

# **A SOFT SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY APPROACH TO DESIGN A RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT MODEL FOR A GREAT TOURISM HOTEL**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is about the design of a systemic model used in restaurants' management inside the hotels of Great Tourism category in Mexico City, applied to the Restaurant the Gifts of the Hotel Sheraton Centro Historico.

With the purpose of establishing a Holistic vision of the work's development, the use of the Systems' Paradigm and concepts of Soft Systems Methodology by Peter Checkland was determinate, since the case of study is a social system that is not only able to choose means to reach certain goals, but also capable to select and to change them.

The designed model was conceptually defined with the restructuring of the information flows, the reorganization of the restaurant's organizational structure and the view of the elements that affect the system in its intern and external environments.

Keywords: Soft System Methodology, management, restaurant, hotel, tourism.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is one of the most important and dynamic segments in the current world contributing with around 11% of the world production and generates one of each eleven work positions. It is considered that in next 20 years 1.6 million tourists will travel around the world and they will leave a billion dollars economic spill, in Mexico the tourism sector contributes with over 7% of the national PIB and it also contributes with more than 9% in direct and indirect work positions (Consejo de Promoción Turística, 2006).

Tourism has become a world level alternative to confront the setbacks of the poor countries that look forward to develop alternatives that improve their economies by means of the creation, diffusion and improvement of its tourist destinations, so much of beaches as of cities. Such it is the case of Mexico that occupies the 7<sup>o</sup> place in tourists' reception at world level with a reception of .31% of the world tourism.

In Mexico the tourist activity and therefore the hotel industry are part of one of the main economic activities, is enough to mention that the hotel occupation constitutes the base to define the tourist demand.

### **External ambient**

The Federal District is one of the most prominent sites of the national territory since it has areas that have been declared as Patrimony of the Humanity by the UNESCO, among which is the Historical Downtown and Xochimilco, considered as a cosmopolitan City that offers cultural and commercial leisure activities, the tourist importance of Mexico City resides in the business segment of tourists of that it receives,

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reason why it is a destination that has high occupations in its hotels on week days while the weekends it keeps economic rates and low occupations. Therefore the lodging companies need to establish promotions packages and discounts to the weekend travelers, settled down in the program Dfiesta which is born like an initiative of the DF SECTUR.

The Federal District harbors a series of Great Tourism category hotels that are presented below with the granted category by SECTUR in stars and with the granted category by the American Automobilist Association (AAA) in diamonds.

**Chart 1. Hotels of category Great Tourism of Mexico City**

HOTEL	SECTUR CATEGORY	AAA CATEGORY
MARQUIS REFORMA	GT	◇◇◇◇
NH TLALNEPANTLA	GT	◇◇◇◇
COLON MISIÓN REFORMA	GT	◇◇◇◇
ROYAL PEDREGAL	GT	◇◇◇◇
SHERATON CENTRO HISTORICO	GT	◇◇◇◇
CROWNE PLAZA TLALNEPANTLA LANCASTER	GT	◇◇◇◇
J.W. MARRIOTT	GT	◇◇◇◇
CAMINO REAL MÉXICO	GT	◇◇◇◇
FIESTA AMERICANA GRAND CHAPULTEPEC	GT	◇◇◇◇
NIKKO MÉXICO	GT	◇◇◇◇
W MEXICO CITY	GT	◇◇◇◇
HABITA GT	GT	◇◇◇◇
GRAN MELIA MÉXICO REFORMA	GT	◇◇◇◇
SHERATON MARIA ISABEL & TOWERS	GT	◇◇◇◇
PRESIDENTE INTERCONTINENTAL	GT	◇◇◇◇
FOUR SEASONS	GT	◇◇◇◇◇

The services provided by the hotels are conformed from the rooms, main source of revenues, until the complementary services such as the restaurant, bar, laundry, dry cleaner's, hairdresser, boutiques, souvenir stores, travel agencies and pharmacy, whose function is to make more comfortable and more pleasant the stay of the guests.

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On the other hand the hotels with Great Tourism category should have restaurant service inside their facilities as NMX-TT-007-1996-IMNC official regulation establishes (COTENNOTUR, 1996), and should also adopt strict hygiene procedures like the "H" distinctive which specifies the hygienic handling of the food, regulated in the NMX-F-605-NORMEX-2004 norm that along with the operation handling and the use of digital control systems, cause the operation of the restaurant to depend on the very operation of the hotel

The above-mentioned generates a situation of uncertainty to be able to direct the restaurants, derived from the inability of the executives to determine the strategies of growth, the long term planning and the appropriate production levels to achieve the feasibility of the operations in the restaurant.

