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DOCTORAL THESIS

-ABSTRACT-

**SERVICE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
OF THE TREATMENT AND
ENTERTAINMENT CENTERS**

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KEY WORDS

Service management, service design, innovation, technology, quality of services, total quality management, strategic management, competitive advantage, wellness, spa, Porter's generic strategies, recovery strategies, human resources strategy.

PART I: STUDY OF THE SPECIALISED LITERATURE

Introductory aspects regarding the research field

Wellness and health, basic values of society, have a great impact on the different aspects of life and influence the consumption and the production patterns of today's society. Even though the field of the spa and wellness centers has rapidly developed, as it is often remarked, more detailed studies in the field are scarce. Therefore, we begin this thesis with the hope to contribute significantly to the knowledge and the development of the research field both on the conceptual and on the empirical levels, as well as to determine the improvement of the services in this field. Analyzing the particularities of service management, of the applied management strategies and of the tendencies registered in this domain, will highlight the numerous practical ways to increase the efficiency of the organizations that perform within this field.

The initial motivation of this research is oriented in multiple directions- as mentioned previously-one of these being the scarce number of academic studies on this topic. Other factors to influence the choice of this topic are its complexity, the economic and social implications of this field, as well as the shortcomings to be faced in real life. Proofs suggest that, despite the preoccupation for the field of services, there is, still, a lack of understanding of what constitutes, in fact, the success of the organizations providing services and the way in which these should be managed.

Actual stage of the field knowledge

Concerning this aspect, we wish to underline the fact that although the field of the spa and wellness centers has become a relevant force from the point of view of the registered income (Global Wellness Institute, 2013), studies conducted in this field are scarce (Stăncioiu *et al.*, 2013). Academic resources on the management of the spa and wellness centers and on the strategies applied in this field are limited, most of them being different reports or articles with a commercial purpose.

Related to this context, the international research in the field is focused on the following topics:

- **the benefits of having a spa center within a hotel, a resort or a holiday destination.** According to Monteson & Singer (2002) and Sheldon & Park (2008), these benefits refer to:
 - having extra income in high season;
 - the extension of the season;
 - satisfying the demands and the expectations of the clients;
 - improving the clients' experience;
 - having an advantage on the competitors;
 - creating a competition advantage on the properties that do not own a center;
 - the existence of wellness services;
 - attracting a new type of clients;
 - the possibility to practice indoor activities in case of unfavorable weather;
 - stimulating some clients to check in a day earlier or to check out a day

later.

- **particularities of the services in this field according to country or to the spa category.** According to Monteson & Singer (2004), the wellness services in countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia are focused on pampering and relaxation, while in Europe the focus is on the utility of these services, the most requested being the recovery treatments and the therapy massages. More recently, due to globalization and the disappearance of borders, the expectations and the preferences of the clients have begun to change. The Americans have started to appreciate the utility of these treatments while the Europeans want to relax, not just to recover after an unpleasant situation. As for the category of the center, the day centers, as opposed to the resort centers, have been identified as consuming fewer resources, being less complex and easily accessible. In exchange, the resort centers offer a broader range of services, accommodation facilities and a pleasant atmosphere. The same study revealed that the price, the quality of service, the accessibility and the cheaper traditional services are preferred by the clients in the day spa centers, while the highly priced procedures do not bring profit to this type of organizations.
- **client profile.** Even though women are the main type of clients for the spa and treatment centers (Smith & Puczko, 2009), according to the International Association of Spas, there is an increasing number of young people and men who are interested in these services. McNeil & Ragins (2005) propose different strategies and techniques to attract other types of clients, such as men, young adults, newly weds or pregnant women. Suna *et al.* (2010) suggest a classification of clients in relation to the benefits aimed by these when visiting a spa center. There have been identified four major types of benefits: social benefits, relaxation benefits, health benefits and rejuvenating benefits. In the authors' opinion, understanding the clients' motivation may help the managers in the field identify potential market targets, improve their offer by adding or eliminating certain services, in order to satisfy better the needs of their clients. Moreover, Monteson & Singer (2004) identify a series of key-clients who may justify the special efforts to attract. They refer to the women under 40, the women over 50 and the men. In the case of children, there are special time frames recommended, in order not to compromise the atmosphere of calm and quiet.
- **the challenges to be faced by the managers in this field.** According to McNeil & Ragins (2005), the perception of the clients regarding this field has changed. If

previously the focus was on pampering, now the focus is on necessity and on a state of well-being. This aspect is a challenge for the specialists in the field, who are trying to satisfy the clients' needs in an efficient way. Another aspect to be faced is the increasing number of men and young adults who are interested in these services (International Association of Spas). As a response to the interest shown by these two types of clients, the managers of the spa and wellness centers must be able to offer services designed especially for them. Last but not least, establishing a services offer that is attractive to the clients and the technology implied by this are the aspects to be constantly evaluated, adapted and adjusted, if necessary.

