

THE ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ITS PRACTICES IN THE PORTUGUESE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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Preliminary communication

Received 4 September 2020

Revised 8 March 2021

21 May 2021

Accepted 13 July 2021

<https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.27.2.9>

Abstract

Purpose – Validation of the Human Resource Management (HRM) practices used by Portuguese hotels, their degree of importance, and the alignment between their strategic dimension and their operational implementation.

Design – The study was developed using quantitative analysis, supported by a questionnaire shared with top managers of hotel companies in the Portuguese Hotels national register.

Methodology – The HRM practices integrated in the study were the result of those identified in the literature review, the global HR barometer developed by the Michael Page company, and the HRM practices integrated in the Label Pro HR project, developed by the Mediterranean Federation from Human Resources in association with HRM Associations and European higher education institutions.

Findings – In Portugal, HRM in the hotel industry is beginning to be understood as a way to achieve competitive advantage. 92,7% of the top managers in our sample reported that the existence of an HR department grants a competitive advantage. Recruitment and Selection, Training and Development, Performance management and evaluation, and Safety and Hygiene at Work are the most important HRM practices.

We conclude that the characteristics of hotels (classification and size) are crucial for HRM, their organizational processes, and the strategic importance assigned to the function.

Originality of the research – The study is innovative because it uses a questionnaire specifically designed for the study, and which considers a high number of HRM practices. The sample consists of 124 of the 1.515 registered hotels (8,2%).

Keywords Human Resource Management practices; HRM in Hotels; top managers; competitive advantage

INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Management has evolved from an administrative and technical stance to a strategic function, directly contributing to the development of competitive advantages and value creation for organizations (Beer 1997; Boxall 1992; Caetano et al. 2000; Kaufman 2001; Laursen 2003). This function is responsible for the personal and professional development of employees and their alignment with organizational objectives and performance (Sikora and Ferris 2014). The changing environment and the need to build dynamic capabilities compel organizations to leverage their resources, structuring, combining and leveraging them with the support of multiple organizational processes and practices (Oliveira 2014). It is in this context that HRM practices play a

significant role in the management and development of people, as well as in aligning their performance with the strategic dimension of the organization. The different practices used in HRM have been the subject of study and detailed analysis. Its applicability and impact on the organization's performance still need a more individualized analysis, indexed to the nature of business and organizations. Our work was focused on identifying the different HRM practices, validating their use and relative importance in the hotel sector in Portugal.

Tourism being a sector with such atypical and ever-changing characteristics, sees human resources management as an ally (Garcia 2016; Martins 2002; Passos, Madureira and Esteves 2014; Thavamin and Kannan, 2016). Tourism in Portugal is a key sector for the development of the country's economy, accounting for 8.2% of GDP in 2018 (travelBI by Turismo de Portugal 2018). In Portugal, tourism is the largest exporting economic activity, accounting for 52.3% of exports and services and 19.7% of total exports in 2019 (Turismo de Portugal 2020). In 2019, the sector employed 6.9% of the country's active population. Within the tourism sector, hotels account for 32.3% of the GVA generated by tourism in Portugal. 70.2 million overnight stays were generated by 27.1 million guests, in 2019. The industry's success is based on service, and it is directly linked to people's performance and their ability to deliver a unique customer experience that exceeds their expectations (Thavamin and Kannan 2016).

The study of the relevance of HRM and its practices in the hotel sector has been neglected (Garcia 2016; Trindade 2006), potentiating its validation and the degree of importance of different practices in organizational development and performance. The existence of HRM formal practices in Portuguese hotels, whether internalized or outsourced, as well as the validation of the existence of a qualified responsible person associated with the process are also linked with the study (Ferreira 2016). In this context, some research questions arise, which we seek to answer in our study:

- What are the most relevant HRM practices in the hotel industry in Portugal? Are they aligned with other practices developed by the hotel industry?
- What is the importance of the Human Resources (HR) function in the hotel industry? Is it associated with the hotel's characteristics?

1. LITERATURE REVIEW – THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

People are the basis of value creation in hospitality. In the hotel sector, HR highly influences the perception of guests regarding the quality of services, affecting the positive evaluation by customers and the resulting customer loyalty (Ferreira 2014). In Portuguese hospitality, we verified the existence of a large number of hotel establishments that invest little in the development of their HR's. Managers identify several HRM practices, but they also recognize that most of them are not used in the sector (Trindade 2006; Passos, Madureira and Esteves 2014).

Nowadays, HRM assumes a proactive nature, forcing all organizational stakeholders to be an active part of strategic management (Ferreira 2014; Garcia 2016). "The activities of HRM are also developed through the planning, organization, development, coordination, and control of a set of techniques, capable of promoting efficient and

effective performance" (Garcia 2016, 14). New concepts about value creation have been laid out, revealing the dynamic perspective of resource management and environment analyses. The resource-based view and the dynamic capabilities approach have been used to enhance and explore the nature and asymmetry of resources, and the "firm's ability to accumulate, reconfigure, renew and leverage resource to build capabilities that can be used to respond to changes in the business environment" (Oliveira and Faceira 2014, 104). Tourism is one of the fastest growing activities in Portugal. Changes in the tourism business are frequent and affected by the dynamics and expectations of tourists. In addition to modern equipment and excellent facilities, the level of service and the employee performance are becoming the source of competitive advantage in the tourism and hotel sector (Martins and Machado 2002).

