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DEHUMANIZATION OF HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY USING INFORMATION-COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

DEHUMANIZACIJA HOTELSKE INDUSTRIJE UPORABOM INFORMACIJSKO-KOMUNIKACIJSKIH TEHNOLOGIJA

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Abstract

The man is standing on the threshold of the Information Age in which information-communication technologies (in the further text as ICT) offer unimagined possibilities in every field of operating and of living. ICT spread human intellectual possibilities and with that they contributed a lot in developing of our civilization but there are some questions: is it our life in this Information Age better, nicer and easier? Are we more satisfied with our work and life? Are we safer thanks to the usage of ICT? On the other hand, there are opening some questions like are we more lonely and more occupied in our job and in our communication because of ICT? Well, with great advantages of its usage and evident benefits, ICT considers also bad consequences, that is, it has also negative sides – dehumanization of working, human relationships, culture. This means that a man is entrapped in continuous improving, so there is more and more present the opinion that ICT and some similar innovations, which are applying in hospitality industry, alienate people or they lead towards dehumanization and towards de-socialization inside the human component. Even if we can't deny to the usage ICT some merits like development of quality in the area of preparation and offering service in hospitality industry or introduction of standardization as a prerequisite of offering service quality, it is incontestable that an enormous quantity of computer appliances in everyday work led towards the dehumanization.

Sažetak

Čovjek stoji na pragu informacijskog doba u kojem mu informacijsko-komunikacijske tehnologije (u daljnjem tekstu: ICT) omogućavaju neslućene mogućnosti na svim područjima djelovanja i života. ICT su raširile ljudske intelektualne mogućnosti i s tim bitno doprinjele razvoju naše civilizacije, međutim postavljaju se pitanja je li u informacijskom dobu živimo lakše, ljepše i bolje? Je li nam rad nudi veće zadovoljstvo u radu i životu? Jesmo li sigurniji zahvaljujući upotrebi ICT? S druge strane, otvaraju se pitanja nismo li zahvaljujući ICT u radu i komuniciranju više zaposleni i usamljeni? Dakle, pored velikih prednosti uporabe i evidentnih koristi, ICT donose i mnoge škodljive posljedice, odnosno, razumno se pojavljuju i njihove negativne strane – dehumanizacija rada, ljudskih odnosa, kulture. To znači da je čovjek uhvaćen u zamku unapređivanja, pa sve više prevladavaju mišljenja da ICT i slične inovacije koje se primjenjuju u hotelskoj industriji, samo otuđuju ljude, odnosno dovode do dehumanizacije i desocijalizacije unutar ljudske komponente. Premda se uporabi ICT ne mogu osporiti zasluge za razvoj kvalitete u području pripreme i pružanja usluga u hotelskoj industriji, na brzini pružanja usluga i uvođenju standardizacije kao preduvjeta kvalitete pružanja usluga, neosporno je da je prevelika količina informatičkih uređaja u svakodnevnom poslu dovela i do pojave dehumanizacije.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hospitality industry in its integrity, becomes more and more a place where the tourist holiday differs only apparently from the work on the conveyor because there is the conveyor of «relaxing, recreating, entertaining, impressing». This becomes a world where the hospitality is well trained, where the guests are safe and everything is predictable, treating in the same way buying the hotel service as any other material good.

Characteristics of hospitality industry, which are marked by offering the services, can be described through a differentiated approach towards the production organizations taking in consideration, above all, the characteristics that are offered:

- a) untouchable services,
- b) simultaneousness of 'production' and of consuming the services,
- c) participation of guests in the process of production and service,

- d) variability of services,
- e) transitoriness (consuming) of services,
- f) confidence relations (between hotelier and guests).

We are used on the fact that we are living in a «hi-tech» age, but we mustn't forget that we are living also in a «hi-touch» age. In the age which demands top-level relations between suppliers and consumers of services. So, sea, Sun, beach, souvenirs are only the «hardware» of tourism which are treated by the tourists as necessity and not as something special, as the top of tourist offer. Modern tourists are searching for tourist «software» that is the kind personnel because it is only the kind personnel who can offer them emotions and impressions which are valuable for them. This is the essence/basis of tourist and hotel products.

Some reseraches of guests' satisfaction coming in Croatia, in the recent years showed that major part of reproaches is directed to the hospitality and kindness. This is not so because the personnel in hotel and tourist industry became less kind, but because of the fact that tourists became more and more demanding in the last years. The new guests is ready to pay more on their vacation but they are demanding also the emotional component as integral part of service and they are simply expecting that.

In the following chapters, in the context of specific quality of offering the services in hospitality industry, we will try to penetrate in quite delicate field of depersonalization /1/ and further level which leads towards dehumanization.

