TOURIST ACCOMMODATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS IN MOROCCO: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PUT TO THE TEST

ALOJAMENTO TURÍSTICO EM TEMPOS DE CRISE NO MARROCOS: A COMUNICAÇÃO INTERNA POSTA À PROVA

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ABSTRACT

Since the 2008 financial crisis, concerns about economic downturns have persisted, impacting global markets, including Morocco's tourism sector. The delayed effects of the crisis were felt in 2012, compounded by the 2011 Argana café attack and later, the Covid-19 pandemic. These events severely affected employment, business finances, and overall confidence. Beyond financial losses, crises demand strong managerial and communication skills. This study analyzes internal communication's role in crisis management, particularly within Morocco's tourism accommodation sector. The succession of crises has exposed business vulnerabilities, emphasizing the need for innovation and adaptation in organizational culture and communication.

Keywords: Internal communication, organization, crisis, motivation, tourism.

RESUMO

Desde a crise financeira de 2008, as preocupações com a desaceleração econômica persistiram, impactando os mercados globais, incluindo o setor de turismo do Marrocos. Os efeitos tardios da crise foram sentidos em 2012, agravados pelo ataque ao café Argana em 2011 e, posteriormente, pela pandemia de Covid-19. Esses eventos afetaram gravemente o emprego, as finanças das empresas e a confiança geral. Além das perdas financeiras, as crises exigem fortes habilidades gerenciais e de comunicação. Este estudo analisa o papel da comunicação interna no gerenciamento de crises, especialmente no setor de acomodações turísticas do Marrocos. A sucessão de crises expôs as vulnerabilidades dos negócios, enfatizando a necessidade de inovação e adaptação na cultura e na comunicação organizacional.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação interna, organização, crise, motivação, turismo.

Introduction

Since 2008 and the collapse of stock markets around the world, we have regularly heard talk of the risk of another recession, or of the efforts being made to avoid one. The international crisis of 2008 had an immediate impact, which then spread the world through various transmission channels, including tourist flows. In Morocco, 2012 saw the delayed effects of this crisis, which resulted in the weakening of the country's key tourist markets, not forgetting the attack on the Argana café (in Marrakech) in 2011, which had an impact on business.

So we can say that the sustained dynamism of tourism activity in Morocco in the 2000s was interrupted by these shocks, which were compounded by the coronavirus health crisis that began in 2020, the consequences of which on employment and company finances have been particularly devastating. Beyond the drop in a company's purely economic results, a crisis causes concern and shakes employee confidence. The technical skills of managers alone are insufficient. Managerial and communication skills, specific to crisis management, are required.

As a result, we have been interested in analysing internal communication to understand how it can help organisations manage unforeseen situations. We also focused on the characteristics of the organisation in order to study the dynamics of human relations and their degree of importance. It should also be noted that the practical part of our study focused on organisations in the tourist accommodation sector, which is one of the sectors most severely affected by the consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic.

The succession of crises has highlighted the factors that make companies vulnerable and accentuated their fragility. Facing up to these challenges requires new ideas and a capacity for renewal in terms of culture and communication practices.

I) Theoretical concepts of internal communication

While companies have long been organised around the imperative of cost control, the increase in contingency combined with a difficult global economic climate is contributing to a destabilisation of the usual operating framework[1] . This turbulence is having a profound effect on the inter-relational equilibrium of workers, who are also subject to urgent deadlines and ever-increasing work pressure.

1) A few definitions

"It is impossible not to communicate"[2] . This means that communication is at the heart of all existence and that every behaviour carries a message. This quote allows us to see communication as an unlimited and indefinite set of behaviours that we send and receive on a continuous basis. Communication "is also, in a professional activity, agreeing on something to do and succeeding together"[3] . At a time when the economic fabric is so complex and markets so international, the business world is experiencing a succession of shocks, and is undergoing a series of transformations in both its structure and the underlying management strategies. If these changes are to be successful, management methods need to be adapted. It is therefore crucial to equip organisations with the managerial tools that best facilitate their integration into such a context.

