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**MANAGING DIFFICULT SPA CUSTOMERS AND
SITUATIONS: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES, CASE
OF ESPA RIGA, LATVIA**

Master Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

Based on Yang and Lau (2019, p. 1) the well-known customer support practice in service-oriented organisations “the customer is God” leads every employee to provide service with supreme perfection by meeting their customers’ needs, pleasing them, and sometimes making a special effort to satisfy their requests and deliver an exceptional service. With reference to Lahap et al. (2016) the definition of “superior service” in the hospitality sector that is relevant to the spa industry as well states that “superior service is a multi-dimensional construct, however, that includes corporate goals; organizational strategies; policies and procedures; work systems; job design and a variety of supporting elements” (Lahap et al., 2016, p. 214). However, it is clear that to provide the appropriate standards of service one of the most vital elements of outstanding service is the human dimension which depends on people.

Many service-oriented training sessions organised by employers as well as hospitality and marketing literature aim at promoting the idea that “the development of customer orientation will generate not only superior business performance but also increased levels of employee and customer satisfaction” (Deshpandé & Farley 1999; Donovan et al., 2004, as cited in Reynolds & Harris, 2006, p. 95). The essence of the theoretical marketing foundation and the marketing concept highlight that to achieve profitability and growth, companies should put the interest of customers first that is, definitely, essential for gaining spa’s economic success. The main aims of hotel spa customers are considered to be: “relaxation, pampering and beautification” (Kucukusta et al., 2013, p. 564) and “social, health, rejuvenation, escapism and hedonic experience” (Koh et al., 2010, p. 731). Beyond that, additional spa positive factors revealed are: novelty, prestige, self-development, re-establish self-esteem, indulgence, “to be with friends” and “to spend time with family members” (Baloglu et al., 2019, p. 431). According to Elias-Almeida et al. (2016, p. 19), the main elements that contribute to the hotel clients’ contentment substantially are: adequate, comfortable spa facilities and committed, professional spa employees.

When earlier stated hotel spa customers' aims are reached the guests are satisfied to the full extent. However, if the perceived service quality is below their expectations, customers tend to be dissatisfied which eventually has impact on customer relationships in the long-term (Cheng et al., 2019, p. 188). Based on Choi & Choi (2014, p. 108) some of the major reasons of low service performance that cause customer dissatisfaction, negative word-of-mouth, and even customer defection if it is not managed properly are: service failures and human errors. However, Reynolds and Harris (2005, p. 330) and Yue et al. (2017, p. 774) believe that other guests' discontentment motives are: customer financial or ego causes, disruptive motivations, the customers' feeling of being entitled to let out their bad moods to service employees or to make enormous demands that be impossible for service employees to meet.

This Master thesis has been written during the COVID-19 pandemic that is regarded as a major global threat that has led to considerable negative outcomes. Tsamakis et al. (2021, p. 2) point out that uncertainty and unpredictability due to lack of endpoint of the pandemic have caused the emergence of mental health issues, such as panic, anxiety, depression, sadness and etc. Moreover, other pandemic's outcomes such as: insomnia, financial loss, job insecurity, safety, panic attacks, threat and risk of contagion, quarantine, social exclusion have a tremendous impact on population psychological wellbeing as well. Khan et al. (2021, p. 13) propose that customer behaviour might change after the COVID-19 pandemic and they will prefer less in contact interaction in hotels with greater hygiene standards. Thus, the preferences of the spa goers could be identical. Consequently, after the re-opening of spa centres the increase of difficult customers and situations is a logical result. Beyond that, due to the fact that spa staff has to interact with guests and provide them with services actively their mental health during the crisis period is of fundamental importance as well. Khan et al. (2021, p. 13) state that the employees' psychological aspects (fear of economic crisis, non-employability, mental health issues) evoked by job insecurity in the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances are obvious.

With reference to the above-discussed factors, the research problem of the present Master's thesis is defined as follows: difficult customers and situations in a spa setting derive from a variety of factors (service failures, human errors, poorly formulated internal rules, lack of customer complaint coping policies and procedures, insufficient staff

training, guests' unfavourable physical, emotional condition that is promoted by a wide range of reasons including the COVID-19 pandemic and the clients' various personal disruptive motivations) and influence spa employees' wellbeing as well as spa business negatively. As a result, the goal of this thesis is to explore stress coping strategies, efficient service recovery styles and essential competences to manage difficult customers and situations and service failures in ESPA Riga centre and provide recommendations for the management of these issues in that organisation. To reach the goal the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What is the impact of difficult customer behaviour and interactions on spa employees' wellbeing?
2. How to handle challenging social interactions and service failures in a spa setting?
3. What is the role of spa management and what possible measures can be taken to overcome the problem of difficult customers and situations?

Specifically, the Master thesis seeks to achieve the following research tasks:

- To explore the relative importance of difficult customers and situations for employee wellbeing in comparison with other major related wellbeing factors and get insight into the key concepts related to the target topic: "wellbeing", "employee wellbeing", "job satisfaction", "emotional labour" and the notions linked to difficult customers and situations that imply a number of terms;
- To investigate the extent of management support with regard to customer problem resolution and the role of spa manager in dealing with challenging issues;
- To explore stress coping strategies, efficient service recovery styles, beneficial competences required to cope with difficult customers and situations and service failures professionally in a spa setting;
- Design and process the study to discover how ESPA Riga centre's spa employees manage difficult clients and situations and identify their self-management techniques;
- To analyse the results and provide practical recommendations for dealing with difficult customers and situations effectively to strengthen service quality and improve spa employees' psychological wellbeing.

The present Master thesis will consist of three chapters. The first chapter will concentrate on the overview of the key notions related to spa employees' wellbeing (wellbeing, employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, work-related wellbeing and its dimensions, emotional labour), and continue with a thorough literature analysis on the major job stress factors, its causes and consequences on spa employees' wellbeing. Afterwards in the second chapter the author will discuss the terms related to difficult customers and situations in a spa setting. Hence she will determine the goal of those challenging issues management, reveal stress-coping strategies, service recovery styles and focus on defining the extent of management support and the role of spa manager in client problem resolution process. Chapter three will expound on the study amongst ESPA Riga employees. It will consist of the description of the organisation, research methodology, data collection and results. The final stage of the thesis will be devoted to the discussion and recommendations that will lead to a conclusion. Due to the fact that customer-related discomfort of spa employees has been vastly underexplored in spa research the current work will expand spa management and spa employees' knowledge in the target topic.

1. SPA EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

1.1. Defining the concepts of “wellbeing”, “employee wellbeing”, “job satisfaction” and its importance in the spa sector

In general, the meaning of “wellbeing” is a complex one. There is a wide range of definitions and models of wellbeing that have been proposed and discussed actively over the years. For instance, Ryan and Deci (2001, pp. 143–147) explain the concept of “wellbeing” on the grounds of two main different perspectives. According to the hedonic perspective, wellbeing is described as happiness and pleasure. This aspect points out the importance of three components: life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood. In the second, eudaimonic, perspective wellbeing is defined in terms of self-actualization, proposing that true happiness is discovered in the opportunity to realize one’s potential. Hence, “it focuses on the engagement in activities which foster human growth, such as autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness that are essential to wellbeing” (Keeman et al., 2017, p. 2). Consequently, the combination of both perspectives (hedonic, eudaimonic) is of equal importance for promoting an individual’s wellbeing.

The notion “employee wellbeing” denotes one’s personal, subjective view of overall contentment and positive feelings toward his/her daily professional duties. Meyer and Maltin (2010, p. 324), share the view that wellbeing should be viewed as the absence of physical illness and psychological anxiety and it should include assessment of one’s personal growth and optimal functioning of the individual. Employee wellbeing is when the person has the psychological, social, and physical resources he/she needs to meet a particular psychological, social, and/or physical challenge while fulfilling his/her professional duties. A high level of employees’ wellbeing experienced during their job performance is an important prerequisite for many certain, positive organizational attitudes such as low turnover, active work engagement, more effort, less tardiness and

less absenteeism. However, based on Komin (1990, as cited in Suttikun et al., 2017, p. 3) employee wellbeing and motivations level may often differ depending on culture as well. Thus, in order to achieve profitability and growth it is essential for spa management to explore particular culture's attributes and better comprehend what explores the experience of target spa employees as well as be mindful of the cultural influence on their employees' level of satisfaction within their work environment (Suttikun et al., 2017, p. 3).

Another term related to employee wellbeing is job satisfaction. Based on Spector (2010, as cited in Walsh, 2011, p. 70) one of job satisfaction's definition is "an emotional affective response to a job or specific aspects of a job such as the gratification that the employee gets from his/her job". In this connotation, job satisfaction is understood as a job resource. Similarly as "employee wellbeing" it refers to one's subjective general attitude toward his/her work. Commonly job satisfaction is viewed as a multidimensional aspect. Some other definitions of employee job satisfaction are presented below:

1. it is a combination of psychological factors and environmental factors that affect employee satisfaction with his or her performance (Pavlović & Marković, 2014, as cited in Perić et al., 2018, p. 620);
2. it is a pleasant or positive emotional state which is the result of performing a job or a whole work experience (Locke, 1976, as cited in Perić et al., 2018, p. 620).

Hence, job satisfaction is connected with behaviour of an employee that includes a set of favourable or unfavourable feelings during fulfilling his/her professional duties as well as points out the importance of reaching the employees' goals during their work experience. Owing to Arvey et al. (1989, p. 188) there are two basic aspects of job satisfaction – extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic factors are related to environmental factors (the working conditions, supervision, etc.) but intrinsic aspects include challenge, achievement, new learning experience, etc. Other scholars, Pelit et al. (2011, p. 793) claim that job satisfaction is also directly related to factors enabling employees to lead a financially reasonable and comfortable life. On the whole, it is obvious that job satisfaction and employees' motivation directly depend on the financial rewards, however, it is discovered that the long-term reliance on material rewards does not lead to

important motivation of employees and there is a number of other essential aspects that advance one's job satisfaction.

The spa business is the service industry, therefore, both the clients and the spa employees with their professional set of skills and competencies provide the main source of income and are significant to the value of any spa company. Apart from that, based on Suttikun et al. (2017, p. 2) there are major differences between the services provided by spa employees, especially therapists, and those delivered by other service employees. These differences derive from the fact the spa therapist and the client establish extremely personal contact during the spa session where the spa therapist is fully engaged and contributes to the customer's wellbeing throughout the whole service period. However, the overall guest's spa experience is created on the grounds of every detail and "touch" of his/her experience with the spa company and specifically with spa employees. Thus, the whole spa journey to some extent is the result of interaction with all spa employees the client come across during the spa visit. Employee personality has been displayed as an important creator of customer service behaviour (Gudergan et al., 2008, p. 29).

Perić et al. (2018, p. 628) assume that communication with professional staff is the basis and it makes the image and provides the key tone to the overall experience of spa tourism. Therefore, to enhance the competitive edge in the spa sector it is of fundamental importance for spa management to take care of their employees' wellbeing and to focus on improving those factors that promote their subordinates' dissatisfaction and ruin their wellbeing. Prior to the discussion of the factors that impact spa employees' wellbeing negatively the author finds it essential to concentrate on the notion: "work-related wellbeing" and its dimensions that assist the management to identify the level of the employees' job satisfaction. In addition, the author will discuss widely investigated term "emotional labour" that has direct impact on employees' wellbeing in service industries.

1.2. Work-related wellbeing, its dimensions and the concept "emotional labour"

In general, work-related wellbeing has often been reviewed as job satisfaction. However, such a notion as affective wellbeing related to work experience is of paramount importance for the study of employees' wellbeing. Affective wellbeing is one of the key

components of psychological wellbeing, thus, its measurement is essential to promote workers' wellbeing. It is a complex notion that captures both positive and negative nuances in experiences of work (Briner, 1997, as cited in Daniels, 2000, p. 276). There is the model, proposed by Warr (2002, as cited in Rothmann, 2008, p. 11) that can be applied to identify work-related wellbeing of the employees. The next described four affective dimensions enable management to diagnose employees' wellbeing and overall satisfaction within working conditions in the service industry. These are as follows:

1. Pleasure-displeasure aspect that is related to an individual's level job or life satisfaction in a more overall sense. It is evaluated on how people feel about the nature of the job tasks themselves and how people feel about aspects of the work situation that are external to the job tasks (Hirschfeld, 2000, as cited in Rothmann, 2008, p. 12);
2. Anxiety-comfort aspect refers to the arising of anxiety due to low pleasure and high mental activation, whereas comfort is a result of low activation and pleasure. The first combination provokes occupational stress that leads to limited commitments, energy, and aspirations;
3. Enthusiasm-depression feature points out low pleasure and low mental arousal, whereas enthusiasm indicates high pleasure and high mental arousal. Feelings of enthusiasm indicate learning, vitality, and work engagement. Work engagement is vital as it promotes a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour (high level of energy and mental resilience while working in combination with the willingness to total job satisfaction), dedication, and absorption;
4. Vigour-fatigue dimension includes the burnout forms and exhaustion that refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Burnout forms consist of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy caused by occupational/job stress (Rothmann, 2008, pp. 11–12).

With reference to the above mentioned dimensions the author has discovered that work-related wellbeing is well exemplified with four incompatible but connected factors. Hence, if these affective work-related wellbeing components are reconsidered regularly by the service management in cooperation with human resource colleagues their employees' wellbeing could be promoted.

An essential notion “emotional labour” deals with noncognitive nature of the service industry’s jobs. Above all, the spa industry has similar characteristic features as the hospitality industry. Thus, emotional labour refers to both sectors. During the high season or based on the fact that the spa or hotel has spacious premises employees participate in service exchange extensively. According to Harris and Ogbonn, 2002 & Hartline and Ferrell, 1996 (as cited in Reynolds & Harris, 2006, p. 97), the core elements that are similar in hospitality and spa business are: closeness of customer contact, size, and economic importance.

Beyond that, the “cult of the customer” that has been enthusiastically and universally adopted within the hospitality sector has been accepted in the spa sector as well (Reynolds & Harris, 2006, p. 107). The spa employees are expected to “put on a smile”, be friendly, confident while dealing with various spa customers and circumstances. They are expected to foster customer satisfaction through a customer-focused approach actively, thus, they meet and face difficult and demanding customers and situations unavoidably. Hence, when interacting with challenging guests the spa employees cannot always feel positively and meet the “service with a smile” expectations, therefore, by making the efforts they regulate their emotions or expressions. So “emotional labour” processes are frequently “switched on” by the employees in handling difficult customers and situations. Subramony et al. (2017, p. 844) suggest that emotional labour is often regarded as a strain on employees concerning its impact on wellbeing, health, and performance, nevertheless, it has potential benefit for customers who expect friendly service.

