

ORIGINAL

Outsourcing proposal at the Comodoro Hotel

Propuesta de outsourcing en el Hotel Comodoro

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ABSTRACT

The present investigation was carried out at the Hotel Comodoro, belonging to the Cubanacan Hotel Group, with the objective of proposing an outsourcing strategy to improve processes. The work procedure developed was based on conducting interviews and applying questionnaires, as well as working with focus groups with the Hotel managers. Techniques were applied that allowed measuring the level of knowledge about outsourcing in the chain of command. Data processing included the calculation of percentages and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, using the statistical program Statistic Program for Social Services. The main results showed different levels of knowledge of outsourcing, as well as deficiencies in the outsourcing strategy as a fundamental basis for a successful realization of the productive chain. It was determined that outsourcing is an optimal variant for creating better economic opportunities for the hotel. A strategy was developed that must be taken into account by the facility's Board of Directors with an on sight to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.

Keywords: Outsourcing; Strategy; Processes.

RESUMEN

La presente investigación se llevó a cabo en el Hotel Comodoro, perteneciente al Grupo Hotelero Cubanacán, con el objetivo de proponer una estrategia de outsourcing para la mejora de los procesos. El procedimiento de trabajo desarrollado se basó en la realización de entrevistas y la aplicación de cuestionarios, así como también el trabajo con grupos focales con los directivos del Hotel. Se aplicaron técnicas que permiten medir el nivel de conocimiento sobre el outsourcing en la cadena de mando. El procesamiento de los datos incluyó el cálculo de porcentajes y el coeficiente Alpha de Cronbach; utilizándose el programa estadístico Statistic Program for Social Services. Los principales resultados evidenciaron distintos niveles de conocimiento del outsourcing, así como deficiencias en una estrategia de tercerización de los servicios como base fundamental para una realización exitosa del encadementio productivo. Se determinó que el outsourcing es una variante óptima para la creación de mejores oportunidades económicas para el hotel. Se elaboró una estrategia que debe ser tomada en cuenta por el Consejo de Dirección de la instalación con vistas a mejorar la eficiencia y la eficacia de la organización.

Palabras clave: Outsourcing; Estrategia; Procesos.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a phenomenon that is among the largest sources of international Gross Domestic Product (GDP) income. The sector creates avenues of development and job opportunities for millions of people, through the eminent productive capacity to maintain the quality and abundance of services requested by customers. As is the case in Cuba and other countries that are advancing in their economic growth, tourism is one of the industries with the highest foreign exchange income and promotes the development of the population's quality of life (Parra, 2021; Sánchez et al., 2022).

Before Covid-19 and the restrictions imposed by Donald Trump's government, Cuba witnessed an accelerated process of annual visits and overnight stays in its hotels. The infrastructure for such an event was foreseen from previous years, which is why it was able to accept 4,3 million international visitors in 2019 for leisure and vacation purposes. Currently, a decline in international arrivals has been experienced for a variety of reasons. Figures from the Statistical Yearbook of Cuba, have confirmed the arrival of 2,3 million international visitors until September 2023 (ONEI, 2023).

Compared to other destinations in the geographic area, the country is not recovering with the speed required by the Cuban economy to compensate for the levels of monetary activity before the pandemic (Hernández et al., 2023). In this sense, the performance of tourism entities is crucial in the search for greater efficiency and competitiveness in the supply of the Cuban tourism product.

Continuing with the previous idea, finding new forms of management for entities, specifically hotels, is a necessity for the business sector. Within this framework, outsourcing is a solution to the immediacy and dynamic nature of the tourism sector, because it can instill a culture of efficiency and effectiveness of greater rigor among institutions (Santa et al., 2023).

The tourism sector has undergone changes since the pandemic, with technological development, socio-cultural change, competition, customer habits and market maturity (Torres, 2023). Despite limited supply chain execution, customers demand higher quality at lower cost. This puts tourism companies in a complex position, forcing the advancement of skills and knowledge to meet customer needs and expectations, which generates higher profitability indexes.

One of the main options for improving management is, without a doubt, *outsourcing* or, as it is known in Spanish, "tercerización" of services, "subcontratación" or "externalización". This alternative is a growing international trend that helps to improve the quality of the services provided by an organization, reduce costs and streamline the existing support processes in all entities (Espino & Gebril, 2023). To this end, specific people in various fields must be incorporated, who occupy responsibilities in the areas designated by the hotel with which they collaborate through quality processes and agreements that conceive the outsourcing of services (Imorillas, 2021).

