

Knowledge, Skills and Competencies of Wellness and SPA Centres' Managers in Greece: A field study

Costas Assimakopoulos*, Ioanna Leontaridou, Lydia Moutsiou, Spyros Avdimiotis

Corresponding Author: *casim@ihu.gr
International Hellenic University

ABSTRACT: *Tourism in Greece is an important pylon of the local economy. It offers more than 20% of the Greek GDP and big hotels and resorts are looking for services differentiation so that they can sustain a share of the 30 million visitors. Services quality among others means trained staff and companies are looking for people with knowledge, skills and competencies over specialised issues in the area of spa and wellness centres. The authors as being members of the International Hellenic University developed a project for examining the market and after performing a quantitative research using structured questionnaires, they contacted a survey to luxurious spa and wellness centres in Greece. The outcome is that a spa manager should not have just managerial qualifications or spa therapist's knowledge but he/she must obtain a more spherical education and training adding to the above qualifications marketing qualifications, new technology and communication qualifications, human relationship management qualifications, innovations adoption techniques and methods, total quality management principals and spa centre design knowledge as well as health and security training. Based on the above findings the authors are aiming to develop a master program in International Hellenic University for spa manager training.*

KEY WORD: *Quantitative Methodology, Spa Manager's Profile*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Economic crisis and recession is the source of new evolutions in many areas of the economic life. One field is tourism and more specifically the area of healthcare and wellness tourism. The need to share a constant not easily developed part of the economy increases competition among stakeholders. In this sense, everybody searches for differentiation regarding services quality. Part of the service quality is the cultivation of special skills and capabilities of the human resources working in this field. It has been recently found during the covid-19 crisis that an explosion of seminars, master programs, and any kind of training took place so labour can be repositioned after the crisis passes. On the other hand enterprises are looking for new sources of revenues in a rather competitive environment. In that framework newly trained with soft skills staff is in the epicentre of hoteliers' interest. The question is what is exactly needed in the area, and how these soft skills could be targeted so they can make the difference without wasting time and money for training.

1.1 Aim of the study

Under this environment this study works¹ to identify the skills, knowledge, capabilities and competencies that a worker in a wellness and spa centre need to have so that he/she can make the quality difference which is so important in the services area. The authors worked carefully making a batch of certain steps. The literature has been scrutinized and the results are depicted in the next section. Then a methodology is developed that entails quantitative field research over a large number of hotels and resorts that offers wellness services of a high level. There face to face interviews took place both to managers and staff. The data collected was analyzed statistically and hard and soft skills are determined. Finally, some conclusions and further research propositions are made.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The economic impact of Tourism in Greece economy is huge and it actually helped Greece confront the economic crisis all recent years. Competition in tourism industry is hard and differentiation is important for

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hotel owners. As this industry provides services differentiation in services is quite important and attracts the attention of hoteliers. Hotels that offer wellness and spa facilities provide a strong differentiation dimension and it has been found that it can provide a strong economic revenue to the hotel enterprise. Since many spa and wellness centres have been developed in recent years and investments are high, it remains a stimulus for the hotels to attract personnel having specialized skills and competencies, so high quality services are provided. It is essential that therapists and managers of a SPA centre assure quality. On the other hand, these competencies should be cultivated to the personnel and in that sense, they should be part of the aims and objectives of an education/training program.

The services provided by wellness and spa centres are directly connected to human health and hence it puts human factor at the top regarding importance of resources. (Dryglas, 2020).

Skills and competences in this area is in the epicentre of several studies in the literature. In Sisodia and Agarwal (2017) there has been identified nine skill axes for the employees of such centres: communication skills, ICT skills, work psychology skills, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, self-management skills, planning and organising skills and conceptual and analytical skills. In Boga & Weiermair, 2011, it is the explicit and tacit knowledge that plays an important role exactly as Leontaridou et al (2021) depicts. Simultaneously, since health issues for a consumer is based on trust build, the capability of building it is of major importance (Smith et al., 2020). As Kleeffeld (2017) claims the competence to build trust is on its turn based on communication and language skills and hence, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) competences do enhance trust (Sheng et al., 2013). Based on Buhalis (2020) it is the e-communication that moderates or in other words re-assures the competitive advantage of a wellness centre. Nevertheless, competition imposes marketing skills as everybody claims for a greater share of the market due to the constant or slightly developed market due to economic austerity/recession of the recent years. Wellness tourism services, in turn, require the use of more sophisticated wellness competences, which include e-communication with consumers (Smith et al., 2020).