HRM and its strategic perspective has altered practices and enhanced its role in creating value for organizations (Nassar 2017). HRM practices evolved from an administrative stance to a strategic position, directly affecting the performance of organizations (Mahoney and Deckop 1986; Boxall 1992; Beer 1997; Kaufman 2001; Laursen 2003).

The literature review allowed us to validate eighteen HRM practices used by hospitality companies. They are shown in table 1, and they are shown from most to least referenced in the literature. To create the table below, we conducted a search for articles, theses, and studies that addressed the theme of HRM practices in the hotel sector. From the articles found, the various practices presented in Table 1 were then listed. Thus, a total of 18 practices were identified.

Table 1: Most common HRM practices in hospitality companies

Practice	Practice description	Authors and contributions to the topic
Recruitment and selection	Recruitment is a practice that begins when the organization admits the need to fill a particular position and ends when the new employee is hired. Selection is based on the process of choosing a candidate, and ends when the contract proposal is made to the candidate (Camara, Guerra and Rodrigues 2001; Sousa et al. 2012).	Bagri, Babu and Kukreti, 2010; Baum 2012, 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Chan 2015; Davidson, McPhail and Barry 2011; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Marco-Lajara and Úbeda-García 2013; Martins 2002; Michael Page n.d.; Nickson 2007; Passos et al. 2014; Pereira 2014; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Ružić 2015; Santos 2013; Solnet, Kralj and Baum 2013; Thavamin and Kannan 2016; Trindade 2006; Watson 2008
Training and skills development	Training can be assumed as the formal or informal process of acquiring knowledge or adopting attitudes and behaviors that are relevant to professional and personal activities (Camara et al. 2001). Personal development is boosted by training, enhancing the	Bagri et al. 2010; Baum 2012, 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Chan 2015; Costa, 2004; Davidson et al. 2011; Eurico, Silva and Valle, 2012; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Hroust and Mohamed, 2014; Marco-Lajara and Úbeda-García 2013; Martins 2002; Michael Page

Practice	Practice description	Authors and contributions to the topic
	efficacy, abilities, behaviors, and attitudes of each individual.	n.d.; Nickson 2007; Passos et al. 2014; Pereira 2014; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Popescu, Iancu, Vasile and Popescu 2013; Ružić 2015; Santos 2013; Solnet et al. 2013; Thavamin and Kannan 2016; Trindade 2006; Watson 2008)
Remuneration management	Remuneration is associated with the professional function; it consists of the base salary and a set of tangible and intangible compensations. Remuneration must be associated with the employee's performance, the services rendered, the alignment with the organization, and contribution to the firm's performance (Garcia 2016).	Bagri et al. 2010; Baum 2012, 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Davidson et al. 2011; Eurico et al. 2012; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Martins 2002; Michael Page n.d.; Nickson 2007; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Popescu et al. 2013; Santos 2013; Solnet et al. 2013; Thavamin and Kannan 2016; Trindade 2006
Techniques of relationship with the employee (internal communication, reception, and integration)	It is developed to increase the level of relationship between employee and organization. Internal communication is always present in organizations (Jaiswal and Dhar 2016). It is a powerful tool used to "attract, retain and develop people in organizations" (Camara et al. 2001, 451). E.g., institutional videos, open-door policy, intranet network. The welcoming and integration of employees begin before they actually start working. Welcoming corresponds to the sharing of information, and begins in the recruitment process. E.g., Welcoming Employee Handbook. Integration must be done with the help of everyone, regardless of their hierarchical level, and implies the provision of information about the job to be performed. E.g., an introductory meeting with the predecessor, or a meeting with the team.	Bagri et al. 2010; Baum 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Chan 2015; Davidson et al. 2011; Eurico et al. 2012; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Hroust and Mohamed 2014; Katou 2008; Martins 2002; Michael Page n.d.; Passos et al. 2014; Pereira 2014; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Santos 2013; Santos, Gomes and Arroteia 2011; Solnet et al. 2013; Thavamin and Kannan 2016; Trindade 2006
Job analysis	This practice encompasses many others, such as recruitment and selection, training, performance evaluation, among others, and that makes this fundamental for the development of organizations	Campos et al. 2011; Ferreira 2016; Martins 2002; Ružić 2015

