

Service recovery in luxury hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka

Udari Nathasha Ponnahennedige

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ABSTRACT

Hotel providers attempt to provide excellent services to guests, but as a service environment is based on human interactions, service failures due to human deficiencies are unavoidable, making service recovery strategies essential for the service organisations. In the hospitality industry, service recovery is often required, as service failure is a common issue. Service failure happens when service delivery does not meet the expectations of a customer, and requires the hotel's management to respond with recovery efforts. Although service failures are considered as a deficiency or a problem area within an organisation, it is assumed that the ultimate test of an organisation's focus on the quality of service is how it reacts to service failure. The objective of this research is to explore the most common areas of service failures and main sources of these failures in luxury hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka, and provide possible service recovery strategies from a human resource management perspective.

The study is based on qualitative research methods and an Interpretivist approach was used to understand texts and descriptions. Secondary data were collected using TripAdvisor negative reviews, and a convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample. Four luxury hotels in Sri Lanka fitted the sample criteria that provided the negative reviews. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the data.

The findings of this study identified that the main areas of service failures were food and beverage, and front office. Other services that were identified in this study were ancillary services, housekeeping, and facility maintenance. The main sources of these failures were mostly inefficient services and unprofessional staff attitudes. Other sources that were identified was poor quality food, technical failures, poor quality of room amenities, outdated room facilities, and mechanical problems. Based on these findings, service recovery strategies were recommended as recruitment and selection, training, and employee development and empowerment. These findings will help managers in the hospitality industry overcome service failure and also address human resources issues in a Sri Lankan hotel context.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Udari Nathasha Ponnahennedige

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Service failure has become a major problem in the Sri Lankan hotel industry and currently, this issue is prevailing in many luxury hotels. The Sri Lankan tourism industry has provided high revenue and strong investment into the Sri Lankan economy (Umasuthan & Park, 2018). As a result, Sri Lanka depends on the tourism and hospitality industry, but there is evidence that service quality is failing in the luxury hotels due to inadequate human resources and poorly trained staff; a significant issue for the hotel industry. Silva (2014), commented that the poor HR management in the Sri Lankan hotel industry, evidenced by low waged jobs, temporary jobs, a lack of training facilities, poor investment, and high labour turnover, would eventually result in poor service quality. Thus, it is important to improve service quality and implement the best human resource management (HRM) practices, to support the hotel industry. This chapter introduces background information in relation to this issue, and the significance of the research. The research aim and questions are then explained, followed by an overview of the research methodology and the structure of the dissertation.

1.1 Research background

The tourism industry in Sri Lanka currently contributes 10.3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Economic Impact Report, 2020). In the World Economic Forum in 2013, Sri Lanka was ranked 14th for national competitiveness in travel and tourism industry, of 47 countries in Asia Pacific region (Jayawardena, 2013). The country experienced rapid growth in the number of inbound, outbound, and domestic tourist arrivals after the re-establishment of peace in 2009. Inbound tourist arrivals increased from 438,475 in 2008, to 1,005,605 in 2012 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2012). This increase in tourism arrivals generated increased hotel accommodation capacity, which grew from 23,477 to 24,757 rooms in 2018 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2018). Similarly, the employment rate increased by 8.7% (Shamil & Samarakoon, 2014), as a result of job opportunities in the tourism and hospitality industry. More recently, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Tourism predicted that more than \$2.8 billion would be spent on developing luxury hotels in the future, requiring 100,000 more staff (“Growing Need for More Talent in the Lankan Hospitality Industry,” 2019). The Sri Lankan economy is in the process of recovering from three decades of civil war, and tourism is a crucial element of the recovery plan, as it attracts foreign income (Ambepitiya & Dharmasiri, 2017).

However, although Sri Lanka has attracted higher numbers of tourists, the hotel industry lacks adequate human resources to provide professional services. Therefore, the objective of delivering quality services is challenging to achieve, as resources are limited, training is inadequate, and the staff are inexperienced (Ambepitiya & Dharmasiri, 2017). Therefore, Sri Lanka is a suitable case for exploring the ways improvements in HRM could increase the quality of luxury hotels, and longer term, attract more tourists. Luxury hotels were selected to study because of the greater economic contribution of the high spending tourists who stay at such hotels.