Spa therapist should also be differentiated regarding the capabilities of the physical object applied. This entails to know massage techniques and new therapeutic methods (Derco, 2014; Smith et al., 2020) as well as cosmetology knowledge. Moreover, human relationships management is important so that commitment to the spa centre can be developed based on enhancing the feeling of co-dependency, and team formulation with people in the Spa (Glouberman & Cloutier, 2017).

In wellness tourism enterprises, multitasking and multi-skilling gain importance. Employees are expected to play many roles in the enterprise not only in one type of task but on the contrary they should be multitasking employees. This results in the need to be trained over an entire set of skills and competences. This imposes new educational and professional challenges, which in turn demands continuous training and development for everybody (Dowthwaite & Rawlinson, 2014). Multitasking roles include among others marketing skills, personal sells and total quality management principles.

In this framework the necessity for developing of new program studies are needful. The authors run in the past a Master program in International Hellenic University for training workers in spa and wellness centres for deploying managerial skills and now it is the re-engineering phase of the program where new syllabuses should be developed. This study comes to cover this literature emerging need taking into account all the above mentioned well-established in the literature theoretical background.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research methodology is described as well as the research objectives. The purpose of the research is to investigate what are the hard and soft skills and competences that a spa manager should have. Those were obtained after literature review and qualitative research of the authors. The methodology for this paper quantitative field research is as follows:

Sampling unit and research population

The population under investigation consisted of units that are potential hotel managers or hotel workers in a hotel's (or resort's) spa/wellness centre. So, filtering questions that could identify the eligibility of the sampling unit have been included to the questionnaire. The population refers to Greece tourism industry and the period of the research was from early 2020 to 30/10/2022.

Determination of the sample size

The researchers contacted 103 members of the population. The population contacted was encouraged to fill in an electronic or a printed questionnaire. It is managed to collect a total of 72 fully completed questionnaires. Response rate is almost 70%.

Sampling method

The geographically spread population and the absence of sampling framework made the random sampling method difficult to accomplish. However, measures had been taken for representative sample in terms of geographical spread and hotel/resort category. The team members travelled to all Greece and interviewed staff of luxurious resorts to many famous Greek destinations. The geographical spread gives a sense of representation of all Greek regions to our sample.

Instrument for data gathering

The questionnaire consists of a total of six groups of questions. Their detailed description follows, as well as the identification of the research hypotheses. The groups of questions are using appropriate scales.

Initially, the first group of questions concerns marketing and administration. The group consists of 10 statements and people are asked to note how much they agree or disagree to the statements using a 5-point likert scale.

The second group entails ten questions regarding communication and new technology skills. They are measured using again 5-point likert scale.

The third group of questions concerns the soft techniques and skills that a Spa manager should obtain. The scale of measurement is a 4-point ordinal scale measuring the necessity of the skill or technique.

The fourth group of questions concerns services quality. This variable consists of a total of nine items, and is measured in a 5-point likert scale.

Subsequently, the fifth group of questions concerns the administration style they propose as most important in such an enterprise. This multi-item construct variable consists of a total of four likert scale statements.

The last (sixth) group of questions regards the three concepts of therapies: body, face and cosmetology.

IV. ANALYSIS

Table 1: Frequencies of the answers of the sample

Knowledge, skill, competence	Percent of the respondents that agree or strongly agree
Systematic gathering of data regarding customers is quite important on a regular basis	68%
Customer's information should be transferred to the working staff	75%
Touristic package that includes spa offers should be known to the staff	80%
Training should include topics regarding health and security	83%
Contemporary technologies for information and communication are considered to be necessary for attracting new customers	81%
Communication and Information Technology soft skills of a spa manager for customer management is essential	95%
Spa manager should have knowledge, skills and capabilities of a spa therapist	52%
Spa manager should have experience of all working stations of a spa/wellness centre	76%
Spa manager should know how to manage relationships among staff	97%
The existing knowledge of a spa therapist like therapies application, body exercises and nutrition considers them as adequate of the respondents	69%
knowledge of a spa therapist like therapies application, body exercises and nutrition is essential to be obtained before applying for a job during the first cycle of the education	70%
The following soft skills are voted to be essential or even absolutely essential by the spa professionals:	
massage techniques (70%)	70%
therapeutic methods (82%)	82%
to know how to manage human relationships (100% unanimous)	100%
know marketing techniques	90%
new technologies in spa sector	88%
cosmetology knowledge	66%
spa centre design	86%
total quality management principles and applications	82%
is not ready to compromise quality for short term benefits	63%
Human relationship management seems also to be in the epicenter of all staff of a spa centre	70%
Marketing issues like customer satisfaction	70%
Innovations	72%
Staff evaluation techniques	92%
Services evaluation techniques	91%
Wages must be connected to a staff evaluation system	88%

Firstly, precautions are taken to examine the eligibility of the variables used. Those have been examined for face and context validity. Then reliability is checked using Cronbach's Alpha method. Our variables have both validity and reliability. Some of the findings follow.