2. PARADOX OF INTENSIVE APPLICATION OF ICT IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Since the modern tourist are demanding more human relation, in front of hoteliers there is a quite responsible task directed towards satisfying both the emotional and functional needs of their guests. So, the message is clear and it shows that the consumers of services have their own needs, way of thinking, expectations and aspirations. This means that we have to create this kind of services and offer which will represent the answer on modern guests' demands to be treated in a special, personal and rememberable way. This leads to the conclusion that the power passed from the side of offer to the side of consumer/guest and that instead of hi-tech, new dimensions in hospitality industry become hi-touch and hi-fidelity. The consumers don't want to be isolated anymore but they want to participate in all phases of service, and sometimes (in the gastronomic offer) they want to participate in production process.

One of very important postulates in the application of ICT in hospitality industry is rationalization of doing business which includes all subsystems of hospitality industry. According to this process of rationalization, the majority of owners, delegates of big business and pleaders of fast capital return from hospitality industry are bearing positively since the modern hospitality industry presumes this process in order to become effective. But, it is also necessary to examine the other side of this process - dehumanization, as negative consequences of ICT application and the rationalization as the process which the owners and engaged management considers affirmatively.

The practice from last several years, which are marked with very intensive implementation of ICT in hospitality industry, shows that this industry becomes more and more dehumanized. In other words, a man – service supplier, feels as more and more isolated subject because he is less included in social environment and loses his emotional unconscious identity with technological that is with information-communication phenomena. This dehumanization, which overlaps with the development of ICT, in its highest moment, provokes more and more increasing level of solitude. This kind of paradox in the application of ICT is that in the initial phase of introduction of those technologies it started from the false premise that with the application of those technologies will be more time to take care about the guest or that the offer suppliers could more dedicate themselves to the guests and that they could socialize with them.

However, too dynamic intensity of ICT development resulted that the personnel is preoccupied with different kinds and exaggerated number of computer gadgets. In this way, the main aim became in its opposite so the offer suppliers are overburdened with serving the computer gadgets and not with communication with the guests. Even more than that, they have less time for talking with the guests because on the other part even guests have a range of different computer gadgets which are considered to offer them the possibility of being pleased and satisfied during their stay in some hotel.

We are witnesses of some kind of a paradox in ICT application in hospitality industry that we don't talk anymore with our guests whilst like a new, demanding trend in industry is personalization of relationship tourist/consumer and service supplier. In this we mustn't forget the fact that strategic usage of information in information system represents a part of entire service and this ability of quality usage of relevant information can represent competitive advantage to each hotel subject /2/.

3. THE REASONS FOR DEHUMANIZING RELATIONS

The need of modern organizational forms in hospitality industry, which can be seen in the need for speed, precision and continuous doing jobs, also influences on the necessity of strict bureaucratized organization. This way of organization makes possible that, in the frame of management, can be realized the principle of doing jobs according to in advance made objective parameters. It considers this way of working which will be in accordance to rational rules, where it won't be paid attention anymore to the personality and where there is no prejudices. The management will develop this approach more completely as far as the degree of dehumanization is increasing, that is as far as the influence of emotional elements is lower. Instead of employees from the old time and a condition of «old-fashioned hospitality», which was moved by personal sympathies, kindness and gratitude, the modern culture demands a strict «objective» expert who is in the same time fair because of dehumanization.

The strict limitation of work to precisely prescribed jobs leads to constraining the human freedom where rigid and rational procedure of bureaucratically practice mainly obstruct spontaneity, creativity and individual initiative. In this determinate relations, where in hospitality industry are involved people who have never worked before in that kind of industry, all is reduced to measurability or profitability which consists of being concentrate on quantification.

Even if the accentuation of quantity (for example: the number of prepared meals, thanks to the kitchen of fifth generation), results with the series of positive consequences but in the same time it severely influences on quality of final products. For employees this means very small probability of finding the pleasure in their job, and this is why the quality of their work, product and service suffers.

The next dimension in application of modern tools of ICT is predictability which is shown in accentuation of worker's discipline, systematic and routine what finally means the identity of appearances and things no matter the time and weather. So, the products and services will be the same in no matter what time and place. While, on the one hand, guests/consumers are relaxing because of this predictability and gives them the sense of safety, on the other hand, for product – service personnel in hospitality industry this means easier job which is possible to perform without thinking and without big effort. The workers in these systems behave quite predictable, following prescribed standard routines, rules and orders of management.

The next dimension of exaggerated usage of ICT in hospitality industry represents increasing control and change of human technologies with those inhuman. This change is, above all, inspired by desire for bigger control since the biggest source of insecurity, unpredictability and inefficiency of each rational system are in fact people although the control of information means also the control of people /3/.

For gaining the control of people there are more or less efficient technologies. Controlled behaviour is possible little by little reducing to the series of almost automatic operations and once, when the people start to behave as robots, it is easy to replace them with real machines and real robots. The exchange of people by the machines is the extreme degree of controlling because they stop to be the reason of insecurity and unpredictability since they don't have anymore the direct influence on the process.