Given the dynamic nature of tourism, outsourcing holds an important position for the adaptation of new processes and better strategies. Outsourcing allows changing the culture of the hotel industry, helping the local workforce and providing solutions to customer demand (Elhoushy et al., 2020). Hotels are complex organizations due to the variety of their tasks, ranging from cleaning to entertainment services, food services and maintenance, so it is essential that the hotel knows how to identify core competencies (Gonzalez et al., 2011).

Nowadays, outsourcing some product or service has become inevitable for most companies located in highly competitive markets and this business strategy can be a key factor for overall supply chain success (Valenzo et al., 2014). This exemplifies the need to delegate tasks to other parties as a means to focus on the company's strategic objectives.

Ignorance of outsourcing implies a misuse of the budget necessary for the proper operation and maintenance of the tourism industry, evident when a high percentage of entrepreneurs and tourism operators are unaware of the term outsourcing (León & Lucía, 2019). In the case of the first global economy, the United States, the tertiary sector has given rise to more than 70 % of its workforce and its impact on business efficiency is increasingly important (Cremailh, 2022).

Thus, outsourcing is a viable strategy within tourism to improve the factors that have a negative impact on tourist satisfaction levels and, consequently, on the efficiency of lodging entities. Among the main deficiencies that can be solved with the practice of outsourcing are the ones gathered in the complaints received by the national tourist facilities where the following stand out: deterioration of the infrastructure due to the scarce level of resources to provide maintenance to the origin of the problems. This damages the autochthonous and differentiated product offered by Cuba in comparison with its major competitors in Latin America.

An example of the above situation is the symbolic Comodoro Hotel. It is a site that has suffered from inefficiencies in the provision of services and strategic planning, due to lack of maintenance and innovation, wear and tear of workers, difficult access to logistics, among others. In view of this approach, there is evidence of non-compliance with the hotel and quality classification required by NC-127:2014. All the above deficiencies have a negative impact on the low level of occupancy shown by the entity, the high staff turnover and customer

complaints regarding service standards, taking into account the condition of the rooms, the degree of cleanliness and maintenance.

The cause of many of the infrastructural problems at the Comodoro Hotel stems from its proximity to the sea and the salt in the air, which causes rust and flaking of the façade, requiring constant maintenance and repairs, despite its capital repair in 2006. This wear and tear requires additional resources on the part of the facility that can be assumed today by Self-Employed Workers (TCP) or non-state entities, who work in brigades with imported materials that could generate substantial savings to heritage institutions such as the case study.

Based on this, the present research is carried out with the objective of making a proposal for an outsourcing strategy for the Comodoro Hotel.

METHOD

Theoretical and empirical scientific research methods were used for the development of the research. The research strategy followed responds to the mixed paradigm, since quantitative and qualitative research methods are used.

Among the theoretical methods employed are:

- Documentary analysis: we reviewed articles from scientific journals, diploma, master's and doctoral theses, books, standards, as well as Internet articles on topics related to outsourcing, its definition and general considerations, service management, production chaining and current outsourcing trends.
- Historical-logical: this method was used to study the evolution of some concepts raised in the theoretical framework that supported the research. Additionally, it allowed to establish a logical organization of the contents in order to arrive at conclusions.
- Inductive-deductive: the inductive process is the form of reasoning by means of which it is possible, from the knowledge of the particular, to include the general, and deduction is the opposite process, conceptualizing more general phenomena with the purpose of achieving more specific analyses.

Empirical Methods

Observation: this method allows obtaining knowledge about the behavior of the object of investigation, as it occurs in reality. It is a way of accessing direct and immediate information about the process, phenomenon and object under investigation.

Non-participatory observation was used for this research, aimed primarily at obtaining information on:

1. Condition of the hotel's infrastructure.
2. Service attributes with a significant number of complaints in the network.
3. Personnel behavior in the operation.
4. Degree of management involvement in problem solving.

