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**MANAGERIAL SKILLS IN HOTEL INDUSTRY –  
EVIDENCE FROM CROATIA**

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***Abstract***

*Regardless of the type of organization and management level, the basic task of the manager is to give a prompt and proactive answer to any kind of pressure which is a part of his/her daily business, with the final aim of providing adequate service to customers (clients, consumers, businesses...). Over the decades, the hotel industry has experienced continued evolution by becoming one of the fastest growing industries worldwide. Today, the hotel industry is exposed to dynamic changes and great market heterogeneity, and, therefore, managers in the hotel industry need to be in a constant race for competitive advantage achievements. Among the numerous sources of competitive advantage, managerial skills also stand out because they produce higher value and affect organizational performance. It is well documented that skilful managers are the key determinants of organizational success. Unquestionably, only skilful managers could become effective managers, and effective managers are crucial for organizational success. An effective manager is the one who should have an extensive set of developed skills in all essential areas of managing which, with the company's growth and progress, become more complex and demand more attention. This paper focuses on the*

*managerial skills, considering the main skill areas of management. The main aim of this paper is to analyse managerial skills in the Croatian hotel industry, specifically in large hotels in the Split-Dalmatia County. The main research question is: whether the level of managerial skills relates to organization effectiveness - is there a relationship between managerial skills and organizational performance in large hotels in the Split-Dalmatia County? In the light of posed research questions, two hypotheses are settled. Quantitative research was conducted and interesting results were found. To collect data, a questionnaire was used as the main research instrument. Out of 61 questionnaires that were sent, a total of 36 correctly completed questionnaires were used for analyses, yielding a response rate of 59%. Two hypotheses were accepted and the research question positively answered. Results showed that managerial skills are well developed; that organizational performance of large hotels in the Split – Dalmatia County depend on managerial skills in directing them to compete on the market. In addition, the research result pointed out that the effect of communication skill is larger than any other.*

**Keywords:** *managerial skills, effective managers, managers in the hotel industry*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's organizations operate in challenging and uncertain circumstances, consequently, more than ever before, their success or a failure is the result of managers' ability to adopt their way of managing to contemporary business environments (Bulog, Jukić and Kružić, 2016). When referring to the changes in our environment Whetten and Cameron (2011, p. 26 - 27) argue that there is still something that has remained relatively constant, with minor variations and stylistic differences; something that has not changed over thousands of years. These are basic skills that lie at the heart of effective, satisfying, growth-producing human relationship. Therefore, it doesn't surprise at all that almost every article or a book targeting topic of management and manager effectiveness stresses the importance of managerial skills for all managers, regardless of the type of organization and level of management.

Due to the great interest of researchers over the last decade, it has been documented in thousands of articles that skilful managers are the key determinants of organizational success (e.g. Bertrand and Schoar 2003; Bennedsen et al., 200; Bandiera et al. 2013; Mullins and Schoar, 2016). Unquestionably, only skilful managers could become effective managers, and effective managers are crucial for organizational success. Management effectiveness and efficiency require managerial skills (Fattah, 1999 in: Mostafa et al., 2012, p. 388). An effective manager is the one who should have an extensive set of developed skills in all

essential areas of managing - from planning and delegation to communication and motivation – which with organization growth and progress, become more complex and demand more attention (Bulog, Jukić and Kruzic, 2016).

The topic about managerial skills has for a long time attracted the attention of many scientists and practitioners. Their focus was usually on strategic management level since it has been empirically confirmed by many researchers that strategic managers are a critical and vital resource for company success due to the significant influence they have over strategic decisions on the organization's overall success on the market.

This paper prioritizes the managerial skills of top management in the hotel industry considering eight essential skill areas of management where managers should focus their energies: understanding team dynamics, selecting and developing the right people, delegating, motivating, managing conflict, communicating, decision making and problem solving, and avoiding common managerial mistakes (Bulog, Jukić and Kruzic, 2016). These are people – oriented skills. Why the hotel industry? Over the decades it has experienced continued evolution by becoming one of the fastest growing industries worldwide. The hotel industry represents significant business within global frameworks and modern development trends (Pavia et al., 2014). Managerial skills are not industry or firm specific, but they may become because of the unique combination of managerial skills that each organization holds (Carmeli and Tishler, 2006, p. 18).