Emotional labour can generally be understood as “the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions” (Morris & Feldman, 1996, as cited in Rupp et al., 2008, p. 904). It promotes employees’ higher levels of anticipated stress, distress and turnover, and lower levels of satisfaction in any service industry (Pizam, 2004, as cited in Pienaar & Willemse, 2008, p. 1053). Beyond that, it is related to the fact that specific feelings have to be induced or suppressed to show behaviour for service recipient to feel safe and cared for, with the implication that this may be at the cost of the individual expressing such feelings. Hence, emotional labour is a form of acting (Hochschild, 1983, as cited in Pienaar & Willemse, 2008, p. 1054). Grandey (2003) and Hochschild (1983), as cited in Rupp et al. (2008, p. 906) declare that

if the desired emotions do not correspond to employee's current emotional state, the worker can take two approaches to evoke those emotions: surface acting and deep acting.

The first one is used by the employee when he/she puts a false smile to mask his/her real feelings, thus, changing his/her displayed emotions. The second type of acting aims at modifying inner feelings to correspond to the emotions required by the company by trying to understand their emotional condition (Rupp et al., 2008, p. 906). If the employee is regularly engaged in surface acting his/her job satisfaction decreases and emotional exhaustion increases. Hence, it leads to negative work outcomes such as stress and job dissatisfaction. Deep acting, in contrast, can increase job satisfaction by boosting sense of personal accomplishment of the employee and decrease emotional exhaustion (Rupp et al., 2008, pp. 906, 919). Consequently, emotional labour may be both tiring and rewarding. Nevertheless the required necessity to constantly control and manage the emotional expression while fulfilling jobs duties during the interaction process in service industry is considered to be the source of stress (Karasek, 1979, as cited in Kang et al., 2016, p. 347). However, apart from emotional labour attributes of service jobs there are other vital factors that increase job stress in employees and impact their physical and psychological health negatively.

1.3. Job stress, its consequences and causes in the spa industry

Job stress can be defined as “an emotional, cognitive, behavioural structure that affects both the content of work and the organisations in a negative way and causes physiological reactions” (European Commission, 2002, as cited in Gok et al., 2017, p. 24). Another explanation of job stress points out that it is an unfavourable emotional condition experienced when the demands due to occupational factors overcome the ability of an employee to manage or control the situation (Moustaka et al., 2010, p. 80). Its major negative consequences on one's health are both physical (headaches, unbalanced blood pressure, high cholesterol level, stomach problems, and even heart attacks) and mental (job dissatisfaction, anxiety, muscle tension, depression, anger, pessimism, emotional anxiety, burnout) (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Selye, 1976, as cited in Tiyce et al., 2013, p. 127).

In addition, intense workplace stress can also threaten a person's sense of identity, negatively impact self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-competence (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, as cited in Tiyce et al., 2013, p. 128). These health problems are disruptive for employees' commitment and lower their productivity in service organisations (Gill et al., 2006, p. 470). Consecutively it leads to negative influence on relationships with customers, coworkers, families and others (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, as cited in Tiyce et al., 2013, p. 128). Beyond that, one more vital, possible negative outcome of job stress is burnout (Pienaar & Willemse, 2008, p. 1054). The same researchers believe that burnout involves a loss of productivity or quality in the employees' work, as well as individual declines in morale, psychological or physical health. However, other scholars assume that low-level stress is favourable for motivating employees and boosting their enthusiasm, engagement, creativity, performance, and productivity (Selye, 1976; Warr, 1999, as cited in Tiyce et al., 2013, p. 129).

Nevertheless, with regard to the spa industry any level of stress could impact the spa's successful and smooth operational process negatively as one of the successful spa's elements is its healing and relaxed atmosphere that is focused on evoking the experience that is supposed to bring harmony to the clients' body and mind. A harmonious or stressful atmosphere is "captured" immediately by the customers upon entering the spa center. So, the spa employees who are exposed to job stress present undesirable attitudes and behaviour toward the organisation, contribute negatively to customer orientation, impact coworkers unfavourably as well as ruin the overall relaxing atmosphere of the spa centre. Next determined key attributes of the work environment in spa and hospitality sectors that cause job stress are as follows:

- unsociable work hours (i.e. spa working hours could be from 6.00 am till 11.00 pm) and shift work (working while others are relaxing and vice versa). It could be challenging for the spa employees to find enough time for their families, friends, household, hobbies, relaxation and health. Working shifts has effects on employees' physical, and emotional wellbeing as such working conditions interrupt natural biorhythms (Tiyce et al., 2013, p.136);
- low and unpredictable wages (i.e. hourly paid shifts and incentives schemes that are related to the spa's monthly budget). It is a well-known fact that tourism and spa

service jobs' main characteristics are unfavourable pay and poor wages. The outcomes of such inadequate financial reward in the tourism and spa sector lead to a considerable proportion of part-time, temporary and seasonal work (Casado-Diaz & Simon, 2016, p. 97);

- poor training. Most hospitality and spa companies train the employees to deliver appropriate service to the customers (Gilbert et al., 1998, as cited in Paulston, 2008, p. 414). However, due to the common features that constitute hospitality and spa employment (shift work, poor wages, emotional labour, active customer orientation, lack of career development, physical extensive work, aesthetic labour burden and etc.) high turnover rates are obvious. Hence, spa management may be unwilling to invest in training as spa staff subsequently leave (Jameson, 2000; Loe et al., 2000 and etc., as cited in Paulston, 2008, p. 414). Consequently, inadequate training threatens the service quality and can humiliate and embarrass employees (Paulston, 2008, p. 414);
- unsupportive relations with supervisors and organisation. Burke et al. (1992, as cited in Kang et al., 2015, p. 71) state that supervisory support is the level to which employees admit that their supervisor is providing them with support and encouragement at workplace as well as he/she takes into account the concerns of the employees. Non-supportive supervisors reduce employees' commitment to the organisation and such work environment results in low employee satisfaction and leads to high turnover or intention to quit (Rizzo et al., 1970, as cited in Kang et al., 2015, p. 71);
- "unfitting" job position for the person due to lack of skills and the COVID-19 pandemic's caused crisis. The person-job fit is important as it indicates whether the employee will be committed and productive to the organisation (Rousseau et al., 1992, as cited in Bin Shmailan, 2016, p. 2). If a person is in the wrong job, it impacts his/her performance. For instance, Global Spa and Wellness Summit (2012, as cited in Fairuz et al., 2015) points out that the spa therapist must have the "spa feeling", as well as more of the power and benefit of human touch, the connection of mind, body and spirit. Beyond that, emotional intelligence is highly valued skill required at service work (Kim & Agrusa, 2011, p. 589). Otherwise, lack of emotional strength, poor social skills, shortage of public self-confidence, and insufficient cultural intelligence unable spa employees to deal with people from various cultural backgrounds, handle the

effects of negative social interactions and other job stressors successfully. However, good social skills, high emotional, cultural intelligences and public self-confidence are advantageous and required to cope with multiple customer-related problems and often discourteous complaints contributing to a customer orientation (Harris & Daunt, 2013, p. 288). Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted tourism and spa sectors drastically. With reference to Filimonau et al. (2020, p.1) the future uncertainty of the hotel business may enable qualified workforce to change their jobs with more secure and stable employment in other economic sectors. Hence, spa staff shortage may force spas to compromise on their requirements and fill the vacancies with candidates without relevant qualifications and experience, thus, boosting the need for job training with qualified trainers (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008, p. 384);

- aesthetic labour burden is one of spa industry's job requirements. Many companies hire service providers with potential to carry a certain look and serve in shaping value, branding image and creating uniqueness (Pounders, et. al., 2015, p. 670). Spa employees become brand ambassadors who sell a look that presents brand image. Such type of labour serves as an influential marketing tool that positively impacts spa clients' emotional processes and attracts potential spa employees. However, Tsauro & Hsieh (2020, p. 91) point out that the aesthetic labour burden caused by: organizational aesthetic demands and training, customer service pressures, burdens in time-off work influence service employees' wellbeing negatively. Due to the fact that spa employees have to display aesthetics (physical attractiveness, positive attitude, helpfulness, adherence to customer service standards and etc.) while providing service daily their personal psychological resources are consumed. Thus, they feel stressed and their work engagement is reduced;
- difficult and unfriendly customers. Walsh (2011, p. 74) states that "dealing with unfriendly customers is emotionally draining". Customer unfriendliness influences life satisfaction, promotes emotional exhaustion which can cause quitting intentions (Walsh, 2011, p. 67). Moreover, based on Dallimore et al., (2007, p. 80) service employees may have feelings of being hurt, offended, or insulted while dealing with angry complaining customers. Finally, Tarvis (1984, as cited in Dallimore et al., 2007, p. 89) outlines that the results of interaction with angry customers are:

“miscommunication, emotional dissonance, acquiring a hostile disposition, loss of self-esteem and respect for others, and making a bad situation worse”.

On the basis of the information discussed above it has to be pointed out that personnel’s job satisfaction has an essential role in the process of production as “employees introduce changes and innovations, they create additional value and they increase business efficiency, and thus the initiation of future organizational performance.” (Perić et al., 2018, p. 617- 618). Undoubtedly, positive, satisfied, motivated and happy employees are the core for the success of the service organisations, and their financial performance. Moreover, Chi and Gursoy (2009, p. 247) stress that if a company takes care of its employees properly, the employees will behave in the same way toward the customers. Consequently, it is essential for spa management to take into consideration various negative factors that produce occupational stress in spa employees and ruin their wellbeing. Subramony et al. (2017, p. 848) point out that customer misbehaviour is dominant stressor in service roles. This phenomenon in hospitality and spa sectors denotes a variety of guests’ actions and reactions the service employees have to cope with. Such clients are considered to be difficult and such situations challenging. The next part of the Master thesis will be devoted to the investigation of the related terms and actions linked to difficult customers and situations, their positive and negative impacts on the spa industry, the employees’ stress coping strategies, hospitality and spa post-recovery actions, the extent of management support with regard to customer-related problems and the role of spa manager in promoting spa employees’ wellbeing when handling with challenging issues and problematic clients.

2. DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS AND SITUATIONS IN A SPA SETTING

2.1. The terms related to difficult customers and situations and their major effects in the spa industry

Due to the fact that there are various terms linked to difficult customers and situations and those concepts cover a wide range of actions performed by customers it is vital to get better understanding of the term “customer misbehaviour”. Harris and Daunt (2013, p. 282) state that there is no single generally accepted definition of customer misbehaviour in the review of existing literature. As “misbehaviour” denotes such actions within the exchange setting that intentionally violate the generally accepted norms of conduct in such situations. Gursoy et al. (2017, p. 2346) state that previously mentioned view is traditional perspective and it illustrates customer misbehaviour as a “rule-breaking” because the clients are expected to behave in a “civil” way and within socialized pre-determined guidelines. Harris and Reynolds (2003) have offered a more service-oriented term describing customer misbehaviour – “dysfunctional customer behaviour” that denotes “actions by customers who intentionally or unintentionally, overtly or covertly, act in a manner that, in some way, disrupts otherwise functional service encounters” (p. 145).

The current term represents overall customer behaviour, rather than the behaviour of a psychologically or physiologically improper group or an intentionally deviant part of society (Fullerton & Punj, 1993, as cited in Fisk et al., 2010, p. 418). Such deeds are often goal-oriented and the clients aim at achieving some kind of gain intentionally (Ford & Richardson, 1994; Paternoster & Simpson, 1996, as cited in Fisk et al., 2010, p. 418). For instance, Gursoy et al. (2017, p. 2342) claim that some clients may unknowingly but some individuals may deliberately act in such way to take advantage of the service motto of “the customer is always right”, as a result, interrupting the service experience of by-

standing customers in the process. Moreover, other clients strongly believe that the service employees' main job is to "serve" their needs. This social inequality does not motivate customers to wait, stand quietly in a queue, and deal politely with the service staff at times when they are badly served (Kashif et al., 2017, p. 902). Therefore, discussed earlier customer orientation well-known phrase and belief can be invalid and produce many situations when customer could be wrong and thoughtless (Lovelock, 2001, as cited in Harris & Reynolds, 2003, p. 145).

Moreover, contemporary research regarding the customer misbehaviour has employed a variety of confusing and similar terms, phrases and even has defined clients' classifications linked to the core notion. For instance, Bitner et al., (1994, as cited in Daunt & Harris, 2011, p. 1035) define "problem customers" as the ones who are reluctant to cooperate with the service provider, other customers, industry regulations, and/or laws. Another term "jaycustomers" depicts the clients who behave carelessly or rudely, causing problems for the firm, its employees, and other customers (Lovelock, 2001, as cited in Daunt & Harris, 2011, p. 1035). Other different terms coined to determine the phenomenon are: "customers from hell", "aberrant consumers", "unfair customers" and etc. (Zemke & Anderson, 1990; Fullerton & Punj, 1993; Berry & Seiders, 2008, as cited in Huang & Miao, 2013, p. 657).

On the whole, there is a multiple range of classifications of difficult customers, however, widely known misbehaving customers' typologies in hospitality industry that are relevant to the spa sector as well are: "compensation letter writers", "undesirable customers", "property abusers", "service workers", "oral abusers" and "sexual predators" (Harris & Reynolds, 2004, p. 342). Such types of customers lead to next serious outcomes, firstly, the workload for staff members increases while dealing with customer misbehaviour, thus, the time to service functional customers efficiently and effectively is reduced. Secondly, negative financial implications for staff in terms of staff retention, recruitment, induction, and training are required. (Harris & Reynolds, 2003, pp. 154–155).

Another term linked with the target notion is "incivility" that involves behaving rudely or discourteously, disregarding others by violating norms for respect in social interactions (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 455). Sliter et al., (2011, p. 122) stress that incivility is

more a result of perception. “One may behave uncivilly as a reflection of intent to harm the target, or one may behave uncivilly without intent (e.g., ignorance or oversight)” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 456). Hence, customers may not have a definite intention to harm although they might be discourteous or rude to employees. Sliter et al. (2011, p. 122) point out that many incidences of incivility are related to harmful work conditions and promote employees’ stress and health problems. Maslach & Jackson (1986, as cited in Sliter et al., 2011, p. 122) believe that the most negative outcome of customer incivility is emotional exhaustion. As a result, higher levels of incivility toward customers, colleagues, organizational deviance, and other forms of counterproductive work behaviours are performed by the employees (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2010, p. 1491). Yue et al. (2017, p. 795) highlight that incidents of mistreatment can boost interchange tendency, such that employees may become hostile toward future customers and actively withdraw help.