The communications function has undergone several changes. It began by focusing on individuals, before moving on to groups and, to a greater extent, organisations and professional relationships.

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between this function and employees, while placing it in its most global context. In other, we are interested in

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[1] The constraints resulting from this situation have an impact on employees and their material, psychological and social conditions. Companies face the risk of reduced performance and loss of value.

[2] Watzlawick, P., Jackson Don D., & Helmick Beavin J. (2014). *A logic of communication*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

[3] Philippe Zarifian, "La communication dans le travail", Communication et organisation [En ligne], 38 | 2010, online 01 December 2013. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/communicationorganisation/1462; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/communicationorganisation.1462

this set of communication actions implemented for the benefit of employees, but which at the same time pursues the objectives of an organisation that aims to be resilient and sustainable.

2) Developments in the communications function

"Unlike classical organisational theories, which were concerned with the formal structure of authority and control mechanisms, the human relations school is interested in the social and psychological characteristics of individuals and the work group"[4] . This statement marks the evolution of the concept of communication over time. Indeed, the classical school of thought defines communication as a tool for control and essentially for transmission, whereas the human relations school is more concerned with introducing individual and relational specificities, thus paving the way for more humane management. Libaert (2015) points out that there is a growing awareness on the part of organisations of the need to equip themselves with more sophisticated and better targeted communication skills. Communication that goes beyond an exclusively technical approach, "where the company conceived communication solely as the transmission of messages about its identity, its values and its commitments"[5] , to become part of a more global strategic approach. This reorientation is nothing other than the reflection of the very evolution of management methods and the maturing of the perception of the environment. From a perspective more specific to internal communication, we borrow from Annie Bartoli's study[6] to demonstrate the link between communication and organisation. The author sets out a number of points that characterise a communicating organisation. She specifies that the organisation must be open, in order to communicate with the outside world (its environment), through interactive transmission and reception. Then, in order to manage the unexpected and the unpredictable, the organisation would benefit from allowing an appropriate mix of

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[4] Laramée, A. (1989). *La communication dans les organisations*. Presses de l'Université du Québec.
[5] Libaert, T. (2015). *La communication de crise*. Paris: Dunod.
[6] Bartoli, A. (1990). *Communication and Organisation*. Pour une politique cohérente. Paris: Les Editions d'organisation.

formal and informal communication, which is intended to provide meaning to the work.

According to Donada and Nogatchewsky (2007), trust reduces uncertainty and increases cooperation[7] . *Conversely*, a crisis situation alters the capital of trust, especially as visibility is reduced.

II) Empirical study

We looked at the relationship between managers and employees and how it evolves in times of crisis.

1) Understanding the context for better action

While tourism activity in Morocco in 2019 seemed to be on the verge of recovery (seven million[8] foreign tourists and almost thirteen million Moroccans living abroad), thanks in particular to communication and promotion campaigns combined with the mobilisation of professionals in the sector[9] , the year 2020 was marked from its very first months by the outbreak of the health crisis caused by the spread of the Covid virus19. Characterised by a high level of insecurity and a prevalence of informal work, hotel staff, despite being key players in the tourism experience, found themselves in a situation where it was difficult to plan ahead or build long-term strategies.

One of the essential functions of internal communication is to motivate staff, by involving them in the work they do and creating genuine team cohesion. However, there are many reasons for mistrust, given the demands of the current situation. Hence the need to explore ways of effectively stimulating employee involvement. Our starting point is the observation that a manager in a tourism

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[7] Donada, C. and Nogatchewsky G. (2007). La confiance dans les relations interentreprises: Une revue des recherches quantitatives, *Revue française de gestion*, vol. 6, n°175, p. 111-124.

