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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AS A MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN THE HOTEL SECTOR

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Abstract: The tourism sector is recognized for its contribution to countries' economies and job creation. However, it faces the effects of globalization, which favors the exchange of quality services at the international level. In this sense, companies are needed to safeguard the knowledge acquired or generated as a result of their operations and, as part of their strategic planning, turn it into a competitive advantage to remain and develop within the market. Tourism MSMEs in Campeche need to evolve to become global organizations and prepare to offer the services demanded by domestic and foreign visitors, with a long-term vision. The main objective of this research is to identify the knowledge management activities carried out by MSMEs in the hotel sector, as well as the perspective that managers of the participating organizations have on these activities. The study is descriptive in nature with a non-experimental cross-sectional design. Its results indicate that acquisition and storage are the most developed activities and that the perception index shows the low importance that managers attach to this process as a possible competitive advantage.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Organizational culture, Competitiveness, Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

One of the effects of globalization is the demand for quality tourism services for increasingly demanding visitors who seek the historical and entertainment essence of each region of Mexico, such as the Mayan and colonial identity of the southeast of the country. In this sense, the city of Campeche requires tourism companies with a real administrative and operational context that recognizes the importance of knowledge generation and the mechanisms for its transmission and safeguarding as an element that distinguishes a competitive organization.

As a result of its strategic analysis, the National Development Plan establishes that the tourism sector represents one of Mexico's main sources of foreign exchange, and therefore its permanence and growth are essential for the federal government and the states where it operates, even more so with the fall in oil prices on which the economy is fundamentally dependent. Over the last 30 years, Mexico's performance in the main international tourism indicators has been moderate compared to other countries; visitor arrivals have grown at rates below the country's potential, thus limiting job creation and the exploitation of tourism benefits for the country's economy.

The state's main tourist attraction is its sixteen archaeological sites, in addition to its historic center, which has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. According to documentary research, no information was found from official state government agencies or databases reporting any studies related to knowledge management in MSMEs in the hotel sector in the city of Campeche as an element that favors the permanence and development of these organizations within the tourism sector.

As part of its strategic objectives, the city of Campeche seeks to position itself as a final tourist destination and not a stopover on the way to other points of interest in the Yucatan Peninsula, thereby reviving the sector and turning it into an important source of income and employment after the oil industry, which is concentrated in Ciudad del Carmen and is currently experiencing serious economic stability problems. In this regard, tourism MSMEs in Campeche must identify their competitive advantages to achieve economic growth.

The hotel sector needs companies that understand their financial situation, level of infrastructure, operations, and the processes implemented to manage and safeguard the knowledge they acquire and generate, which

ch allows them to position themselves in a market that demands quality in comprehensive services for domestic and foreign tourism.

This study has the following objectives: a) To determine the knowledge management practices of hotel MSMEs in the city of Campeche; b) To identify how managers of MSMEs in the tourism sector in the city of Campeche acquire and apply knowledge; and c) To determine the perception of tourism MSME leaders regarding knowledge management activities within their organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pérez (2008) conceptualizes knowledge management as the design of strategies for the creation and comprehensive use of knowledge in organizational contexts, which involves the optimal use of the capabilities of a person or group of people to obtain some type of benefit. Canals (2003) points out that it consists of two fundamental processes: knowledge creation and knowledge transfer. Both processes are not independent and are interrelated.

To identify the existence of statistically significant relationships between leadership styles, knowledge management, and the design and implementation of strategies, Pedraja and Rodríguez (2008) worked with 78 SME managers and found that there are statistical relationships between the elements studied, concluding that knowledge management has a significant impact on strategy design. Therefore, they were able to establish a causal relationship between leadership and knowledge management, and between knowledge management and strategy design for the population analyzed.

Mul and Ojeda (2014) conducted a study in the state of Yucatán, taking as their population companies with innovation activities. To this end, they first designed an instrument that covers knowledge management activities (acquisition, storage, transfer, application,

and protection) as well as organizational factors (culture, leadership, and information and communication technologies).

With the aim of identifying the value created by MSMEs through the tacit and explicit transfer of knowledge, Larios (2016) developed an empirical study from the perspective of knowledge management as a competitive factor in the business market, highlighting the interdependence with the organizational context and external factors that limit development. Among the results generated by the population studied, the low importance given to knowledge generated within the organization and the low level of its management stand out, as well as its effects on the strategic planning of this type of company. As a result of the study, they found that in the population studied there is a high degree of knowledge management, with storage and application activities predominating and, conversely, protection and acquisition being the least developed practices. They also establish that although the participating companies are managing their knowledge, it does not appear to be a conscious and formal process.