The global development of luxury hotels began in 1998, as the industry identified the need for increased profitability and efficiency (Sherman, 2007). Luxury hotels were highlighted for their creative designs and accessible services (Kucukusta et al., 2014). *Luxury* is comprised of guests' expectations and past experiences (Harkison et al., 2018b), as guests are demanding and self-indulgent (Buehring & O'Mahony, 2019). In luxury hotels, the guests' expectations are set at a high level; therefore, identifying guests' requirements and desires is important in order to satisfy them (Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011). As the demand for luxury hotels rises, service quality standards also need to change, to satisfy customers and avoid service failure (Lu et al., 2015). It is a challenge for luxury hotels to retain and gain customers, as they may not return if service delivery does not meet their expectations (Rauch et al., 2015a). Luxury hotels' major objectives are to provide high quality service and manage service failures (Liat et al., 2017), as a service failure can occur without any fault from either guests or hotel management (Ekiz et al., 2012). Although service failure is considered as a deficiency or a problem area within an organisation, it is also assumed that the ultimate test of an organisation's focus on service quality, is the way it reacts to a service failure (La & Choi, 2012). There is evidence that for hotel guests, rooms are a common source of service problems, with rooms not being ready, slow service, slow check-in/out, incorrect invoices, and missing reservations all being common (Lee, 2018). However, service failures are mostly due to the high levels of interaction between guests and employees in the process of service delivery (Koc, 2019). Human resource management (HRM) practices can be implemented effectively to improve service quality, customer satisfaction, and hotel performance (Chand, 2010).

1.2 Research aim and questions

The objective of this research was to explore the most common areas of service failure, and identify strategies for service recovery in HRM, by investigating luxury hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka. To achieve the aim of the research, two research questions were proposed:

Question 1: What are the most common service failure areas in Sri Lankan luxury hotels?

Question 2: From a human resource management perspective, what are appropriate service recovery strategies for Sri Lankan luxury hotels and resorts?

1.3 Significance of the research

Guests can be dissatisfied if the quality of service is not to their expectations (Lu et al., 2015), and dissatisfaction often results in negative reviews and complaints (Ro, 2015). The hotel industry in Sri Lanka is rapidly growing; thus, service failure has been a major issue for its luxury hotels. *Service failure* is considered to be the gap between the actual service delivered and the guest's expectation of that service (Koc, 2019). This study will assist managers to understand the actual reasons for the service failures. Customer and employee interactions are high in luxury hotels, which may lead to an increased level of service failures. Therefore, HRM has an important role in managing service failure. Employees have different skills, experiences, values, attitudes, and behaviours, all of which are influenced by HRM practices (Koyuncu et al., 2014), and importantly, service quality and customer satisfaction are linked to HRM practices (Vencatachellum & Mathuvirin, 2010). In the Sri Lankan luxury hotel industry, service failure is mostly due to poor human resources management, and poorly trained employees (Umasuthan & Park, 2018). Therefore, in consideration of the lack of research on Sri Lankan luxury hotels generally, and also the importance of improving the quality of service in the hotels, this study examines the reasons for service failure to overcome them through HRM strategies. The significance of the research is in the types of hotels explored in the study, as they can help find recovery strategies using HRM practices, which will ease the current problem in the Sri Lankan hotel industry, such as a lack of human resources, and poor training. This research sets out to provide insights for hotel managers to help them implement effective service recovery strategies through HRM practices. It also expects to provide guidance on this topic for future studies.

1.4 Research methodology and methods

This research adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology, because the research aimed to understand and illustrate guests' experiences of luxury hotels by interpreting guests' reviews. The chosen research paradigm was interpretivist, as this helps a researcher to recognise the meanings, reasons, experiences, feelings, and backgrounds of different individuals (Taneja et al., 2011). The data analysed were secondary data from TripAdvisor guests' reviews. TripAdvisor is a large and popular online platform for international travellers to share experiences through reviews and ratings (Cordato, 2014). The population was 20 luxury hotels, however, it was difficult to analyse reviews from such a large population. The convenience sampling technique was therefore used with specific criteria to select a sample; four luxury hotels and resorts met the criteria, surrendering 60 negative guests' reviews. The data analysis method was thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps to identify the codes and themes.

