

What the Spa manager profile consists of? A qualitative approach

**Authors: Leontaridou Ioanna; Assimakopoulos Costas;
Avdimiotis Spyridon; Moutsiou Lydia**

Affiliation: Department of Organizations Management, Marketing and Tourism, International
Hellenic University (IHU)

E-mail*: casim@ihu.gr

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ABSTRACT

Wellness and Spa management is attracting the attention of stakeholders and hoteliers in a more competitive environment, This environment creates the imperative need for providing high quality services to customers. Quality creates differentiation and thus sustainability. A key point for quality in service providing is the skills and competencies of the therapists and the managers of the SPA centers.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to study the knowledge, skills and competencies needed by graduate of a training program in the scientific area of SPA therapist and additionally a SPA manager.

The objective of the research imposes the methodology that should be followed. Therefore, a qualitative research has been carried out. The research takes place on a sample of managers of wellness and spa centers based on their experience of administering staff and procedures. A semi-structured questionnaire is targeted, aiming to delineate the profile of a well trained and finally successful spa manager. In-depth interviews were contacted in worldwide known touristic destinations in Greece. The research instrument was the outcome of a Delphi method selection of items. The interviews have been recorded and keyword analysis followed. Specialized software is used and keywords are mapped over a chart making prominent dominant notions.

Findings of the research indicate that in terms of required competences, from the managers' perspective, have a twofold orientation. It is the explicit orientation, which includes management,

marketing, sales, treatment and product development and the tacit orientation of knowledge which involves long term skills such as acknowledgement of employee organization behavior, leadership capabilities, experience on customer handling, effective decision making, self and employees' motivation.

Keywords: Spa manager profile, qualitative research

1. INTRODUCTION

Health and/or spa tourism has been recognized as a separate sector of tourism with its own keen supporters and audience. Wellness tourism is highly connected to the contemporary movement for green development, reduced footprint by human activities and Environmentally Responsible Behavior (ERB) by hotel visitors and resort entrepreneurial activities. It is the world economic crisis after the pandemic, and the energy prizes that create a contradictive economic environment for any corporation. On the one hand the temptation to fall again to a Non ERB which can provide short term revenue for corporations (not ethical neither legitimate solution) and on the other hand to keep on with the ERB and adapt, or even better differentiate someone's provided services, on a level that quality is prominent and counterbalance any losses by ERB.

High quality services and differentiation among others might mean that personnel is accordingly highly trained or specialized so much that could make the difference and attract customers, or retain customers, increasing their loyalty. Hence,

enterprises are on the run for recruiting highly trained staff, specialized to particular subjects, or train/educate them so they acquire specialization and improve skills/knowledge [1].

In Greece the working staff in the touristic sector of the economy numbers millions. Recently, there has been noticed a lack of specialized staff. After economic recession and covid-19 pandemic Greece now is running to cover the lost space in development. This reality is an opportunity for Higher Education Institutions to offer specialized educational programs at sectors where the need for labor is prominent. This opportunity was the motivation for International Hellenic University (IHU) to begin a research program which aim was to investigate the needs of spa management sector and restructure a Master of Science educational program of the 2nd cycle that already existed.

The aim of this paper is to study the opportunities of such a venture, to describe the methodological steps needed and to proceed with the first step which is the qualitative research. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: In the next section papers regarding spa management are scrutinized for methodological approaches and state of the art methodology in deploying an MSc program, simultaneously with tools for qualitative research. Then, methodology is explained, and the results and discussion over them is presented. Finally, conclusions and further work suggestions finalize the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally speaking, leadership requires some skills that depend on the culture of the region, the subject of the company and the business that are led. In the epicenter is the knowledge of the business. Nevertheless, team inspiration and support are basic characteristics of the leader [2]. Moreover, the inspired leader is the one that adopts innovations in the subject of the business [3] and the supporting technology [2]. Especially in tourism according to [4] the leader builds his/her profile by undertaking tasks in a competitive environment gaining social influence.

Nevertheless, in spa management particularly, the leader has to study the profile of his/her customers along with their passions and motivations, life style so that customer segmentation and adapt spa to the

customer's personalized needs [5], [6]. Clearly marketing studies are indispensable.

Additionally, spa manager should be aware of the touristic package and contribute to its design, [7]. Moving a step further the whole environment of a spa center –aesthetics, atmosphere, design should be part of the manager's job [8]. Even the décor should be originated by the local cultural influence or the spaces should be organized depending to preferences of social outreach [9]; [10]. Spa managers should work on service enhancement [11].

The health and safety issues that arise in a spa /wellness center according to the literature is a subject of a spa manager. The manager should know the guidelines of World Health Organization and introducing new technologies should take care and re-assure water hygiene and sanitation [12]. Health, hygiene and sustainability issues are strongly connected [13] and along with the usage of high edge technologies [14], impose somehow the knowledge and skills background of a modern spa manager.