Much research focused on managerial skills has documented that there is a positive connection between organizational performance and well established skills for managing people (Whetten and Cameron, 2001). Managerial skills are viewed as being of fundamental importance for improved managerial performance and effectiveness as the whole (Analoui et al., 2000). As Carmeli and Tishler (2006, p. 18) stress “it is not so much the particular skill that each of the managers possesses, but rather how they complement one another to affect firm performance”.

The main objective of this paper is to analyse the development of managerial skills at strategic management level in the Croatian hotel industry, specifically targeting large hotels in the Split-Dalmatia County. The main research question is: whether the level of managerial skills relates to organization effectiveness - is there a relationship between managerial skills and organizational performance in large hotels in the Split-Dalmatia County? This research contributes to the literature on management and leadership.

## **2. MANAGERIAL SKILLS**

Organizations, just like humans in every aspect of their life, need to grow and develop to survive in the current environment. For organizations, this requires mastering many types of managerial skills. Managerial skills are parts of managerial competencies (Smutny et al., 2016). Managerial competences are

explained through competence models which usually include various abilities, skills, knowledge, personality features, attitudes and other characteristics individually tailored. Competences at an individual level influence the effectiveness of the entire organization (Cardy and Selvarajan, 2006; Analoui, 1999 in: Smutny et al., 2016). This paper is focused on managers who hold a formal managerial position and on their skills, but not on the other variable of their competencies mentioned here.

Management skills identify abilities or behaviours that are crucial to success in managerial positions (Hunsaker, 2001). When considering managerial skills, one thinks about the set of behaviours that direct the manager to better job performance. The term “skill” refers to the ability to do something in an effective manner (Yukl, 2002). Managerial skills are defined by Katz (1974) as a manager’s ability to transform information and knowledge into practice. They are seen as the building blocks upon which effective management rests (Whetten and Cameron, 2011, p. 30). Whetten and Cameron (2011) differentiate managerial skills from other kinds of managerial characteristics and practice by defining their various characteristics: behavioural; controllable; developable; interrelated and overlapping; contradictory or paradoxical.

When it concerns the typology of managerial skills, several authors have identified skills that effective managers should possess (e.g. Katz, 1974; Christensen et al., 1978; Koontz and Wehrich, 1988; Castanias and Helfat, 1991; Mumford et al., 2000; Whetten and Cameron, 2001; Yukl, 2002; Montel et al., 2004; Carmeli and Tishler, 2006). The most common classification of managerial skills was conducted by a great mind in management - social psychologist Robert Katz (1974). He was the first who provided a typology of managerial skills by identifying three types of skills: technical, human and conceptual with regard to the skills’ importance for successful management. He actually set the foundations for the skill research area. All typologies that were developed after were the product of researchers’ conscious awareness that there are some other managerial abilities or behaviours that are also critical to organizational success, e.g. team building, delegation, motivation, goal setting etc. Recent developments in this field point to the presence of three paramount and overlapping categories of managerial skills that play a crucial role towards increasing managers effectiveness in both private and public sector organization (Analoui et al., 2000): task-related; people –related and self-related

Since the responsibilities of managers have become more demanding and sensitive due to the increase of environmental complexity, effective managers should have an extensive set of developed skills in all essential areas of managing. By developing and upgrading them over time they would increase efficiency of their organizations. In this paper, authors decided to analyse eight essential skill areas of management on which managers should focus their efforts (Bulog, Jukić and Kružić, 2016): understanding team dynamics, selecting and developing the right people, delegating, motivating, managing conflict, communicating, decision making and problem solving, and avoiding common managerial mistakes. These skill areas are explained in Table 1.