At the present time, it is preponderant to create new strategies directed to establish new ways of managing the restaurant establishments inside the hotels that generate management alternatives that correspond to the necessities of the systems, in order to do it is necessary to carry out a diagnose of the current situation to be able to establish improvement mechanisms that contemplate the elements that conform the study object, in this case the "Los Dones" Sheraton Centro Histórico Restaurant that is treated by means of Soft Systems Methodology because it is a system of human activity where the qualitative elements acquire greater relevance to try to know the phenomenon and to promote its improvement, by means of those involved that have common goals but not necessarily search for the improvement of the system.

### Internal environment

This paperwork approaches the problem and proposes a model of restaurant management for a great tourism hotel of Mexico City that considers the limitations settled down by the international frame mark policies and the tendencies of the tourism, to contribute to the decisions making and its improvement.

The administration involves the decisions making inside the management, which is composed by the head master committee whose main functions are constituted by: specify the orientations, to suggest the development of the actions, to favor the exchange of information, to deal with the conflictive issues and to take actions.

Below the departmental divisions of the Hotel Sheraton Centro Histórico are presented with the intention of locating the department of Food and Beverages that will be studied along the analysis.

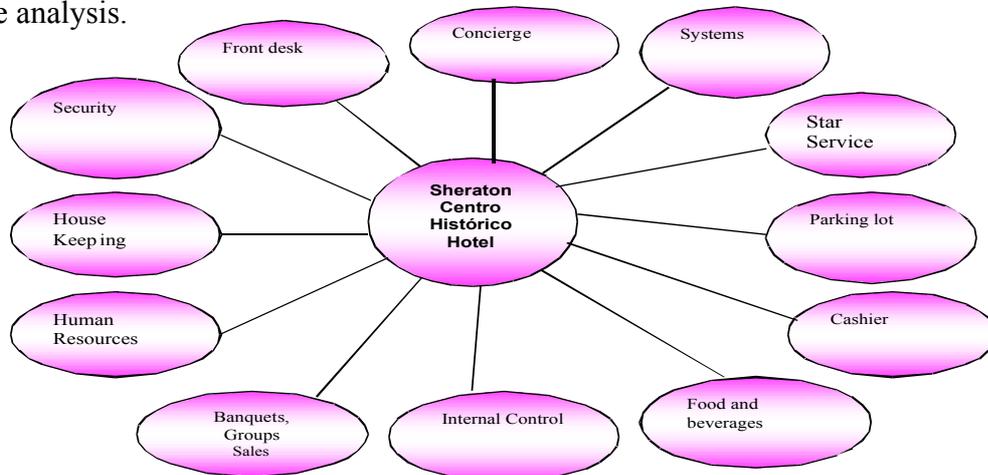
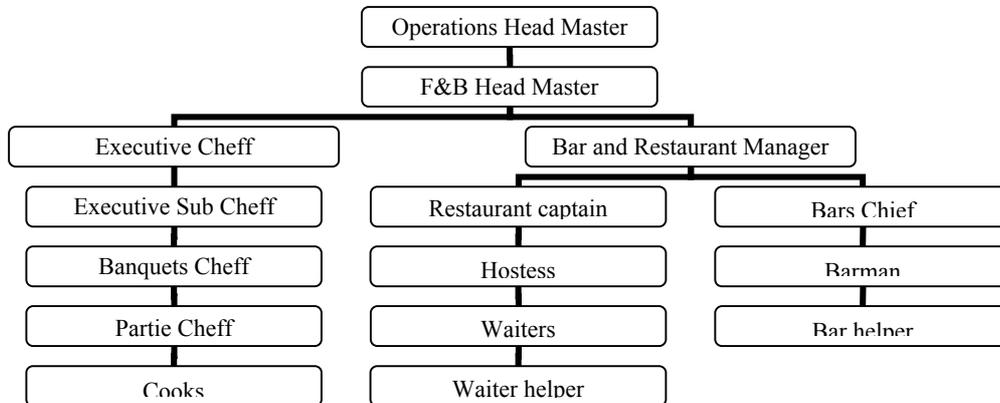


Figure 1. Departmental Divisions of Hotel Sheraton Centro Histórico Mexico City

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For the specific case to be studied the Hotel Sheraton Centro Histórico is composed by the division by departments.

Inside the attributions of the Food & Beverages (F&B) department, the informative hierarchical flow that composes it. is presented next.



**Figure 2. Food and Beverages department Organisational Chart**

**Source: F & B Policies and Procedures Hotel Sheraton Centro Histórico Manual**

Inside this representation, we can observe not only the hierarchy lines but the representation of the information flow by means of the which the communication channels that give life to the restaurant system are established, composed by the Food and Beverages area that is divided in two specific areas: on one hand the kitchen area or production of food and for the other one the management of the services area.

