is the result of an ongoing research, and it formulates de hypotheses, yet to be verified, that the competitive market in the hotel sector on a global scale, has implied the implementation of processes of rationalizing the work which feature the strong use of technologies of information and the reduction of staff and also the increase of production goals. The result is an increase in the work density, decreasing free time and health stress both to workers and managers (the focus of the article).

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