Table 1

## Essential skill areas of managing

Managerial skills	Explanation
Understanding team dynamics and encouraging good relationships	Be aware of the diversity regarding personality, abilities, skills, and perspectives of team members, and pilot those differences in a positive direction.
Selecting and developing the right people	Have good recruitment skills, because selecting and developing the right people is a basic requirement for achieving organizational effectiveness.
Delegating effectively	Delegating the tasks to the right people and clearly outlining the expectations determine success of the managers themselves and the company overall.
Motivating people	Motivation skills are essential for high performance employees who will, through high job satisfaction, achieve valuable and meaningful individual and organizational goals, and thus contribute to the overall business results.
Managing discipline and dealing with conflict	Managers must discipline the members of the team trying to facilitate a resolution or avoid destructive conflict between employees if they want the company to progress.
Communicating	Effective communication skills are essential to organization success because the level of communication effectiveness leads to more or less successful objectives achievement.
Planning, making decisions, and problem solving	These activities, done properly or slovenly, can make a great difference not only to individual managers' careers, but also to the organization position on the market.
Avoiding common managerial mistakes	It is imperative to learn how to recognize and avoid common mistakes that managers make because this help manager to become more successful and productive, and consequently, their company can benefit.

Source: Adopted from: <http://www.mindtools.com>

These skill areas of managing are the key skills needed if the manager aspires to individual and organizational effectiveness. These skills fall into the category of people-related skills and they must be developed and improved on an ongoing basis as managers encounter new challenges or opportunities when leading/managing people.

### 3. MANAGERS IN HOTEL INDUSTRY

The global hotel industry is changing rapidly and continuously, therefore, it is necessary for a hotel's management to adjust to those changes (Vrdoljak and Bukvic, 2004). Cerović (2003) classifies hotel types according to their size, completeness of the provided service, location and global market orientation. The size differentiates small hotels up to 100 beds, medium to 300 beds and large with over 300 beds. In large hotels, the managers are the head of departments (e.g. reception, household, food and beverage, accounting and other) who are also the most responsible personnel who manage the hotel's daily business (Hayes and Ninemeier, 2005).

The hotel manager sets the goals, creates a strategy and establishes the business policy of the hotel. He or she makes decisions, contracts, organizes, allocates, creates teams, delegates, motivates, cares for the advancement of associates, and manages financial and other resources (space, equipment, time, people, money...). Furthermore, if s/he wants to be effective, s/he needs to control the accomplishment of each goal and the performance of each task; needs to provide information about business, and encourage economic and technological development (Sambol, 2008). The overall effectiveness would be accomplished in his/her work if s/he manages all essential areas of management.

Cerović (2003) states that managers in the hotel industry in regards to other economic sectors must be: more entrepreneurial, more imaginative, more prosperous, more persistent and more patient. They always need to be at guests' disposal in order to satisfy their needs due to the fact that, in the tourism industry, the guest is always right. Another feature of the hotel business is the exposure to constant changes that need to be confronted. More than in any other industry, the manager in the hotel industry must have developed skills in all essential areas of management. Galičić and Simunic (2006) state that hotel management needs to adopt new principles and new management trends in order to fit more efficiently into international tourism streams. For the purpose of a successful response to current market trends, in hotel management the main task is in mastering numerous knowledge and abilities such as: understanding managing change; ability to lead in the dynamic and unpredictable circumstances; ability to manage complex organizational structures; inventiveness and initiative in terms of technological progress; management and use of increasingly complex information-communication systems; managing human potentials etc.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

This study attempts to contribute to the better understanding of the importance of managerial skills. The main objective of this paper is to analyse the development of managerial skills at strategic management level in the Croatian hotel industry, specifically targeting large hotels in the Split-Dalmatia County.