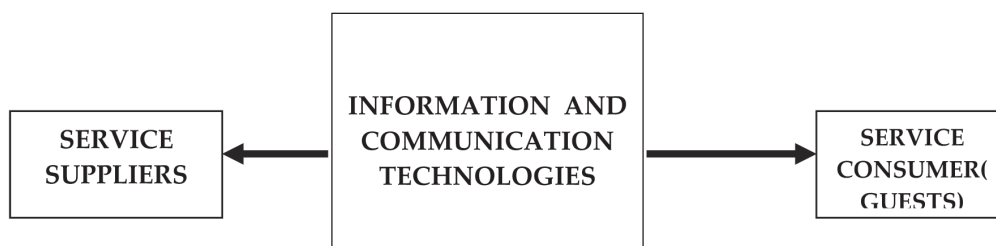
4. THE INFLUENCE OF ICT APPLICATION ON PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROCESS OF OFFERING THE SERVICES

Regarding all mentioned, there is a need for defining the exit from this kind of situation and to give an answer on question how to reconcile that paradox in hospitality industry caused by the ICT application? From the figure 1, it is visible that in the modern conditions, which dominate in hospitality industry, between guest/consumer and supplier of service, as mediator appears powerful ICT which, in great measure, unable and not predict larger oral communication as something desirable.

It is necessary to underline that the influence of ICT on guests and on the personnel is reciprocal and that in this process both sides are surfeited with information, even if the more powerful information technology is not a guarantee that some person will be better informed /4/.

Further on, we can state that whole applied ICT have positive and negative influences and all this on the level of interaction:

- service personnel – guests;
- service personnel – service personnel;
- service personnel – management.



According to mentioned reciprocal relations, in the continuation we will shortly describe on which way and on which fields the ICT influence on nominated interest groups in the entire process of preparation and of offering the services in hospitality industry.

Service personnel - guests

Intensive development and spreading of application space of ICT accompanied with continuous disturbs in business communication space which are using the hotel guests and the personnel who is serving those guests. Domination this created problem, as the extreme result it is necessary to have more guests' pleasure through offering the service in new and more quality way. This means that the quality of service mainly depends on those who are offering those services /5/, and the service which has low-quality is the most expensive.

Present guests want more to communicate and they like more those workers who are communicate with them and during doing that they won't take in consideration some mistakes in business, but they will take in consideration unkindness. The communication skill and management skill of ICT today represent the prerequisite of quality in hospitality industry and the balance of those skills represents the main prerequisite of successful performing jobs. So, the personnel and their guests are not in conflict but it is the responsibility of management to reconcile human aspect of offering the service with the conditions that dominate in application of ICT and to create the environment where they will offer optimal service in the informatization conditions /6/.

Technological development, especially on the informatization field it has already transformed the hotel business and relation of employees towards their guests. The innovations and changes, that are so fast today, resulted that the hotel subject depend more and more on human resources in realization of their goals /7/. In this we have to pay attention about the fact that in the market match, where all hoteliers are exposed on the offer side, momentary it is evident that additional value can create only

the people, in this case service personnel with their competencies. This means that the usage of modern ICT don't have necessary influence on business quality, if we neglect that factor which is pressed more and more and this is human relation, socialization, relation between guests and service personnel. Often reason for this misunderstanding of relations which have to dominate in relations personnel-guests, management, that is not enough computer literate and it is considered that with application of ICT simply solving the problems of guests' satisfaction.

Service personnel – service personnel

In hospitality industry, as extremely obligingly, the personnel represents critic connection in the chain of guests' satisfaction. This defined thesis is a consequence of the fact that it is a management the one which is responsible for successful performing of product – service process and not the personnel. The management solves the problems and takes care of guests when the offered services don't satisfy expected standards. In this process, where the personnel uses even disposable ICT /8/, it is very important that they are satisfied because only in that way they can transmit this on the guests. The successful hoteliers keep the major number of permanent guests in the following conditions:

when there is a climate for offering the services to the guests in which the exceptional qualities on all levels and in the frame of all process function are rewarded and supported and

when the employees feel that the hotel management takes care of them, when they want to help them in their advancement and when they are fair.

Those are the reasons to make more effort on the humanization of working place, giving to the employees more and more responsibilities and more pleasure on their work. This concerns that the existing human potentials in hospitality industry don't have to be changed but they need to be adapted to the new conditions and to the new reflection of doing business. They have to be stimulated to take responsibility for their job, to take initiative and to guarantee for their performed job. However, many

facts lead to the conclusion that a man becomes «user-friendly machine».

Twenty years ago, the term «user-friendly machine» was very present in the professional and popular discussions about ICT. With this term it was underlined that the machines and the programs (computers and software) need to be formed on the way that is 'friendly' towards the user, that is that the usage of machines becomes pleasant and simple to the user and not exhaustible or even repulsive.