Lissarrague, Simaro, and Tonelli (2010) consider that tourism is characterized by a high content of intangible assets, which makes the management and measurement of intellectual capital important in the decision-making process carried out by the senior management of this type of company. They also point out that adequate knowledge management generates value in organizations.

Falquemberg (2012) points out that SMEs in the tourism sector, particularly hotels, increasingly need to design differentiated and therefore competitive products and services as a means of surviving in the market. He notes that most studies related to this sector address aspects of financing, human resources, technology, and information, but do not include issues related to knowledge manage-

ment. In the case of Argentina, 90% of hotel companies are family-owned SMEs where decision-makers mostly disregard key aspects for achieving competitiveness, such as organization and intellectual capital management, which are currently considered a strategy for improving competitiveness.

The development of today's society is based on knowledge. Therefore, intangible assets are strongly related to the process of value creation within organizations. For this reason, organizations that provide services, such as tourism, need to professionalize their management in order to achieve sustainability. Tourism is characterized precisely by efficiency in the identification, preservation, development, and maintenance of intangible resources as a distinguishing feature of companies participating in the market (Simaro, Tonelli, and Ribalaygua, 2012).

In a study conducted by Pérez, Leal, Barceló, and León (2013) to diagnose knowledge management processes in the restaurant sector and determine its position in this regard, they found that the companies under study have a good level of development in the processes of identification, acquisition, creation, transfer, and application. On the other hand, knowledge storage and assessment are the areas in which they have evolved the least. Goncalves, Sass, Rastrollo, and Savi (2014) establish that the hotel sector has high staff turnover, which affects the retention of existing knowledge in the company, as contact between staff and customers generates fundamental information about the market and the business itself, which can lead to the loss of significant knowledge.

Benavides and Quintana (2003), cited by Mul, Mercado, and Ojeda (2013), consider that organizational culture is a factor that supports the stimulation of innovation and creativity and that supports decision-making and performance. Alawi, Marzooqi, and Fraidoon

(2007) point out that trust, communication, systems, and organizational structure are cultural factors that contribute to knowledge management within organizations.

Wallingre (2005) establishes the need to implement an innovative organizational culture in hotel SMEs according to the study he conducted considering organizations in Argentina as the population, based on the fact that this activity is a fundamental factor for the socioeconomic development of countries. He argues that innovation results in highly satisfied guests and guest loyalty, leading to economic benefits and reflected in lower costs and staff turnover. As in other cases, the main limitation is resistance to change on the part of the owners or leaders of organizations; therefore, a high degree of commitment and dedication must be agreed upon for the implementation process to be successful.

Castellucci (2009) analyzes aspects of the quality of tourism services and their problems in relation to the organizational culture of tourism companies in so-called mature destinations, which are characterized by the saturation of public space, poor service quality, limited capacity to generate services, and reduced tourist spending, which is reflected in the stagnation of their development. The author considers that these organizations should move towards a culture of quality based on a set of beliefs, values, norms, and practices aimed at providing a service that meets customer expectations.

With the aim of analyzing the relationship between competitive success and four factors of the internal environment of SMEs (human resources, strategic planning, innovation, technology, and quality certification) Estrada, García, and Sánchez (2009) conducted a study in which they established that highly competitive SMEs in the case of the population studied are those whose products, processes, and management have a higher technological level

and a strategic plan. However, they found no empirical support for the variables of human resources and quality certification. Based on their results, they point out that innovation should be understood as a permanent process that becomes a way of thinking and managing, and that technology applied to processes can provide companies with a competitive advantage, as it is difficult to imitate. , in this sense, the biggest obstacle is making the financial investment for this type of asset.

Rodríguez and Guisado (2002) conducted a study on competitiveness and strategic analysis of tourism in Galicia, Spain, and suggest the need to redefine collective strategies to maximize comparative advantages and transform them into competitive advantages, with the central objective of ensuring the sustainability of the activity over time. Bohórquez, Ferrer, Ramírez, Anaya, and Rairán (2011) propose a model of sustainable management indicators to improve competitiveness in tourism SMEs based on a conceptual review process, in view of the need to formalize the potential advantages to be gained through innovation and the development of differentiation strategies that enable them not only to remain in the market but also to meet the changing needs of tourists who require greater personalization and high quality.