Practice	Practice description	Authors and contributions to the topic
	(Landy and Vasey 1991; Sackett et al. 1981; Sanchez and Levine 2012; Schneider and Konz 1989; Singh 2008; Stybel 2010). It consists of breaking down the function that serves as a guide for the collaborator.	
Performance management and evaluation	It is an important practice, as it allows validating the recruitment and selection process, performance metrics, managing the compensation system, identifying potential, and diagnosing training needs (Camara et al. 2001). However, it can also verify compliance with the organization's strategic objectives, promote innovation and change, and improve internal communication (Sousa et al. 2012).	Bagri et al. 2010; Campos et al. 2011; Chan 2015; Davidson et al. 2011; Eurico et al. 2012; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Martins 2002; Michael Page n.d.; Passos et al. 2014; Pereira 2014; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Ružić 2015; Santos 2013; Santos, Gomes and Arroiteia 2010; Santos et al. 2011; Solnet et al. 2013; Thavamin and Kannan 2016; Trindade 2006; Watson 2008
Administrative HR Management	It is subdivided into two levels: administrative management itself (e.g. "Wage processing, personnel information, occupational medicine, legal obligations" (Martins 2002, 65) and labor relations (examples: "Collective bargaining, Relations with workers ' organizations, work Regimes " (Martins 2002, 65).	Bagri et al. 2010; Campos et al. 2011; Davidson et al. 2011; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Lacombe and Tonelli 2001; Nickson 2007; Pereira 2014; Pillai and Abraham, 2016; Santos et al. 2011; Solnet et al. 2013; Thavamin and Kannan 2016; Trindade 2006
Safety and hygiene at work	This practice consists in being "responsible for taking care of the safety, the physical and mental health of employees and also laws enforcement and norms related to the area" (Melise 2012).	Baum 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Davidson et al. 2011; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Martins 2002; Nickson 2007; Santos 2013
Career management (and development)	This practice is "the process by which individuals collect information about values, interests, and skill strengths and weaknesses (career exploration), identify a career goal, and engage in career strategies that increase the probability that career goals will be achieved" (Noe 1996, 119).	Bagri et al. 2010; Baum 2012, 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Chan 2015; Davidson et al. 2011; Eurico et al. 2012; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Martins 2002; Nickson 2007; Passos et al. 2014; Pereira 2014; Ružić 2015; Solnet et al. 2013; Thavamin and Kannan 2016; Watson 2008
Social Responsibility	All practices allow greater awareness of social and environmental issues (Raseth 2017).	Campos et al. 2011; Martins 2002; Trindade 2006

Practice	Practice description	Authors and contributions to the topic
Employees satisfaction and motivation promotion activities	Any activity that promotes the satisfaction of employees and keeps them satisfied, monetarily or not (e.g. "Safety at work, esteem and accomplishment at work" (Sousa et al. 2012, 100), "the delegation of responsibilities employees, job security, incentive programs, career progression opportunities, recognition and training" (Martins 2002, 81).	Bagri et al. 2010; Baum 2012, 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Chan 2015; Davidson et al. 2011; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Hroust and Mohamed 2014; Martins 2002; Nickson 2007; Passos et al. 2014; Pereira 2014; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Ružić 2015; Santos 2013; Solnet et al. 2013; Thavamin and Kannan 2016; Trindade 2006; Watson 2008
Conflicts mediation and management	It is how the conflicts that arise in the organization are managed to arrange an acceptable solution for both parties involved (HR-Fusion n.d.)	Campos et al. 2011.; Garcia 2016; Martins 2002; Nickson 2007; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Santos 2013
Outplacement	It is a practice that some companies offer and consists in assisting the process of dismissing a collaborator, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. E.g. elaboration of a curriculum vitae, preparation for an interview, identification of job opportunities (Sousa et al. 2012)	Campos et al. 2011; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Stacho and Stachová 2015
Quality management systems in HRM	The Portuguese standard 4427 establishes the requirements for the development and implementation of human resources management systems (HRMS). The system responds to two central needs of the organizations: Internally - to develop human resources in a way that continuously meets all the needs of organizations arising from their activities and the environment; Externally - recognizing good practices in human resources developed by several types of organizations (public and private companies, manufacturing industries, service providers) (SGS no date)	Campos et al. 2011; SGS n.d.
Empowerment and definition of corporative policies	Empowerment is a tool that implies the decentralization of powers (Menon 2001), to provide greater autonomy to each	Baum 2012, 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Chan 2015; Davidson et al. 2011; Martins 2002; Michael Page n.d.; Nickson 2007; Pillai and Abraham 2016