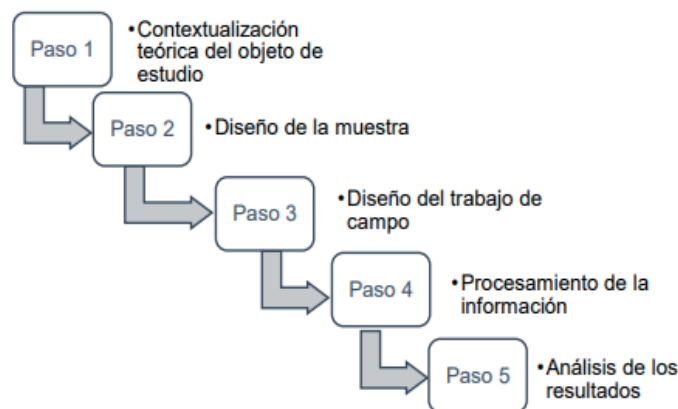


Figure 1. Methodological Trajectory

Surveys: it is the collection of quantitative primary information to analyze the opinions and evaluations of individuals and groups. This method is mainly used to analyze the intentions, opinions, motivations, capabilities, feelings, attitudes, evaluations and representations of individuals and groups. In the research, the survey is applied to the hotel managers, and it is carried out by means of a questionnaire.

In addition, the calculation of the Cronbach coefficient was used to evaluate the reliability of the instrument. For digital analysis and data processing, Statistic Program for Social Services (SPSS) for Windows (version

25.0.0.0, 2017) was used. Fundamentally, we work with the data of the Mode and frequency analysis by the characteristic of the data obtained. Contingency tables were also used to characterize the study sample.

The methodological trajectory used for the field work consists of five steps that made it possible to extract useful information for the design of the proposal in the third chapter of the work, as shown in figure 1, which shows the sequence of logical steps followed in the field work.

This report will present the main results associated with steps 2 to 5.

- Step 2: sample design: taking into account that the research aims to explore the real possibilities of the Hotel to carry out an effective outsourcing strategy, we worked primarily with the board of directors, who are in the line of command and authority of the organization, those who have responsibility for the formal exercise of decision making, although, this does not exclude that for more extensive and applied research the size of the sample universe is increased. Therefore, the study population is defined as eleven people who participate in the Board of Directors of the Hotel Comodoro, distinguished by management, assistant management, training and consulting positions. Thus, it was decided not to use sampling and to work with the entire population in focus groups.
- Step 3: for the fieldwork step, the focus group technique was used, which is an essential tool in qualitative research. The group is test type and was made up of 11 people, to whom a questionnaire was presented and an unstructured interview was conducted, in order to obtain a greater wealth of information.
- Step 4: data processing was carried out in two stages. Firstly, with the application of SPSS, version 25, where the answers of the questionnaire were processed, which gave an acceptable reliability for the work with an Alpha 698. The same was coded in nominal variables and ordinal variables, the latter to establish hierarchies in the answers of the respondents and to be able to build a profile of the expectations and perceptions of the group regarding the tertiarization of the service. In a second step, a content analysis of the interview results was carried out in order to triangulate the information. In the final step, which is the analysis of the results, we worked with the output information from the SPSS tables and the analysis of the interview content, which allowed us to establish the foundations of the strategy.

RESULTS

Results of the focus group work. Expectation of outsourcing application

In the population studied, the male sex predominates, and the age group with the highest representation is those between 53 and 63 years of age, so it can be inferred that they are experienced workers. Thus, the variables that define the structured sample are age and experience.

These variables are chosen in the research because it is necessary to know the researchers' views on outsourcing, noting the differences in terms of the trajectory in working life. Once the group was formed, the questionnaire was applied, which yielded valuable results. The 11 respondents admit that they know about the term outsourcing. When evaluating the level of understanding that the managers present on the subject in question, a high level of judgment is shown, according to the self-evaluations, since more than half of the respondents recognize that their level of knowledge is quite high or very high, as shown in figure 2.