1.5 Dissertation structure

The dissertation consists of five chapters as follows.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter has background information and overviewed the significance of the research. The research aims and the questions were outlined, and the research methodology discussed. The structure of the dissertation was also presented.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter reviews extant research on the research topic. The chapter begins with a definition of luxury hotels and an explanation about Sri Lankan luxury hotels. Service is then defined, and service quality discussed, including the measures of service quality. A definition of service failure is provided, followed by an exploration of the types and areas of service failure. Then, service recovery is defined, and recovery theories and strategies reviewed. A definition of HRM is also provided and its practices are discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with the identification of gaps in the current research and a summary of the chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology and methods

This chapter presents and explains the research methodology and methods used in the research. The research philosophy and paradigm are also discussed. The research adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology, which is defined and explained. The use of secondary data from TripAdvisor guests' reviews is explained, and the sampling technique and the population are outlined. Finally, an explanation of how the data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify and categorise the themes is provided.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the TripAdvisor reviews. The findings revealed the highest level of guest dissatisfaction areas were food and beverage, and front office. Other areas that caused guest dissatisfaction was identified as ancillary services, housekeeping, and facility maintenance. The main sources of service failure were inefficient service and unprofessional staff attitudes. The discussion analyses the similarities and differences of the literature review. Based on the findings, the most important service recovery strategies from an HRM perspective were recommended: recruitment and selection, and training and development activities that fit the Sri Lankan hotel context.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the research, and includes recommendations for practice. The limitations of the study are also explained and suggestions for future research outlined.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of the academic literature on service failure and recovery from a human resource management (HRM) perspective in luxury hotels. The chapter begins with a definition and background information of luxury hotels. Then, service is defined, and service quality discussed, including the measures of service quality. The next section defines service failure in luxury hotels, and is followed by an exploration of the types and areas of service failures. Then service recovery is defined, and recovery theories and strategies reviewed. Human resource management is then defined and its practices explained. Finally, the chapter concludes with the identification of research gaps in the current research, and a summary of the chapter.

2.2 Luxury hotels

2.2.1 Definition of luxury hotels

It is challenging to give a clear and specific definition for luxury, as it is difficult to illustrate what the word “luxury” means (Chu et al., 2016). *Luxury* is defined as an equivocal concept but there tends to be an agreement between academics on the main features of luxury, that is, the identification by others of additional value, a strong link to status, high quality, and limited supply (Harkison et al., 2018b). However, Kucukusta et al. (2014) described a luxury hotel as one having a unique location, extensive space, high-quality food and beverages, cleanliness, attractive nature, high level of privacy for guests, safety, and highly personalised services; this has now been extended to include high quality accommodation, 24-hour room service, valet parking, fine dining, business facilities, and well-trained staff. The luxury hotel industry has evolved as a medium for travellers to imagine and fantasise about other lifestyles (Chu, 2014); therefore the luxury hotel industry is growing rapidly in the global context, due to high consumer demand (Padma & Ahn, 2020).

2.2.2 Luxury hotels in Sri Lanka

Luxury hotels are classified according to various different systems. A hotel classification system is defined as a system that offers an evaluation of quality standards and the provision of tourist accommodation, facilities, and services, usually under five categories,

and often represented in up to five symbols (Narangajavana & Hu, 2008). Hotel classifications in different countries are usually from government or semi-governmental institutions, professional rating companies, or the hotel brands themselves (Cser & Ohuchi, 2008). New Zealand classifies hotels through the Qualmark star-rating system that rates levels of service quality service in hotels (An, 2018). Similarly, China has adopted a star-rating system called the People's Republic of China Tourism Hotel Star Standard, which is used to identify luxury hotels (Zhao, 2018). The widely used systems in the United States of America (USA) are that of the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the Forbes Travel Guide (Chu, 2014). While most countries have adopted a national classification system, some countries have no official classification (Lupu & Nica, 2010), for example, India and Sri Lanka, who have no recognised terms or system for defining luxury hotels. However, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, classifies hotels (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010) according to their facilities and services (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.). Similarly, the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), Government of Sri Lanka, defines luxury hotels according to specific facilities and service that were outlined in a gazette issued by the Government in 2016 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2019a). These different classification methods can lead to confusion for guests and researchers when trying to identify or define luxury hotels.