This kind of structural hierarchy is designed to allow the free flow of information for the decisions making, however, the restaurant is divided inside its management by the areas so much productive as for the services areas, maybe for a convenience in the handling of the Food and Beverages in general. That when being examined from the systems approach shows us the inconsistencies of the hierarchical structure, because work cells are not being integrated under a communicative hierarchy capable to carry out functions that regulate the disorder in the system, which generates a lack of functionality in the handling of the management.

It is necessary to mention that the hotel restaurant system belongs to an specifically greater area, a greater system denominated Food and Beverages by means of which, a centralized management is carried out to control the information flows and the management handling, concentrating it on the section chief of the Food and Beverages area named: Food and Beverages Head Master .

Generally, the hotels have an area manager, this person has the attribution to control the operation, we refer to the restaurant captains, whom have under their responsibility to control and to coordinate the physical operation of the establishment, is important to mention that inside the management patterns of the hotels, it is considered that management or management committee is considered as the only one authorized to carry out modifications, proposals or adaptations to the operation systems, although they are not directly controlling the operation of the area. This means that although it is certain that a high hierarchy is necessary to make certain decisions, it is also certain that the operation, organization and planning for the right decisions making to improve their own management, should be left in the hands of the direct area managers.

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The same thing happens within the information flows since generally, the head masters receive all the information that concerns to the decisions making, and they take their actions establishing a general level of management in the whole area of food and beverages. That is to say, they consider non appropriate solutions for particular F and B consuming centers because they visualize all of them as homogeneous.

The above-mentioned is considered as a non functional element of hierarchical competence, on the other hand it is convenient to mention that the information received by head masters is processed by the Food and Beverages management establishing the necessary presage that cover its required level of economic and sales benefit, without considering or carrying out an analysis of the situation that consuming centers live at the moment where their area managers are far from being decisions makers and only assume a technical role, controlling the physical operation and giving solution to the problems that are generated during the day

On the other hand, the headmasters generally are not appropriately prepared to establish tools or instruments that allow them to measure the way in which the actions are developed inside the restaurants in a qualitative way. They consider the sales like only element that indicates everything goes like it should, when the necessary thing to improve their managerial levels is to consider the qualitative and quantitative variables that generate an improvement in the sales variable.

Inside the current management that the hotel restaurants follow and in general in the whole hotel, complaints and technical handlings and abilities that the supervising personnel have to control such complaints are given priority. However, they are only centered in the possible solutions that can generate a favourable situation in the moment of the quarrel with the client, without taking in consideration the primary causes that caused the phenomenon, generally the bad service it is solved with granting incentives to the clients like discounts, special prices or simply the reinstatement of the physical product that constitutes the service, in this case the dishes of the restaurant that generates higher costs but doesn't solve the frequent problems to which the services providers face.

Inside the quality controls with which the Starwood chain counts, we can find the inspection visits of the corporate to measure what they call the quality of the services, which rather refer to the execution of the standards to determine the perseverance in their use. This revision is performed every 6 months and at the end of the inspection the executive committee meets with the Shopper, who informs on the obtained results.

This kind of evaluations is very common inside the hotel industry where the handling of the standards is related with the client's satisfaction, trying to establish a level of service, that is to say that the quality of the service is reduced to the repetitive use of standards, minimizing to a very inferior scale the human potentialities that can be directed toward better structured goals.

The above-mentioned, shows one more lack of functionality in the evaluation aspect of the services providing.

Is important to mention that the lack of functionality presented in this stage of the research will be recaptured for the structuring of the restaurant management model in which they will be given a systemic treatment to promote their improvement.

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## DEVELOPMENT

The systems of human activity are systems models built to perform an activity with the intention of questioning the situation of the real world in a comparison phase. Contrary to the hard systems, the human activity systems or soft systems face disordered problems and human beings in social roles, reason why the methodology is used to create the Holón (the whole) with defined purpose and emergent property that is to say with capacity to pursue the purpose completely (Checkland & Scholes, 1994).

### Description of the not structured problem

Next, through the use of the soft systems methodology is presented the first image that makes allusion to the situation in which the problem is perceived.

In this stage, it is necessary that the researcher knows the nature in which the problematic situation is generated. Based on the theoretical information analyzed and on the experience about the Hotels systems, the definition of the studied system is presented next.