The most frequent examples of uncivil customer behaviour in all service jobs including spa sector are: neglecting to be polite by saying “please” or “thank you”, talking on the phone while service is being provided, blaming the employee for a service failure even if the incident is outside the employee’s control, dropping or leaving trash for the employees to clean up, raising one’s voice during the customer-client interaction, etc. Some of the other uncivil actions happening in the hospitality sector that are relevant to the spa industry as well include: complaining about slow service, criticizing the employee for a problem he or she did not cause and expressing dissatisfaction about the value of the goods and services (Wilson & Holmvall, 2013, as cited in Torres et al., 2017, p. 52).

Fullerton & Punj (1993, as cited in Kashif et al., 2017, p. 902) suggest that there are three core drivers of customer misbehaviour and incivility. These are: psychological (personality and attitude), demographic (age and gender), and social (norms and peer pressures) components. Cheng et al. (2020, p. 1738) claim that service employees might compare their inputs (time, motivation, energy) to returns from customers and expect fair returns from the clients. If the expectations are not met and they experience incivility instead the sense of inequity, the feeling of injustice are developed that promote service sabotage toward customers. Service sabotage in the hospitality industry as well as in the spa sector can happen when the service employees ignore the clients’ requests, fail to

keep the treatment room perfectly clean, might intentionally keep him/her waiting to be served, refuse to provide the clients with comprehensive and accurate information (Cheng et al. 2020, p. 1740). However, Skarlicki et al. (2016, p. 116) claim that required conditions for customer injustice to translate into customer-directed sabotage primary stem from low moral identity of employees and low supervisor justice.

The final relevant notion to be discussed in the present subchapter is “guests complaining behaviour”. It is regarded as the most frequent customer practical response to a state of discontentment that is promoted by service failures or human errors that happen during the service interactions even in the best run spa or hospitality organisation. According to Bitner et al. (1990, as cited in Cheng, et al., 2019, p. 189) service failure happens if the client has an unpleasant experience or feels dissatisfied with the service. Examples of human errors in a spa setting include: overbooking treatments, wrong time and date of booking, misunderstanding of the customers’ needs and requests, miscommunications with colleagues, recipe errors, ignoring details while making the reservation and etc. The most common situations of service failures in the spa industry are as follows: the desired treatment has not been delivered to the client according to the spa standards and timely, overcrowded spa facilities, noisy guests and kids disturb other clients, the poor hygiene in the changing area, the guest is under the influence of alcohol or has brought alcohol secretly into the spa and other clients have witnessed the situation, etc.

Based on Thøgersen et al. (2009, p. 773) complaints from clients can be irritating, time-consuming, and costly as well as complaints can promote the damage of the company’s reputation. However, complaints give the company a great chance to learn from and to correct problems and errors (Thøgersen et al., 2009, p. 773). Complaints can assist the company to reestablish customer contentment. Nevertheless, illegitimate complaints cases occur in service industries occasionally as well. Ro and Wong (2012) define illegitimate complaints as ““opportunistic complaint behaviour” where clients’ actions are aimed at receiving material gain by exaggerating, altering, or lying about the fact, situation, or abusing service guarantees” (p. 420). However, scholars Kowalski (1996); Alicke et. al. (1990); Goodwin and Spiggles (1989); Reynolds and Harris (2005), as cited in Ro and Wong (2012, p. 420) believe that there are various other drivers to the guests’ opportunistic complaining behaviour such as: impressing and gaining approval from

observing clients, evoking sympathy and attempting to be viewed favourably by others, creating negative reactions from onlookers as well as willing to enhance their own feelings of self-worth or ego. Most frequent opportunistic complaints in the spa sector happen in the form of exaggerated and fake claims for untrue service failures, such as writing compensation letters expressing dishonest appeals to intentionally exploit service recovery policies of the company. Kim and Baker (2020, p. 124) assume that for spa management it is essential to be aware of the fact that providing positive service recovery to illegitimate complainers may hurt the company financially in a long term as the customers learn to be complainers by observing the illegitimate complainer receiving a good service recovery.

In general, difficult customers and situations involve a variety of guests' actions promoted by different reasons. Therefore, to reduce the negative consequences of challenging guest-related situations on spa employees' and organisation's performance it is beneficial for the spa team to comprehend the importance of difficult customers and situations management, to be aware of effective stress-coping strategies, service recovery styles as well as helpful competences and tools that contribute to successful guest relations management process. As a result, it will help spa organisations to eliminate possible reputational damage, assist to retain the clients and restore the customers' confidence.

2.2. The goal of management difficult customers and situations

Khalilzadeh et al. (2017, pp. 451–452) believe that in order to encourage repeated visits and repurchases it is necessary to maintain continuous relationship with a customer. Moreover, due to intense competition in the spa sector managers more and more value quality of service and the significance of guests satisfaction and delight. When guests are happy, other stakeholders (employees, management, shareholders, etc.) will be correspondingly happy as guest contentment ensures the definite opportunity to enhance revenue (Stauss & Seidel, 2007, as cited in Ogbeide et al., 2017, p. 205). Cheng et al. (2017, p. 48) claim that a company which has very satisfied customers would be very likely to enjoy a very positive corporate image that has a direct effect on customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth and company's profitability. Thus, in order to generate income

and revenue, enhancing spa guests' satisfaction service quality has to be constantly maintained and improved in the spa industry.

El-Dief (2018, p. 87) proposes to foster the service quality the hotel/resort spa sector by focusing and investing more in facilitating the service interaction between staff and customers as these are basic attributes expected primarily by spa-goers. Additionally, Lu et al. (2015, p. 180) point out the significance of understanding the perceptions and motivations of the guests in detail, by conducting quantitative customer satisfaction surveys, or using brief comment cards. As a result, the overall physical and service environment of the spa hotel can be discovered, thus, leading to minimizing of negative incidents and maximizing the positive experiences (Lu et al., 2015, p. 180). Guest satisfaction is closely linked to the spa staff work with their adequate skills and abilities to provide guests with the service willingly, effectively and professionally. Therefore, in case of challenging situations, client misbehaviour and service failures effective employees' actions, well-executed service recoveries will enhance customer satisfaction whereas poor recoveries will lead to customer defections (Smith et al., 1999, as cited in Guchait et al., 2016, p. 150). Furthermore, Cheng et al. (2017) are confident that "service recovery is an opportunity to gain access to superior market intelligence on the cause of customer dissatisfaction, which can, in turn, lead to more reliable service offerings" (p. 43). Thus, service failures assist management to determine specific problem areas.

Finally, based on Grönroos (1984); Smith and Bolton (1999) and etc., as cited in Tang et al. (2018, p.756) service failures result in economic losses from customers as well as negative emotional responses (depression, anger, disappointment, regret and anxiety) from the clients. As a consequence, if required recovery solutions to such guests' responses are not provided proactively by spa staff it can facilitate guests' unfavourable attitudes toward spa staff and organisation. Based on Cheng et al. (2019, p. 188) the fundamental goal of managing difficult customers and situations, service failures is to reduce the negative impact of a bad experience that a client suffers and eventually, enhance customer loyalty when the issue has been resolved responsibly.

2.3. Spa employees' stress-coping strategies

On the whole, to handle challenging situations and negative social interactions demand sustained efforts from the employees and exceed their resources. With reference to Billings and Moos's study (1981, as cited in Jung & Yoon, 2016, p. 1652) to eliminate stress service employees engage in three stress-coping strategies. These are as follows:

- ✓ Cognitive-appraisal coping that implies two ways of an individual's judgements: negative cognitive stress appraisal when the problem is perceived as 'threat' that is harm or loss and positive cognitive stress appraisal when the 'challenge' that is described as a threat that can be met or overcome (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Tohmiya et al., 2018, p. 2). If spa employees apply positive cognitive stress appraisal when confronting with difficult customers or situations they prevent themselves from negative impact on their wellbeing. However if they prone to negative cognitive stress appraisal they will regard the same problem as a threat and promote unfavourable emotional condition that impacts their job performance;
- ✓ Problem-focused coping is 'vigilant coping', aims at problem solving, or modifying the source of the stress to avoid or control it (Collins, 2008, p. 1177). This style is based on accepting the stressful situation and be willing to resolve it. Positive problem-focused coping strategies consist of planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint and looking for social support. Planning includes thinking about how to deal with a stressor, producing action strategies and steps to take and how to solve the problem in the most efficient way. Suppression of competing activities is about avoiding distractions to handle the stressor. Restraint coping aims at waiting for an appropriate opportunity, making a pause and not acting prematurely (Carver et al., 1989, as cited in Collins, 2008, pp. 1177–1178). Finally, social support involves seeking practical advice, assistance and information to deal with the issue (Collins, 2008, p. 1180). Thus, such a coping style is highly valuable for spa jobs as it aims at active spa employees' actions (to communicate with the spa clients to comprehend their needs, requests, referring to the manager in case of necessity and etc.) to avoid and prevent customer dissatisfaction and misbehaviour.
- ✓ Emotion-focused coping deals with reducing or controlling the emotional distress associated with the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Carver et al., 1989, as cited

in Collins, 2008, p. 1177). The two most actively used emotion-focused coping strategies in service roles are seeking social support and avoidance. Social support is about getting informational, practical or emotional support by talking with colleagues about the negative incidents and letting out unfavourable emotions (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, as cited in Subramony et al., 2017, p. 848). Avoidance is about overcoming the stress and making a pause or distancing oneself from the clients psychologically by rejecting customer requests, ignoring problem customers, leaving the service desk and switching on doing other tasks instead of delivering the service to the clients (Weatherly & Tansik, 1993; Bailey & McCollough, 2000 and etc., as cited in Subramony et al., 2017, p. 848). As a result, emotional types of stress-coping in a spa setting can influence negatively spa employees' wellbeing, as anxiety, emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction can be promoted. Apart from that, it can influence overall service climate as spa staff can be infected with a negative state that will enhance service quality decline. However, due to the fact that most of professional spa employees are empathetic and possess "people skills" by nature the choice of emotion-focused style is a common one and seeking social support (practical, informational advice) is obvious and can be favourable for both individual and team's development.

On the grounds of the above discussed information it is obvious that for spa employees' wellbeing the most flexible and beneficial ways of reducing the stress level are the application of positive cognitive appraisal and problem-focused coping styles. However, the choice of the specific stress reducing style is very linked to the spa employees' personal characteristics. The following individual qualities are vital in one's selecting his/her coping style while handling with difficult customers and situations: negative affectivity, self-efficacy and the employee's level of emotional intelligence.

The first individual attribute 'negative affectivity' according to George (1992); Watson and Clark (1984), as cited in Goussinsky (2012, p. 174) is described by a negative worldview, pessimism, a tendency to regularly experience negative emotions (anxiety, anger, sadness, and distress), to react strongly to daily stress situations, to focus on the negative side of oneself and the world as well as have an unfavourable overall orientation toward oneself and the world around. As a consequence, the spa employees with high

negative affectivity react stressfully to the challenging circumstances or negative interactions, assess their abilities to deal with the issue lower and use emotion-focused coping strategies (avoidance or seeking emotional support) frequently that can be harmful for the spa organisation and their wellbeing.

The second personal feature 'self-efficacy', based on Bandura (1997), as cited in Goussinsky (2012, p. 180) is a major element of an individual's task performance. The researcher states that service employees with high levels of emotion work-related self-efficacy are likely to be challenged by difficult situations, be less threatened and continue to deal with problems, failures, dysfunctional clients, and employ effective coping strategies to successfully handle the issue (Goussinsky, 2012, p. 180). However, for people low in self-efficacy regular interactions with difficult clients may cause the increase of job stress as they lose their ability to manage the situation and, as a result, they employ emotion-focused coping strategies.

Finally, the third crucial quality is 'emotional intelligence'. With reference to Mayer et al. (2002, as cited in Jung & Yoon, 2016, p. 1649) 'emotional intelligence' is the universal ability to perceive others' emotions and express suitable self-emotions. Jung and Yoon (2016, p. 1664) point out that employees' ability to efficiently handle stressful situations is determined by how well they understand and control their emotions. The spa employees with a high level of emotional intelligence are likely to deal with stress using either positive cognitive appraisal or problem-focused coping styles and, as a result, they feel more satisfied with job. However, the spa employees with a low level of emotional intelligence have shortage of emotion controlling abilities and tend to emotionally react to challenging issues that leads to unwillingness of finding problem solutions, feelings of embarrassment, stress, anxiety that foster job dissatisfaction. Beyond that, all the previously discussed personal characteristics (low negative affectivity, high self-efficacy and high emotional intelligence) assist the hospitality and the spa employees to determine service incidents, react appropriately and follow adequate recovery actions.

2.4. Service recovery strategies

As mentioned earlier, dissatisfied clients and the occurrence of problematic situations in the spa industry are frequent causes of service failures. According to Bitner et al. (1990,

as cited in Koc, 2019, p. 514) there are three categories of service incidents that derive from: the nature of failure (unavailable or slow service); the nature of requests (special needs, customer preferences, customer mistakes, disruptive customer behaviour) as well as the nature of employee action (cultural norms, level of attention, unpleasant reaction). As a consequence, many service failure incidents provoke spa guests' complaining behaviour thus, leading to the spa clients' unfavourable reactions (incivility and misbehaviour) and the occurrence of difficult situations.

However, Kwon and Jang (2012, p.1236) point out that the customers' perception is crucial of how severe they think the service failure is and how fair they believe provided recovery efforts are. It derives from a psychological value that can be perceived differently depending on which state consumers are in. Thus, the stronger the clients' relationships with the company are the more indulgent they are to service incidents and if the relationships are weak the more intolerant the clients could be to service failures. However, with reference to Smith et al. (1999, pp. 369–370) and Greenberg (1993, as cited in Fu et al., 2015, p. 57) core factors that are suggested to take into account by service staff to manage relationships with the complaining customers after service failures are as follows:

- ✓ the clients' perceptions of justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) as well as the identification of the service failure type (the process incident or outcome failure) are of vital importance when evaluating recovery efforts following service incident;
- ✓ distributive justice concentrates on the perceived fairness of outcomes, procedural justice refers to the policies and procedures through which the outcomes are produced. Interactional justice that is divided into: informational and interpersonal justice considers the social interaction between different participants. Interpersonal justice is the most important in comprehension of the clients' behaviours when service incidents take place in spa and hospitality industries (Greenberg, 1993, as cited in Fu et al., 2015, pp. 57–58);
- ✓ the compensation has positive effect on perceptions of distributive justice, an apology has the major effect on perceptions of interactional justice and a speedy recovery has a greater result on perceptions of procedural justice while coping with outcome failures;

- ✓ the process failures (unwelcoming, inattentive service) caused by spa employees' behaviour or attitude impacts spa guest contentment more than outcome failures (unavailable times for the treatment due to the schedule changes, system errors);
- ✓ the level of the magnitude of failure plays crucial role in adopting an effective recovery strategy.