Practice	Practice description	Authors and contributions to the topic
	employee. (Martins and Silva 2013 – thesis Ferreira 2015)	
Communication plans	“A communication plan is a policy-driven approach to providing stakeholders with information. The plan formally defines who should be given specific information, when that information should be delivered, and what communication channels will be used to deliver the information.” (TechTarget Contributor 2015).	Bagri et al. 2010; Baum 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Chan 2015; Davidson et al. 2011; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Hroust and Mohamed, 2014; Martins 2002; Nickson 2007; Passos et al. 2014; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Santos et al. 2010, 2011; Solnet et al. 2013
Control of HRM indicators	The use of indicators allows the control of our process and “enable HR to track and measure performance on different aspects and ultimately predict the future” (van Vulpen 2016).	Baum 2015; Campos et al. 2011; Martins 2002; Michael Page n.d.; Nickson 2007; Ružić 2015
Talent management and employees retention	It includes the elaboration of an individual plan that mentions how each employee may evolve. Evolution should be adjusted to the needs of the organization and personal expectations to reach the maximum resource potential and objectives of the organization (Garcia 2016). In other words, it “is a process of evaluation, alignment, and reconciliation between the needs, opportunities, and organizational and individual changes” (Sousa et al. 2012, 160).	Baum 2012; Chan 2015; Costa 2004; Davidson et al. 2011; Ferreira 2016; Garcia 2016; Martins 2002; Michael Page n.d.; Nickson 2007; Passos et al. 2014; Pereira 2014; Popescu et al. 2013; Ružić 2015; Santos 2013; Solnet et al. 2013; Thavamin and Kannan 2016; Trindade 2006; Watson 2008

Source: Elaborated for the study

Based on the objective of our work, we sought similar studies that would allow a comparative analysis. The most recent study on the practices of HRM in Portuguese organizations was developed by the multinational recruiting company Michael Page and carried out in 2015 (Michael Page n.d.).

The study inserted in the Global HR Barometer was conducted in early 2015 and gathered information collected in 2.572 companies from seven regions (Europe, UK and Ireland, North America, South America, Asia Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East). The study was based on the perception of executives and HR managers of companies of different sizes and sectors of activity. Multinational companies were 69% of the sample. Managers were mostly between 40-45 years years old (25%), and the female gender was the most representative in the study (58%).

The study concluded that the most important HRM practices to managers were the acquisition of talent/recruitment (86%); HR policies (83%), relationship with employees (81%); training and development (79%); talent management (78%) and employee retention (75%). The top priority practices to be developed by managers of European companies are change management process (34%); training and development (33%); acquisition of talent/recruitment (31%); talent management (30%); performance management (27%) and employee retention with 21%.

When we analyze the case of Portugal in particular, the study concludes that 31% of the companies increase the budget concerning recruitment practices, and it turns out that only a small minority (13%) decrease the budget value allocated to the HR function. Managers responsible for the HR function in Portuguese firms announce as priority practices training and development (55%), performance management (32%), and recruitment (32%) {Formatting Citation}.

Our study was based on the several studies mentioned in table 1, to be able to list as many practices as possible related to the sector under analysis.

The practices included in the Michael Page study are consistent with the several practices identified in the literature review and shown in table 1.

From the practices found in the literature review, the Michael Page study considered the following: recruitment and selection, training and skills development, remuneration management, techniques of relationship with the employee (internal communication, reception, and integration), performance management and evaluation, empowerment and definition of corporative policies, control of HRM indicators, and talent management and employee's retention. However, the Michael Page study was only a comparative study. This was the most recent study we found that specifically focused on HRM practices. Furthermore, this study had a good scope since it looked at several companies from different sectors, including hospitality, at a national level.

2. HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION AND RESEARCH MODEL

In our analysis, we used a hypothetical-deductive process to verify possible answers to our questions (Coutinho 2013). This model defines the use of hypotheses as a decisive factor for solving the problem to be investigated.

H₁ – The existence of a formal HR department is associated with the size of the hotel.

H₂ – The relevance of the HR function is positively associated with the size of the hotel unit.

The size of the organization is a differentiating factor regarding the importance attributed to the HR function, the HRM practices, and their applicability (Gooderham, Nordhaug and Ringdal 1999; Hroust and Mohamed 2014; Pereira 2014; Čech et al. 2015; Ružić 2015; Garcia, 2016). H₁ attempts to validate this assumption, associating the organization's size with the existence of a HRM in the hotel. For measuring

organizational size, we used the small, medium, and large-sized enterprises (SMLEs) classification. H₂ seeks to validate the relevance of the perceived role attributed to the HR function taking into account the size of the organization.

Some authors talk about the inexistence of an HRM department and associate it with the size of hotel units. In this sense, Garcia (2016) says that "when analyzing Human Resources Management in hotel units it is essential to mention that it has only been implemented relatively recently in large companies, and there are still those who opt for a traditional family structure and flat hierarchies in small and medium-sized companies, in which human resources practices continue to be carried out by top management" (76/77). Pereira (2014), on the other hand, mentions that the "region under study has mostly independent hotels, many of them with family management that hinder developments in the human resources sector" (57). Two Portuguese studies can demonstrate how the hotel industry is characterized in the country. Still regarding validation based on the size of hotel units, Ružić (2015), in one of her hypotheses, tried to validate "HRM key activities in hotel companies vary in relation to hotel company size" (59) and concluded that, in her study, "HRM key activities do not differ by the criterion of hotel company size" (61). However, in her literature review, she also referred to Hoque (1999) who argued that "only large hotel companies can allow themselves to experiment with HRM practice (Hoque 1999)" (58/59). Hroust and Mohamed (2014) also argued that "(...) there is a large number of small firms which hardly institute formal HR practices (...)" (3). Other authors mention that several studies evaluate the influence of the size of hotel units, as they believe that it "tends to influence the methods used for controlling and coordinating employees." (Gooderham et al. 1999, 518). Another study validated that "100% percent of large and medium-sized companies have independent HR departments while 76.47% small firms do not." (Čech et al. 2015, 3).