Rodríguez (2010) investigated whether leadership styles influence organizational culture and whether this in turn influences effectiveness, working with a sample of 68 senior managers from Chilean SMEs. His results show that there is a relationship between leadership styles and culture, as well as between organizational culture and effectiveness, since the former explains 69.9% of the effectiveness obtained in the participating companies. Based on the above, the author suggests creating and sustaining a culture oriented toward innovation and competitiveness, backed by a transformational leadership style.

Leadership practices have been studied in different sectors such as manufacturing (Zamora and Poriet, 2011), who applied the IPL model to address aspects related to the use of behaviors that contribute to identifying and managing change, developing a vision, taking risks, setting an example, and celebrating achievements. Their results indicate that the most prevalent practice was providing encouragement, followed by serving as a role model, empowering others to act, challenging the process, and inspiring a shared vision that favors the achievement of results in their organizations and is reflected in competitiveness at the managerial and organizational levels.

Studying the influence of leadership in the area of well-being and job satisfaction, Contreras and Juárez (2013) analyzed the psychological capital of a group of managers from Colombian SMEs to determine its effect on their own leadership practices. According to their results, participants showed a high level of psychological capital, with optimism scoring lowest and a tendency toward transformational leadership with some transactional characteristics.

Leadership practices in MSMEs in the service sector have been the subject of study, as it is well known that the personality of the leader influences the decision-making of organizations, which is reflected in the results achieved by them (Vázquez and Pedraza, 2014). These researchers conducted a study on these practices and found, through a self-assessment, that the five dimensions of the IPL were present in management leadership practices in Cd. Victoria, Tamaulipas, with the highest average score in the dimension related to path modeling, which indicates that the prevailing leadership style is transformational.

DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD

The study is descriptive because it measures or collects information on the variables involved in the problem under study, which are knowledge management practices. The design is non-experimental and cross-sectional, as data were collected at a single point in time in their natural context, using questionnaires administered to MSME managers in the hotel sector with the aim of describing variables and analyzing their incidence. The method used to collect quantitative information is fieldwork, and the technique employed is the survey (Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista, 2014).

The population consisted of tourism MSMEs in the hotel sector, specifically hotels and hostels that do not belong to hotel chains or franchises in the city of Campeche. According to the Mexican Business System directory, 26 companies were identified with this specialty. Of the 26 hotels identified, 23 agreed to participate, representing 88% of the initial universe.

To obtain quantitative information, the section identified as knowledge management activities in the questionnaire designed by Mul, Mercado, and Ojeda (2013) was used. This instrument is linked to the central objective of the research by contributing to the identification of management practices developed at the managerial level in the 23 hotel MSMEs that participated in the study. The elements that comprise it are shown in Table 1.

The instrument considers scores assigned on a Likert scale with values ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly agree. An initial section was added to the questionnaire to obtain socio-demographic information and information on the leader's position, followed by questions to establish the administrative profile of the organization.

A pilot test was previously conducted to evaluate the understanding of the instrument with 10% of the population, obtaining

a Cronbach's alpha of .836. The test was then replicated, obtaining the overall values for the instrument and by dimension, which are shown in Table 2.

Dimension	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Knowledge management	43	.972
Acquisition	13	.925
Application	3	.937
Transfer	13	.878
Storage	14	.922
Protection	4	.876

Table 2. Reliability of the survey administered to managers of MSMEs in the hotel sector.

Source: Prepared internally based on statistical information.

Questionnaires were administered in person to hotel managers, each lasting twenty minutes, and the data was processed using SPSS version 21 software.

RESULTS

The instrument includes a section with sociodemographic data on the entrepreneurs who participated in a previous study on self-assessment of leadership practices with the same population and frequency, conducted by Quijano, Arguelles, and Fajardo (2016). 56.5% of the business owners interviewed were male, 30.4% were single, and 60.9% were married. The most common age range was between 41 and 50 years old, and 78.3% of the owners had a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education.

Only 4.7% consider themselves to have an excellent level of competitiveness and indicate that the price of the services they offer is their main competitive advantage (42.4%), followed by quality (27.3%). Among the quality policies implemented, an active and participatory work environment (24.2%) and compliance with the specifications of the services they offer (17.7%) stand out.