Additionally, based on Smith et al. (1999, p. 370) and as discovered by other scholars: Meffert and Bruhn (2009), as cited in Ogbeide et al. (2017), Kwon and Jang (2012), Jeong and Lee (2017) and You et al. (2020) in relation to competent responses or compensations to service failures the following key aspects of four effective strategies were revealed:

1. Monetary compensation could be either partial or full refund (discounts, coupons, free entrances to spa facilities or substitution). It is a central service recovery strategy that promotes building of mutual trust, increases satisfaction and enhances return intentions (Jeong and Lee, 2017, p. 14). It is effectively employed when the service failure magnitude is high. It improves repurchase intentions substantially only when the firm is responsible for the failure and the failure is assigned to a stable cause (Kwon & Jang, 2012, p.1236). If the compensation should be provided or reconsidered in order to respond on social media environment expressed service incident it is suggested for the managers to ask the clients to send a private email to them. In such cases the complaints can be reviewed competently and possible opportunistic customers' complaints could be detected. (Jeong & Lee, 2017, p. 8). Compensation is more effective when used in combination with other recovery efforts, such as an apology (Fu et al., 2015, p. 57);
2. Replacement or reparation. It is usually applied in matters of material goods that could be replaced for a better substitute (Meffert & Bruhn, 2009, as cited in Ogbeide et al., 2017, p. 208) For instance, to offer the spa client to have another treatment or have the session with a different spa therapist;
3. Official apology. It is an immaterial, psychological type of compensation that could come together with small present to show appreciation and regret to the disappointed guest (Meffert & Bruhn, 2009, as cited in Ogbeide et al., 2017, p. 208). Genuine and sincere apology, including personal touch, such as authenticity in the process of correcting occurred service failures expressed by the managers promotes positive customers' psychological responses (Jeong & Lee, 2017, p. 7). However, You et al.

(2020, p. 135) are confident that acknowledgment of the failure can emphasize the service company's fault and indicate their responsibility, a situation that may carry over to lead consumers to let in negative thoughts about the service company;

4. Appreciation. You et al. (2020, p. 135) assume that appreciation is superior to apology as it compensates service incident by highlighting customers' merits and contributions in the service encounter that, consequently, enhances customers' satisfaction and boosts clients' post-recovery self-esteem. It addresses praising customers' merits and contributions, appreciation expressed by service providers following a service failure ("Thank you for your patience", "Thank you for your understanding! We appreciate it!) and it includes the service provider's admission of the service incident and acknowledgment of consumers' sacrifice (You et al., 2020, p. 135). However, the choice of the service company's whether to use appreciation or apology should be determined by certain situation, for instance, such factors as timing of the recovery, severity of failure and individual consumers' traits have to be reconsidered in advance (You et al., 2020, p. 147).

Other forms of service recovery actions that are applied in hospitality and spa industries are: "acknowledging causality, supervisor intervention, showing care, and giving an explanation" (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003, p. 259). Nevertheless, it is essential to regard that resolution to problems during the guests' service experience should be prompt and interaction with well-trained and empowered employees that have authorities to make decisions independently is of fundamental importance for success of the service recovery (Ogbeide et al., 2017, p. 214). Promptness is a key driver of guests' overall satisfaction with the organisation as it fosters customer loyalty, and recommending the company to others (Ogbeide et al., 2017, p. 214).

To enhance spa clients' positive psychological and behavioural outcomes in response to spa service failures it is significant for the spa team to strive for establishing a long-term relationship with the clients by "email marketing, interpersonal communications and/or personalized communications" (Jeong and Lee, 2017, p. 14) as well as to not offer the compensation with any service failures but to focus on a proactive marketing strategy. Based on Fu et al. (2015, p. 62) recovery policies and procedures should be worked out and efficiently communicated to service employees so they can respond accordingly to

occurred failures. Thus, training of spa employees to be knowledgeable in recovery policies and procedures enables them to react competently and achieve successful service recovery.

2.5 The extent of management support with regard to customer-related problems

To predict and decrease customer related problems it is critical for management to identify such conditions and practices that lead to possible challenges. Afterwards the ways how to tackle those problems and reduce spa employees' resource losses could be looked for. Based on Meyer & Allen (1991), as cited in Tian et al. (2014, p. 29) support provided by the organisations and their leaders contributes to enhancing the employees' emotional bond, which is regarded as being a significant determinant of organizational dedication and commitment. Therefore, Han et al. (2016, p. 100) assume that organizational support is able to interfere between customer misbehaviour and burnout by alleviating or preventing a stress appraisal response. Furthermore, based on earlier discussed difficult customers' reactions and actions it is obvious that many clients dehumanize the staff by regarding the spa employees as "the elements of paid service".

Caesens et al. (2017, p. 537) point out that when employees feel less dehumanized by their organization they experience a higher levels of subjective well-being. Thus, it enables the employees to feel less dehumanized by the clients as well. Hence, enhancement of the spa employees' perceived organizational support is of primary importance. This could be achieved by means of a variety of human resource practices and policies that convey them that they are welcomed, accepted, respected members in the organisation by offering valuable training programs on personal growth and target aspects of their jobs, providing accurate information, introducing with the rules, procedures and implementing of adequate client relations management software solutions, innovative technologies to increase level of employees' wellbeing and maintain efficient and positive spa guest relations.

Prominent tools that help management to deal with customer-related issues, strengthen the relations between the company and the client as well as enhance guest satisfaction are the application of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) strategies. With reference

to Kotler and Keller (2011), as cited in Kampani & Jhamb (2020, p. 221) CRM is the process of carefully managing detailed information about individual customers and all customer “touch points” to maximize commitment. These customer touch points occur at any situation when the customer approaches the brand or product. Competently implemented CRM solutions, firstly, enable service organisations to provide high quality products for the target clients in real time conditions by offerings, services, products, secondly, help them to identify the causes of service failures, complaints and enable companies to cut costs, enhance the efficiencies of value chain, build brands, produce revenue and boost customer satisfaction (Kampani & Jhamb, 2020, p. 224). The most frequently used E-CRM and web-based CRM strategies are as follows: email, chat rooms, mailing lists, forums, Internet surveys, shopping agents, contact management: outbound, inbound, sales force and services, virtual customer, chatbox and etc. Indeed, spa companies which use such practices and create their own CRM software increase their client base, monitor the service quality, personalize with spa clients, reduce expenses on employees’ training programs and grow business.

Khan et al. (2021, p. 13) assume that by designing the strategies of effective employee management the organisations are able deal with subordinates’ and clients’ psychological factors caused by ongoing pandemic successfully. For instance, the same scholars propose that the adoption of technological infrastructure for maximizing profitability in the present era of advancement should be the priority (Khan et al., 2021, p. 13). However, Tuomi et al. (2021, p. 232) believe that technological innovations should be reconsidered and applied with caution to find an adequate balance between operational efficiency and customer expectations. With reference to above mentioned information, it is evident that the extent of management support with regard to successful resolution of customer related problems as well as enhancement of service employees’ wellbeing is enormous. Management is able to apply a wide range of professional instruments, innovative technologies, human resource practices that help to promote psychological safety, supportive climate, service quality and increase revenue.

2.6 The role of spa manager in dealing with difficult customers and situations

Himle, Jayaratne, & Thyness (1989); Sucharski, & Rhoades (2002) and etc., as cited in Kang et al. (2015, p. 69) state that supervisors are a source of emotional, informational, and social support while being key individuals in averting job stressors in the workplace as well as acting as organizational mediators in their actions toward subordinates. Kim and Qu (2019, p. 72) recommend service managers to give employees autonomy to cope with uncivil customers and challenging situations so as to enable them to control the situation by themselves. Moreover, Sommovigo et al. (2019, pp. 14–15) state that an empowered certain degree of service flexibility assists to keep service employees healthy and more productive. Nevertheless, Baker and Kim (2020, p. 9) believe that two beneficial parts of managerial support minimize the impact of negative customer behaviour on employees' wellbeing. Firstly, procedural managerial support which deals with the policies that support employees and not giving all power to the always right customer. Yang and Lau (2019, p. 8) point out that managers' emphasis on customer orientation may induce employees' psychological resource depletion that prevents stress coping. Secondly, emotional managerial support which aspire to give their employees both formal and informal advice how to cope with customer negative behaviour (Baker & Kim, 2020, p. 10).

Other proposed tools and suggested actions based on hospitality scholars' investigations to be reconsidered by spa managers that could be selected and applied to assist spa employees' to handle difficult customers and situations professionally as well as promote spa personnel wellbeing are as follows:

- ✓ the implementation of formal written zero or low tolerance policies for workplace mistreatment, determining reasonable from unreasonable clients' demands and requests (Baker and Kim, 2020, p. 10);
- ✓ the gathering of frequent feedbacks from spa clients to monitor and detect the emergence of service failures (Sommovigo et al., 2019, p. 14);
- ✓ the arrangement of workshops aimed at addressing difficult issues spa employees are likely to face while performing their job duties as well as analyzing negative customer

- encounters, sharing emotional and professional experience so as to find tailored solutions to satisfy customers' expectations (Sommovigo et al., 2019, p. 14);
- ✓ to organise team-based activities such as games, sharing sessions, gatherings, and retreats to foster cooperative work climate and encourage affective mutual support between fellow teammates (Yang & Lau, 2019, p. 8);
 - ✓ to enhance one's own (manager's) emotional intelligence by educating themselves to better create a trusting emotional atmosphere and regulate employees' emotions (Yang & Lau, 2019, p. 8);
 - ✓ to give the spa employees' the chance to rebuild their self-esteem and save face while dealing with uncivil or rude spa client behaviour by encouraging the spa employees to issue polite, tactful reprimands to the spa guests. For instance, "Please, keep civil, I do my job". Thus, it can minimize the increase of spa employees' counterproductive behaviour and unwillingness to provide recovery efforts (Frey-Cordes, et. al., 2019, p. 947);
 - ✓ transformational servant leadership style is powerful contributor to fostering a stress free workplace environment (Divya & Suganthi, 2018, p. 129). Based on Bass (1991, as cited in Divya & Suganthi, 2018, p. 121) such a style is about individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation. However, servant leadership style focuses on listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, commitment to people growth and community building (Spears, 1998, as cited in Divya & Suganthi, 2018, p. 121);
 - ✓ recruitment of service employees with high customer orientation, thus, possessing such qualities as friendliness, openness, empathy and etc. As a result, such employees are able to cope with customer mistreatment functionally (Yue et al., 2017, p. 797);
 - ✓ to ensure the registration of customers' complaints and keep a portfolio of best response strategies for compensation in times of failure (Khalilzadeh et al, 2017, p. 468);
 - ✓ when illegitimate complaints are suspected the employees may be allowed to withdraw from a stressful interaction with a customer, thus, helping them to detach from it physically. The employees are encouraged to submit names of offending illegitimate complainants or dysfunctional actions to service organisations for possible blacklisting

(Huang & Miao, 2013, p. 678). As a consequence, a sense of control of the situation is developed and active problem solving skills promoted.

Furthermore, if service failure occurs it is essential to bear in mind that complaining customers are people first and customers second, who expect corresponding courtesy and respect from employees when the customer is being friendly, courteous, and respectful to them (Gruber et al., 2009, p. 650). However, if the customer is unfriendly the employees should not jeopardize service recovery by being rude or uncompromising when it is legitimate complaint as it can negatively impact other customer's reactions within shared service environment (Kim & Baker, 2020, p. 124).

However, Kim & Baker (2020, p. 124) are confident that in case of customer illegitimate behaviour the companies should not be afraid to confront difficult customers, expel or blacklist them and should focus on taking care of other clients and actively aim for new customers who are respectful and trustful. Finally, it is crucial for spa management to focus on creating a strong service climate where the emphasis is on training and process and policy development, communicating the internal rules to spa employees, promoting the application of problem-focused coping strategies and management support. The training should also deal with enabling the employees to cope with their feelings and how to use emotional displays in an adequate manner (Jerger & Wirtz, 2017, p. 374).

Taking all things into consideration, it has to be admitted that a major aspect of efficient application of service recovery strategies as well successful handling of difficult customers and situations is learning. Thus, engaging the spa staff in learning behaviour will help to prevent the occurrence of possible incidents, make easier for the employees to effectively deal with angry or dysfunctional clients, actions and foster their personal growth. The next part of the Master thesis will be devoted to discover how ESPA Riga centre's spa employees manage difficult clients and situations and to identify their self-management techniques. The author intends to conduct the analysis of the results and provide practical recommendations for dealing with difficult customers and situations effectively so as to strengthen service quality and improve spa employees' psychological wellbeing in ESPA Riga.

3. STUDY AMONGST ESPA RIGA TEAM

3.1. Overview of ESPA Riga

ESPA Riga is one of the five star SPA centers created by one of the most prestigious international world companies—ESPA that is currently owned by the Hut Group (THG) and is known as ESPA Skincare Company. The Hut Group (THG) is classified among the world’s largest online health, beauty retailers and brand owners. ESPA Riga is the department of Radisson Blu Latvija Conference & SPA Hotel. Besides, ESPA Skincare Company is one of the well-known European spa franchise systems that has successfully spread around the world (Employee/trainee handbook, 2020, p.12) ESPA Riga is one of ESPA Skincare franchisees opened in 2009 and is truly regarded as conceptually unique SPA complex in the Baltic states. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that ESPA International has been a “total spa” organisation that has been in charge of spa design, pre-opening process, management services, financial forecast, marketing support as well as ESPA products, treatments and spa staff training. Beyond that, ESPA Riga has distinctive premises and facilities. ESPA Riga provides its services and facilities in the architectural six floor renovated art nouveau building.