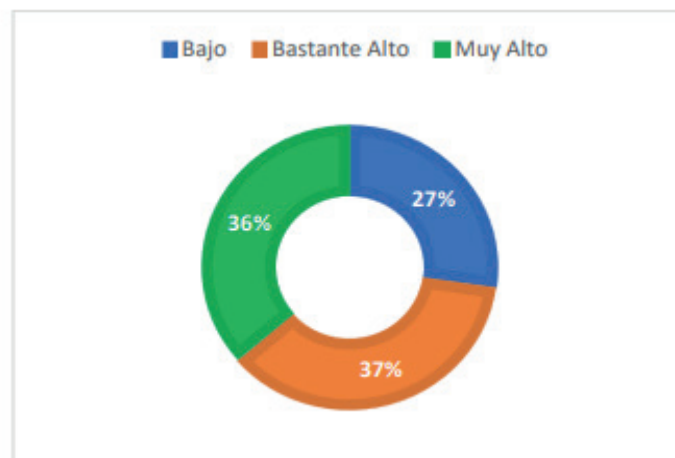


Figure 2. Level of knowledge about outsourcing. Self-assessment

Analyzing how the focus group self-assesses itself in terms of outsourcing fundamentals, figure 3 shows the behavior of the answers, attending to criteria that are important. In the practices of service outsourcing, most

of the interviewees recognize that they have a fairly high knowledge in the topics of: Customer Repeatability; Inter-company Cooperation; Customer Satisfaction and Productive Linkages.



Figure 3. Self-assessment of outsourcing objectives

The question includes criteria that are not directly related to outsourcing, such as customer repeat business and satisfaction, but are evaluated to measure the priority given by managers to the organization's objectives and problems.

As the figure above shows, the aspect that reflects a greater divergence in terms of the purposes of outsourcing is the cooperation between companies, being an issue to be taken into account in the result of the research, since one of the weighty criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the outsourcing of the activity is the cooperation between the entities, considering that it mediates an act of contracting and a strategic alliance to increase the efficiency of the parties involved, especially to minimize transaction costs.

In contrast, the customer satisfaction indicator is the one they claim to have the highest degree of knowledge. This behavior reveals gaps in the managers' self-assessment of the subject under investigation. Firstly, although the actions of service outsourcing can and do influence customer satisfaction, their use as a business strategy is more linked to the company's efficiency than to directly impacting the customer satisfaction process.

Secondly, they associate it with productive linkages; however, it cannot be said that outsourcing aims at productive linkages, since the purpose of the latter is superior, since it is not only a relationship between buyers and sellers, but also extends to the articulation between economic sectors.

Finally, the result of self-evaluation of the knowledge shown in the subject of productive linkages, being this a tendency little worked in the Cuban business sector. It is inadequate, therefore it is an aspect to be deepened in the interviews carried out to the same selected sample. Of the 11 surveyed cadres, eight recognize the existence of outsourcing in the company, and 5 of the interviewees do not see outsourcing as a critical factor for the success of the organization. This is demonstrated by figure 4, where the majority of respondents see it as a viable strategy of limited importance to the entity.

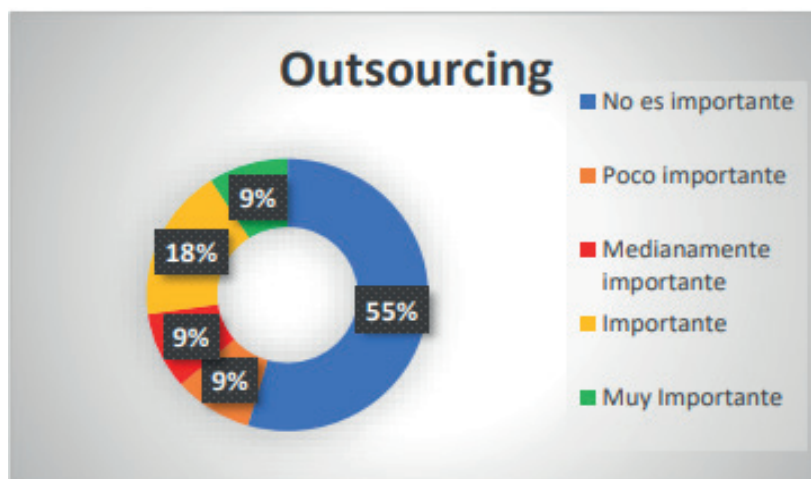


Figure 4. Level of importance of Outsourcing for the Board of Directors

Figure 5 shows that the Hotel Comodoro consistently relates outsourcing only to technical services. It is notorious that the hotel considers that security services should be provided by the hotel and that support processes such as human resources, economy and quality, are not associated with outsourcing, in addition, there are discrepancies between the interpretations of marketing and strategic planning.