Tourism and hospitality in Sri Lanka has become in the recent years, an industry that attracts a growing number of international tourist arrivals annually. Arrivals were 244,239 during January 2019, representing a growth of 2.2% on the arrivals in the previous year (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (2019). The development of hotel rooms is also growing rapidly. Hotel development projects increased from 350 in 2018 to 366 in 2019, of which 22 were large hotels with nearly 200 rooms ("Sri Lanka Hotel Pipeline 2019 | Q1," 2019). As the tourist arrivals and the development of luxury hotels in Sri Lanka increase, service standards need to be managed and improved to meet the growing competition in the industry (Gunarathne, 2014). In order to offer high quality service to meet guests' expectations, a well-trained and skilled labour force is required, which has historically been a challenge for the Sri Lankan hotel industry (Kumarasinghe et al., 2019). Related challenges faced by the industry include current problems of poor information about hospitality job opportunities, low waged jobs, temporary or casual jobs, a shortage of training facilities, inadequate private investments and engagement, high labour turnover, and the negative social beliefs about hospitality work (Umasuthan & Park, 2018). Star ratings and classifications have influenced guests' expectations of the

level of hospitality they expect to receive in a hotel, as they believe that if a hotel has a high star rating, a greater standard of hospitality will be offered (Harkison et al., 2018a). Therefore, customer expectations play a significant role in luxury hotels.

2.2.3 Customer expectation of luxury hotel service

Customer expectations are assumptions about service quality that act as standards or criteria by which actual performance is judged (Bhavani & Pawar, 2013). Pizam et al. (2016) identified two reasons for needing to understand customer expectations or requirements: 1) they provide knowledge of how customers interpret service quality, and 2) they promote the development of customer satisfaction questionnaires. Customer satisfaction depends on the level to which the services provided to customers meet their expectations (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012). Harkison et al. (2018b) indicated that customers' expectations of luxury have changed, as customers are more intense and effective in their assessment of luxury experiences because of more engagement in luxury. Luxury hotels are usually known for excellent facilities and services that lead customers to continually demand greater value for money, and higher standards of service and facilities (Presbury et al., 2005). Customer satisfaction derives from service quality, so it is important for luxury hotel providers to focus on delivering quality service that meets guests' expectations (Lu et al., 2015).

2.3 Service

2.3.1 Definition of service

The term "service" comprises definitions from various perspectives. In general, *service* is a type of product that involves actions, benefits, or modes of satisfaction that are for sale and are intangible (Armstrong et al., 2017). In the hospitality industry, *service* refers to the ability of experienced, skilled, and passionate employees to deliver products and services to their internal and external customers in a way that fulfils defined and unknown needs, and eventually leads to positive word of mouth and customer retention (Lucas, 2009). However, this definition does not acknowledge that customer service may not always be satisfactory, potentially leading to negative word of mouth (Hudson & Hudson, 2012). Service can be distinguished according to key characteristics.

2.3.2 Characteristics of service

Service is based on four key characteristics: intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability. Service is considered intangible, because unlike a manufactured product, it cannot be seen, felt, or touched before the purchasing process (Armstrong et al., 2017). The inseparability of service means that service quality and customer satisfaction are reliant on encounters between employees and customers (Hudson & Hudson, 2012), and therefore, service cannot be separated from its provider. *Heterogeneity* in service refers to the idea that service delivery relies on who delivers the service, so maintaining good quality is a challenge, as quality can differ from one individual to another (Armstrong et al., 2017). *Perishability* means that in the hospitality and tourism industry, service cannot be stored and sold later (Armstrong et al., 2017). According to Lovelock and Gummesson (2004), another service characteristic relates to rental/access. This means in a hotel context, that service is “providing temporary possession or access instead of ownership” (Fisk et al., 2014, p.11).

2.4 Service quality

2.4.1 Definition of service quality

Service quality is an ambiguous and theoretical concept that is difficult to define and measure (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011); there are different ways of defining service quality. Service quality is basically the difference between the customers’ expectation of service and the actual experience of the performance (Lu et al. 2015). Service quality for luxury hotels is based on the service’s features that adapt to the organisation’s requirements (Fisk et al., 2014). However, service quality is more usually defined according to the degree to which service delivery meets customers’ expectations (Fisk et al., 2014). Many researchers have identified a relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Amin et al., 2013; Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010; Mola & Jusoh, 2011; Rauch et al., 2015). Service quality generates customer satisfaction, so satisfied customers are likely to return, leading to increased profitability and organisation performance. However, Hoffman and Bateson (2011) argued that these relationships are unclear, as some researcher have stated that service quality derives from perceived service quality, whereas others state that service quality leads to customer satisfaction.