The main research question is: *whether the level of managerial skills relates to organization effectiveness - is there a relationship between managerial skills and organizational performance in large hotels in the Split-Dalmatia County?* The main objective of this paper is to analyse managerial skills in the Croatian hotel industry, specifically in large hotels in the Split-Dalmatia County. In the light of the literature discussed in previous sections and the above posed research questions, the following hypotheses are suggested:

*H1 - The managerial skills possessed by managers in the hotel industry are well developed.*

*H2 - The managerial skills possessed by managers have a significant positive effect on organizational performance.*

Our survey was conducted among large hotels in the Split-Dalmatia County in the year 2017 (January and February). To collect data, a questionnaire was used as the main research instrument. Questionnaires were mailed electronically to the strategic managers. Out of 61 questionnaires that were sent, a total of 36 correctly completed questionnaires were used for analyses, yielding a response rate of 59%. Previous studies indicated that top managers are a reliable source of information (O'Reilly et al., 1993; Miller et al., 1998 in: Carmeli and Tishler, 2006). With the aim of encouraging managers to participate, two commitments were made: first (1) that their participation is anonymous, and (2) the results of empirical research would be delivered to them, which they can use for evaluation and further improvement of their managerial work.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part considered some demographic characteristics of managers: age, gender, education and tenure. The second contains questions about people-related managerial skills considering eight areas of managing: 1) understanding team dynamics, 2) selecting and developing the right people, 3) delegating, 4) motivating, 5) managing conflict, 6) communicating, 7) decision making and problem solving, and 8) avoiding common managerial mistakes. Managers were asked to answer the questions from the current position to the current state, meaning that, for each statement, they chose the answer that best described him/her. There were 2 – 3 questions/statements for each managerial skill category.

The third part was dedicated to organizational performance. In the literature, organizational performance has been operationalized in a variety of ways. Some authors used subjective measures (manager's perception) while others used financial data. Research has found measures of perceived organizational performance to correlate positively with objective measures of firm performance (Dess and Robinson, Jr, 1984; Dollinger and Golden, 1992; Powell, 1992 in: Delaney and Huselid, 1996). This research considered three perceptual measures of organizational performance which target three levels of performance: financial, market and operating (according to: Kaynak, 2003). These measures are: a) profit; b) market position and c) quality of services their hotel provides. In this part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to give responses to the proffered statements according to a Likert's scale with five levels of intensity, ranging from "I strongly disagree" to "I strongly agree". Collected data were evaluated using the SPSS 23.0 and Microsoft Excel software. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

## 5. FINDINGS

The sample included predominantly female managers (61.1%), with a university degree (44.4%) (see Figure 1). This is a little bit surprising, but positively. This is actually in line with the results that show that the rate of women in management positions in Croatia is on the rise, but they are still significantly under-represented in comparison to male managers. Perkov et al. (2016) encouraged the inclusion of women in management structures as being

of high significance to modern tourism organizations if they wish to survive, grow and develop, because in that way, they will gain the necessary diversity of leadership styles and approaches to management.

Managers are mainly young people. One third of the sample are managers who are not older than 40 (77.8%). A part of managers have been in their current positions between 0 and 5 years (50%). Thus, it can be concluded that managers were introduced on their positions (high ones) very early in their career. Just a small part of managers (2%) have earned their current position with considerable years of experience.