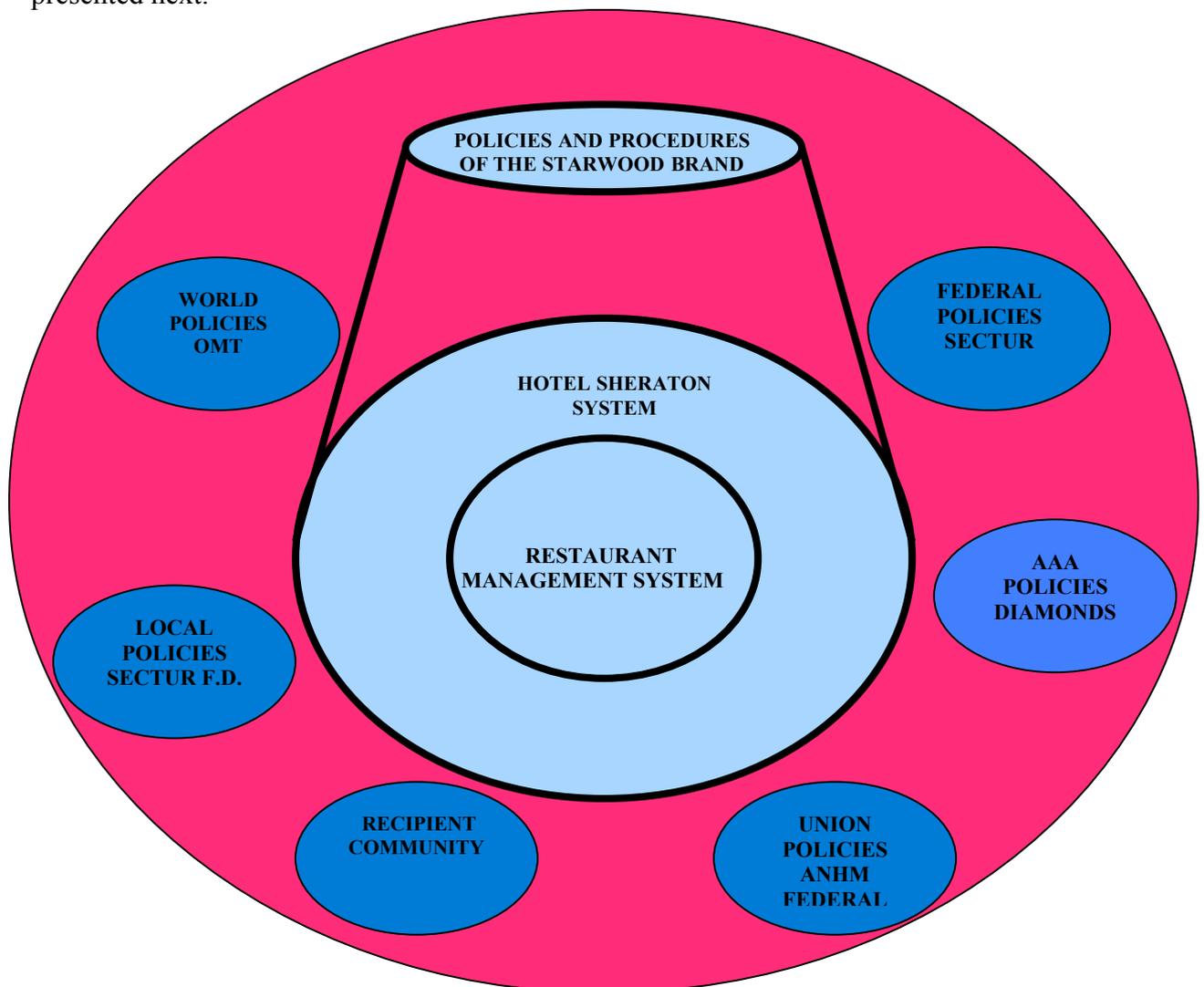


Figure 3. Definition of the studied system

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### *Interpretations*

The previous graph shows us the elements that intervene in the Restaurant Management Model for a Great tourism Hotel inside Mexico City where, in a first approach, we can notice the existing relationship between the elements and the environment to consider.

Inside the previous relationships, we can notice that the regulations imposed by the STARWOOD Chain, acquire higher relevance since they are constituted by the standards, policies and procedures of the brand, generated in the corporate that establishes the requirements inside which the operation of the Great Tourism Hotel Sheraton system is held.

On the other hand, the System doesn't escape the classifications of international organisms that establish a series of regulations, in this case we refer to the OMT, that generates information and supports toward the sector.

The regulations imposed by the federal governments that vary depending on the locations in which the hotels are, run in charge of Federal Tourism Ministry (SECTUR) main promoter of the destinations and their development.

Inside the local area the regulations run in charge of the Federal District Government and specifically in this case, with the Mexico City Tourism Ministry (SECTUR), inside their attributions and competences.

On the other hand, the recipient community is constituted by the necessary human capital for the operation of the system that performs a primordial role inside the development of the services.

Inside the considerations of the environment, we find the regulations, supports, information and training provided by the National Association of Hotels and Motels (ANHM), which is born with the intention of giving support, impulse and development to the Hotel companies of the country.

On the other hand, we have the settled policies by the American Automobileist Association (AAA) in charge of establishing the criteria to categorize the services as well as the facilities provided by the deluxe hotels, to locate them inside some category identified by the number of diamonds that it grants.