- **quality of services.** Basheer (2012) analyses which aspects of the quality of services are the most relevant for the client satisfaction in the Malaysian spa centers. The study reveals that empathy and tangibility play the most important role in estimating the client satisfaction and the client's intention to buy the services again, while insurance is the only insignificant aspect for this part. In the comparative study of the criteria for the quality of services, which had as starting point the dimensions of quality developed by Parasuraman *et al.*, Snoj & Mumel (2002) identify the diversity of the professional services, the physical safety and the safety of the personal belongings as well as the appearance of the employees as being the most important aspects of the quality of services. On the contrary, adapting the facilities, the equipment and the environment to the type of service provided has been considered as the least significant aspects for the quality of services.
- **customer loyalty.** In the opinion of Anuwichanant & Mechinda (2009), the specialists in this field can increase customer loyalty in four different ways. The first and foremost is the quality of services, the second is the reputation and the status of the organization, the third refers to increasing the emotional value by creating a feeling of joy and happiness during the spa experience. Fourthly, the price of the services must be a fair one.
- **the efficiency of the services management in the field.** A study conducted by Ferguson *et al.* (1999) revealed that the technical aspects of the basic services are greatly appreciated by the clients of the spa centers and that they had a major contribution to their satisfaction, to the general quality perception and to their desire to come back or to recommend the spa to other potential clients. On the other hand, the functional aspects of quality have been evaluated as being inferior to the technical ones, both for the basic services and for the additional ones, especially by the clients

who had had previous spa experience. It has also been revealed that the most recent additional services did not have a significant contribution to creating a competitive advantage for the center. Studies suggest the fact that when additional services are implemented, the management should assure an excellent quality of human interaction, which could compensate for the possible initial imperfections. Last but not least, the staff should have an accurate perception of the client's expectations and of the way in which the client evaluates the quality of services provided. In other words, there should not be a discrepancy between the evaluation of the service quality and the perception of the staff over this evaluation. Once the expectations of the clients are clear, adequate standards for the performance of the services can be designed and delivered. Practically speaking, improving the design of the services and their quality is a continuous process of trying and correcting the errors that may appear.

Reading the specialized literature has lead to identifying a set of clear needs for research. We have not found a complex study on all the research conducted in the field of the management strategies that are applied in the spa and wellness centers, which could constitute a reference point for the specialists in this field and the ones in the business field. This fact showed us the perspective from which we should go further in this field. We have also noticed the fact that studies approach the topic from the perspective of the clients, of their needs and preferences, rather than from a managerial perspective, as we intend to do in this thesis. Should we refer to our country, the specialized literature in the field is focused on studying the traditional, treatment centers and this is the reason why we consider that an update of the studies on this topic is more than necessary, having in mind the new models that the modern society has imposed.

Defining the objectives of the research

Considering the complexity of the topic, it is necessary to establish a set of objectives for the research. *The main objective* of the doctoral thesis *Service management strategies of the treatment and entertainment centers* is to conduct a complex study of the service management, focusing on the management strategies of the services provided by the treatment and entertainment centers. The research part includes a presentation of the theoretical concepts, identifying the particularities of the research field and making an empirical study on

the applied management strategies, with the *purpose* to identify and state some proposals of good practices for this field.

The specific objectives of the research are:

- Presenting the theoretical concepts related to the service management, including different approaches met in the specialized literature, in order to create a framework as complete and as complex as possible;
- Presenting the characteristics of the services and the particularities that these services impose on the management from this field;
- Identifying the management strategies applied in the field of services;
- Clarifying the concepts related to the field of the spa and wellness centers;
- Presenting the tendencies in the research field;
- Identifying the client profile for the spa and wellness centers;
- Presenting the statistic data that support the importance of studying this field;
- Conducting an empirical study regarding the management strategies of the services which is based on the managers' opinions as well as on the opinions of the clients from the spa and wellness centers.

In order to achieve these objectives, we used as starting point a series of bibliography sources, such as:

- specialized books published in our country and abroad by internationally famous writers;
- articles published in the international data bases;
- publications of institutions from our country and abroad.

Structure and organization of the thesis

In order to achieve the objectives set for this research and for the sake of a balanced contextual approach, the thesis is structured in five chapters. After presenting the introductory aspects in the first chapter, the second, the third and the fourth chapters, which have a theoretical conceptual nature, are assigned to the study of the specialized literature, whereas the fifth chapter is dedicated to the empirical study, as a way of testing the exposed theory. At the end of the paper are presented the conclusions and the personal contribution to this doctoral thesis.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the analysis of the specialized literature on the services and their management. We started with this approach because we believe that the services play the major part in the spa and wellness centers. In order to offer a very clear perspective, we tried to take into consideration the well-known theories to be found in the specialized literature on the management of services, but also the empirical studies that have been conducted up to the present. In this chapter we presented the opinions of the Romanian and the foreign specialists regarding the particularities of the management in the field of services, with an accent on defining the services, establishing the place and the role of the services, mentioning the most comprehensive classifications of the services met in the specialized literature and presenting the tasks and the challenges that the managers from this field have to face, aspects that are firstly influenced by the special characteristics of the services. For a better understanding of the complexity of this field and of the necessity to adopt different strategies and management strategies, we found beneficial a clarification of the concepts of services design and management of the services quality.

Chapter 3 makes a delimitation and a conceptual framing of our field of interest by analyzing a few of the concepts that are used in the field of the spa and wellness centers. Also, for a better understanding of the actions to be taken into consideration in order to obtain organizational performance, we included a subchapter that analyses the type and the profile of the clients to be met in this field. The economic and social implications of the spa and wellness centers have been presented here in order to highlight the importance of studying this field. At the end, we made an analysis of the situation concerning the spa and wellness centers from Romania, in order to observe the tendencies and the perspectives manifested within this field of activity.