Dimension	Operational Definition	Items	Proportion
Acquisition	It is the natural or designed process through which the company obtains and generates the organizational knowledge that enables it to achieve its objectives.	2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 25, 29, 31, 32, 33, 40	30.2
Application	These are the processes developed by the company to disseminate knowledge to the various areas that make up the organization.	17, 37, 38	7
Transfer	Methods implemented to transmit knowledge, whether internal or acquired, to personnel who collaborate with the organization.	1, 8, 10, 26, 27, 30, 35, 36, 41	21
Storage	Use of technological systems and tools to safeguard knowledge generated by the company.	4, 7, 15, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 34, 39	32
Protection	This is the safeguarding of knowledge applied and generated in the company, which allows it to remain in or lead the market.	42, 43, 44, 45	9

Table 1. Definitions of the questionnaire administered to managers of MSMEs in the hotel sector.

Source: Prepared internally using data from Mul, Mercado, and Ojeda (2013).

Dimension	N	Minimum value	Maximum value	Mean	Standard Deviation
Acquisition	23	1	4	2.35	8.659
Application	23	1	4	2.52	2.793
Transfer	23	1	4	2.27	6.185
Storage	23	1	4	2.73	9.456
Protection	23	1	4	2.52	3.55

Table 3. Descriptive statistics relating to knowledge management activities.

Source: Prepared internally based on statistical information.

In the social sphere, 60.9% mention that they have a good perception, 43.5% consider that the international agreements signed by the government favor the sector and that they have a good commercial relationship with the government sector.

The mean and standard deviation of the five dimensions that make up the variable were determined in order to analyze the responses closest and furthest from the assigned values and the level of dispersion of the responses, which are shown in Table 3.

None of the five dimensions obtained values close to 3 or 4. The highest value corresponds to the “storage” dimension, and the lowest to “transfer,” which indicates that managers are concerned with safeguarding their information but do not have their own schemes for transmitting organizational knowledge.

Similarly, “storage” is the dimension that obtained the greatest dispersion in the responses, indicating that in most organizations, protocols on information repositories, feedback on activities, or the use of electronic media as a key tool are not well defined (Table 4).

The least dispersion in the opinions of those surveyed was obtained in the “application” dimension, which indicates that, in general, there are established and defined processes for the design and redesign of products and services, as well as market research as a common practice for generating information (Table 5).

To establish the influence of sociodemographic factors and administrative profile on knowledge management, Student's t-tests were applied for independent tests and ANOVA to establish significant differences between variances. When analyzing gender, marital status, and age, significant differences were

Reactive	Minimum	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
18. Company procedures are documented in protocols or manuals.	1	4	2.09	1.125
7. Induction courses are provided to familiarize staff with the workplace, their colleagues, and everything related to their job.	1	4	2.52	.898
34. Internal rules, procedures, and processes are constantly disseminated.	1	4	2.83	.778
19. The preparation of reports and reports on processes and best practices is an established practice.	1	4	2.48	1
15. The preparation of written documents as repositories of valuable information is common.	1	4	2.30	1.105
28. There are formal mechanisms in place to enable the exchange of best practices between areas or departments.	1	4	2.43	.788
20. The company makes databases and paper files containing information relevant to their work available to employees.	1	4	2.70	1
39. The company has mechanisms in place to address customer opinions, suggestions, needs, and complaints.	1	4	3.17	.778
21. It is important for the company that databases are updated regularly.	1	4	3.22	.95
14. Electronic media are indispensable in business for capturing and storing information relevant to the business.	2	4	3.43	.728
22. The company has specific catalogs and files for important documents such as reports.	1	4	2.91	.793
23. Information repositories can be accessed through some type of internal computer network (e.g., intranet).	1	4	2.43	1
24. Work teams hold regular meetings to provide feedback on their activities.	1	4	2.61	.988
4. The use of electronic media is a key tool for accessing valuable business information.	1	4	3.04	.928

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the storage dimension.

Source: Prepared internally based on statistical information.

Item	Minimum	Max	Mean	Standard
38. The analysis and design of new processes, products, and services is carried out on a regular basis.	1	4	2.39	1
37. The analysis and redesign of processes, products, and services is carried out on a regular basis within the company.	1	4	2.52	.898
17. The preparation of reports on the market, technologies, and new products and/or services is an established practice.	1	4	2.65	1

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the application dimension.

Source: Prepared internally based on statistical information.

found in the “application” dimension, which allows us to infer that the passage of time influences the establishment of processes for service design, as well as market research as a common practice for generating information.