In the centre of the image we have the representation of the Restaurant Management Model inside the Great Tourism Hotel of Mexico City where the mainly involved are in the central part of the model represented by the decision makers head master executives and the services direct providers, the collaborators or employees of the hotel that provide the services to the customers.

For the present study, an investigation instrument was designed by means of which direct interviews directed to those involved were carried out, which gave us the interpretations of those involved and that were used for the design of the Restaurant Management Model inside the Hotel Sheraton Centro Histórico of Mexico City:

### **Situation of the Expressed Problem**

Inside the expressed situation the situation of the problem was developed through enriched graphs that are the means to capture as much information as possible. An enriched graph shows the human system behind the activity, and in addition, it indicates us anomalies and how the structures and the processes are related to each other.

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### Root definition of the relevant systems

The enriched graphs helped to express the main problems of the situation, which are going to be solved by root definitions of the conceptual systems to be proposed.

For example, the six elements of root definitions are presented in the initials CATWOE where the necessary minimum activities are required to solve the anomalies, are described in the human activity system under study.

C= Customers- They are those that are benefited with the system under studied, for example:

1. Hosts
2. Tourist Market (Travel Agencies)
3. Employees
4. Other Hotels
5. Local Population

A= Actors, are those who will be in charge of the transformation of the information entrances into exits. STARWOOD Policies and Procedures.

1. SECTUR
2. Managers
3. Employees

T= Transformation. Is the process of the entrance conversion into exit.

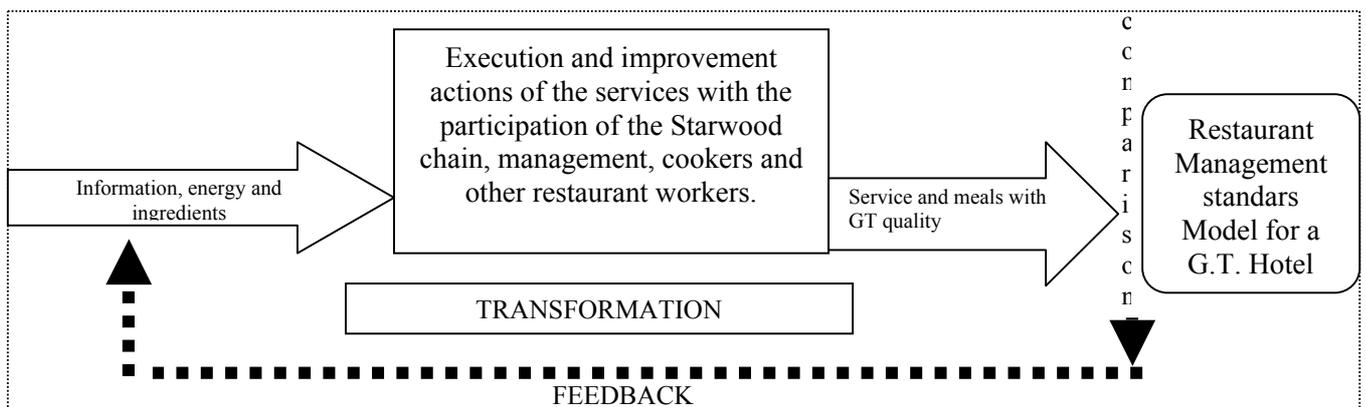


Figure 6. Transformation Diagram

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W= Weltanschauung. - Is the German expression for the vision of the world, this vision of the world makes the transformation process meaningful in the context, in this stage we recapture the results of the applied instrument and synthesizing is presented in the following chart.

**Chart 3. Summarized positive an negative vision**

ACTORS	POSITIVE VISION	NEGATIVE VISION
Starwood Brand Policies.	<p>They allow the control of the standards</p> <p>They propitiate the understanding of the tasks to develop.</p>	<p>They limit the creativity and they reduce the initiative of the human factor.</p> <p>Create insensibility when treating people they motivate impersonalized service.</p>
Management Performance	<p>Propitiates the development inside the company.</p> <p>They perform integration and motivation functions of personnel.</p>	<p>They propitiate a difficult atmosphere when establishing progressive discipline to maintain the control of the actions.</p> <p>They don't solve the generated inter departmental conflicts in benefit of the services.</p>
Kitchen area	<p>Promotes standardized times.</p> <p>Accomplish, within possible, the customers requirements.</p>	<p>They make mistakes when preparing the dishes, generated by misinterpretations of the customers' requirements.</p> <p>There is saturation in moments of higher affluence of customers.</p>
Steward Department	<p>They keep an adequate stock in each area that allows the good operation of service.</p> <p>They promote the separation of the equipment by size and shape to speed up its cleaning.</p>	<p>They propitiate scarcity of equipment when transferring it to other consuming centers.</p> <p>In saturation moments they propitiate delays in the delivery of the equipment.</p>
Bar Area	<p>Maintains updated inventory.</p> <p>Provides a quick answer to the customers needs.</p>	<p>They forget to Publish their Products in 86.</p> <p>The supply process of warehouse y too lingering.</p>

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O= The owner, the decisions maker that in this case is the General Director and owner of the Hotel Mr. Siau Sittou, through his faculty as direct Head Master of the Hotel and in his majority investor role.