Chapter 4 presents different opinions that we met in the specialized literature on concepts such as *strategy*, *strategic management* and *organizational performance*, our objective being to offer a holistic view over the present stage of the scientific research in this domain. Since we believe that maintaining an organization on the market or extending the activity of an organization are directly related to strategy- that is stating, implementing, evaluating and monitoring a set of strategies meant to create a competitive advantage -, we tried to present a variety of strategies that can be adopted by an organization. This way, the organization will be able to adapt successfully to any changes, so as to benefit from the opportunities and to eliminate possible dangers from the field. There are almost no studies that analyze the strategic management of the spa and wellness centers; nevertheless, we tried to present

different studies and theories that we read about in the specialized literature. Our objective was to offer a starting point for the empirical study and also to help create a clear view on our field of interest.

In *chapter 5* we checked the validity of the hypotheses that had been stated according to the information presented in the previous chapters by applying two questionnaires designed for the managers and for the clients of the spa and wellness centers. At the end, we presented the results obtained after analyzing the questionnaires and these results led to validating or to invalidating the hypotheses. There have also been noted some personal conclusions regarding different aspects that had been noticed, with focus on the importance of strategy and of some generally-accepted criteria for evaluating the performance of an organization.

Finally, we hope that the results of our research constitute valuable information for all the organizations performing in this field, information that will increase the interest in this topic.

PARTE II: METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

Methodology of the research

The research methodology is the basis of scientific research and it is a set of research principles and methods that lead to obtaining valid results (Marczyk et al, 2005: 4). It has a direct impact on the processes of validation and generalization of a study and it plays a very important role in increasing the amount of knowledge related to the business field. (Yang et al., 2006).

At this stage of the study we chose a quantitative analysis for gathering as much information as possible related to the opinion of the managers and the clients from this field. In this regard, we selected a questionnaire-based analysis. Chelcea defines the research questionnaires as being „a technique and, also, an investigation tool that consists of a set of written questions and, possibly, graphic images, linked in a logical and psychological order, which, when administrated by the research operators or by self-administration, deliver answers that are recorded in writing” (Chelcea, 2001: 70). The main reason for choosing this

option is that it helps the respondents to remain anonymous. Quite often, the respondents avoid answering questions if they feel insecure, insufficiently prepared or if the questions are too personal. The advantages of using a questionnaire are: a higher level of objectivity than in the case of interviews, rapidity, lower costs and an easier way to turn the standardized answers into statistics.

The hypotheses to be validated by the research are:

Hypothesis 1: The performance of a spa and wellness center is directly influenced by the investment policy and by the differentiation strategy .

Hypothesis 2: The innovative spa and wellness centers have a higher level of performance than the competition.

Hypothesis 3: The advanced technology leads to a higher market share of the spa and wellness center.

Hypothesis 4: The business development strategy is influenced by the type of clients.

Hypothesis 5: The strategy for establishing prices is based on the “Less movement, high prices” theory.

Hypothesis 6: A high level of performance is directly influenced by the stability and the professionalism of the personnel.

Hypothesis 7: The clients of the spa and wellness centers are mainly women over 30 from city areas.

Hypothesis 8: The clients of the spa and wellness centers have an income above the average.

Hypothesis 9: The type of clients influences the way in which they appeal to the services of the spa centers.

Hypothesis 10: Promptitude is the main aspect that should be taken into consideration by an organization when trying to find a solution to a problem.

Designing the questionnaires and stating the objectives

The questionnaire designed for the managers of the spa and wellness centers contains 15 questions that aim to identify the type of center and the type of manager, as well as the

different strategies, techniques and tools that have been chosen. The questionnaire designed for the clients of the spa and wellness centers has 21 questions that aim to identifying the type of clients who appeal to the spa and wellness centers (by using the multidimensional analysis methods for sorting the clients according to their characteristics) and identifying the factors that influence the clients' decision.

Establishing the sampling method and the sample volume

The first step to be taken at this stage is establishing the characteristics of the targeted population. In our research, the target population is represented by the managers of the Romanian spa and wellness centers – for the first questionnaire- and the clients of these centers for the second questionnaire. We want to mention the fact that in this thesis, we are only interested in the spa centers, not in other facilities that may offer spa services. In establishing the sample population for the first questionnaire, we appealed to the data offered by the web site *spabusines.ro*, according to which there are approximatively 70-80 locations that offer spa and wellness- type services. For the second questionnaire, we used the data offered by the *Spa business brochure 2015*, according to which, in the year 2015, the spa centers had 153.000 clients, out of which 135.000 were Romanian and 18.000 were foreign. Knowing the volume of the total target population, we tried to establish the minimum number of respondents, so that the sample may be a representative one.

The way of applying the questionnaires

In order to apply the questionnaire designed for the managers of the spa and wellness centers, we started by contacting the managers from the local spa centers. Then, we sent emails to other spa centers managers, using the email addresses we had found on their web pages. In this regard, we made an electronic variant of the questionnaire as being a more rapid option and a less costly one. Because of the low answer rate to these questionnaires, we decided to contact the founder of the web site *desprespa.ro*, which is the most popular specialized web page in our country, and the founder agreed to send the questionnaire to the collaborators of his site. Eventually, we tried to contact by telephone all of these persons and we obtained a higher answer rate to our questionnaire, making our sample population a representative one.