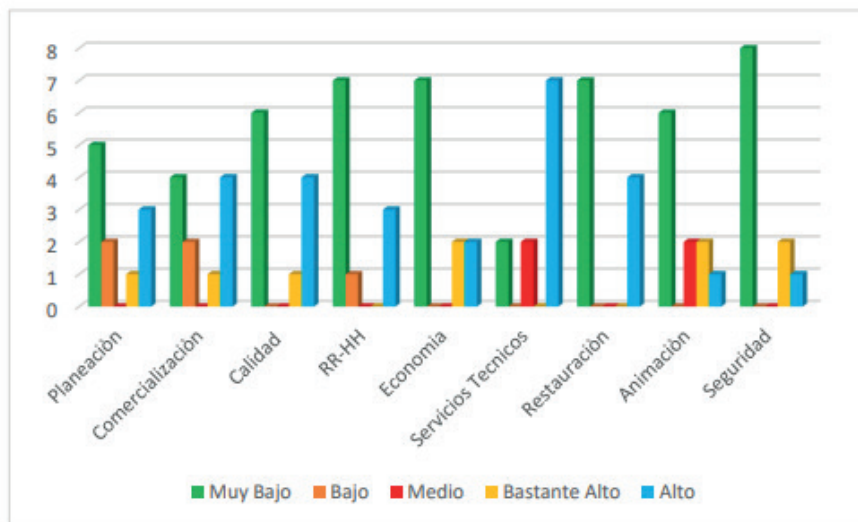


Figure 5. Degree of relationship of hotel processes with the possibility of outsourcing

Analyzing the figure above, the management does not consider catering and entertainment as processes to be outsourced, however, there is a tendency to use strategic alliances, especially in catering to use recognized brands in the market and increase the reputation of the Hotel. In the case of entertainment, it is an activity that can be evaluated, taking into account the profile of the Hotel's market segment.

In summary, when constructing the profile of the focus group and their vision of outsourcing, it can be seen that there are inconsistencies with respect to the theory. In the first place, outsourcing is not conceived as a key factor, it is not given importance within management and its essence is unknown. Secondly, they do not see it as an agreement between companies and relate it to productive chains, when in practice outsourcing is more an act of strategic alliance or agreements between companies to take advantage of synergies of resources and human capital capabilities. Ultimately, outsourcing is a way to increase business efficiency, due to the reduction of hiring costs. Although these costs are not accounted for, they constitute economic costs of the organization that are incurred in the search for suppliers, information and time dedicated to the act of economic contracting itself.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the managers were surveyed about the main problems presented by the hotel. For this purpose, a list was given of what was appreciated in the non-participatory direct observation, and those collected from the opinions in the social networks. As shown in figure 6, the problems that are valued as the ones that most affect the image of the hotel are supplies, deteriorated rooms and cleanliness.