As mentioned earlier it is the department of Radisson Blu Latvija Conference & Spa Hotel, hence, the clients’ flow depends on the hotel’s occupancy substantially. With reference to ESPA Riga management (personal communication, September 24, 2020) ESPA Riga centre’s main aim is to ensure safe and secure SPA facilities and services, to determine the needs, wants, and interest of the target markets and achieve the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors in a way that preserves and enhance the guests’ long-term wellbeing. ESPA Riga has two unique areas of relaxation: Active Leisure area with Fitness Gym, 18 meters swimming pool, the vitality pool, the rock sauna, the steam room, experience showers and heated benches. The second area is the Thermal Suite that has the only outdoor vitality pool in Riga, the steam and sauna pods, rondello sauna, ice fountain, experience showers and spacious relaxation areas that

are available for treatment guests and one-year full time members. ESPA Riga offers more than thirty body and facial treatments and five Day SPA Special packages. ESPA Riga has three spacious changing areas (female, male, family) that are fully equipped with all the necessary amenities. It has its own SPA Café where the guests enjoy a healthy and tasty cuisine and a wide choice of freshly squeezed juices and smoothies. In addition, ESPA Riga provides the customers with an option to organize different parties with friends, teambuilding, private and corporate events (ESPA Riga, 2021).

ESPA Riga Reception Manager (personal communication, September 24, 2020) stated that 64% of ESPA Riga clients are the Latvian residents, 15% of the clients are Radisson Blu Latvija Conference & Spa Hotel guests and 21% of the clients are tourists who come to enjoy the capital of Latvia. It has to be outlined that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic ESPA Riga was working to full potential almost the whole year and its financial results were above the average most of the time. For example, ESPA Riga Reception Manager (personal communication, September 24, 2020) stated that 8040 people had treatments in ESPA Riga and 26000 people visited ESPA facilities in 2018. Currently, the main spa visitors are the domestic clients. Mostly these are women (70%) and men (30%) who are medium and high income residents of Riga. They prefer to indulge themselves as well as they value exceptional facilities, pampering service and want to keep themselves physically and emotionally healthy. In general, the Scandinavian clients have always been regarded as one of the primary target groups as well.

An operational and financial control of ESPA Riga is conducted by Radisson Blu Latvija Conference & SPA Hotel General Manager and franchisor –ESPA Skincare owned by the Hut Group (THG). Currently, there are all together twenty nine employees in ESPA Riga department. The head of the department is Spa Director who drives and leads main operational and financial aspects of the SPA. Reception Manager in cooperation with Senior receptionist are responsible for ensuring smooth running of the guest journey within the SPA as well as they train and develop the team of six spa receptionists within ESPA service standards and requirements. The Senior Therapist is responsible for the supervision of twelve therapists as well as management of the stock, treatment rooms, spa equipment and boosting SPA therapists' retail sales targets. Additionally, there is ESPA brand “in-house” trainer in ESPA Riga who works on training new spa therapists and

monitors the adherence of ESPA service standards. In addition, to twelve SPA therapists there are three manicure and pedicure specialists. The Senior Attendant and her team (five spa attendants) in cooperation with the hotel's Senior engineer are in charge of the maintenance of SPA facilities, daily operation of sauna and steam rooms as well as keeping the spa areas in a clean, well-organized condition. The spa attendants are working with SPA guests face-to-face regularly as well. They ensure the guests with the amenities and monitor the flow of the guests to the Thermal Suite. The Senior Fitness Trainer conducts the individual training sessions and in cooperation with a different Fitness trainer leads and organises the work of Fitness Gym (ESPA Riga staff, personal communication, July-September, 2021).

Currently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic devastating impact, the business of the hotel and ESPA Riga is not productive and profitable as well as it does not meet the needs of shareholders. The Latvian government has declared the state of emergency situation twice in Latvia (the period from the 13th of March till the 9th of June) and (the period from the 9th of November till the 6th of April) (Cabinet of Ministers Republic of Latvia, 2020). Thus, ESPA Riga facilities and services have been unavailable for a substantial amount of time. However, based on previous stated facts prior to COVID-19 pandemic ESPA Riga services and facilities have been in high demand from the clients and its spa professionals served a large number of various types of clients. As a result, they have encountered a variety of challenging incidents and spa customer misbehaviour and are able to provide different information from various angles and share their exceptional experiences in customer service.

3.2. Research Methodology

Based on Pandey and Mishra Pandey (2015, pp. 7–8) research is a mental activity that aims at revealing new knowledge, correcting the present mistakes, eliminating existing misconceptions, and boosting new learning to the existing fund of knowledge. The present research is in social sciences. Such investigations focus on expanding the principles that enhance the comprehension and prediction of multiple human interactions as well as looking for practical guidance in solving instant problems of human relations (Jahoda et al., 1959, as cited in Kothari, 1990, p. 6). The current study is mainly devoted

to peoples' views, experiences, and their knowledge, aspects which are crucial for the final results, therefore, the application of interpretivism research theory was deemed as the most relevant framework for this Master study. With reference to Creswell (2007, p. 29) interpretivism is applied in social sciences theories to reconsider societal issues and problems of groups. The research questions of interpretivists aim at exploring specific problems or topics as well as conditions that serve to disadvantage and exclude the particular group of individuals in the society.

Bearing in mind the goal and the research questions of the study, the most appropriate approach to manage the thesis in a competent way was to use a qualitative research design method. It allowed the researcher to create a detailed, profound view on the target issues, illustrate various attitudes, opinions and experiences of ESPA Riga spa employees and the target company's clients. The data was gathered in the form of open-ended responses to two sets of questions (one for spa management (Appendix 1)) and one for spa receptionists, spa therapists, one fitness trainer and one spa assistant (Appendix 2) via digital link: www.visidati.lv. The author provided the questions in the Latvian language and introduced the participants to the goal of the conducted research. The answers to the questions were collected during the period from the 17th of February to the 1st of March. The link was shared with twenty-two ESPA Riga spa employees through Facebook Messenger platform due to social restrictions. The author of the study found it particularly essential to be human-centred, non-intrusive and respectful in the COVID-19 pandemic provoked abnormal and unpredictable circumstances. The researcher believes that such a type of collecting information has similar benefits and drawbacks as e-interviews.

For example, open-ended questions in written form as e-interviews are asynchronous and allow the researchers to choose the most convenient time for them to reflect on their professional experience and provide the researcher with carefully thought-out responses (Bampton et al., 2013, p. 331). Based on the same scholars (2013, p. 331) e-interview as well as a target form of gathering information provide the interviewees with protection from the embarrassment that could be promoted by the investigator's physical participation or respondent's individual features of character as well as written responses help to avoid errors in recording and transcription from phone or Skype interviews. Finally, Bampton et al. (2013, p. 331, p. 336) point out that e-interviews give the

interviewees the opportunity to remain anonymous. That is relevant to open-ended written questions as well. Hence, unfavourable impact on the relationship between the researcher, respondents and the organization are avoided and the participants' privacy is ensured (Bampton et al., 2013, p. 337). General limitations of e-interviewing as well as written open-ended questions are that it is not possible for the researcher to establish rapport and build trust with the participants, thus, they could be unwilling to give candid answers to the questions. However, due to the fact that the author of the study was a part of ESPA Riga team and managed to establish positive, responsive and trustful relationships with her ex-colleagues, the target group expressed their views, shared their knowledge and provided extended answers to the questions.

Nevertheless, another drawback of e-interviews and the selected method of data gathering with reference to Bampton et al. (2013, p. 335) is that body language, non-verbal means of communication and voice inflexions are lost in such a way of gathering information and can lead to misunderstandings between the parties involved in the process. Finally, one vital limitation pointed out by Creswell (2014) in relation to face-to-face interviews that is relevant to using a written form of open-ended questions is that providing information could be indirect because it is filtered through the perceptions of the participants. Consequently, to avoid possible misinterpretation, the author stated in her message to the respondents that she was available to give clarification in case of some unclear points.

The non-probability convenience sample method was applied to approach the target population. The findings of this qualitative research was done by using purposeful sampling. Judd et al. (1991, as cited in Karatepe, 2009, p. 50) assign this type of sampling to picking cases that are judged to be typical of the population in which the errors of judgment in the selection will tend to counterbalance one another. The drawback of using the target sampling is that it is not necessarily reflective of the total population. Nevertheless, the sample is purposive, since the interest of this paper is specifically ESPA Riga spa center's employees who have been working in ESPA Riga for at least three years. The author's previous professional experience assisted her to determine the spa employees with substantial professional experience.

As soon as the author had received the responses to two sets of open-ended questions she translated the data. Afterwards she used a thematic data analysis method to interpret the obtained information. This type of data analysis helps the researchers to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across a data set (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p. 1). While doing the translation of the information, the author got familiar with the data obtained, next she generated the codes that helped her to identify key themes. Finally, significant themes provided important links between data items and assisted her to answer key aspects of research questions (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p. 6). Statements and respondents' answers were coded as: from "P1" to "P20" which indicates the responses of twenty ESPA Riga employees. Six themes were determined: (1) ESPA Riga spa employees' job stress factors, their stress-coping and self-recovery techniques; (2) Experience with difficult customers and situations varied among ESPA Riga spa employees; (3) Difficult customers and situations have a negative impact on spa employees' wellbeing and cause them to use emotion regulation strategies; (4) "People-skills" in combination with adequate recovery strategies lead to successful management of service incidents; (5) The role of spa employees' educational training sessions and service standards in customer service; (6) A harmonious working environment helps employees to effectively handle customer-related problems and produce guest satisfaction.

3.3. Analysis of the Results

3.3.1. ESPA Riga spa employees' jobs stress factors, their stress coping and self-recovery techniques

ESPA Riga spa employees outlined various job stress factors. For instance, essential stress "promoters" that were pointed out by most ESPA Riga employees were: "lack of knowledge"; "negative incidents and misunderstandings with colleagues"; "inability to actively and proactively participate in the spa's development to their full potential"; "inadequate level of salaries" and "work schedule (the shift work)". With regard to frontline ESPA Riga employees the majority of them (P11, P12, P9, and P8) mentioned "an excessive workload"; "early shifts" as the most dominant job stress factors. However, spa management, P1–P6, the spa therapists, P13–P18 as well as P19, P20 admitted that being in contact and dealing with "difficult customers and situations" increase level of

job stress, first and foremost. For example, P2 confessed that “despite the fact that our spa employees are very professional with five, six and even thirteen years of working experience in ESPA Riga it can still be frustrating experience for them to deal with challenging situations.”

To cope with above discussed job stressors and serve the spa clients professionally for a long time ESPA Riga spa employees disclosed their own stress-coping and self-recovery techniques. These are as follows: “to talk about the incident with my team”; “to seek practical help”; “to pause and think of a possible solution”; “physical activities”; “free time with loved ones”; “quality sleep”; “reading”; “nature therapies (long walks in the park, forest alone)”; “visiting the country house”; “the meditation and breathing techniques”; “visiting ESPA Riga facilities”; “going to the shower after every shift as “running” water deflects negative energy and releases the tension”. Only one participant (P17) confessed: “usually I do not need any special recovery ritual. I restart immediately as soon as I meet the next client. If I end my working day after a difficult client, then I can go to the Fitness gym and visit spa facilities to “recover mentally”.”

Clearly, there are job stress aspects in every professional field, however, the service industry is specifically challenging due to active interaction with various people and service jobs’ particular characteristics. Thus, one’s awareness of the importance of self-recovery strategies and application of effective stress coping techniques improve one’s wellbeing. As a result, to maintain overall health and not to “dwell” on the negative sides of job aspects is paramount for all spa employees. It is obvious that ESPA Riga employees are knowledgeable lifestyle employees who take care of themselves, as a result, they are able to work in their positions productively for seven, nine and even thirteen years in ESPA Riga and look after their spa clients professionally.

3.3.2. Experience with difficult customers and situations varied among ESPA Riga spa employees

The respondents had encountered various difficult spa customers and their actions. Most of them described incidences of incivility such as: “the clients who are “on the phone” during the whole treatment time and cannot relax properly”; “the spa clients who are always late and cancel their treatments regularly, thus, making the spa employees feel

stressed”; “arrogant spa clients who believe that their financial status give them the right to disregard the basic social and ethical norms of conduct”; “the spa guests who do not listen to what is explained on the pre-treatment consultation and do not listen to post-treatment recommendations”; “irresponsive guests who disregard any truth/evidence except theirs”; “the guests who ignore and show disrespect toward spa employees and other spa clients”; “the clients who leave the trash in the changing areas for the spa employees to clean up”; “the guests who believe that the service employees have to satisfy all their wishes, requests and needs”. For example, P7 said, “if according to the spa client’s opinion the spa employee is young or inexperienced there are cases when the spa guests behave impolitely and even offend the spa receptionist.” Next case provided by P19 demonstrates the client’s attitude “know what they want”:

The spa client wanted to have the fitness training at definite times, he expected the fitness trainer and the spa organisation to meet his expectations and provide him with this opportunity. It was difficult to solve such a situation as the client was uncompromising and did not accept any offered possible times and dates.

P20 shared her experience that illustrates the client’s discourtesy toward other spa guests around him/her:

The spa client complained about a lack of proper ventilation in the changing area. I called the hotel’s technician who checked the ventilation and he assured me that the ventilation functioned well. I offered the client to use another changing area, she declined my offer. She was dissatisfied with the situation and put a plastic water bottle to keep the door in the changing area partially opened. I was confused about this situation. Other spa guests did not like the half-opened door, as a result, they decided to use another changing area. In my opinion, the spa client wanted to attract attention from both the spa organisation and the other spa guests.

Other participants’ characteristics of difficult customers are linked to the guests’ lack of emotional grounding: “an emotionally unstable”; “scandalous”; “unpredictable”; “selfish and aggressive”; “inadequate demanding personalities”; “the spa guests who have already been dissatisfied or disappointed with something before his/her spa visit”; “the guests who have come to the spa in a bad mood and they perceive a spa visit as the opportunity to solve their problems”; “the guests who blow off their steam on the spa employees”.

For instance, P10 gave the following example of her experience with the spa guest she has found as a difficult client:

Once I had a case- when I offered the spa guest to visit Fitness Gym I looked down to see whether she has got on fitness clothing. It happened in the elevator during the summer when we have light clothes on. The spa guest misunderstood my glance and she decided that I was arrogant and my glance was appraising. As a result, ESPA Riga management received the letter of complaint with a dramatic description of the situation and given suggestion to get rid of such an over-confident and arrogant spa employee. Spa management sent the letter of apology to the spa guest and explained the misconception of the situation. I believe that the spa guest's complaining behaviour was facilitated by her willingness to get "missing" attention and raise her affected self-awareness.