As for the clients of the spa centers, again, the higher answer rate has been reached after contacting them personally, over the telephone or by email, with a message appealing to their kindness in order to help us and offer us their answers.

It is worth mentioning that preparing, applying and analyzing the data of the questionnaires was a very important stage for this research and the time frame was a longer one because we wanted to obtain significant results for our study.

Analyzing and interpreting the results of the research after applying the questionnaires

The research has been conducted on two levels: the managers of the spa and wellness centers and the clients of the spa and wellness centers and it had different stages:

- *Evaluating the quality of the obtained information:* eventually, the valid sample population for the part of the research concerning the managers of the spa and wellness was made of 50 subjects, and the one concerning the clients of the spa and wellness centers had 205 respondents;
- *Doing multiple variables analyses:* comparing groups (the Student test, Mann-Whitney, Wilcoxon); linking tests (the Hi-square test, Kendall's multiplier);
- *Evaluating the influence of some variables on the quantity variables* (the ANOVA analysis);
- *Identifying the influence factors of the diverse variables used* (which has been made by applying the quantity and quality regression patterns).

In the part of the research assigned to the clients of the spa and wellness centers, we appealed to characterizing them according to their profile. In this sense, we applied the cluster-type analysis with the aim to identify different types of clients, by taking into consideration the aspects evaluated within the questionnaire. The analyses have been made with the help of the statistics software SPSS 19.

The spa centers have been evaluated by using a set of criteria. The first criterion was their category according to the type of clients, since one of the followed hypotheses (number 4) evaluates the influence of the type of clients on the development strategy. Almost half of the spa centers sample (48%) considered that they are luxury facilities. The rest is divided almost

equally: 24% consider that they are accessible to all types of clients, where 28% considered that they offer services to the medium income level clients. As for the evolution of these centers, 80% of the spa centers sample have developed their activity in time and only 20% succeeded to maintain their activity at the same level. We also noticed that the medium age of the spa centers sample is 6,72 years, almost identical to the general medium age– 6 years- therefore, half of the spa centers has been active for 6 years the most. When it comes to the personnel, the variation is relatively higher. There are spa centers with 2 employees and also with 45 employees. This discrepancy comes from the fact that some spa centers function within a hotel and they do not need additional staff, while others are independent and, besides the specialized personnel, they also need to hire additional administrative staff.

The managers of the sample spa centers have a medium age of 5,25 years of experience in this field and 3.97 years of experience as effective managers of the centers that they manage at present. Besides the effective managing experience, we also evaluated their experience by taking into consideration their previous employment areas: 36% of the respondents have been active in this field, while 64% of the respondents have been working in very different fields.

The clients of the spa centers have been analyzed based on different criteria. Such criteria are: gender, residency, occupation, civil status, education, living standard, age, monthly income and monthly amount of money spent on these services. We also analyzed the purpose of their visits to the spa centers, the frequency of these visits and the type of services they appeal to more frequently.

After the descriptive evaluation of the variables, we tested the hypotheses stated for the research. The results to the questionnaire designed for the managers of the spa centers sustained our hypothesis as being a valid one, for each way of evaluating the performance. It is well known the fact that the financially-directed questions may encounter a refusal from the part of the respondents. For this reason, we tried to evaluate the performance of the spa and wellness centers by referring to the non-financial aspects. Thus, according to Popa (2005), the performance of an organization is ensured by:

- Its degree of stability and adaptability;
- The resources involved;

- Its reputation and its image;
- The relationship with the employees and the communication within the organization;
- Its culture and the management style;
- The quality of the organizational processes.

In 2003, The Day Spa Centers Association was the first one to make a comparative evaluation report for the industry of the spa centers. The purpose of that research was to look beyond the financial aspects and to promote a successful development of the spa centers, by offering quality, competitive services. Based on this study, The Day Spa Centers Association revealed the main characteristics of a successful spa center:

- The size (the size of the spa center, the number of the treatment rooms, the number and the size of the spaces destined for sauna, hydrotherapy, sports and other leisure activities, the medium size of a treatment room, the existence and the size of the bathrooms, the locker rooms, the relaxation area, the reception, the spa shop, etc.)
- The business mix (the number of therapists and of the personnel involved, the existence of a motivation and compensation program for the employees, etc.)
- Products and services (the diversity of the offer, the offered packages and the a la carte services, etc.).
- The promotional mix (attractive prices are used as a developing technique in this business, cooperating with different specialists from the medical field who can promote this center in the media, etc.)
- The business mix/Future plans (a service warranty, personnel training, extension plans for the future, etc.)

According to Cohen & Bodeker (2008) the key indicators for the performance of a spa center are:

- The income: total income, income/treatment or service, income from sales or membership tax, etc.
- The expenses: total expenses, payments, salaries, trainings, rentals, bills, marketing, insurance, etc.
- The clients: total number of clients, frequency of visits and treatments, etc.

- Human resources: the total number of employees, qualification level, salaries and benefits according to the position, etc.

In our questionnaire, we took into consideration the evolution of the activity of the spa center and the fluctuation level and absenteeism of the personnel as methods for evaluating the quality of the performance; we considered the number of employees and the age of the center as methods for evaluating the quantity of the performance.

Hypothesis **H1**: *The performance of a spa and wellness center is directly influenced by the investment policy and by the strategy for diversifying services* is partially validated.