2.4.2 Perception of service quality

Guests' perceptions of service quality are important to luxury hotel providers. The two factors that influence perceptions about service quality are customer expectations and service performance (Singh, 2017). Once a service is purchased, guests tend to compare the quality of its performance against their expectations (Lu et al., 2015) as they are ultimately the judges of quality (Singh, 2017). Service quality can therefore be evaluated by measuring the perceptions and expectations of guests (Tefera & Migiro, 2017). It is important for hotel providers to learn about guests' perception of service quality, as expectations are developed by the guests (Luo & Qu, 2016). According to Kucukusta et al. (2014), employees' opinions on service quality are at a higher level than those of the customers (Dedeoğlu & Demirer, 2015). Even with the superior facilities of luxury hotels, service quality still depends on service delivery that has the objective of satisfying customers (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). The main components of excellent service quality are employee passion, employee honesty, and trustworthiness (Ineson et al., 2011). It is therefore important for hotel managers to provide effective training and support to provide service quality (Lu et al., 2015).

2.4.3 Relationship between service quality and HRM

Service quality and customer satisfaction are connected to employee satisfaction, which in turn involves HRM practices, making service challenging (Vencatachellum & Mathuvirin, 2010). Chand (2010) stated that service quality, customer satisfaction, and hotel performance are connected by HRM practices. Employee perceptions of HRM are similar to customer perceptions of service quality (Tsaur & Lin, 2004). Two particular studies discussed the relationship between HRM practices and service quality (Chand, 2010; Tsaur & Lin, 2004). Chand (2010) investigated HRM practices as antecedents of service quality, customer satisfaction, and organisation performance in the Indian hotel industry. The results suggested it was important to focus on selection, training, development, and pay. Similarly, Tsaur and Lin (2004) explored the relationship between HRM practices, service behaviour, and service quality; the findings suggested focusing on employee selection, training, and compensation. Vencatachellum and Mathuvirin (2010) identified that HRM practices solve issues in hotels; such practices include terms and conditions of employment, recruitment and selection, training, job design, quality management, communication and consultation, and pay systems. Employee performance is evident in their behaviour and attitude when providing services that can lead to

customer satisfaction (Lee et al., 2015). Many researchers identified that different HRM practices are used by hotels to improve service quality and performance (Maroudas et al., 2008; Tsaur & Lin, 2004; Vencatachellum & Mathuvirin, 2010). The broadly accepted HRM techniques that support service quality and performance are training and development, performance appraisal, recruitment and selection, and compensation (Maroudas et al., 2008). Vencatachellum and Mathuvirin (2010) proposed four core HR strategies that lead to service quality: hiring the right people, developing people to deliver service quality, providing the needed support systems, and retaining the best people. Al Khattab and Aldehayyat (2011) measured hotel service quality performance in Jordanian hotels. The results showed that of the five dimensions of service quality, the least used dimension was that of empathy, which refers to the personalised attention given to a customer's requirement, which ranked lowest; this perhaps explains why hotel providers need to focus mostly on employee issues to improve service quality. Vencatachellum and Mathuvirin (2010) investigated which HRM practices in Mauritian hotels were customer service oriented. Their study examined the service gap model, which highlights the gap between customer expectation and actual performance of service. The findings showed that human resources problems lead to delivery gaps (gap 3), caused by employees not delivering the required standard of service quality (Vencatachellum & Mathuvirin, 2010). It is therefore important to examine the dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL model) and service gap models.

2.4.4 Service quality models

Service quality is conceptualised and measured in several models (Mola & Jusoh, 2011). The commonly used model is the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) to assess customer perceptions of service quality in service that are widely accepted. Parasuraman et al. (1985) also contributed the conceptual model of service quality called the "Gaps model."