The “application” dimension reported significant differences when evaluating seniority in the position, which may stem from the experience gained in performing the duties of the position. In the case of the number of employees working in the company, the “acquisition” and “transfer” dimensions reported significant differences, which allows us to infer that this element of the administrative profile influences the decision to participate in non-governmental courses, organize formal training for employees, share project information, and hire specialized personnel.

Additionally, and with the aim of gaining a clearer idea of how company managers perceive knowledge management, a quantitative analysis was carried out to evaluate this perception and obtain a Knowledge Management Index (KMI), following these steps:

- a) The sum of the values assigned to each question by company was obtained.
- b) The maximum score that any company could achieve was 172 (4 points maximum for 43 items).
- c) The number obtained in step “a” was divided by 172 and the result was multiplied by 100 to obtain a “Knowledge Management Index” (KMI). The higher the KMI, the greater the manager’s knowledge of it as a competitive advantage (Table 6).

Company	Score per company	Maximum Score	KMI (%)
1	97	172	56.40
2	96	172	55.81
3	81	172	47.09
4	141	172	81.98
5	143	172	83.14
6	149	172	86.63
7	120	172	69.77
8	162	172	94.19
9	103	172	59.88
10	116	172	67.44
11	149	172	86.63
12	97	172	56.40
13	104	172	60.47
14	120	172	69.77
15	120	172	69.77
16	99	172	57.56
17	100	172	58.14
18	100	172	58.14
19	79	172	45.93
20	79	172	45.93
21	55	172	31.98
22	74	172	43.02
23	74	172	43.02

Table 6: Knowledge Management Index (KMI).
 IGC = Knowledge management index = Score / Maximum score x 100. The result obtained for each company can be interpreted as the perception that the manager or founding partner has of the mechanisms implemented in the company for the acquisition, transmission, and protection of the knowledge that the organization possesses as a competitive advantage in the market. Source: Prepared by the authors.

The average KMI obtained for the population studied is 62.13%, which gives an idea of the importance these organizations attach to the development of activities that enhance business knowledge management, from its acquisition to its safeguarding as a potential competitive advantage in a market that demands ever higher quality services.

CONCLUSIONS

When comparing the results obtained with previous research, it can be seen that the overall averages for knowledge management activities can be considered low, particularly in relation to “transfer,” which indicates that the participating organizations in the tourism sector are not formally transmitting the knowledge acquired or generated by the company itself, which contrasts with the suggestions of Canals (2003) and Pérez (2008), and may be the source of operational and administrative information loss.

Of the activities evaluated, “storage” obtained the highest average, although this cannot be considered high as it did not reach a value of three on the measurement scale. In general, participants indicate that electronic media are indispensable for the company to capture and store relevant information, as well as to keep it constantly updated, as they consider it a fundamental tool for obtaining valuable information for the business. This is in line with the study carried out by Mul and Ojeda (2014), who consider that technology is key to the management activities of organizations and a factor that contributes to their competitiveness.

“Application” is the activity that reported the least dispersion in responses, reinforcing the idea that having established and defined processes for the design and redesign of services, as well as market research, is a common practice in these organizations to generate information, as concluded by Larios (2016).

The evaluation of the section on the administrative profile of the business shows that the managers who are at the forefront of decision-making in the participating organizations consider that they have a regular level of competitiveness according to their relationships with the environment and customer perception in terms of quality, a situation that should be carefully analyzed by them, as warned by

Lissarrague, Simaro, and Tonelli (2010), as they themselves are a strategic factor for competitiveness. This may arise from the most difficult challenges to overcome, including hiring qualified personnel, bureaucratic procedures, and obtaining credit support to finance their operations (Falquemberg, 2012).

In view of the objectives of this study, it can be concluded that the activities of acquisition, application, transfer, storage, and protection are carried out within the companies studied, without a high level of development according to the values obtained through the instrument used. This shows that greater formalization and tion of operational and administrative processes is required on the part of those responsible for safeguarding organizational information.

The highest values were obtained for the processes implemented to share, store, and protect knowledge, as they consider that they use information and communication technology to share experiences, document procedures in manuals or protocols, and consider it important to ensure the retention of people recognized for their knowledge of the business.

Based on the knowledge management perception index, it is possible to point out the lack of interest on the part of managers in the organizations studied in promoting management activities as a possible competitive advantage in the market. In this sense, business knowledge and its management are not elements that appear to be part of the organizational culture.

Conducting similar research in other regions of the country could help establish whether knowledge management activities in this sector are truly linked to economic or cultural factors and whether they contribute to the survival and development of the participating companies.

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