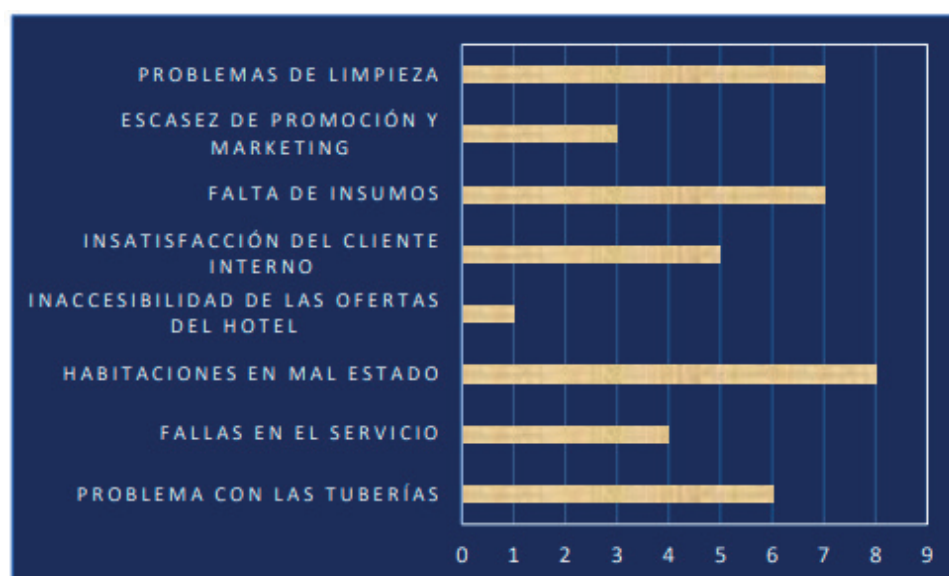


Figure 6. Problems affecting the hotel's image

Referring back to the previous graph, managers associate the main service difficulties with logistical inadequacies, maintenance and cleanliness. However, issues such as promotion and marketing shortages and internal customer dissatisfaction are not considered to directly affect service.

In the next question on the informational need for research, we analyze the activities that managers directly associate with the possibility of outsourcing, figure 7 shows their responses.



Figure 7. Activities that can be outsourced.

It is evident the presence that outsourcing can have for the support of some of the departments in the Hotel, because most of the respondents agreed that a TCP, MSME, cooperative and entrepreneurship service could be included in the outsourcing for maintenance, rehabilitation and interior design services in the Hotel Comodoro. Evening and daytime entertainment and leisure activities were disfavored by the hotel management, although, according to clients' opinions, this is an issue that has room for improvement, especially evening entertainment.

The external advice on quality management systems is endorsed by only one manager, so there is a perception that the process can be improved entirely with the hotel's current staff. This analysis demonstrates the lack of vision to weave a strategic alliance with external actors, more sophisticated and more updated with practical knowledge and *know-how* to combat existing bad management practices.

The management of social networks (use of a *community manager*) was seen as an unimportant aspect in the questionnaires answered. The Cubanacan group has an agreement in force with El Guajirito S.R.L. to offer lodging services at the Comodoro Hotel, but this network does not have the hotel's offers updated, so this is an aspect that can be improved with outsourcing.

Despite the fact that the vast majority are aware of the outsourcing services that work in synchrony with the hotel, in practice it is perceived that they do not assume the vitality proposed by this modality, which is on the rise for the tourism institution. There is a dilemma between the definition and conceptualization of outsourcing and the perception of this form of management by the managers of the entity, since they refer to knowing about outsourcing services, but mention institutions directly related to the core business of the hotel, that is, institutions directly related to tourism. In such cases, the following are mentioned: EmpresTur Las Tunas, TecnoTur and EmpresTur Servicios Tecnológicos. On the other hand, it is known that the hotel has at least 21 subcontracts with different companies for the provision of materials and activities related to technical services, painting, food, climate, furniture, cleaning, technological accessories and security.

Analysis of interviews

With the use of the interviews, it was possible to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the criteria of Hotel Comodoro's managers regarding the hotel's situation and their expectations with respect to the prevailing subcontracts, as well as the staff's perception of third-party services. In general, most of the managers agree that the hotel's situation is stable despite the fact that its main building is closed for repairs.

It was found that the hotel has invested 71 million CUP in subcontracts for maintenance, remodeling and repair of real estate from January to October 2023. In addition, human resources services are contracted, specifically from tourism institutions such as EmpresTur for a large number of auxiliary services that do not have permanent staff at the hotel, due to the high turnover of personnel in the country's tourism institutions.

The interview ratified an essential issue, the impact of outsourcing in the hotel and its use is evident. All agree that outsourced services have improved the image and quality of services in the hotel. Moreover, it has had an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution. The relevance of outsourcing services for progress in the areas considered critical by the management of the institution under analysis is demonstrated.

The contribution of the interviews provided information on the dynamics between state and non-state enterprises, exemplifying cases of costs and ways of manufacturing services and products. Additionally, state and non-state entities differ in payment systems towards their workers, which can make or break the cost of

services provided by each of these groups of institutions. For example, outsourcing providers, on occasions, have cheaper prices compared to state providers, because the state provider has to pay a staff of workers, neglecting the result of the final product.

In the opposite case, the outsourcing sector charges by results and minimizes expenses as much as possible, leaving the most apt and experienced workers for the work in question. Also, private companies have more stimulating modes of labor rewards than their counterparts, so that the worker strives to perform a higher quality work with an equivalent reward, which is sometimes not perceptible in companies run by state agencies.