Based on the above literature and the opinion leaders there exists a basic research area for the qualitative approach that is the main objective of this study. The literature scrutiny deduced to a qualitative research tools ie the semi-structured questionnaire which was the main research tool for this phase of the project.

3. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research was conducted between March 2020 and June 2020. In the first face the research team scrutinized literature for spa manager profiling. Based on the findings, opinion leaders and the academic experience of our team a semi structured questionnaire was prepared. The questionnaire did not entailed closed questions but it was oriented to allow the interviewee the freedom to deploy his/her opinion over the issues of the questions. One block of questions discussed about the core of the profession of the therapist and included topics like therapies application, treatments, massage techniques, cosmetology and products, nutrition etc. The discussion wanted to find out whether this knowledge and skills are necessary for the inferior staff or should a manager be trained over it. Another block of questions regarded managerial skills and knowledge. The aim

was dual purposed. On the one hand to distinguish any particularities a spa manager should be trained of, and the second one was to identify the extent to which traditional managerial skills contribute to the profile of a modern spa manager, according to the opinion of professionals in this sector. A third unity of the questionnaire entailed questions regarding marketing, consumer retaining methods, personal sales, data collection regarding customers' special needs, new customers attraction, customer satisfaction etc. This part was quite important as it is directly incorporated to the services quality. A fourth unity has to do with health and safety issues that someone working there should be aware and trained of. A fifth part regarded discussion regarding the place design which seemed to be strange as a subject but very interesting for an entrepreneur point of view. A last part of the discussion entailed soft communication skills and information technology issues oriented to the spa management, spa marketing, spa customer communications, etc. See in the appendix the qualitative tool.

The team succeeded in taking 10 interviews with highly specialized opinion leaders in the area, academics, practitioners, managers and owners of wellness/spa centers.

The interviews were recorder using video and audio means and the data was then analyzed using Nvivo software for nodes construction, terms grouping and trellis analysis between nodes.

4. DATA AND METHODS

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5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the data analysis the counterpart of spss software was used (pspp). A specialized software for qualitative research is also used like (Nvivo). Data was organized into groups of terms (nodes) and for every node related terminology was connected. Based on the nodes identified and the terminology a "tree diagram" has been built. This diagram constitutes the basis on which the authors build the tool for the successive quantitative research. Descriptive statistics was also used see figure 1.

Based on the above results the quantitative questionnaire was built. In appendix II the questionnaire is presented.

The qualitative research revealed how important is the human relationship management in modern

companies and in spa centers even more important. Employees working in such a place are spending many hours a day in a technically created environment continuously over several months. Conflicts and inter-personal problems arise, and thus, the manager usually comes to solve or counterbalance those disputes. HR management is a key course in a Spa manager profile.

Competition and the need for differentiation impose to offer flawless services of high quality. Do the correct things, follow protocols and paths of services offering, continuous self-improvement, services design, etc. All these notions are primary principals of total quality management.

Additionally, the variety of personalities of customers/staff, the variety of services and

environments /needs that a spa/wellness center comes to cover imposes that the manager has the knowledge and skills to adapt to dynamic administrative conditions. In other words spa manager should be aware of different management styles existing in the literature and this should be a training subject.

Continuous improvement, spa managers should never be isolated or estranged from the actual duties and professional skills. New therapies, massage techniques and exercises should be top priority. Even, techniques that are applied being old fashion should be taught in depth so that their working mechanism would be really and in depth known.

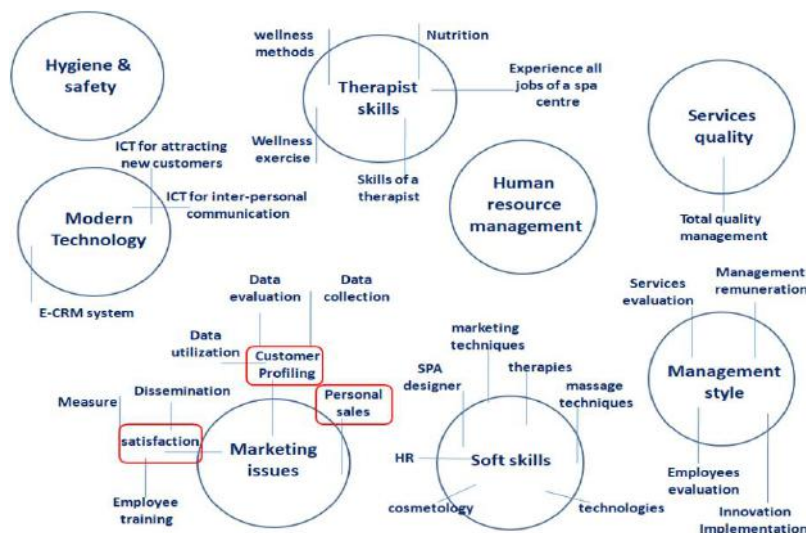


Figure 1. Nodes and terms related

Moreover, the descriptive statistics of the terms has been extracted giving a sense of importance or weighting for every term. Figure 2 depicts the frequencies per term over the number of interviews and the extent of the terms recorded per interview.