- **Evolution of the center's activity:**
 - quality of services (Sig. 0.076<0.1);
 - investments made in diversifying the offer (Sig. 0.051 <0.1);
 - investments made in personnel training (Sig. 0.008<0.1);
- **The fluctuation level and absenteeism of the personnel:**
 - extremely diversified offer (Sig. 0.006<0.1);
 - investments made in facilities improvement (Sig. 0<0.1);
 - investments made in personnel training (Sig. 0.027<0.1);
- **Number of employees:**
 - investments made in facilities improvement (Sig. 0<0.1);
 - investments made in personnel training (Sig. 0<0.1);
 - investments made in improving the comfort level of the employees (Sig. 0.004<0.1);

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Number of employees (X)} = & 12,65-8,059*\text{personnel training}+5,742*\text{technology-} \\ & 4,528*\text{ facilities improvement}+5,889*\text{service quality} \\ & +2,686*\text{improving the comfort level of the employees} \end{aligned}$$

- **Age of the center:**
 - investments made in diversifying the offer (Sig. 0.080<0.1);
 - investments made in facilities improvement (Sig.0.083<0.1);
 - investments made in personnel training (Sig. 0.041<0.1);
 - investments made in advertising (Sig. 0.041<0.1);
 - diversifying strategy based on the competition's offer (Sig. 0<0.1).

$$\text{Age of the center (x)} = 4,118*\text{ diversifying strategy based on the competition's}$$

offer - 2,826*diversifying strategy based on the clients wishes +3,016*advertising-2,089*other services than the competition +1,049 * facilities improvement.

Hypothesis **H2**: *The innovative spa and wellness centers have a higher level of performance than the competition* is partially validated.

- **Fluctuation level and absenteeism of the personnel:**

- diversifying strategy based on the latest discoveries in the field (Sig. 0.099<0.1);

- **Number of employees:**

- product and service innovation is important (Sig. 0.028<0.1);

- **Age of the center:**

- product and service innovation is important (Sig. 0.043<0.1);

Age of the center (x)= 2,536* Environmental factors: Technological evolution.

Hypothesis **H3**: *Advanced technology leads to a higher market share of the spa and wellness center* is not valid. Considering the previously presented analyses, where we highlighted the fact that the technological evolution does not influence the performance measured by the activity evolution of the center, we may conclude that on the analyzed sample, hypothesis H3 is not valid.

Hypothesis **H4**: *The business development strategy is influenced by the type of clients* is partially validated. The aspects to support this hypothesis are:

- the applied management strategy supports cooperation with the clients (Sig. 0.002<0.1);
- the management strategy is focused on client loyalty (Sig. 0<0.1);
- the center offer is diversified (Sig. 0.022<0.1);
- establishing prices based on the type of clients (Sig. 0<0.1);

- establishing prices based on the competition's prices (Sig. 0.040<0.1).

Hypothesis **H5: *The strategy for establishing prices is based on the “Less movement, high prices” theory*** is partially validated. This hypothesis is confirmed when establishing the prices is based on the number of clients either we speak generally or if we refer to the category of the center, for the medium and luxury centers, when establishing the prices is based on the type of clients, as well as in the case of the centers for all types of clients, when establishing the prices is based on the costs and on the number of clients.

Table 1. Ways of establishing prices influenced by the type of clients

Ways	Multiplier Test (Value)	Sig
Establishing prices based on the number of clients	0,305	0,005
Establishing prices based on the costs	0,015	0,912
Establishing prices based on the type of clients-all types of clients	0,098	0,699
Establishing prices based on the type of clients –medium income level	0,514	0,004
Establishing prices based on the type of clients - luxury	0,440	0,004
Establishing prices based on the costs and the number of clients –for all types of clients	0,632	0,064
Establishing prices based on the costs and the number of clients – medium income level	0,140	0,591
Establishing prices based on the costs and the number of clients - luxury	-0,040	0,824

Source: personal work in SPSS 19

Hypothesis **H6: *A higher level of performance is directly influenced by the stability and the professionalism of the personnel*** is partially validated. The elements to support this statement, for every type of performance evaluation, are:

- **Evolution of the center activity:**

- fluctuation level and absenteeism of the personnel (Sig. 0.036<0.1)
- the employees' interest is supported by specific and adjusted motivation practices (Sig. 0.038<0.1);

- investments made in personnel training (Sig. 0.008<0.1);
- client dissatisfaction compensation is made by re-offering the service, at the client's request (Sig. 0.076<0.1).

- **Number of employees:**

- fluctuation level and absenteeism of the personnel (Sig.0.001<0.1)
- investments made in personnel training (Sig.0<0.1).

No. employees(x)= 24,279 + 2,894*the team involved in establishing the strategy has the knowledge, the skills and the necessary experience - 3,595 * fluctuation level and absenteeism of the personnel - 4,046* investments made in personnel training.

- **Age of the center:**

- fluctuation level and absenteeism of the personnel (Sig.0.001<0.1)
- investments made in personnel training (Sig. 0.041<0.1).

Hypothesis **H7: *The clients of the spa and wellness centers are mostly women over 30 from city areas*** is validated. The respondents to the questionnaire were: 70.5% women, 95.2% from city areas, their medium age being 33 years old.

Hypothesis **H8: *The clients of the spa and wellness centers have an income above the average*** is validated. A percentage of 99 % of the respondents to our questionnaire considers to have a living standard above the average and only 1 % of the respondents have a living standard below the average.