E= Environment

That is composed of the following elements.

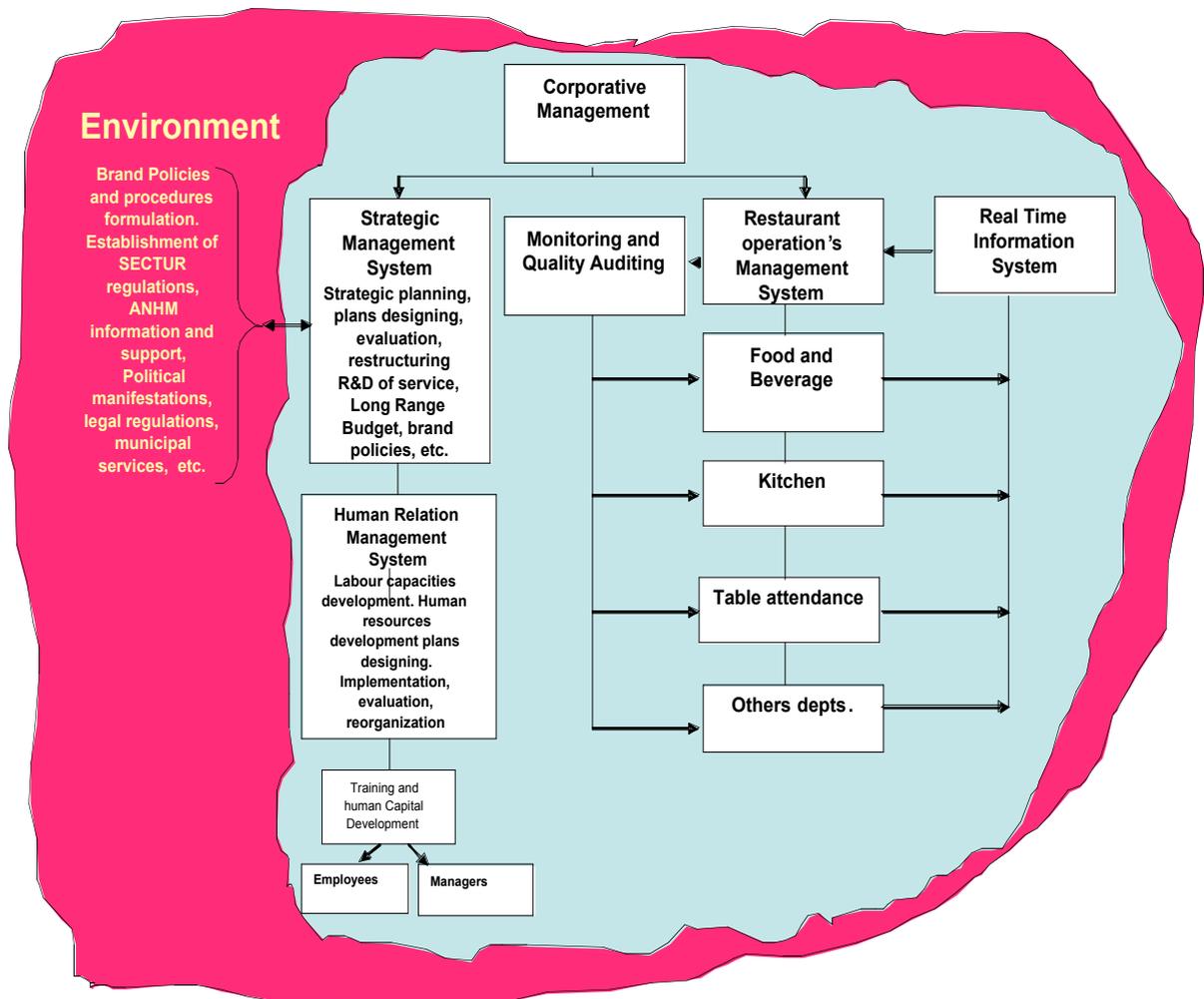
- The policies and procedures of the Starwood Brand
- The Tourism Ministry in its ruler and regulating faculty.
- The Mexico City Tourism Ministry in its faculty to grant the operation authorizations.
- The norms emitted by the OMT in their ability to influence in the world corporations.
- The AAA within its faculty to grant the recognitions of services and facilities levels, measured with diamonds.