H₃ – The classification of the hotel (star rating associated with the level of comfort and service) affects the importance given to the development of the company's human resources.

In the literature review, we verified the association of a HR function with the typology of the hotel unit, namely associating its highest intensity to 4 and 5-star hotels (Chan 2015; Nassar 2017; Pillai and Abraham 2016; Thavamin and Kannan 2016). This hypothesis attempted to validate if the level of comfort and service of a hotel was associated with the development of the HR function in the hotel's organizations (Uyar and Bilgin 2011; Marco-Lajara and Úbeda-García 2013; Nassar 2017).

The size of the organization is associated with the development of the HR function. Several authors argue that the analysis and development of the function will only make sense in medium and large-scale organizations (Baum 2015; Davidson et al. 2011; Passos et al. 2014; Popescu et al. 2013; Ružić 2015; Trindade 2006).

In Portugal, there are several small hotels, but with a high level of service (4 and 5 stars). This hypothesis seeks to validate the association of the service quality to the development of the HR function in Hotel organizations.

H₄ – The HRM practices considered most important by top managers are those who are applied in the hotel units.

H₄ associates the degree of the strategic importance of each practice identified by top management with the operational and strategic practices effectively used in the HRM by each company. We performed the validation of this hypothesis sequentially: first, and based on the perception of the top managers, we identified the HRH practices considered as more critical; in a second phase, we associated these practices with those effectively developed by the function.

2.1. Research methods

We based our study on the perceptions of hotel directors or top managers. The difficulties associated with the use of interviews and qualitative analysis led us to the use of a questionnaire and quantitative techniques. Initially, we tried to conduct a mixed-method study, but due to the unwillingness shown by some top managers, we opted for a quantitative study. The questionnaire was elaborated and made available online to hotel units. We also contacted top managers directly via e-mail and telephone calls.

The questionnaire prepared for the study was composed of three sections. In section A, thirteen questions were asked (one of which was optional). In this section, we collected some data about the hotel unit and some social-demographic variables about the top manager (who was the respondent). Section B was about the HRM function in the organization, and lastly, in section C we tried to validate the importance of each HRM practice based on the top manager's perception and the leading HRM practices applied in the hotel unit. We made the validation of the questionnaire before distribution over a small sample composed of 20 hotel directors. The instrument was developed by Natália Costa (2017).

2.2. Sample and data collection

The study included responses collected between April 2017 and July 2017. The study had the participation of 124 top managers that represent 8,2% of the hotels registered in Portugal in 2015. According to the Portuguese Tourism Agency, in December of 2015 there were 1515 hotels listed in the National Hospitality Register. This registration is mandatory. We sent the questionnaire to the entire population.

2.2.1. Characterization of the hotel units integrated into the sample.

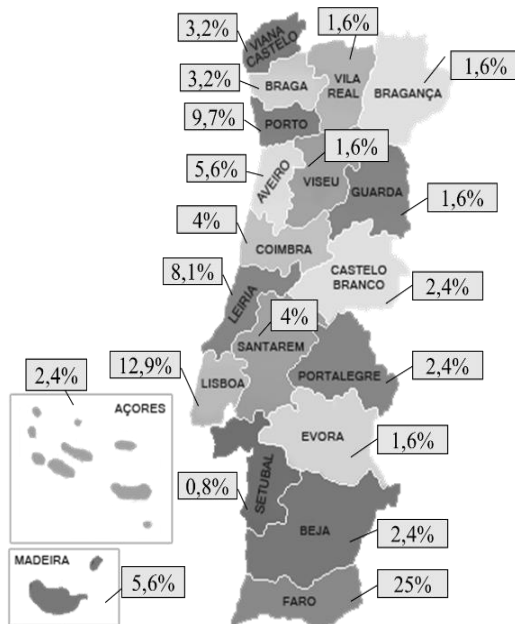
The characteristics of the population presented are associated with those defined in the hotel typologies, well-defined in the Portuguese Legal Regime of Tourism Enterprises ⁱ.

ⁱ Based on Decree-Law no. 39/2008 of 7 March (Ministério da Economia e da Inovação, 2008), in the wording given by Decree-Law no. 15/2014 of 23 January (Ministério da Economia, 2014b), Decree-Law no. 128/2014, of 29 August (Ministério da Economia, 2014a) and Decree-Law no. -Legal no. 186/2015, dated September 3 (Ministério da Economia, 2018).