Hypothesis **H9: *The type of clients influences the way in which they appeal to the services of the spa centers*** is partially validated. The variables to confirm this result may be seen for each type of center in Table 2.

Table 2. Synthetic table with the influence of the characteristics of the clients on the way in which they appeal to the services of the spa centers

Center type	Variable	Multiplier Test	Sig
Traditional, treatment centers	Gender	-0.058	0.523
	Residence area	0.122	0.1
	Occupation	0.018	0.848
	Education	0.160	0.072
	Civil status	0.036	0.674
	Living standard	0.082	0.433
Hotel-type or day spa centers	Gender	0.114	0.194
	Residence area	0.077	0.379
	Occupation	0.039	0.665
	Education	0.031	0.730
	Civil status	0.071	0.409
	Living standard	0.214	0.023
Resorts	Gender	-0.130	0.141
	Residence area	0.071	0.300
	Occupation	-0.181	0.048
	Education	0.104	0.247
	Civil status	0.063	0.446
	Living standard	0.086	0.278
Seashore centers	Gender	0.070	0.431
	Residence area	0.004	0.949
	Occupation	0.021	0.795
	Education	-0.017	0.851
	Civil status	-0.079	0.326
	Living standard	-0.002	0.981
Holistic centers	Gender	0.135	0.122
	Residence area	-0.045	0.691
	Occupation	0.038	0.673
	Education	0.029	0.754
	Civil status	-0.194	0.021

	Living standard	0.072	0.453
Yoga centers	Gender	0.080	0.374
	Residence area	0.102	0.031
	Occupation	0.189	0.085
	Education	-0.174	0.064
	Marital status	-0.030	0.749
	Living standard	0.327	0.022
Meditation centers	Gender	0.043	0.650
	Residence area	0.096	0.033
	Occupation	0.131	0.232
	Education	-0.145	0.145
	Civil status	-0.036	0.710
	Living standard	0.276	0.049

Source: personal work in SPSS 19

Hypothesis **H10: Promptitude is the main aspect to be taken into consideration when finding a solution to a problem** is validated. According to our study, as it may be seen in Table 3, there is a significant relation between the way in which the solution to a problem has been perceived and the aspects listed in the left column. It can also be noticed in Table 4 that the higher results obtained when solving a problem were registered when the solution was found immediately.

Table 3. The relationship between different aspects related to finding a solution to a problem and the promptitude of the solution

Aspects	Multiplier Test	Sig
-way to solve the problem	-0.631	0
-problem solving time	-0.601	0
-attitude and interest of the personnel	-0.511	0
-attitude and interest of the management	-0.478	0
-availability of the managerial team in solving the clients' problems	-0.478	0
-availability of the managerial team for the clients' requests	-0.432	0

Source: personal work in SPSS

Table 4. Evaluation of problem solving from the point of view of the organization's availability

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Solving problem – employees availability	On the spot	8.03	2.475	.391	7.23	8.82	1	10
	Within an hour	6.73	1.555	.469	5.68	7.77	4	9
	Within a day	5.64	2.420	.730	4.01	7.26	1	9
	Within a week	7.00	.000	.000	7.00	7.00	7	7
	More than a week	8.00	.	.	.	.	8	8
	Problem not solved	5.86	2.800	.597	4.62	7.10	1	10
	Total	6.99	2.595	.278	6.44	7.54	1	10
Solving problem – availability of the management team	On the spot	8.05	2.541	.402	7.24	8.86	1	10
	Within an hour	6.64	2.203	.664	5.16	8.12	3	10
	Within a day	6.64	2.203	.664	5.16	8.12	1	9
	Within a week	7.50	.707	.500	1.15	13.85	7	8
	More than a week	8.00	.	.	.	.	8	8
	Problem not solved	5.57	2.976	.649	4.22	6.93	1	10
	Total	7.07	2.695	.291	6.49	7.65	1	10

Source: personal work in SPSS 19

After the analyses made, we observed the following:

- Having in mind the fact that in the specialized literature we could not find a generally-accepted evaluation standard for the performance of the spa centers and the fact that this evaluation includes different aspects, the results of the analyses may vary significantly. Each performance criterion has its own characteristics, which lead to these differences. Until a consensus is reached, the data from the specialized literature will continue to vary and each of them will imply other factors to influence performance. In our case, if performance is evaluated by the evolution of the center or by the level of personnel absenteeism and fluctuation, the results reject hypothesis 2 (*The innovative spa and wellness centers have a higher level of performance than the competition*), but if performance is evaluated according to the number of employees and to the age of the center, the situation is very different. Even if there is not a generally accepted option in the specialized literature, we recommend that at least inside the organization should be used the same evaluation system because otherwise, the results may be inconsistent or deceiving.
- We advise the organizations from this field to pay attention to the registered expenses because the clients might not be willing to pay more, even if there is an attraction for the novelty or even if they get better services. A relevant example in this sense was the fact that using a high level of technology did not lead to a higher market share of the organization.
- We remarked that the usage rate of the strategic tools is very low: 72% for the value chain analysis, 64% for the 5 competition forces pattern, 68% for the VRIO analysis and 40% for the SWOT analysis. We recommend to the managers to become familiar with these strategic analyses methods because their effectiveness has already been proven and they have numerous other advantages.
- Regardless the way in which we analyzed performance in our study, the stability of the personnel has a direct influence on the performance of the center. Should we refer to the professionalism of the employees, our study reveals that solving client dissatisfaction by re-doing the service at the client's request and investing in personnel training have a great influence on the performance if it is evaluated according to the number of employees and the age of the center. It has been

highlighted, this way, the importance of having a human resources management system which to include customized procedures of recruitment, selection and employee compensation so that their motivation can become higher and help the success of the organization.