In the present time, the term «user-friendly» is somehow forgotten. In the same time, today is expected from ever user to be ready to learn every demand of some technological innovation so there is a real danger that a man would be enslaved by the ICT products which are showing a tendency to lead a man towards «machine-friendly» being. We have to accentuate the fact that in spite of fear that is felt by one part of the personnel using it all ICT are transformed in the means of simple handling and understanding /9/.

Used ICT have influences on those groups of personnel whose main task is to offer different services to their guests. Today's process orientation that dominates in different organizational forms of hotel subjects imposes reciprocal coordination and collaboration. This implicates availability of numerous data and information in different departments to make in disposal to all employees of defined product – service process but who belong to different organizational parts of hotel. Not updating of data about guests leads to entropy in the system, this tries to be avoided with stronger application of different ICT. In this context, information which are given to each individual executor of some job serve also as basis of successful personnel training for quality execution of task /10/.

Service personnel - management

The main characteristics of modern management in the future hospitality industry can be deduced on following /11/:

- disappearing of hierarchy in management,
- increasing of independence in decision-making,
- stimulation of creativity and independence of employees,
- unnecessary classical supervising.

Along with mentioned trends it is necessary to accentuate higher responsibility of workers to decide alone about everyday routine jobs. The attitude of hotel management towards the executive personnel is changing and all this because of chronicle lack of high educated workers and because of important regularly high motivated working force for success of a hotel.

Besides the marginal working force who can be developed by chance and towards whom the financing of education and of development is not directed, today the executive personnel is considered the repository of potential that has to be built selectively, cultivated with care and further developed to satisfy the requests of affairs. Goldsmith identified three components (elements) of human potential management /12/. Those are:

- traditional activities of personnel (recruitment, training, rewarding),
- specific manager and organizational philosophy that considers personnel as:
- the most precious resource of organization and
- the view on the personnel as the component of developing,
- human potential as integrative factor of strategic management and of entire organization.

Inside the hospitality industry, in the conditions of increased application of ICT, it is developed division on more successful personnel, who manages better with ICT but it is not kind towards the guest. The management, because of its handicap expressed in insufficient computer literacy, prefers the personnel who managers to work with ICT than the personnel who are kinder and more traditional with the guests.

In this dehumanized system are applied double standards on different categories of personnel. While the rationalization is imposed to the employees who are placed at the bottom of hierarchical pyramid, on the other hand the top of hierarchical pyramid (owners and top management) is mainly freed from limitation of rationality because they try to make their positions less rationalized.

This attitude is a consequence of reflection that they, in contrast from their subordinates, need the freedom of creativity. In other words, the aim is to impose blind respect of rules, regulations and other structures of rational system to subordinates whilst it is permitted the creativity to the management (and very often inefficient). Those relations represent much dehumanized working environment because to the employees is permitted the application only of a little part of ability and skills which they possess and this causes big alienation. The workers are unsatisfied with their job they perform, they are often absent from the work, their stay in organization is short (big fluctuation of working force) etc. This kind of system dehumanizes also its consumers because passing through the restaurant like on the conveyor, the guest is like a «machine» whose main function is made of faster food consuming without any pleasure in the meal.

5. CONCLUSION

Because of dynamic development and implementation of modern ICT, in the field of hospitality industry there is a dehumanization of relations between the participants in product-service process. Organizational forms in hotel economy subjects become more and more mechanical systems without emotions and with lack of any organic relation with the people.

Modern lifestyle, aggressive and technologically developed, influences even consumers of services and employed in hospitality industry. They live and work in the time and in the organizational environment which is distinguished by characteristic dynamic of all working and life aspects. The quantity, dynamic and the way of implementation of ICT in hospitality industry defines management which doesn't use this technology in the measure (or it doesn't use it at all) it is used by the personnel who, besides the usage of this technology has a task to implement desirable professional relation of confidence with guests/consumers.

This means that the personnel are in two ways exposed to the pressures. On one side, this is the pressure coming from the numerous applied ICT and on the other side there are the pressures from the guests and their demands for offering perfect quality service in time. This position of product-service personnel leads it to a delicate situation which has more than serious consequences. In fact, the focus and the ability of judging in this immense number of relations and connections, the structure in an organization and with applied ICT it unavoidably leads the personnel in the state of passivity and indifference towards their working environment where the domination of guests is increasing.

In the same time, they are not capable to develop very high tolerance on extremely situations in which can be the guests and its consequence can have a service of low quality and discontent of guests. Observing mentioned process in long-term, the personnel can be saturate which can be resolved only by simplification in ICT usage and this means higher level of tolerance and understanding by the management in imposing the greater number of gadgets and appliances that will be used by these personnel.

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