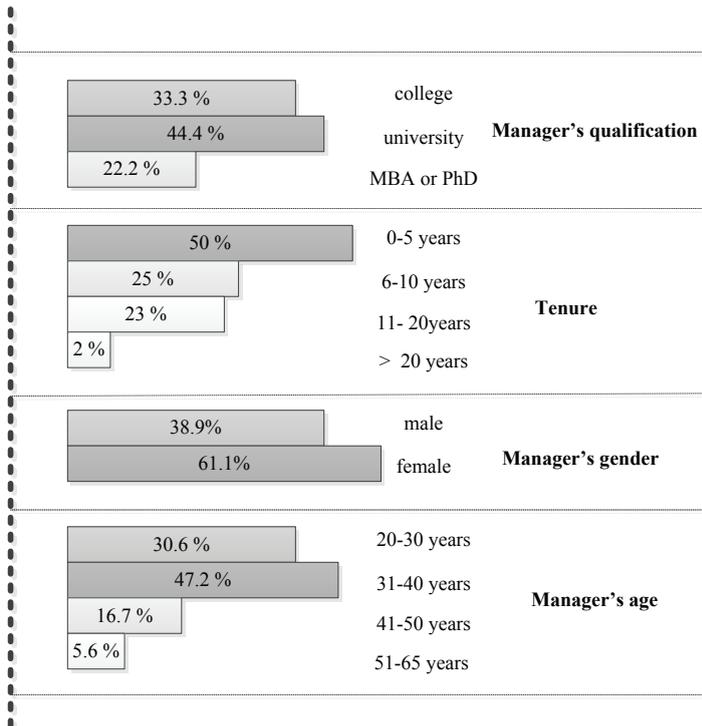


Figure 1 Main characteristics of managers in the sample

Source: Research results

Due to the characteristics of contemporary business environment of the hotel industry and rapid technological achievements that are part of everyday business activities, young people, because of their education backgrounds, can progress in their careers faster and more easily. Namely, their knowledge comes to the fore– it is much needed if organizations want to be up to date.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the main variable in this study - managerial skills. As shown in the table, all managerial skills are showing

a great level of appearance (from 4 to 5). By analysing each managerial skill area, it can be seen that managers' communication skills are the most developed which amounted to 4.97; while the skill of avoiding common mistakes is somewhat less developed and amounted to 3.97. Communication skill, which is the most developed, is of great importance for managers in the hotel industry, since as a team leader and as a hotel leader, the hotel manager must always be at guests' disposal. S/he needs to have well developed communication skills because s/he and his/her team are always in direct contact with guests. In addition to all the other skills, s/he has to be able to listen and to accept customer feedback and advice, listen actively, speak, talk, communicate.

Among the most developed skill areas are also team building skills, selecting and developing right people and managing conflict (means were above 4.5). Areas in which managers should focus their attention and efforts are: motivation and decision making (means were under 4.5).

Overall, it can be concluded that managers in this research sample possess all eight managerial skills and that each is well developed. Thus, Hypothesis 1 can be accepted.

Table 2  
Mean values and dispersion measures of managerial skills

Index N=36	Managerial Skills	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. D.
MS1	Understanding team dynamics and encouraging good relationships	4.64	5.0	5	.593
MS2	Selecting and developing the right people	4.53	5.0	5	.506
MS3	Delegating effectively	4.25	4.0	4	.649
MS4	Motivating people	4.00	4.0	4	.862
MS5	Managing discipline and dealing with conflict	4.61	5.0	5	.549
MS6	Communicating	4.97	5.0	5	.167
MS7	Planning, making decisions, and problem solving	4.25	4.0	4	.554
MS8	Avoiding common managerial mistakes	3.97	4.0	4	.736

Source: *Research results*

In addition, it was interesting to see whether there was any difference in developed managerial skills when considering the gender variable. Concerning gender differences, Table 3 reveals that somewhat equally managerial skills are developed among men and women managers. But, it also could be noticeable, when it comes to skills of delegating and motivation, that the mean difference was a little bit higher in favour of men and when considering managing conflict skill the mean difference was a little bit higher in favour of women. Results are interesting, but since women dominated the research sample, it is hard to give some objective arguments for the explanation of these differences.