Most of the respondents were associated with hotels (82,3%), followed by resorts (8,1%) and touristic villages (3,2%). Regarding the corresponding comfort classification, it was found that the majority of the sample was composed of enterprises classified with four stars (41,1%), the five-star enterprises have a sample composed of 30 top managers (24,2%), and 22,6% were composed of three-star hotels. Only one respondent from star-rated establishments was involved.

42% of the top managers worked in hotels that are part of international groups. To validate the hotel's size, we used the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361 of 6 May (SMLE). Our hotels were classified as micro, small, medium, and large enterprises (European Commission, 2003). In our sample, the small companies represent 36,3% and medium-sized companies 35,5%. Microenterprises make up 24,2% and large companies 4% of the sample. We present the location of the hotels in figure 1.

Figure 1: **Distribution of the sample by districts**



Source: Elaborated for the study

The majority of Hotels already had several years of business experience, 50% had opened before 2001.

2.2.2. Characterization of the respondents (top managers)

The majority of top managers were females (51,6%). The average age was 40,4 years; the mode was 35 years. The majority were married (58,1%). 80,5% of managers had higher education qualifications.

When questioned for how long they had had top management responsibilities, we got an average of eight years and two months. 83,9% of the top managers who participated in the study had some responsibility in the HRM of their organizations.

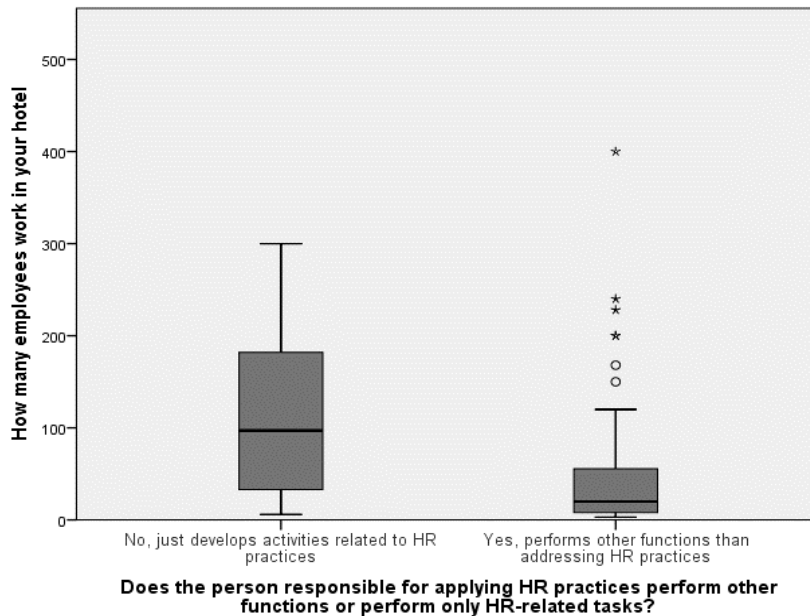
3. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS DISCUSSION

3.1. H₁ – The existence of a formal HR department is associated with the size of the hotel.

Variables used: number of employees (size of the hotel unit) and the person responsible for applying HR practices performs other functions or performs only HR-related tasks (qualitative).

We applied the Mann-Whitney U test ($p - value = 0,000$), which allowed us to determine the existence of differences in size (measured by the number of employees), and the existence of an HR manager ($p - value < 0,05$). We validated H₁, concluding that it was the largest hotel that had managers exclusively affected to the HR function.

Graphic 1: **Bloxpote of the variables in analysis in H₁**

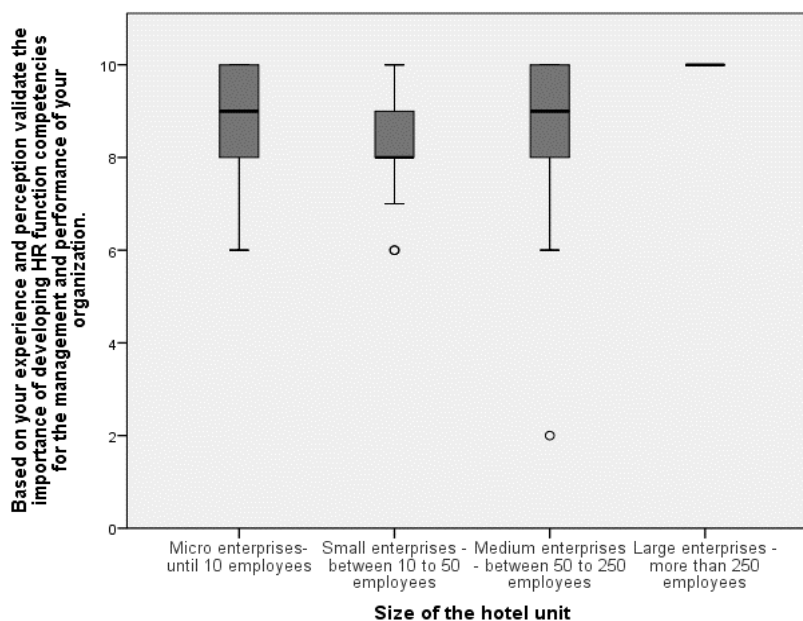


Source: Elaborated for the study

3.2. H₂ – The relevance of the HR function is positively associated with the size of the hotel unit.

Variables used: the importance of HR competency development (10 point scale - unimportant to very important) and size of the hotel unit by type of SMLE (qualitative). The characteristics of the variables required the use of the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test for independent samples ($p - value = 0,004$). We found differences associated with the size of the hotel. Differences did exist, but were not indexed to the size of the hotel.