In the first stage of the research, some necessities are identified for people working in a spa centre. Thus, systematic gathering of data regarding customers is quite important as the majority of the respondents answers that this job must be done on a regular basis (68% of the respondents). Additionally, this information is agreed to be transferred to the working staff (75% of the respondents). Gathering information is part of a marketing procedure that is called individualization and customization of the services. Simultaneously, more than 80% of the interviewees agree that they should know about the touristic package that includes spa offers because they think that spa is important and attract customers to the hotel or resort.

Since in a spa centre the environment is moisture and warm it is a place for micro-organisms to live. Thus, there are arose issues of health and security. The overwhelming majority of the staff proposes that training should include topics regarding health and security (83% of the respondents).

Additionally, contemporary technologies for information and communication are considered to be necessary for attracting new customers (81%), but also part of the soft skills portfolio of a spa manager for customer management (95% of the respondents).

Majority (but limited 52% of the respondents) claims that spa manager should have knowledge, skills and capabilities of a spa therapist, however, 76% agree or strongly agree that a spa manager should have experience of all working stations of a spa/wellness centre.

Moreover, 97% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that a spa manager should know how to manage relationships among staff, issue of high importance as the environment exudes calmness and loose spirit for the sake of the customers.

Regarding the existing knowledge of a spa therapist like therapies application, body exercises and nutrition the majority of the respondents (69%) considers them as adequate. They simultaneously claim (70%) that these knowledge is essential to be obtained before applying for a job, just during the first cycle of the education.

The following soft skills are voted to be essential or even absolutely essential by the spa professionals: massage techniques (70%), therapeutic methods (82%), to know how to manage human relationships (100% unanimous), know marketing techniques (90%), new technologies in spa sector (88%), cosmetology knowledge (66%), spa centre design (86%), total quality management principles and applications (82%), whereas 63% is not ready to compromise quality for short term benefits. Human relationship management seems also to be in the epicenter of all staff of a spa centre, as well as marketing issues like customer satisfaction (both more than 70%).

Other managerial issues are important like innovations application (72%), staff evaluation techniques (92%), and services evaluation techniques (91%). Finally, the wages must be connected to a staff evaluation system (88%).

V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above findings the authors depicts for the first time at the best of their knowledge the profile that a spa manager should have in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies so that a training program can be created, according to the needs of an important touristic developed destination like Greece. The body of the profile is essential for someone who wants to build a syllabus for a spa manager training program. The profile follows:

PROFILE OF A SPA MANAGER
Marketing Knowledge, Skills, Competencies
Customer data and profiling skills
Customer personal data collection
Customer personal data evaluation
Responsibility for customer data utilization (e.g. customer satisfaction with wellness and SPA services and products)
Personal sales
The tourism package knowledge, design, build up
Customer satisfaction
Customer satisfaction measure and study
Customer satisfaction dissemination among the employees
Continuous employee training on customer satisfaction issues
Hygiene and safety issues
Employees in a wellness centre and SPA should be adequately trained on health and safety issues in these centres
Modern technology knowledge and skills
Modern information and communication technologies related to attracting new customers
Modern information and communication technologies related to inter-personal communication
Modern IT and communication technologies related to electronic customer management system
SPA Therapist skills
Knowledge, skills and abilities of a therapist
Experience from all departments and all jobs of a spa centre
Applications of wellness methods, exercise, nutrition

Human resource management skills

The manager of a SPA must have the knowledge, skills and abilities to manage employee relations problems in the department

Soft and technical skills

To know massage techniques

To know therapeutic methods

To know human relations management

To know marketing techniques

To know modern technologies in the field of SPA

To have knowledge of cosmetology

To know how to design the space of a SPA

Questions regarding quality of services

Total quality management principles

Management style

Implementation of innovation

Employees evaluation methods and techniques

Services evaluation methods and techniques

Management remuneration system

As can be seen it includes ten areas of training (bold letters) including marketing, management, IT&C skills, services quality, human resource management etc. The profile can be built in the framework of an MSc program whose students should be therapists in the area of wellness, aesthetics and cosmetology.

A challenge for future work is the design and construction of the analytical syllabus of the program, which is the aim of the authors in the near future.

A limitation of the study was the covid-19 pandemic that prevented the authors from gathering a greater sample that would cover a greater geographic area in the country.

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