The Root definitions allowed examining the policy of the problematic situation and as the power is obtained and used, since a Root definition is a condensed representation of the system in its more fundamental form.

Inside this stage, we proceeded to the construction of the conceptual models starting from the root definitions, these models present the necessary minimum activities to develop the process of the system where one of the activities is taken like a resource of the new root definition which is modeled with more detail. The model looks for to raise the human activity and it denotes the relationships of the different elements with the environment.

Inside the following diagram the correlations of the subsystems that integrate the Conceptual Model System of restaurant management for a Great Tourism Hotel of Mexico City are presented:

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**Figure 7. Conceptual Model of Restaurant Management**

### **Comparison of the real world with the considerations of the real world systems.**

The Hotel Sheraton Centro Histórico operates with the following human systems, a decisions maker human system compound by head masters and managers, in which the managerial planning converges, on the other hand the operative Human System made up of the personnel of customer direct services personnel, responsible for the customers satisfaction and for a system called human support System, composed by personnel from support to the production, constituted by the personnel that doesn't provide services directly to the customers but that however perform support tasks.

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### **Feasible changes and actions to improve the situation**

The formality of the scientific research implies the measure of the concepts that intervene in its development, the simplest measure concept is constituted by the comparison, to perform it, the proposed model's systems became operative, in order to verify its boundaries, comparing them with the accomplishment current operating systems.

According to the situation of the relevant systems, the actions that transformed the reality of the system are presented next, because the systemic approach is not only useful to know the existent reality but also to transform it.

#### *Political and mark procedures*

The brand policies should respond to the necessities of the system, that is to say that they should be planned and elaborated to respond to the necessities of the elements and the relationships that compose the system, therefore they should be flexible and adjustable. The system is in constant evolution generated by the internal and external elements that mark the different states in which the system is through time where such flexibility can be considered to perform an appropriate evaluation.

#### Performance Evaluation

Inside the performance evaluation of "Los Dones" restaurant, it is proposed the implementation of a tool of its own that provides information about the customers' satisfactions, with the intention of being able to adjust the policies and procedures, directing them toward the necessities of the customers.

#### *Organizational structure*

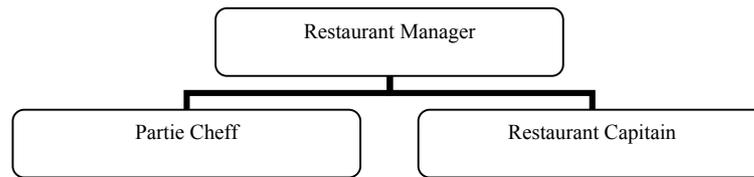
Inside the current organizational structure a series of errors derived from the administration are propitiated, they are enunciated in the analysis of the diagnosis, reason why an organic structure able to be adapted to the necessities of the subsystem restaurant is proposed.

Inside the hierarchical environment the proposal is directed toward the adjustment of the structure in such a way that allows a greater fluency in the information and agility in the decisions making. The proposal is viable because it is a hotel of franchise of the Sheraton brand for such a reason a structural change it is promoted in the operation of the restaurant that allows it to work as a productive system, eliminating the barriers of communications and improving its management.

Taking in consideration that it belongs to a bigger system the proposed changes are recommended only for the restaurant, being the management of Foods and Beverages intact for a feasibility matter, which means that an improvement is intended in the restaurant area without compromising costs or unnecessary expenses trying to change the organic structure of the Hotel.

Next, the related proposal is presented, toward the organizational structure of the "Los Dones" restaurant.

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**Figure 8. Proposal of organizational structure for the “Los Dones” restaurant.**

The proposed Flowchart tries to break the barriers of the traditional communicative and hierarchical bureaucracy that hotels pursue where a control and leadership attribute is created in the restaurant manager, to whom will be given attributions to handle the management of its domain without breaking the informative link with the restaurants and bars neither with the Food and Beverages head master. The same thing happens in the case of the kitchen where the existent hierarchical link with the executive Cheff is recognized, however with the proposal a work cell is created where the restaurant manager has the faculty to take to the subsystem restaurant to execution of the objectives.

### *Restaurant management Personal*

In this case the proposal is directed toward specialized personnel's recruiting, mainly in the part of the restaurant management because operative technical personnel is usually hired to carry out this functions, when the most convenient, in the case of the new organizational structure of the restaurant, is to have specialized personnel able to give answer so much to the technical as to the administrative and growth matters.

### *Human capital development*

For this improvement proposal it is considered the development inside the organization as well as the human development, that is to say that the personnel should be developed in both areas to be able to be functional to the long term directed proposals. This means to break up with the hotel tradition of the internal development to be able to integrate it to the human personal development, remembering that only the authenticity of the services actions is considered as valid within its providing, therefore there should exist a link with the educational institutions that supply of the required human factor.