Table 3

## Mean values of managerial skills according to gender

Index N=36	Managerial Skills	Men (Mean)	Women (Mean)
MS1	Understanding team dynamics and encouraging good relationships	4.60	4.68
MS2	Selecting and developing the right people	4.60	4.55
MS3	Delegating effectively	4.50	4.14
MS4	Motivating people	4.50	3.64
MS5	Managing discipline and dealing with conflict	4.40	4.64
MS6	Communicating	5.0	4.95
MS7	Planning, making decisions, and problem solving	4.30	4.23
MS8	Avoiding common managerial mistakes	4.00	4.14

*Source: Research results*

Hypothesis 2 focused on the relationship between managerial skills and organizational performance among large hotels in the Split-Dalmatia County. The results about interdependence between managerial skills and organizational performance are interesting and somewhat puzzling. To test the hypotheses, a correlation test was conducted. Table 4 reveals only significant results. As shown in the table, results of correlation analysis show a statistically significant interdependence among seven managerial skill areas with one or more organizational performance measures. Only one managerial skill showed that there was no interdependence with any of the organizational performance measures. Namely, only for managing conflict skill a statistically significant correlation was not determined. This might be due to communication skills that are highly developed and therefore conflict situations are not so pronounced.

Highly significant results were found for the interaction of the five managerial skills with organizational measure - quality of service ( $p < 0.01$ ). The intensity of those relationships is very strong (values of correlation coefficients were above 0.4). All other, previously mentioned connections are significant, but on the lower level of significance ( $p < 0.05$ ). Overall, the results revealed partial support for Hypothesis 2.

Table 4

The interdependence between managerial skills and organizational performance

Spearman's rho Correlation coefficient; Sig. (2-tailed); N = 36	P	MP	QS
MS1		.372* .025	.562** .000
MS2	.343* .040		
MS3			.453** .006
MS4	.461** .005		.426** .010
MS5			
MS6	.360* .031	.346* .039	.518** .001
MS7			.518** .001
MS8		.386* .020	

Source: Research results

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$  - only significant value are shown

Only one managerial skill (communication) is positively related to all three measures of perceived organizational performance. With the first two measures (profit and market position) results revealed statistically significant correlation with positive direction, but slightly weaker intensity compared with the third measure (quality of service) which is of strong intensity. Also, positive and statistically significant correlation with two measures of organizational performance was determined when analysing two managerial skill areas (team building and motivation). Therefore, it can be concluded that each managerial skill has a different effect on organizational performance.

Overall, the results revealed that the people-related managerial skills variables examined in this survey are very important for organizational performance of large hotels.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Skilful managers are of crucial importance for organizational success because of contemporary business external environment characteristics. Regardless of organization type, it is undisputable that managerial skills, viewed as a part of managerial overall competencies, influence organizational effectiveness.

Acceptance of the two hypotheses of this paper and positively answered research question empirically validate that the above statements also apply to the hotel industry in Croatia, specifically on large hotels in the Split- Dalmatia County. Results showed that managers in the research sample possess all eight managerial skills and that each is well developed. Among the most developed skill areas are: communication, team building skills, selecting and developing right people and managing conflict. Areas in which managers should focus their attention and efforts are: motivation and decision making. Partial acceptance of the second hypothesis indicates that there is a statistically significant interdependence among the seven managerial skill areas with one or more organizational performance measures. Only the managerial skill of managing conflict showed the interdependence with none of the organizational performance measures. In addition, research results pointed out that the effect of the communication skill is larger than any other. Namely, it is more related to organizational measures than any other.

Overall, it can be concluded that the organizational performance of large hotels in the Split – Dalmatia County depends on the managerial skills in directing them to compete on the market. Hotels need to develop them in order to survive in the contemporary business environment. This requires mastering many types of managerial skills. Managerial skills can be learned and gained by training; therefore managerial skill training needs to be an important part of managers' education.

The limitations of this study and suggestions for future research are closely linked. Undeniably, future research may reduce the limitations. This research can be upgraded into several directions in order to get a more detailed and complete picture about managerial skills development in the hotel industry in Croatia. Future research in this area would benefit from studies aimed at increasing the sample to more easily achieve generalization of the research conclusions. It would also be valuable to make a comparison between the hotel and other industries in Croatia; to compare the hotel industry in other regions of Croatia as well as to compare the hotel industry in Croatia and other countries in the region. The importance of managerial skills should also be discussed in relation to the external environment variables since it is acknowledged that organizational functionality depends on the conditions of the external environment.

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