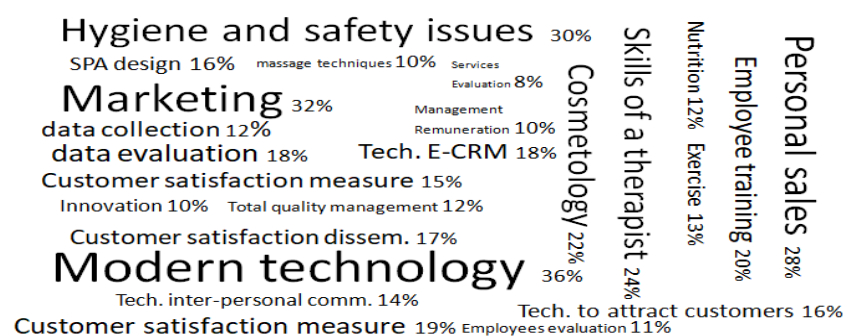


Figure 2. Frequencies per term

Wellness and spa centers are warm environments with high levels of moisture. The environment is friendly to germs and microbes (funguses). Measures of hygiene and safety should be applied. The dangers regarding germs must be explicit to the workers and administration should elaborate to the measures taken to prevent contaminations and their application must be strict.

Moreover, therapeutic techniques should be accompanied by appropriate cosmetology products and nutrition. Skin and body must be treated with all products that are important for its health. Thus, therapists and managers in wellness centers should have specialized training regarding cosmetology and nutrition. In this direction qualitative research depicted that cosmetology and nutrition should be part of a training spa manager program.

Data gathering requires ICT for customers' wills and passions capturing. Social media and social networking is a modern tool for supplying data to the spa /wellness centre servers for CRM and profile segmentation. Moreover, the latter can assist sales and promote offers and get feedback from potential customers. Finally, ICT can play an important role for intra-company communication and extra-company communication.

CONCLUSIONS

After a long investigation that took place from March 2020 until October 2022 the authors succeeded in investigating by qualitative means the special knowledge, skills and competencies that a spa manager should have in contemporary competitive environment in the tourism sector where spa/wellness centers are embedded into luxurious resorts and differentiation along with high quality services are an imperative need. In this framework the qualitative research provided the seeds for quantitative research and a complete package of twelve modules has been designed. The modules are attend on four basic axes that are also presented. The new proposed MSc program aspires to be successful again and attract the interest of professionals in the spa /wellness area.

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8. Appendix

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Is the qualification of evaluating customer data (eg Customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction with wellness products and SPA services) needed for graduates?
2. Is it considered that the wellness and SPA graduate should have knowledge and opinion about the tourism, wellness and SPA tourism package?
3. Should your employees be adequately trained on health and safety issues in wellness and SPA units?
4. What knowledge, abilities and skills do you think a graduate of a master's/undergraduate program related to SPA MANAGEMENT should possess
5. Whether IT and communication technologies are a necessary qualification of a SPA MANAGEMENT graduate (eg CRM system).
- B1. Do you think that the manager of a SPA should have the knowledge, skills and abilities of a therapist?
To what extent do the existing knowledge, skills and abilities of a therapist (eg applications of wellness methods, exercise, nutrition) meet modern needs and the soft skills that "a therapist should have"? Are they outdated or prudent?
- B 2. How was the design of your space done? Was it done by an expert?
- B4. How important is it for employees to know about quality management, human resource management?
- B5. How important is it for employees to know about marketing?
What are these;
- B6. Do you intend to incorporate modern developments and best practices in the management of wellness and SPA units?
Who are they;
- A'2. To what extent do the existing knowledge, skills and abilities of a therapist IN SPECIAL AND ALTERNATIVE FACIAL THERAPIES-SPA TREATMENT PROTOCOLS meet the modern needs and the soft skills that "a therapist should have"? Are they outdated or prudent?
- A3. To what extent do the existing knowledge, skills and abilities of a therapist IN SPECIAL AND ALTERNATIVE BODY THERAPIES-SPA TREATMENT PROTOCOLS meet the modern needs and the soft skills that "a therapist should have"? Are they outdated or prudent?
- A4. To what extent do the existing knowledge, skills and abilities of a therapist IN THE COSMETIC ACTION OF PRODUCTS-THERAPIES meet modern needs and the soft skills that "a therapist should have"? Are they outdated or prudent?