The model feeds back through the training of the employees and the formation of the tourist sector professionals where the main involved are so much the department of human development as for the educational institutions.

In a pictorial way the previous reflections are shown next:

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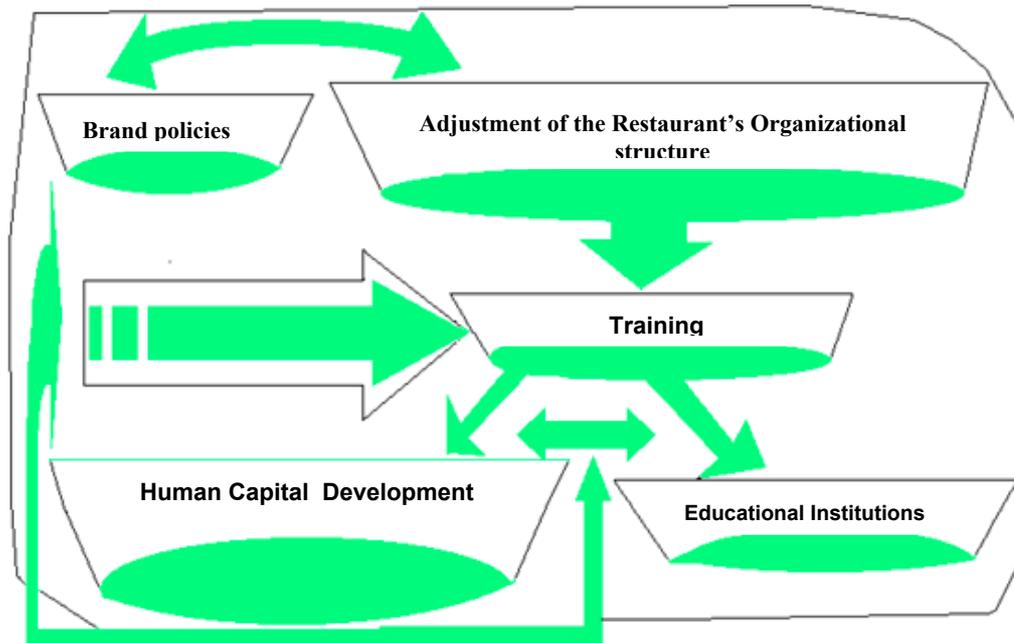


Figure 9. Human Resources Scheme

### CONCLUSIONS

The globalization is a nowadays phenomenon in the big transnational companies, airlines, hotels and shipping that look forward to be more and more competitive every time with the intention of obtaining differential advantages that distinguish them from their competitors, phenomenon that is difficult if we consider the vertiginous changes in the information systems generated by the new digital electronic era that has transformed the way of operating, of serving, of providing, and merchandising the tourist services. Reason why these companies are forced to establish criteria, standards, policies and procedures that can derive in the approach toward customers' satisfaction.

The new ways of managing are born from the necessity to improve the managerial profitability that has generated new handling models, control and application of the resources that taken to the tourist plane, increase their complexity because they are centered in the handling, control and development of the human resources so much operative as administrative who are those responsible for the customers' satisfaction.

The restaurant management model of a Great Tourism hotel dismembers the components that integrate it with the intention of carrying out the analysis that lead us to identify the vulnerabilities that the lodging companies suffer when being subjected to the soft systems methodology, because they are centred in policies and brand procedures designed to increase its profitability without it necessarily deriving in an increment of the satisfactory level experienced by its customers.

When being subjected the study phenomenon hotel restaurant to the systemic methodology, the divisional operation of the involved departments was demonstrated, because the restaurant is composed of a series of departmental jointing that respond to different hierarchical lines and therefore to diverse lines of information.

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However, the main lack of functionality finds is found in managerial levels, from medium and higher management where the priority is the technical operability of the areas assigned to such positions, without being able to be centred in the planned strategic development that can take the organization to an evolution and to the joining of the generated changes in its environment that can reduce the uncertainty that it experiences.

The previous work represents an effort to analyze and to improve the tourist companies that for the fact of belonging to a complex sector are also complex, as a consequence they require to be treated from global knowledge generating perspectives that can lead to positive results, because, although it is certain that it is developed in technological levels, its importance resides since in the healthy managerial handling of the human resources since it is the only road that allows it to be developed.

Therefore, new organizational outlines that centre their attention in the necessities and the clients' requirements are required, so it turns out imminent, at least in the hotel tourist sector, not only to train the human resources but it is also necessary to allow their professional and human development that derives in genuine interactions able to transform the perceptions of the customers that in turn are translated into greater economic benefits.

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