The next part of the respondents' answers were connected with customer dysfunctional behaviour that is promoted by various reasons: "drunk spa visitors"; "the spa clients who violate the spa's internal rules"; "people who "associate" themselves with a definite social status, hence, it influences their emotions/behaviour/thoughts/opinions during their spa visit"; "the clients who are complaining to get a discount and pay less for the service"; "due to possible incomplete information provided or the lack of clear, internal rules the spa guests who "use the situation" for selfish purposes"; "the guests with unrealistic expectations"; "the spa guests who try to impose their wishes/needs aggressively, thus, creating problematic and conflict situations". Indeed, the next offered answer by P10 illustrates the example of customer dysfunctional action perfectly:

At the end of the spa's working day the client wanted to get the service. Definitely, it was not available, thus, it caused the spa guest's dissatisfaction. As a result, the scandal arose with the guest's complaining behaviour. To deal with the issue the treatment was conducted free of charge the next day. To my mind, such difficult spa guests sometimes "use" the situation and the spa organisation to satisfy their needs and ambitions.

Last responses of the spa employees regarding the target clients were: "guests who do not know themselves what they want"; the guests who do not treat their health condition seriously"; "conservative guests with rigid expectations and guests who are not ready for

a new and different experience”; “guests’ subjective negative perception of the spa treatment results”. The next answer summarizes several subjective reasons of customer dissatisfaction mentioned earlier. P2 said:

These spa clients are unable to admit that their expectations regarding spa service are unwarranted and imaginary, therefore, the problematic situations can happen which are challenging to solve by the service provider. Possibly, it happens due to their “sensitive” emotional condition, sometimes under the influence of alcohol or other substances, may be due to bad previous experience or their individual psychological problems. However, sometimes it stems from their personal self-interest motivations, for example, to get the service free of charge or with a discount.

The final situation that is worth mentioning and described by P19 gives the example of spa guest’s and spa therapist’s inability to establish the contact:

The spa client was dissatisfied with the received treatment and she complained at the reception. I did everything according to the treatment protocol and technically it was delivered very well, however, I and a spa client were unable to “form a bond”. Thus, the dissatisfaction was based on the spa client’s subjective perception. Nevertheless, due to the motto “the client is always right” to satisfy the spa guest she was paid the monetary compensation by the organisation. As a result, ESPA Riga had a financial loss.

Needless to say, ESPA Riga team members face with difficult customers and situations periodically. Based on the provided earlier answers it is obvious that: many spa guests perceive the spa employees as “the elements of paid service” rather than human beings and the spa professionals who can boost their wellbeing; many spa clients are unable to manage their own emotions and behaviour themselves as well as some of the spa clients look for gaining financial rewards or saving their money. Finally, there are challenging situations when the employee-guest contact is not formed successfully. There could be various reasons, for instance, the spa guest’s expectations were warranted as well the spa guest or the spa employee had unfavourable emotional, physical condition that impacted the course of delivering the treatment.

3.3.3. Difficult customers and situations have a negative impact on spa employees' wellbeing and cause them to use emotion regulation strategies

The respondents indicated that difficult customers and situations affect their wellbeing adversely. The main feelings mentioned by the target groups were: “stressful”; “emotionally drained”; “sudden headache”; “the loss of attention and productivity for some time”; “loss of confidence and self-esteem”; “fatigue”; “unfairness”; “anger”; “demotivation to serve the clients”; “willingness to become defensive”; “despair and sadness”; “burn out from my job”; “feeling of being used up after the job”. Additionally, some respondents stated that negative customer-related cases promote “anxiety”; “negative temper”; “nervousness”; “impatience” and “burnout aspect”. For instance, P12 wrote: “I always control my emotions and never argue with the clients. I am always civil and formal, however sometimes it is unbearable when there are obviously unfair clients’ reactions and demands. After such incidents the working day could be ruined”. In addition, P9 admitted:

We have to be welcoming all the time. We have to control not only our feelings but also our body language (voice, a facial expression) that depends on our emotional condition greatly. People “catch” your mood, voice, glance and attitude immediately, thus, it can be very hard to do constantly, especially if you have a very busy day. Sometimes it makes me feel down.

Finally, P7 expressed the following:

ESPA Riga is a very popular spa in the city, sometimes the hotel, city guests and residents come actively to enjoy the spa facilities, so to keep the quality high and facilities tidy we have to limit the guests’ flow. There are many cases when the clients do not want to listen that they cannot get in and they start yelling, blaming you for low service and demand to call the manager. Definitely, we call spa management to talk with them. Such situations are very unpleasant and time is needed to come back to positive and welcoming service mood.

The above shared views point out not only negative outcomes of difficult customers and situations on spa employees’ wellbeing but also emphasize specific nature of service jobs,

when the service employees have to exude a friendly and welcoming demeanor despite of being annoyed or worried. Thus, to avoid negative impulses the spa employees fake their real emotions by switching on the processes of emotional labour. As a result, such an effortful way of hiding one's true feelings could be critical for the spa employees' desirable service performance and overall health condition.

3.3.4. "People-skills" in combination with adequate recovery strategies lead to successful management of service incidents

The respondents described a number of personal qualities, skills and abilities that genuinely assist them to provide service efficiently to a various types of clients. Thus, due to customer-orientation nature of the industry most participants stated human-relations-associated competences. For instance, some respondents outlined: "a great written and oral communicator"; "making people feel comfortable with you"; "a mild, soft and calm tone of voice and open body language"; "empathy"; "friendliness"; "to have good intuition"; "being tactful"; "being a good observer and watch others". P10 noted that "I have learnt a lot about how to deal with the clients from just observing them, especially our members. They are different, hence, I change my serving style in accordance to the clients' personalities. It helps a lot!"

Other participants gave the following responses with regard to their successful management of customer-related interactions: "to perceive problematic situations as the opportunity for professional and personal growth"; "the ability to be adaptable and flexible"; "being patient and tolerant"; "long professional experience"; "team skills (support from the colleagues and spa management)"; "professional look and pose"; "an attentive and individual approach to every spa customer"; "outstanding listening skills" and "self-confidence". Indeed, P4 gives a wise advice to keep in mind for their employees' to be resourceful:

I always remind my team that for the protection of their health and decrease of the possible psychological burnout factor, they should not perceive difficult clients' actions or problematic situations personally, they should not take them closely to their hearts but rather aim at "letting go" such situations.

It is a fact that demonstration of “people-skills” in combination with spa employees’ professional look and open body language assist the spa employees to meet the spa guests’ needs, desires and expectations and to successfully manage spa guests’ problems with sensitivity and tact. Apart from “human” competences, ESPA Riga management and frontline employees cope with difficult customers and situations and service failures using the following methods: “private conversation with the guest”; “the telephone call and sending an email to the client aiming at expressing the understanding of his/her case”; “expressing an apology and finishing with the promise to take into consideration the shared incident to prevent such cases in the future”; ““apology” gifts (ESPA products, gift cards)”; “monetary compensation (either full or discount)”; “free entrance visits to spa facilities”.

In addition, P1 and P3 pointed out the significance of determining whether the complaint or service incident is justified or not. When it is determined the adequate solution is looked for. However, P1 outlined that “in case of unjustified cases of complaining behaviour we have to point out our spa guest that his/her unrealistic expectations from the spa visit have not corresponded to the spa organisation’s promises.” Other determined ways of handling difficult spa employees were: “to make an attempt to understand “the pain” of the clients or “the root” of the situation”; “to show empathy and understanding”; “to be calm and confident yourself”; “to express the desire to help the spa client by offering personalized treatment/the set of exercises”; “to offer the substitution of the service”; “to tell that he/she cannot offer the requested treatment/service honestly”; “to ask for the social support and practical advice from the colleagues and spa management”. Finally, most of guest conflict and successful problem resolution depends on spa employees’ abilities to communicate and negotiate effectively. For instance, P12 reflected on her experience:

Just a few days later after the expiration of the membership the loyal member came to ESPA Riga. He did not accept that his membership has expired and asked to be let in to use ESPA Riga facilities. We arranged that we will let him in for the special price that is offered for the membership holder’s friends and family members.

However, P11 shared the following experience:

The spa guest complained about the treatment. I apologized for the result of the treatment and offered the discount for the same treatment in the future. Probably, the spa guest expected that he would not have to pay for the treatment, however the spa treatment has been already conducted.

All in all, efficient, professional management of difficult customers and situations in a spa setting is achieved by the application of appropriate tools (monetary compensation, replacement, apology, giving an explanation) in combination with the spa employees' set of "people skills". As a consequence, the spa employees are able to develop favourable relationships with their spa guests and ensure positive spa performance.

3.3.5. The role of spa employees' educational training sessions and service standards in customer service

With regard to training the majority of the ESPA Riga employees stated that they have been trained in customer service (i.e. ESPA service standards and "Yes I Can" training provided by Radisson Blu Latvija Conference & SPA Hotel) and during those training sessions the most common incidences have been reconsidered. For instance, with regard to educational practice on challenging issues discussed during ESPA and hotel's training sessions the spa employees gave the following answers: "the cases when the security should be called to deal with the incidents are discussed in detail"; "the examples of the clients' actions in the treatment room when the therapist has the right to stop/cancel the treatment"; "the treatments' contraindications are reviewed thoroughly as well as the importance of signing the consultation cards before the spa treatments is explained"; "open discussions within all team members"; "role-plays on the most frequent situations"; "host lecturers who give an overview on serving the customers professionally and how to improve one's communication skills". One participant, P10, stated: "we have not had specific training on dealing with difficult customers and situations, however we discuss and reconsider the problematic situations and incidents with the colleagues, so as to know how to appropriately and efficiently react to possible future similar situations". In addition, P2 added:

Training on serving difficult customers is a continuous process. As soon as the problem arises-I can state it is an excellent opportunity to learn. Due to the fact that every person

is unique the same is about every case/situation and it is important to handle such situations with caution and tact. I believe that real practical incidents are the best “teachers”.

However, one of the best ways to eliminate the occurrence of problematic situations in ESPA Riga is to aim at prevention of such incidences by revising relevant information, reconsidering internal rules, managing quality control and boosting spa employees’ development. For instance, P4 pointed out:

When the spa occupancy is low, we arrange the time for practical sessions with the in-house trainer. In every preparation room as well as the staff room we have “remainders” about the most sophisticated or new treatments’ protocols, brochures on the spa products, lists of contraindications, thus, enabling the spa therapists to check or refresh relevant knowledge when it is required.

Besides, P2 explained:

ESPA Riga is one of the top leading spas in the Baltics states. To keep our reputation high and business sustainable an exceptional customer service is of vital importance for us. Twice a year we invite ESPA international trainers to give our spa employees training. Before ESPA international trainer arrives she conducts the “mystery shopper” procedure and then she visits one of our treatments. Afterwards we get the detailed report and the Seniors with the in-house trainer go through the results with their subordinates. We encourage our clients to provide feedback by offering “comment cards” at the reception as well.

In practice, it is evident that educational training sessions on customer service and set service standards established by ESPA company play an essential role in the successful performance of the spa organisation. For instance, many ESPA employees emphasized that they are in favour of having service standards due to: “the adherence to the spa standards promotes ESPA Riga centre in “the eyes of the clients””; “creates the positive guest’s impression”; “fosters the spa clients’ loyalty”; “it gives the spa clients as well as me and my colleagues the feelings of security and consistent service”; “it is requested by my spa management”.

However, other answers make clear about the challenges of following the service standards fully as well. Most of spa therapists and spa trainer disclosed the next reasons: “when the spa therapist with regular and loyal guests establish “informal” relationships some of the service standards are lost”; “if the spa guest has the contraindications-the spa therapist has to be flexible and make changes in the treatment procedure (i.e. choose suitable ESPA products, substitute the treatment)”; “ESPA service standards imply active communication with the spa client, if the spa guest does want to speak with the spa employee, the spa therapist aims at delivering the treatment without devoting time to communication”. One P17 stated the next professional opinion: “I think the longer professional experience you have the easier it is to find the balance between following the service standards and an individual approach to the client.” Moreover, common sense and the ability to be critical in every situation is pivotal. For example, the following view of P10 was expressed:

Service standards are essential as they give ideas on how the spa employees have to behave or act in the spa organisation in the most common situations. However, with regards to challenging issues the service standards can be adjusted based on the definite situation as there is no one and exact model of behaviour that is suitable for all the cases and incidents. Every case has to be reconsidered individually. Hence, a degree of service flexibility is vital to find the best solution to the problem that could satisfy both involved parties.

Another response stresses the necessity of being farsighted and be able to find an adequate balance between business and client orientation. P6 declared:

“The degree of service flexibility” and disregarding of service standards partially or fully in finding the solution must be reconsidered cooperatively within the team. For instance, a paid service has not been used by the spa guest due to his/her illness. Nevertheless, the spa employees have to keep in mind that if the guest is allowed to take advantage of his/her individually granted benefit, most likely he/she will continue to claim for them in the future.

Hence, based on the replies it is obvious that educational training sessions and service standards are integral part of spa employees’ professional lives that promote financial sustainability of the organisation. Nevertheless, active spa work environment as well as

the spa clients' individual needs, peculiarities and health conditions enable the spa employees to be flexible and adaptable. ESPA Riga employees aim at finding an individual approach to the client. However, "degree of service flexibility" in finding the best solution to the problematic situation should be done cooperatively within the team. Otherwise more cases of the spa guests' taking advantage of the situations will occur, inconsistent service will be enhanced, thus, leading ESPA Riga centre to financial losses and the decline of the customer service.

3.3.6. A harmonious working environment assists employees to effectively handle customer-related problems and produce guest satisfaction

Based on the responses there are two broad ways of limiting damage on the spa employees' wellbeing from negative incidences. Firstly, it is essential to promote service personnel problem-solving skills and enhance their autonomy in taking the responsibility for making the decisions with regard to problem resolutions. ESPA Riga management believes that to foster spa employees' problem skills it is necessary: "to gain practical experience with challenging issues"; "to organize the psychological and crisis intervention courses with professionals"; "to conduct regular training, discussions, case studies and practical interactive sessions on how to deal with different situations"; "to arrange "supervision" meetings that aim at individual's, team's and organisation's development". P2 emphasized: "above all, the spa employees should be aware that they are empowered and entitled to make their own decisions regarding the best possible solutions to deal with the challenging issues and these solutions should focus on satisfying both parties involved".