- The best strategy to be adopted by the Romanian spa centers is the cost strategy. Even if 10.5% of the clients who responded to the questionnaire considered that a varied offer is a major characteristic when choosing the spa center, we could not find any proof for that when testing it in relation to the performance of the spa centers. Here are some facts related to our study, which support the idea:
 1. If differentiation implies advanced technology, the performance of the organization is not influenced positively.
 2. If differentiation implies higher service quality or if the offer is too varied, the performance measured by the activity evolution is influenced in a negative way, while if performance is evaluated by the fluctuation level and absenteeism of the personnel, these aspects seem to have no influence at all.
 3. If differentiation implies investments in facilities improvement or in advertising, the performance measured by activity evolution of the center and by the fluctuation and absenteeism of personnel are not influenced.
 4. If performance is measured by the age of the center, a strategy based on establishing a different offer than the competition or a strategy based on the clients' wishes (customized services) seem to have a negative influence.
- We believe that these results are a consequence of the fact that all of the above mentioned aspects involve higher prices that the client has to pay and, eventually, the client is not willing to pay for the added value. We also mention the fact that the link between price and quality has been considered by the clients as being the most important criterion when choosing a spa center. Therefore, we consider that the differentiation strategy is only suitable for the luxury centers, whose clients are not price-sensitive but they are more attracted to the experience itself and to the atmosphere.

- We recommend to those who want to invest in this field to consider the location firstly, because the clients seem to find this criterion of utmost importance when choosing a spa center. Other criteria to be taken into consideration are: high quality of services, impeccable hygiene and cleanliness, improved facilities, the professionalism of the personnel and the diversity of services.
- Since the most frequented centers have been the entertainment centers, followed by the seashore centers, we advise the organizations from this field to include this kind of services and facilities in their offer.
- It is impossible to avoid failure all the time, as much as one tries to. The way to solve a problem makes the difference when it comes to convincing the client to come again and to project a positive image of the spa center. All of the involved aspects – the way to solve the problem, the promptitude of the solution, the attitude and the involvement of the personnel and those of the managerial team, the availability of the managerial team towards the clients' request – have a major influence in finding a solution to a problem. For this reason, implementing a management system with a good strategy for recovery after failure is essential.

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION

Our work has been focused on reaching the main and the specific objectives of this thesis. The empirical study has the role to complete the theoretical information presented in the first chapters and to validate the stated research hypotheses.

In order to achieve the objectives, we decided on a general-to-particular approach, meaning that we firstly presented the basic concepts and aspects of the services and then we referred to the services offered by the spa and wellness centers, with an accent on their specific characteristics. In order to do that, we presented the particularities of the management in the field of services, the services provided by the spa and wellness centers and the management strategies applied in this domain.

We are now going to present the main contributions made in this field, among which we want to mention:

At the theoretical and conceptual level:

- *Defining and clarifying some basic concepts that must be considered when it comes to services and their management.*

The analysis of the services and of the concepts related to the service management has been made in chapter 2, where we presented the theories of the specialists in this field and the results of different studies conducted up to the present. At this stage, we focused on three essential aspects. We firstly approached the main aspects related to the services and to their management by presenting the opinion of different specialists in order to offer a complex and clear view on the subject. We analyzed the definitions of the services, their place and role and the relevant classifications offered by the specialized literature. We also highlighted the challenges that the managers from this field have to face, challenges resulted from the characteristics of the services that we have analyzed in detail. Secondly, we clarified the significance of the service design concept and we argued on the importance of innovation and technology in creating competition advantages. Finally, we underlined the importance of quality, insisting on the definitions found in the specialized literature, we highlighted the connection between quality and client satisfaction and we presented the SERVQUAL tool as being the most popular method for measuring quality. The last stage was to introduce the concept of total quality in the field of the services, with an accent on the specific elements that support its achievement and its preservation in all the fundamental processes of a business.

- *Clarifying the notions related to the treatment and entertainment centers field and offering a better understanding of the field.*

This contribution may be observed in the information presented in chapter 3. We chose to focus on these subjects because we had noticed the fact that the specialized literature offers a limited, maybe even confusing amount of information related to the services in this field, and this may lead to difficulty in establishing the best strategy for increasing the performance of an organization. We considered relevant to analyze this field based on the definitions, the economic and social implications and to establish the type of activities, as well as the client profile. Even if the specialized literature offers a variety of definitions, it is important to see the spa and wellness service as an

activity for relaxation, an activity that influences the way that the clients manage their health, their appearance and their stress level but also to consider it as a socializing activity and a travelling activity. The development of this field brought about new concepts in the specialized literature but, despite the specialists' debates on them, it is important to associate these new concepts with a healthy lifestyle, a lifestyle that brings harmony to the body, the mind and the spirit.