Currently, most of the repair and reconstruction works are carried out by MSMEs. These, unlike the state sector entities, have the optimal materials, even imported, for a high standard rehabilitation.

In the interviews conducted with the managers of Hotel Comodoro, there is a disconnection between the classification of processes. There are three classifications of processes: key, strategic and support. A dilemma is perceived because managers choose to use outsourcing for all processes that cannot be supplied by the hotel and tourism resource providers, while outsourcing of services is based on helping non-key processes to increase organizational resources.

Triangulation of information

Through the use of quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques, as well as the study of documentary information, it was possible to triangulate the information and obtain the following results: The hotel's managers self-assess themselves with a high degree of knowledge of outsourcing, and consider that they put it into practice within the organization, however, with the interviews it was possible to verify, that what is actually carried out is a contracting of services to third parties that cannot be covered by the traditional suppliers with which the hotel has worked.

The literature recommends that this strategy be carried out with the processes that are not key and that there is a saving in finances, as the third parties are the most efficient. It was not possible to verify the existence of evidence within the hotel regarding the performance of the current assets used for contracting services. Analyzing the hotel's economic data, the declared investment in contracting services to third parties represents 16 % of the facility's gross income and 35 % of the accumulated net profits for the current period.

On the other hand, figure 8, which shows the company's revenue structure, shows that the activity with the highest revenue is catering, yet most of the third-party contracts do not have an impact on this activity.

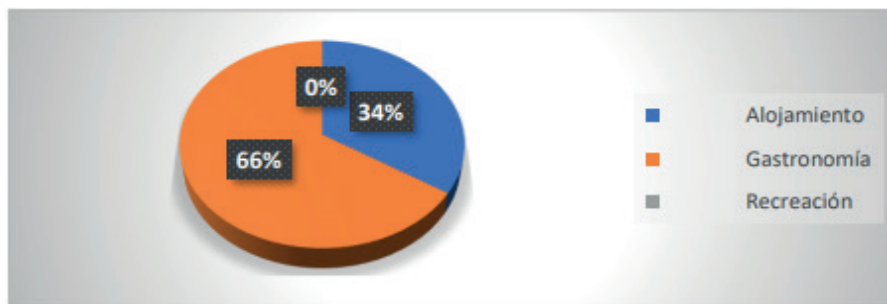


Figure 8. Structure of income by activity according to the Income Statement

The study of the company's outsourcing processes with third parties, which can be considered as an incipient strategy of outsourcing services, occurs from 2022, with a total of 55 contracts with suppliers. Of the total number of contracts, 11 are the suppliers of services to the company related to the problems detected in the survey. Of these, only 7 are associated with what would be an objective of outsourcing in the hotel.

Within these aspects of the triangulation of information, it was possible to have access to the document referred to by management as a reference document for the organization's strategic planning, with a view to integrating the proposed strategy within the company's design. It was found that there are deficiencies in the strategic planning process of the entity, so that the proposed strategy cannot be annexed to what is established in the organization because key result areas of the strategic process are not defined.

On the other hand, business objectives have a limited scope to impact the organization's performance. Of the three determined, only the first corresponds to some extent to the strategic projection of the company. The second transcends the field of activity of the hotel facility and the third corresponds to a functional problem of the facility. Thus, we can conclude that the main problem to be solved in the research and with the strategy to be designed is centered on the lack of knowledge on the part of the managers of the objectives to be taken into account in an outsourcing strategy in the company, since what has been evaluated so far is characterized by the following:

- Outsourcing is identified with the contracting of the company's suppliers, being so, it is analyzed more as an operational process and not a strategic one.

- Contracting is done primarily to solve problems associated with business logistics and not for business services, as it is not possible to contact that there is a long-standing contract at the facility.
- There is a marked bias in what is considered as outsourcing in hotel facilities, as it is directly associated with maintenance, infrastructure and internal design problems. The new changes in the Cuban platform for managing the economy, where new forms of ownership are developed, offer the tourism sector an important alternative of new service providers, while fostering the link between the public and the private as recognized in the Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Communist Party of Cuba.

Proposed strategy

From the results of the diagnosis used and taking into account the organization's need to develop successful relationships with third parties, based on the problems detected in the hotel to cover the services, a strategy is designed to establish the incorporation of outsourcing as a profitable practice for the organization.