Secondly, it is important to establish a harmonious spa working environment. According to spa employees' responses the following tools are required: "precisely worked out efficiently communicated internal rules to the spa employees and clients"; "supervision meetings that concentrate on the discussion of various situations, its possible resolutions"; "to ensure an active communication between all team members to efficiently and constructively solve the issues"; "to monitor the spa employees' adherence to the set of service standards regularly"; "to have a sufficient quantity of employees to ensure high customer service"; "to be harmonious, mindful yourself, thus, taking responsibility for

creating a safe, positive and supportive atmosphere”; “to reconsider the level of salaries and improve motivational programmes (market-competitive and decent salaries)”; “to encourage the spa employees’ proactive involvement in the spa’s development process”; “to promote an open internal communication”. Other core attributes that contribute to positive working climate are perfectly summarized by ESPA Riga Reception Manager’s response:

To my mind, to foster a harmonious working it is important to establish mutual respect within the team, to take into account the subordinates’ needs, interests, individual peculiarities. On the one hand, it is necessary to be sincere, open, honest, forgiving, however, on the other hand, to be demanding, intolerant to laziness, indifference and disregarding of ethical and social norms of conduct at work.

Other opinions expressed by the participants on harmonious spa working environment features were as follows: “the working environment where you come with pleasure (the colleagues, spa management, promotional opportunities, the employees’ benefits”; “the team-building activities”; the opportunity “to be appreciated and listened to”); “the team work –cooperative work, where colleagues help each other in “troubles and joys””; “peaceful, respectful, trustful and stress-free environment where the spa employee is appreciated and valued”; “cleanliness”; “gratitude from the spa clients”; “ergonomically comfortable working environment and comfortable temperature, which allows the spa employees to provide qualitative services and gain job satisfaction”.

Hence, on the basis of ESPA Riga team’s answers it is obvious that earlier mentioned features of positive working environment are crucial for the establishment strong service climate, where the spa employees have the authority to make individual decisions on client management and grow both personally and professionally. Furthermore, such a strong service climate aims at creating enjoyable interactions both within the team and the spa clients that promotes the creation of self-management, strong team that is able to manage problematic situations cooperatively and skillfully, to boost guest contentment, to promote word-of-mouth recommendations and customer loyalty.

3.4. Discussion and Recommendations

Responses to two sets of open-ended questions with ESPA Riga team gave the researcher the opportunity to explore different areas across the participants, helped her to study of the evolving issues and answer the research questions of the current Master thesis. Thus, on the grounds of the analysis of both parts the following points were disclosed:

- The variety of work-related “stressors” (unsociable work hours; lack of skills; insufficient training; unsupportive relations with the team; emotional labour attributes; aesthetic labour burden; difficult and unfriendly customers and etc.) in spa and hospitality jobs discussed by Tiyce et al. (2013); Paulston (2008); Walsh (2011) coincides with ESPA Riga employees’ expressed opinions on the most stressful nuances of their jobs. Furthermore, as Subramony et al. (2017, p. 848) stated customer misbehaviour is dominant stressor in service roles, the majority of ESPA Riga employees have pointed out that difficult customers and situations do increase occupational stress in them substantially;
- With regard to job stress consequences both physical (headaches, unbalanced blood pressure, stomach problems and etc.) and mental (anxiety, burnout, anger, unfairness, loss of self-esteem and etc.) investigated by Maslach & Leiter (1997); Selye (1976), as cited in Tiyce et al. (2013, p. 127); Dallimore et al., (2007) generated from negative work environment, it was disclosed that ESPA Riga employees have identical negative outcomes after their contact with challenging clients and situations;
- Distinctive opinions provided by the scholars: Gursoy et al. (2017); Harris and Reynolds (2003); Harris and Reynolds (2004); Kashif et al. (2017); Bitner et al. (1994); Sliter et al. (2011) and etc. on describing difficult customers and their actions that are guided by incivility, dysfunctional, complaining customer behaviour as well as self-interest motives support ESPA Riga employees’ provided views on the target clients. It is obvious from the research that a variety of guests’ unfavourable actions and reactions stem from different reasons and most of them have link with incivility, service failures, human errors, the clients’ personal motives as well as lack of the guests’ physical, emotional, spiritual, educational and social grounding;
- On the grounds of Billings and Moos’s study (1981), as cited in Jung & Yoon, 2016); Collins (2008); Lazarus & Folkman (1984), as cited in Tohmiya et al. (2018) explored

stress-coping strategies and Mayer's et al. (2002), as cited in Jung & Yoon (2016) as well as Jung and Yoon's (2016) discussion on 'emotional intelligence' it was discovered that ESPA Riga employees apply various stress coping strategies. However due to "human-associated-relations" nature of the spa industry and possessing a lot of "people-skills" especially high emotional and social competences, most of the spa employees use emotion-focused (talk with colleagues, seek practical support from the team) techniques. In addition, they have their own self-recovery techniques to handle job stress and keep themselves resourceful;

➤ With respect to Smith et al. (1999); Meffert and Bruhn (2009), as cited in Ogbeide et al. (2017); Kwon and Jang (2012); Jeong and Lee (2017); and You et al. (2020) provided competent responses to service failures most frequently used management techniques of overcoming service incidents in ESPA Riga are identical ones: monetary compensation, replacement, an apology, explanations. Furthermore, the spa employees' set of "human" competences, especially emotion regulation, social and negotiation skills as well as their long professional experience assist them to manage problematic issues skillfully;

➤ Finally, concerning the role of spa manager in customer problem regulation process the author disclosed that many actions (organizing different customer service training, providing the spa employees' with autonomy, emotional and procedural support, accepting the service degree of flexibility, monitoring service quality with clients' feedback cards) researched by Kim and Qu (2019); Sommovigo et al. (2019); Yang & Lau (2019); Kim & Baker (2020) are implemented in ESPA Riga to maintain consistent service and solve guest related problems. ESPA Riga team conducts educational training sessions, monitors clients' satisfaction with comment cards and organizes Mystery shopper audits, supports the service degree flexibility to some extent bearing in mind the significance of service standards. They try to find reasonable, analytical approach to every sensitive situation. Beyond that, spa management entitles their spa employees with the authority to find the solutions on job-related problems individually.

On the whole, the current study has disclosed that ESPA Riga team is knowledgeable, professional and very skillful in handling difficult customers and situations in a spa setting. As it has been mentioned earlier the current thesis has been carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic's provoked crisis. Thus, apart from negative social interactions, spa guests' uncivil behaviour current possible occupational stress factors could be connected

with increased job insecurity, limited job opportunities and spa business future uncertainty. As a consequence, not only defined work-related difficulties but also present atypical conditions may cause ESPA Riga employees' mental and physical health complaints, lower their level of job satisfaction and promote higher turnover intentions in ESPA Riga in times of crisis. As a result, the author of the study proposes the following steps in the form of recommendations to be reviewed by ESPA Riga management to overcome challenging circumstances, negative social incidents and facilitate positive working condition. Thus, these are as follows:

- to aim at sharing relevant information in response to COVID-19 (safety-related information and plan) to promote workplace safety;
- to apply appreciation as a post-recovery technique taking into account timing of the recovery, severity of failure and individual guests' traits, thus, to say "thank you" rather than to say "sorry" to facilitate ESPA Riga clients' satisfaction;
- to provide ESPA Riga employees with appropriate active and psychological support by encouraging them to express negative emotions to some degree, hence, enabling the subordinates to get social support and perceive unpleasant service situation as challenge stressors so as to promote the confidence of service employees in their service-related skills;
- to give breaks to spa employees so as to limit their contact with customers and increase their tolerance for guests' unpleasant reactions;
- to eliminate the negative health outcomes that emotional labour fosters to encourage the spa employees to issue polite, tactful reprimands to the spa guests to rebuild their self-esteem and save face while dealing with uncivil or rude spa clients' behaviour;
- to promote formal written zero or low tolerance policies for workplace mistreatment by conducting regular training to new or existing spa employees on introducing and revising internal rules of ESPA Riga center, recovery policies as well as include modifications upon the necessity cooperatively;
- to conduct error management training so as to enable spa employees to make mistakes, to reconsider the situations and find new solutions to various problems. In addition, such training sessions are sources of beneficial information concerning the spa employees' skills that require further enrichment;

- to train the spa employees, especially inexperienced colleagues in providing tactful, clear explanation and apology for a service failure, thus, promoting their social and negotiation skills;
- in order to minimize possible illegitimate complaining incidences to keep the record of the most typical behavioural patterns and have clear guidelines how spa employees can manage the issues and to what extent they are authorized to deal with the problem;
- to reconsider the application of updated CRM software to have the opportunity to personalize with the client, offer him/her suitable products, services and detect possible incidents as well as offer personalized needs analysis online test “Let’s us choose the best treatment for you!” on the website;
- to encourage the spa team to provide explanations of illegitimate customer action for witnessed customers to decrease their unfairness perceptions;
- to provide ESPA Riga employees with psychological rewards (recognition, gratitude, compliments);
- to reward their employees for the performance of aesthetic labour to enhance their sense of honor, to facilitate spa employees’ attendance of spa facilities to soften their psychological stress when performing aesthetic labour and improve their wellbeing;
- to promote spa employees’ professional competences as gaining new knowledge will help them cooperatively identify the needs of the spa guests and create or adjust the menus where more healing and educational programmes (mental and physical recovery, holistic therapies, music, arts) to boost the spa guests’ confidence and improve their general health and wellbeing will be offered.

The current study has a number of limitations that should be acknowledged and could be explored in further research. The study focuses on examining ESPA Riga employees’ views, opinions and experiences on dealing with difficult customers and situations. Hence, to generalize the results and have more informative study, future research could concentrate on gathering and comparing recent data of other ESPA brand’s spa employees’ perceptions of the target issues in different locations from various channels. The future study could also deal with investigation of how to cultivate emotional resources for spa employees’ well-being and job performance. Finally, it could be beneficial to get insight into the use of innovative technologies, artificial intelligence as the ways of management support in handling with customer-related issues in a spa setting.

CONCLUSION

Based on Pandey (2015, p. 75) the main purposes of data and results interpretation are as follows: to explain the real importance of the material in the context; to find new facts regarding the investigated topic; to provide hints of conclusions and recommendations for the researcher and support the aim of the thesis in a practical way. The last part of the Master thesis outlines the significant outcomes of the overviewed theory and conducted research. The goal of this thesis was to discover stress coping strategies, efficient service recovery styles and essential competences required to manage difficult customers and situations and service failures in ESPA Riga centre and provide recommendations for the management of these issues in that organisation. The following research questions were explored: what is the impact of difficult customer behaviour and interactions on spa employees' wellbeing?; how to handle challenging social interactions and service failures in a spa setting?; what is the role of a spa manager and possible measures to be taken to overcome the problem of difficult customers and situations in a spa environment?

The earlier mentioned tasks were fulfilled by working on the set of the tasks during the research process. Qualitative research design method was selected by the author of the study. As a result, it started with the use of the theoretical analysis of the problem of the investigation, afterwards proceeding with exploration of the social phenomenon in ESPA Riga centre. The author of the Master thesis made contrasts, compared and analysed various authors' opinions, views as well as she provided reasoning based on the combination of the literature. Afterwards the researcher designed and processed the study to discover how ESPA Riga centre's spa employees manage difficult clients and situations as well as she identified their most commonly applied management techniques. The empirical part was grounded on the thematic analysis of twenty spa employees' responses to two sets of open-ended questions distributed via link www.visidati.lv.

Based on the research outcomes, it can be noted that difficult customers and situations are primary stressors in many spa roles and impact the spa employees' wellbeing

negatively. After facing with difficult customers and situations the most common consequences revealed were: emotional exhaustion; fatigue; unwillingness to serve the clients; loss of self-esteem and confidence; burn out; feeling of unfairness; anger; physical health problems; and etc. Beyond that, difficult customers and situations denote a variety of guests' actions that stem from different reasons.

According to this study it can be concluded that work-related incidents point out specific problem areas and give the opportunity for spa management to improve or change the spa's operational process, reconsider service offerings as well as help to find out spa employees' competences that require training. Besides, it was disclosed that sometimes due to subjective guest's perception of the situation, the spa employees' unfavourable condition or spa organisation's internal rules to meet the certain needs of the clients could be challenging. Nevertheless it is vital to draw attention to all the guests' issues and make efforts to resolve problems by giving the client possible alternatives or provide the guest with clear explanation of the situation timely and promptly. As a result, it will boost high service quality of the spa organisation and foster positive and honest relationships with the spa guest.

With regard to the next result of this study it was disclosed there are three basic stress-coping strategies, however the selection of the style depends on one's personal characteristics. The application of positive cognitive-appraisal or problem-focused stress-coping styles contributes to positive overcoming of customer-related stressors and enhances one's personal and professional growth. It was discovered that to manage a variety of guests and cope with work-related stressors in a spa setting successfully the following qualities, abilities and competences are essential: patience, adaptability, flexibility, empathy, being supportive, striving to find an individual approach to every spa customer being responsive, analytical, a good communicator, listener and observer. Moreover, spa management should encourage the subordinates' to take the responsibility for problem resolution, thus, promoting their autonomy and aim at determining level of "service degree flexibility" cooperatively.

Another revealed outcome of the study is that the most frequent methods used to handle service failures in service industries are: monetary compensation, replacement or

reparation, official apology, appreciation, acknowledging causality, supervisor intervention, showing care, and giving an explanation. In case of customer illegitimate behaviour and extreme clients' misbehaviour the service organisations should expel or blacklist such clients and make focus on taking care of other clients as well as aim actively at attracting new customers who are respectful and trustful.

Undoubtedly, to combat the clients' misbehavior totally is an unrealistic expectation due to the intense competition in the spa sector. The spa companies permanently focus on customer satisfaction and delight, thus, promoting the spa guests' rights. However, precisely worked out internal rules of the organisation, customer service standards, recovery procedures, formal written low tolerance policies for workplace mistreatment, adequate innovative technologies are of primary importance and should be communicated and explained to the spa employees on customer service trainings programs occasionally. Hence, they are able to revise the information and present it to the spa clients about the organisation's rules in advance or during the service delivery. Besides, relevant information should be presented on the company's website as well.

Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic's promoted crisis that has caused multiple mental health problems of general population, possible unwillingness of active human interaction with service providers and gain the competitive advantage on the market, the adoption of technological infrastructure to boost profitability and improve employees' wellbeing will become the priority for many service organisations. For instance, spa frontline employees, spa attendants could be substituted by technologies (service robots, service kiosks, robot bartender). In general, the automation of some functions and innovative technologies help organisations to cut expenses, increase efficiency, deal with the problem of lack of human resources and provide the client with safe service experience, however, the adoption of the digital technologies in service operations should be done in a strategic and skillful way including (marketing (i.e. the way the brand is communicated to the target audience); necessity of additional training for employees; ethical regulations). Moreover, the more automation is included in service operations the more technical problems will happen for the service providers to resolve. Nevertheless, the author of the Master thesis believes that many spa-goers have deficiency in human touch and human contact in the COVID-19 pandemic period. Thus, after the re-opening

of spa centres there will be highly requested spa treatments, wellbeing sessions with lifestyle experts. Indeed, there will be the problem of insufficient amount of human resources as well. Apparently, the spa customers will look for more privacy and control of infection in spa premises. Thus, spa management should be able to find appropriate solutions to tackle those issues and provide more services to strengthen the guests' mental health problems as well as support the spa employees in deflecting possible client negative energy. In some of those cases the use of digital technologies and automation of some functions in combination with human capabilities can help to solve some topical problems and promote service encounters. In addition, effective leadership (mutual respect, autonomy, empowerment, transparent communication, the application of adequate innovative technologies, constant learning, and support) contributes to the creation of strong spa service climate, consistent service and improvement of spa employees' wellbeing as well. As a result, the occurrence of problematic situations is declined, the spa's high customer service quality is strengthened and positive client management relations are promoted.

Finally, due to the fact that client management issue is always one of dominant business goals, the outcomes of the research and provided recommendations for ESPA Riga team to manage difficult customer and situations could be beneficial for the students majoring in spa and wellness management, spa industry leaders, human resource practitioners as well as guest relations professionals. The target topic has been discussed vastly in many service industries, however, there has been lack of academic studies in the spa industry. Thus, this thesis shades the light on various useful observations, methods, related concepts and practical tools on management process of difficult customers and situations in a spa setting.

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Appendix 1. Open-ended questions for ESPA Riga management

Most of the in-depth interview questions to ESPA Riga spa management were created by the author and some were adapted from Reynolds & Harris (2006, p. 98).

1. Kāds ir Jūsu amata nosaukums?

What is your job title?

2. Cik ilgi Jūs strādājat ESPA Riga centrā?

How long have you been working for ESPA Riga?

3. Kādas Jūsaprāt ir galvenās rakstura īpašības vai spējas, kas palīdz un kādas ir vēlams attīstīt (spa darbiniekiem), lai profesionāli strādātu ar dažādiem cilvēkiem un situācijām?

According to your view what key personal qualities, skills and abilities that are needed and should be developed by the spa employees to work with a various types of clients and situations efficiently in the spa industry?

4. Kas Jūsaprāt ESPA darbiniekiem var visvairāk izraisīt darba stresu?

Based on your opinion what are the major job stress factors for your spa employees?

5. Kas Jūsu izpratnē ir sarežģīts/grūts spa viesis? Aprakstiet dažas viņa uzvedības formas vai darbības. Kā Jums liekas, kāpēc cilvēki mēdz tā rīkoties? Ko viņi sagaida no spa darbiniekiem, organizācijas?

With reference to Reynolds & Harris (2006, p. 98):

How would you define difficult spa customer? Describe some of his/her forms of behaviour and actions. Why do you think people act in such a way? What do they expect from your spa employees or spa organisation?

6. Vai darbinieku apmācību procesā Jūs izskatāt sarežģīto/grūto viesu apkalpošanas situācijas, piemērus un iespējamus risināšanas veidus?

How do you train your spa employees on serving difficult customers or managing challenging situations?

7. ESPA Riga centrā ir noteikti servisa apkalpošana pakalpojumu standarti. Vai šajos standartos ir noteikumi, kā rīkoties sarežģīto/grūto viesu apkalpošanas situācijās?

ESPA Riga has a definite set of service standards. How do you control that the spa employees adhere to the standards of service set by your company? (Reynolds & Harris, 2006, p. 98). What are the cases when the spa employees deviate the set of service standards?

8. Kādas ir visbiežāk izmantojamās metodes spa klientu sūdzību situāciju atrisināšanā Jūsu spa centrā?

What are the most frequently used methods to cope with difficult customers and situations in your spa organisation?

9. Kā Jūsaprāt pilnveidot darbinieku “problēmsituāciju” risināšanas iemaņas?

In your opinion how to improve your spa employees problem-solving skills?

10. Kā Jums liekas, kā visefektīvāk nodrošināt labvēlīgu spa darba vidi saviem darbiniekiem?

In your opinion how to facilitate a harmonious spa working environment?

Appendix 2. Open-ended questions for ESPA Riga team (spa receptionists, spa therapists, spa assistant, spa fitness trainer).

Most of the in-depth interview questions to ESPA Riga spa team were created by the author and some were adapted from Pearson et al. (2001, pp. 1393–1395), Reynolds & Harris (2006, p. 98).

1. Kāds ir Jūsu amata nosaukums?

What is your job title?

2. Cik ilgi Jūs strādājat ESPA Riga centrā?

How long have you been working for ESPA Riga?

3. Kādas, Jūsaprāt, ir galvenās rakstura īpašības vai spējas, kas Jums palīdz darbā ar dažādiem cilvēkiem un situācijām?

What are key personal qualities, skills and abilities that help you to work with a various types of clients and situations efficiently in the spa industry?

4. Kas Jums visvairāk darbā izraisa stresu?

What major factors increase the level of job stress in you?

5. With reference to Reynolds & Harris (2006, p. 98):

Kas Jūsu izpratnē ir sarežģītais spa viesis? Aprakstiet dažas viņa uzvedības formas vai darbības.

How would you define difficult spa customer? Describe some of his/her of behaviour and actions.

6. Vai Jums ir bijusi apmācība vai seminārs par to, kā efektīvi strādāt ar sarežģīto/grūto viesi un risināt sarežģītas viesu apkalpošanas situācijas?

How have you been trained by your spa organisation on serving difficult customers and dealing with challenging situations?

7. ESPA Rīga centrā ir noteikti servisa apkalpošanas pakalpojumu standarti. Vai Jūs personīgi vienmēr ievērojat šos standartus? Kāpēc? Kāpēc nē? Kādos gadījumos Jūsprāt ir nepieciešams būt elastīgam apkalpojot SPA viesi?

ESPA Rīga has a definite set of service standards. Can you mention some cases in service delivery process when being flexible and adaptable is/was crucial than adherence to the set of service standards? Describe, please, at least one case. (Reynolds & Harris, 2006, p. 98).

8. Vai Jūs varat aprakstīt kādu konkrētu sarežģītā/grūtā klienta uzvedības vai problēmsituācijas piemēru Jūsu praksē? Kā šīs situācijas ietekmēja Jūsu labsajūtu vai produktivitāti? Kā tas atrisinājās? (Ja tas atbilst Jūs piemēram- Kā Jums liekas, ko klients sagaidīja no Jums vai no organizācijas?)

In the context of your workplace, please describe a specific example of difficult customer behaviour or a problem situation that has occurred. Why do you think people behave in such a way? How do such incidents affect your wellbeing and productivity? How do you generally manage these behaviours?

9. Kā Jūs atjaunojat savus spēkus pēc aktīva fiziska un emocionāla darba ar dažādiem klientiem?

How do you improve your wellbeing after dealing with job promoted stressful situations and difficult customers?

10. Kā Jums liekas, kas ir labvēlīga spa darba vide?

What is a “harmonious spa working environment” in your opinion?

Appendix 3. Characteristics of ESPA Riga Individual Participants

	The Code	Participant’s position	Experience in ESPA Riga (years)
1.	P1	ESPA Riga Director	10
2.	P2	Reception manager	10
3.	P3	Senior spa receptionist	4
4.	P4	Senior spa therapist	13
5.	P5	Senior spa fitness trainer	5
6.	P6	Senior spa attendant	13
7.	P7	Spa receptionist	3
8.	P8	Spa receptionist	4
9.	P9	Spa receptionist	6
10.	P10	Spa receptionist	6
11.	P11	Spa receptionist	13
12.	P12	Spa receptionist	10
13.	P13	Spa therapist	3
14.	P14	Spa therapist	4
15.	P15	Spa therapist	7
16.	P16	Spa therapist	9
17.	P17	Spa therapist	9
18.	P18	Spa therapist	13
19.	P19	Fitness trainer	13
20.	P20	Spa assistant	3

RESÜMEE

KEERULISTE SPAA-KLIENTIDE JA -OLUKORRADEGA TOIME TULEMINE: VÄLJAKUTSED JA STRATEEGIAD, LÄTI RIIA ESPA JUHTUMI NÄITEL

Anna Cvetkova

Käesolev magistr töö uurib spaatöötajatega seotud ebamugavusi keeruliste klientide ja olukordadega tegelemisel, kasutades nii käsitletavate küsimuste teoreetilist analüüsi kui ka Riia keskuse ESPA praktilist juhtumit. Teadlaste Choi & Choi (2014, lk 108); Reynolds ja Harris (2005, lk 330) ja Yue jt. (2017, lk 774) järgi on keeruliste klientide ja teenindusprotsessis esinevate keeruliste olukordade peamised põhjused järgmised: teenustega seotud probleemid, inimlikud eksimused, kliendi rahalised või egost tulenevad põhjused, häirivad motivatsioonid, klientide tunne, et neil on õigus oma halba tuju teenindavate töötajate peal välja elada või esitada tohutuid nõudmisi, mille täitmine on keeruline.

Käesolevas magistr töö uuritav probleem on määratletud järgmiselt: keerulised kliendid ja olukorrad spaakeskkonnas tulenevad paljudest teguritest (teenustega seotud probleemid, inimlikud vead, halvasti sõnastatud sise-eeskirjad, klientide kaebuste lahendamise põhimõtete ja protseduuride puudumine, personali ebapiisav koolitus, külaliste ebasoodne füüsiline ja emotsionaalne seisund ning klientide erinevad isiklikud häirivad motivatsioonid) ning need mõjutavad negatiivselt nii spaatöötajate heaolu kui ka spaaäri. Selle magistr töö eesmärk on uurida stressiga toimetuleku strateegiaid, tõhusaid teenuste parandamise stiile ja hädavajalikke pädevusi keeruliste klientide ja olukordade ning teenustega seotud probleemidega toime tulemiseks Riia ESPAs, et anda juhtkonnale soovitusi nende probleemide haldamiseks selles organisatsioonis. Magistr töö eesmärgi saavutamiseks püstitati järgmised kolm uurimisküsimust: milline on keerulise kliendi käitumise ja suhtlemise mõju spaatöötajate heaolule?; Kuidas toime tulla keeruliste sotsiaalsete suhete ja teenustega seotud probleemidega spaakeskkonnas?; Milline on spaa

juhataja roll ja millised on võimalikud meetmed, et saada jagu keeruliste klientide ja olukordade probleemist spaakeskkonnas?

Teoreetiline osa keskendub ülevaate andmisele spaatöötajate heaoluga seotud peamistest mõistetest, peamistest tööstressiteguritest, nende põhjustest ja tagajärgedest spaatöötajate heaolule. Peale selle analüüsitakse keeruliste klientide ja olukordadega seotud mõisteid ning nende peamisi mõjusid spaatööstuses. Lõpuks määratakse kindlaks nende väljakutsuvate probleemide haldamise eesmärk; tuuakse välja stressiga toimetuleku strateegiad ja teenuste parandamise strateegiad ning arutletakse spaa juhtkonna rolli üle probleemide lahendamisel. Seejärel kavandab uuringu läbiviija uuringu ning viib selle läbi Riia keskuse ESPA spaatöötajate seas. Uuringu läbiviimiseks rakendatakse kvalitatiivset uuringu kavandamise meetodit. Andmed kogutakse kahele küsimusekomplektile avatud vastuste kujul digitaalse lingi kaudu: www.visidati.lv. Seejärel kasutatakse temaatilist andmeanalüüsi meetodit kuue põhiteema määramiseks ja saadud teabe tõlgendamiseks.

Uuringutulemuste põhjal on ilmne, et keerulised kliendid ja olukorrad on paljude spaa-ametikohtade esmatähtsad stressorid ja mõjutavad spaatöötajate füüsilist ja psühholoogilist tervist negatiivselt. Töoga seotud vahejuhtumites tuuakse välja spetsiifilised probleemsed spaavaldkonnad, mis vajavad parandamist või muutmist, ning esitatakse spaatöötajate pädevused, mille osas on vaja koolitust. Avastati kolm stressiga toimetuleku strateegiat: kognitiivne hinnang, probleemile keskenduv ja emotsioonidele keskenduv strateegia.

Erinevate külalistega edukaks toime tulemiseks ja tööga seotud stressorite haldamiseks on hädavajalikud mitmesugused inimestega suhtlemisega seonduvad oskused koos piisava stressiga toimetuleku stiili ja töötamise järgsete taastumistegevustega. Lisaks peaks spaa juhtkond julgustama alluvaid võtma vastutuse probleemide lahendamise eest, edendades seeläbi nende autonoomiat ja seadma eesmärgiks ühiselt määrata “teenuse astme paindlikkuse” tase. Tuvastati, et teenustega seotud probleemide käsitlemiseks kasutatakse kõige sagedamini järgmisi meetodeid: rahaline hüvitis, asendamine või heastamine, ametlik vabandus, tunnustamine, põhjuslikkuse tunnistamine, juhendaja sekkumine, hoolitsuse näitamine ja selgituse andmine. Kliendi ebaseadusliku käitumise

ja klientide äärmuslike väärkäitumiste korral peaksid teenindusorganisatsioonid sellised kliendid välja saatma või musta nimekirja kandma.

Uuringu peamine tulemus on see, aeg-ajalt tuleks spaatöötajaid klienditeeninduse koolitustel teavitada täpselt välja töötatud organisatsiooni sise-eeskirjadest, klienditeeninduse standarditest, taastamisprotseduuridest, ametlikest töökohal väärkohtlemise vähese tolerantsi reeglitest. Seega saavad nad need läbi vaadata ja teavitada spaakliente organisatsiooni reeglitest kas eelnevalt või teenuse osutamise ajal. Lisaks peaks asjakohane teave olema välja toodud ka ettevõtte veebisaidil. Lõpuks aitab tõhus juhtimine - mille eesmärk on vastastikune austus, võimaluste andmine, läbipaistev suhtlemine, pidev õppimine ja toetus – tugevalt kaasa tugeva spaateenuste kliima ja järjepideva teenindusele loomisele ning spaatöötajate heaolu parandamisele. Seeläbi vähendatakse probleemsete olukordade esinemist, tugevdatakse klienditeeninduse kvaliteeti ja edendatakse positiivseid kliendihaldussuhteid.

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