Graphic 2: Bloxpot of the variables in analysis in H₂



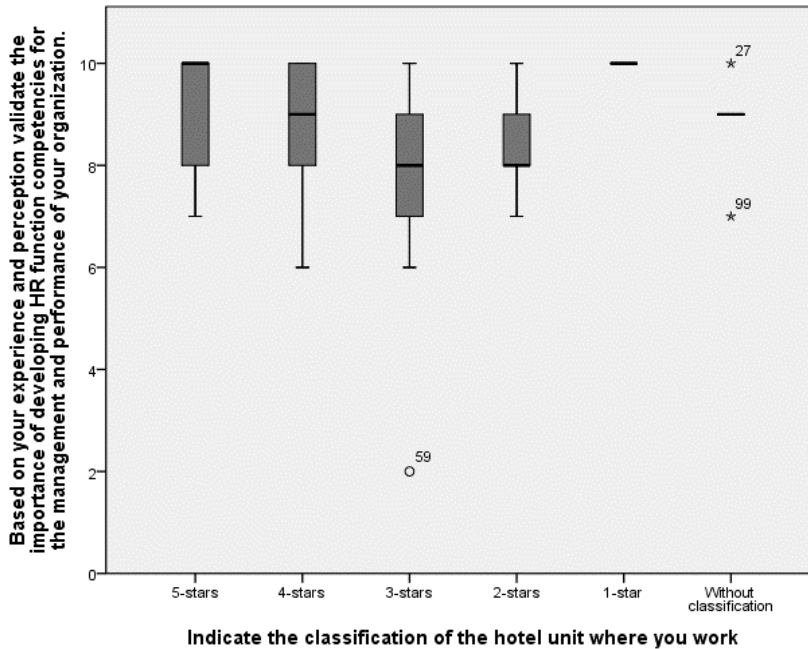
Source: Elaborated for the study

3.3. H₃ – The classification of the hotel (star rating associated with the level of comfort and service) affects the importance given to the development of the company's human resources.

Variables used: the importance of HR competency development (10 point scale - unimportant to very important) and classification of the hotel unit by star system.

We used the Kruskal-Wallis test ($p - value = 0,026$) to validate differences between the importance of the HR function attributed by the top managers and the hotel classification (stars classification). Differences existed and we confirmed that the top managers of the 5 and 4-star hotels gave more importance to the HR function (graphic 3). Despite the importance attributed to the HR function, we did not find any connection between the hotel classification and the existence of an HR Manager in the hotel.

Graphic 3: **Bloxpot of the variable in the analysis of H₃**



Source: Elaborated for the study

3.4. H₄ – The HRM practices considered most important by top managers are those who are applied in the hotel units

This hypothesis was validated in three phases. First, we identified the most used HRM practices by the hotels. Then, based on manager’s perceptions, we validated which practices were most relevant to HRM in their organizations. Finally, we made the association between the developed practices and the ones elected as most important for the development of the organizations. We used the V-Cramer test.

From the eighteen practices presented, recruitment and selection, training and skills development, performance management and evaluation, and Safety and Hygiene at Work were considered by the top managers as the most important. Repeating the same exercise to validate the most developed practices by hotel unit, we ended up with safety and hygiene at work, recruitment and selection, and human resource administrative management.

The results, as shown in table 2, allow the conclusion that, of the eighteen practices presented, only six were not aligned with the relationship between their strategic importance and the formal application in the organization. These practices were empowerment and definition of corporative policies, job analysis, performance management and evaluation, recruitment and selection, safety and hygiene at work, and techniques of relationship with the employee.