[8] Berriane, M. (2020). Le tourisme marocain de l'après-COVID-19, *Téoros* [Online], | 2020, Online since 10 November 2020, connection on 17 February 2022. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/teoros/7627

[9] The Moroccan National Tourist Office's 2018 report describes the communication actions carried out in 2018 to promote our country as a tourist destination to the French.

business supervises a multi-disciplinary team whose members are in contact not only with customers, but also with partner companies. As a result, their role in ensuring this balance is crucial. This means being attentive to the communication style of the people you are dealing with and the message you really want to get across. "What limits or promotes a manager's success? It's not just their level of technical knowledge. Above all, it's their ability to establish human relationships that enable the group to function, or not function, as a team"[10] . What's more, their participation in decision-making and its implementation is essential, especially for those who, by virtue of their expertise or seniority, are considered to be naturally supportive of management issues: "Management that is purely linear and top-down is denounced by employees who demand participation and the right to express themselves".[11]

2) Description of the methodology

Based on a mixed study, quantitative by questionnaires and qualitative by individual interviews, a survey was carried out among a sample of Moroccan companies and establishments operating in the tourism sector. As the tourism sector is composite and multi-branched (accommodation, transport, catering, leisure, entertainment, etc.), we decided to focus our quantitative study on the tourist accommodation sector. This enabled us to refine our analysis with a view to gaining a targeted understanding of the deployment of internal communication processes in a crisis context. Specifically, we have focused on large establishments (75% with over 100 employees), which are the most likely to have a communications unit. Despite the extreme complexity of the period during which we were collecting responses from hoteliers, we managed to obtain a total of 27 responses. To process the results, we used Principal Component Analysis (PCA) , an exploratory method adapted to observations described by quantitative variables. It is an interdependence technique in which all the variables are considered

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[10] Colombo, J., & Moine J-F. (2008). *Être un manager communicant.* Paris: Cegos.
[11] D'Almeida, N. (2017). *The promises of communication*. Paris: PUF.

simultaneously. It is used for exploratory purposes as a multidimensional descriptive analysis technique, and aims to summarise the information contained in a set of variables along a number of factorial axes.

To gain a better understanding of the quantitative data collected, we supplemented the survey a qualitative study by conducting interviews with a small group of operators in the sector. The choice of a qualitative study was motivated by the human approach that characterises it. Unlike a statistical survey based mainly on figures, a qualitative approach highlights personal opinions and feelings, and offers the opportunity to gain a better understanding of attitudes and behaviour.

Conclusion

What we can learn from this is that a crisis probably opens up other opportunities for managerial innovation, in the broadest sense, and communicational innovation in particular. Managers are called upon to build up as clear a vision as possible of what can motivate and stimulate their staff, not through the usual channels and classic tools offered by their function, but rather by appealing to their sense of listening and demonstrating humanity and creativity. A complex equation then arises: reconciling humanist management (already advocated by Jean Marie Peretti) with an organisation that is both resilient and high-performing.

It is undeniable that the specific context studied, that of a sector shaken by crisis, implies particular managerial qualities, which go beyond the purely and usually technical perimeter of a manager (supervision, distribution of work and control...). In other words, a constantly changing environment requires the managerial body to intervene within the framework of the following two major missions: (i) Safeguarding the company's competitiveness by mobilising teams and (ii) Communicating to motivate and maintain team morale. We detail a number of practical actions that reflect these two missions: 1. Involving employees by encouraging new ideas and practices; 2. Set realistic intermediate targets to gradually return to the initial production standards and encourage the achievement of the targets set; 3. Monitor developments in the situation in real time, step by step;

4. Take into account the feelings and emotions of each member; 5. Managing emergencies and implementing a strategy adapted to a fragile context; 6. Communicating information honestly and transparently about the future of the organisation; 7. Take into account the form of communication, which must be based on a proactive and interactive approach; 8. Ensure regular communication, providing the necessary explanations and justifying all positions taken; 9. Identify and share business indicators related to the crisis; 10. Avoid allowing harmful and inaccurate information to develop internally; 11. Anticipating employees' fears and understanding their questions; 12. Be able to argue and synthesise information to make it accessible to the public; 13. Training in communication techniques and preparation for managing crisis situations and implementing plans and different possible scenarios.

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