Other aspects that have been clarified are related to the history, the evolution and the potential that our country has. If, initially, Romania owned a series of impressive treatment centers that were internationally famous, most of them are in a decaying state today. Nevertheless, we noticed a certain interest on the subject from the part of the leadership of the country and from the part of the local businessmen, an interest that has been put into practice by attempts to modernize the traditional treatment centers by adding wellness services to them, in order to achieve a combination of spa and wellness activities.

- *Clarifying the concepts associated with the strategic management*

The strategic management may seem, sometimes, a complex science if we are to consider the different concepts, patterns and frames, all of them having different interpretations. In order to offer a clearer perspective, we chose to approach the subject based on the opinion of different authors. It has become clear that the strategic management involves a set of decisions and managerial actions which influence the performance of an organization and it implies an analysis of the internal and external backgrounds, stating a strategy, implementing it, evaluating it and monitoring it. Some of the major tasks and challenges that the managers have to face are: the need to establish a set of directions to be followed by the organization, knowing and using appropriate strategic tools which allow a permanent analysis, selecting the appropriate strategy and identifying the necessary resources and the necessary skills in order to obtain a competition advantage. Since the specialized literature identifies the approach of Porter (1980) as being the most commonly used method to which the researchers appeal in their attempts to find the strategic possibilities available to a company, we decided to choose the same approach. Each strategy has been presented from the point of view of its characteristics, from the point of view of the ways in which the organizations may reach a higher position and from the point of view of the risks that it involves. We also highlighted the link between the performance of an organization

and the human resources strategy. It has become clear that the human resources systems involving serious recruiting, selection, compensation, motivation and training procedures, systems that are designed to benefit from the environmental opportunities and to eliminate the possible dangers have the greatest contribution to increasing the performance of the organization. The recovery strategies after failure are also very important. Some unpleasant situations are impossible to avoid, but it is important for an organization to be able to deal with them and to make a quick recovery after encountering them.

Although in the previous studies the strategic management was not seen as an important feature for the spa and wellness centers industry, we tried to create an updated framework, considering the research in this field. If the specialized literature allowed it, we analyzed some notions in detail if they were related to the services from the spa and wellness field.

At the level of the empirical research:

The personal contribution for the empirical research may be found in the second part of the thesis, more precisely in chapter 5, where we presented the results obtained after conducting the research.

- *Designing a questionnaire that reveals the reality of the Romanian spa industry from the perspective of the managers in this field.*

By applying the first questionnaire, we have been able to:

1. Make a profile of the field (based on the age of the centers, the number of employees, the experience of the managers in the field, previous experience and the type of center).
2. Identify the way in which the managers know and apply the concepts of strategic management.
3. Identify the major aspects of establishing the strategy.
4. Identify the environmental factors that may influence the applied strategy.
5. Identify patterns for solving the problems and the ways to deal with the problems.
6. Identify the main tendencies for directing the investments.

- *Designing a questionnaire that reveals the reality of the Romanian spa industry from the perspective of the clients of the treatment and entertainment centers.*

In this questionnaire we tried to outline different aspects of the strategic management that we considered to be important for this field, with the purpose to state some good practices proposals that might be useful to the managers of the spa centers. After applying the second questionnaire, we were able to:

1. Establish a client profile (based on age, gender, residence area, occupation, monthly income, civil status, education, living standard, monthly expenses).
2. Establish the main reason for visiting a spa center, the frequency of the visits and the most frequently required services.
3. Establish the frequency of visits for the different types of spa centers.
4. Create a clearer view of the real situation by evaluating several aspects of interest for this field.
5. Identify the problems that are encountered by the clients of the spa centers and the way in which these problems are solved.
6. Identify the main criteria for choosing a spa center.

- *Highlighting the relations between different factors that characterize our field of interest and their intensity.*

Testing the hypotheses implied making different statistics analyses which established the direction and the relation between the analyzed variables. Therefore, we were able to notice:

1. The influence of the development strategies and of the investments policy on the performance.
2. The influence of innovation on the performance.
3. The influence of technology on the market share.
4. The influence of the type of clients on the development strategy.
5. The influence of different factors on establishing the prices.
6. The influence of stability and professionalism on the performance.
7. The influence of the human resources management on the performance.

8. The influence of the type of clients and of the way they appeal to the services of the different types of centers.
9. The influence of different aspects of the organization on the way in which the clients evaluate the solving of a problem.

Perspectives and research limitations

We consider that this thesis, which is probably the only one in this country and one of the few at an international level to approach this topic, may be improved by an ulterior research. We believe that this research may constitute a starting point for future studies, with a higher degree of complexity. In this sense, we allow ourselves to make a few suggestions:

- An intensive analysis of the particularities of the different categories of spa centers.
- A presentation of the main problems that the managers in this field have to face and identifying a set of solutions for solving these problems.
- Applying the questionnaire again, after a certain period of time, in order to notice the progress made in this field.
- Making a comparative study between the Romanian spa centers and the spa centers from a neighboring country.
- Making a case study on one of the successful companies from this field.

Among the limitations that influenced this research the most, we want to mention:

- the limited amount of academic resources that contain issues of interest for our topic;
- the reticence of the respondents towards answering to the questionnaires and towards offering information related to the organization.

Ethics of the research

This research has been conducted by following and respecting the ethical principles. In this regard, we state that the bibliographical sources have been cited when used and in the practical part, the used data are genuine. The respondents agreed to be part of our study and they have been informed that the information they offered us is confidential and used for academic purposes only.

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