The strategy is chosen as a procedure to socialize the outsourcing practice, since it is incorporated into the organization's objectives.

To this end, the objective is defined as follows: To design the company's procedure for the effective implementation of outsourcing in the hotel by 2024.

Strategies

1. Develop the outsourcing model to be followed by the organization.
2. Define the framework for joint governance.
3. Areas of the company where the strategy impacts.

Since the research did not confirm the existence of key result areas in the organization, where the designed actions can be supported, it was decided to work on defining the functional areas according to the organization chart.

4. Commercial Subdirection.
5. Economics Subdirector.
6. In the seven mid-level departments in the chain of command.

Finally, associated with the strategy and in accordance with the control function, a contracting process is proposed to the hotel as shown in figure 9.

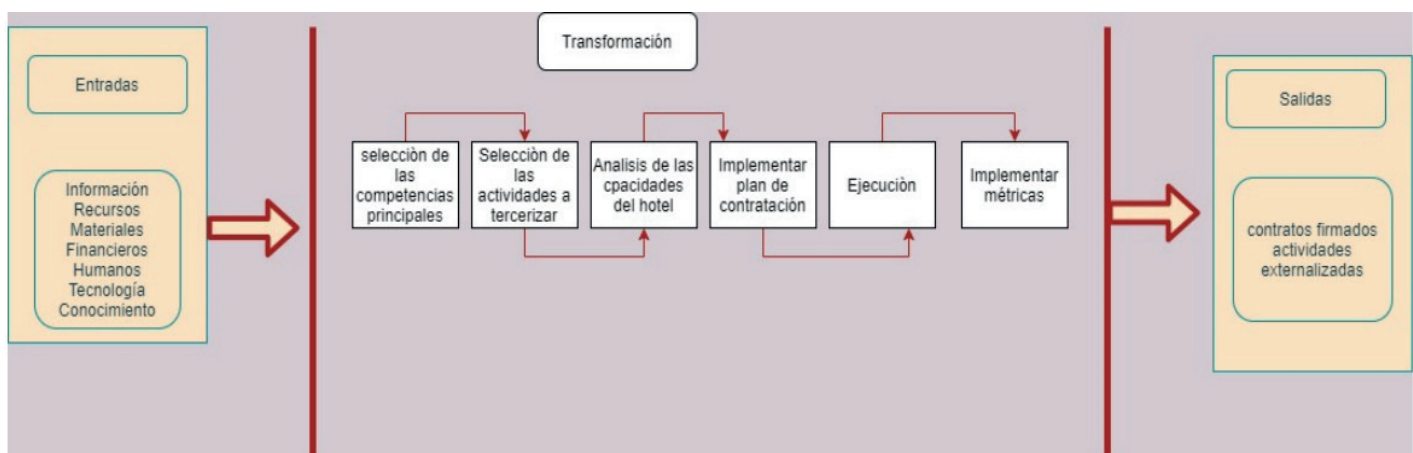


Figure 9. Outsourcing process proposal

With the implementation of the strategy, the hotel studied has tools that allow it to carry out an effective outsourcing process, although it is recommended to work on the aspects related to the general strategy of the organization that presents deficiencies, which hinders the design of the outsourcing. On the other hand, once the proposal presented is discussed with the management, it is necessary to work on the design of the procedure and metrics to be used to evaluate the outsourcing of the hotel.

CONCLUSIONS

Outsourcing is shown as a feasible strategy to be employed in hotels in the search for an increase in the quality of services and improvements in business efficiency due to cost savings.

It was found that the vision that the Board of Directors has of outsourcing is limited by associating it with activities that present difficulties due to supply issues in the current Cuban market.

There is little confidence in carrying out an outsourcing strategy in activities that management considers to be related to the hotel, for example, entertainment and security, while maintenance is presented as the activity that can be outsourced par excellence.

From the information provided by the hotel, it can be seen that there is no adequate outsourcing policy in place, which hinders the process of offering a new operating model.

The strategy design is a starting point that not only allows for the improvement of the outsourcing activity, but also lays the foundations for the improvement of the activity in the hotel and its approach to international outsourcing standards.

The process designed outlines the actions necessary for the strategy to be reflected in the hotel's structure and for contracts to be signed with a broader scope, thus reducing the transactional costs of the organization under study.

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