Table 2: The most developed HRM practices vs. the most important

HRM Practices	Developed by the hotel unit		The importance attributed to the practice		Diferencial	V Cramer Test	
	N	%	Important	%		p-value	Decision
Safety and hygiene at work	119	96%	108	87%	8,9%	0,84	Accept H0
Recruitment and selection	118	95%	119	96%	-0,8%	0,11	Accept H0
Human Resource Administrative Management	116	94%	97	78%	15,3%	0	Reject H0
Training and skills development	113	91%	116	94%	-2,4%	0	Reject H0
Remuneration management	111	90%	109	88%	1,6%	0,02	Reject H0
Conflicts mediation and management	110	89%	104	84%	4,8%	0,02	Reject H0
Techniques of relationship with the employee (internal communication, reception, and integration)	109	88%	114	92%	-4,0%	0,07	Accept H0
Job analysis	107	86%	94	76%	10,5%	0,19	Accept H0
Employees satisfaction and motivation promotion activities	102	82%	105	85%	-2,4%	0,01	Reject H0
Empowerment and definition of corporative policies	100	81%	97	78%	2,4%	0,06	Accept H0
Performance management and evaluation	100	81%	116	94%	-12,9%	0,36	Accept H0
Social Responsibility	98	79%	97	78%	0,8%	0	Reject H0
Communication plans	96	77%	91	73%	4,0%	0,03	Reject H0
Quality management systems in HRM	94	76%	85	69%	7,3%	0	Reject H0

HRM Practices	Developed by the hotel unit		The importance attributed to the practice		Diferencial	V Cramer Test	
	N	%	Important	%		p-value	Decision
Control of HRM indicators	90	73%	94	76%	-3,2%	0,04	Reject H0
Talent management and employees retention	84	68%	104	84%	-16,1%	0	Reject H0
Career management (and development)	83	67%	96	77%	-10,5%	0	Reject H0
Outplacement	77	62%	74	60%	2,4%	0	Reject H0

Source: Elaborated for the study

The Michael Page study identifies HRM priorities for Portugal. The three priorities were training and development (55%), performance management (32%), and recruitment and selection (32%). These priorities are in line with the results obtained in this hypothesis. Note that there is no connection between the importance given to talent management, performance management, and evaluation and career management, and those that are effectively being developed by organizations. Inverse analysis can be performed for practices like HR administrative management, job analysis, safety and hygiene at work, and quality management systems in HRM.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study allowed us to identify and classify different HRM practices used by Portuguese hotels nowadays. We identified 18 practices and, based on the managers' perceptions, validated their level of use and their strategic importance to the organization. This way, recruitment and selection, training and skills development, performance management and evaluation, as well as Safety and Hygiene at Work are considered by the top managers as the most important. These results allow us to answer the first part of the initial question - What are the most relevant HRM practices in the hotel industry in Portugal?

In Portugal, HRM in the hotel industry is beginning to be understood as a way to obtain competitive advantages. 92,7% of the top managers in our sample reported that the existence of an HR department grants a competitive advantage. Thus, it is possible to state that the top managers considered the HRM function is very important to the sector (a second question we define in the study).

To answer the second part of the second research question - Is it associated with the hotel's characteristics? - we conclude that the characteristics of hotels (classification and size) are decisive in HRM, their organizational processes, and the strategic importance attributed to the function. An example of this were the results obtained in the validation

of the hypothesis under study, which showed that it is the larger hospitality companies that have managers exclusively affected the function, and those also reveal a higher perception of its strategic importance for organizations.

The results obtained in the study of the hotel activity, regarding the use and importance of the HRM function, follow the conclusions of studies developed by Baum (2015); Davidson et al. (2011); Passos et al. (2014); Popescu et al. (2013); Ružić (2015).

We also validate the articulation between the importance attributed to the HRM practices and its development in Portuguese hotels to answer the second part of the first research question - Are they aligned with the practices developed by the hotel industry? - The most used practices in hospitality are those associated with safety and hygiene at work, recruitment and selection, and HR administrative management. Those considered most important for the achievement of competitive advantages are recruitment and selection, training and skills development, performance management and evaluations, techniques of relationship with the employees, and remuneration management. In many of the practices, there is an alignment between the use and the strategic importance of the practice. The exception is performance management and evaluation, with a significant difference between its strategic importance and its implementation as an instrument by the hotels.

It should be noted that the practices follow the guidelines of the Michael Page study concerning the priority practices to be developed in the HRM.

The main limitation of the study is related to the sample size. In Portugal, the hospitality sector is not very receptive to this type of study. For this reason, there are few national studies in the sector and, when they exist, their samples are very small, which does not allow for a study with a very significant and representative percentage of the sector.

Another limitation of this study is the small amount of information found by the authors in their literature review. This fact reduced the comparability of the results obtained, forcing the need for their validation (by comparing them) with those existing in different markets. We also met with difficulty accessing the top managers of the hotel units and that made it impossible to deepen the study, which could have been carried out with the use of a qualitative study.

This study differs from other studies because it compiled several practices performed in the hospitality sector. In addition, it identifies which practices are considered the most important and which are the most developed by the sector. Thus, there may be future work that will pick up exclusively on these practices and explore further their impact on hotel unit performance.

As guidelines for future work, it would be interesting to validate the impact of using the different HRM practices (strategic) on the organizational performance and their impact on the level of services provided by each hotel unit.

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Please cite this article as:

Costa, N., Oliveira, C.M., Oliveira, I. (2021), The Role and Relevance of Human Resource Management and its Practices in the Portuguese Hotel Industry, *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 407-427, <https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.27.2.9>



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