I. SERVQUAL model

The most commonly used framework in most studies for measuring service quality is SERVQUAL (Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011; Al-Rousan et al., 2010; Mola & Jusoh, 2011). Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed SERVQUAL to measure customer perceptions of service quality using five dimensions: "tangibles," "reliability," "assurance," "responsiveness," and "empathy." *Tangibles* refers to the presence of the

physical facilities and the overall quality of the resources used by the service provider (Rauch et al., 2015b). *Reliability* is the dependability and consistency of the service provider's performance (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011), and *assurance* refers to the level of trust and confidence delivered to customers (Rauch et al., 2015b). *Responsiveness* is the willingness of employees to assist guests and provide excellent service (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011), and *empathy* is the customised attention provided to guests in response to understanding their requirements (Rauch et al., 2015b).

Along with these key dimensions, Parasuraman et al. (1988) designed a SERVQUAL measurement scale to measure service quality (Fisk et al., 2014). The scale comprises two parts of questions. The first part consists of 22 questions that capture the customer's expectations of service (E), and the second part consists of another 22 questions used to evaluate customer perceptions of performance (P) as related to the five dimensions (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). A positive gap score indicates that perceptions exceed expectation, leading to customer satisfaction, and a negative gap score means that perceptions are less than expected, leading to customer dissatisfaction. Equal to zero scores indicate that perceptions have met expectations (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). Al-Rousan et al. (2010) examined the impact of service quality dimensions in Jordanian five-star hotels. The results suggested that assurance is the best predictor of service quality (Al-Rousan et al., 2010). Similarly, Mola and Jusoh (2011) investigated and measured service quality in Penang (Malaysia) hotels. The results showed that when negative scores exceed positive scores, perceptions are less than expectations (Mola & Jusoh, 2011). The SERVQUAL measurement scale is useful for luxury hotel managers to use to improve service quality and understand the factors that impact on customer satisfaction, expectations and perceptions (Mola & Jusoh, 2011).

II. Service gap model

Service quality can be investigated according to five gaps that can be used to improve service quality performance (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed the service gap model to identify the gap between perception and expectations. The five gaps are: "knowledge gap" (Gap 1), "standard gap" (Gap 2), "delivery gap" (Gap 3), "communication gap" (Gap 4), and "service gap" (Gap 5) (Mazumder & Hasan, 2014).

The *knowledge gap (Gap 1)* refers to the inconsistency between customer expectations and management's perceptions of those expectation (Blesic et al., 2011). This gap appears

through mistakes in the process of extracting information about customers' requirements (Fisk et al., 2014). It is caused by poor management skills, if the customers' expectations are not understood effectively (Singh, 2017). The *standard gap (G2)* refers to the inconsistency between management's understanding of customer expectations and specifications of service quality (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). This gap can occur due to a lack of resources or poor engagement from management, with the customer oriented approach (Fisk et al., 2014). Having a *delivery gap (Gap 3)* means there is inconsistency between service quality specifications and the delivery of the service (Mazumder & Hasan, 2014). This can happen due to a failure in employees, or in service equipment, in the process of service delivery (Fisk et al., 2014). Therefore, poor HRM practices, weak interest, and poor team work can lead to Gap 3 (Singh, 2017).

The *communication gap (Gap 4)* refers to the inconsistency between the service delivered and the service provider's external communication given to customers (Blesic et al., 2011). This occurs when the hotel promises impossible services through external marketing advertisements and poor communication (Singh, 2017). Finally, a *service gap (Gap 5)* is the inconsistency between customer expectations and their perceptions of service performance (Mazumder & Hasan, 2014). This gap consists of the other four gaps, resulting in customer dissatisfaction (Fisk et al., 2014). The gap model tends to provide luxury hotel managers with a visible view of the service quality delivered and helps them understand guests' expectations and requirements for improving service delivery in an attempt to avoid service failure (Singh, 2017).

2.5 Service failure

2.5.1 Definitions of service failure

Many researchers have studied the concept of service failure in the hotel industry (e.g. Koc, 2019; Lee et al., 2011; Letsa & Asimah, 2018; Loo et al., 2013; Susskind & Vicari, 2011). *Service failure* refers to moments or times when a service fails to meet customer expectations in terms of service quality (Lesa & Asimah, 2018). According to La and Choi (2012), service failure is considered a deficiency or problem area within an organisation, and the ultimate test of an organisation's focus on the quality of service, is how it reacts to service failure (La & Choi, 2012). Service failure results in customer dissatisfaction, reducing customer confidence in hotel services, causing negative word of mouth responses, decreased return customers, and declines in revenue (Suprpto &

Hashym, 2010). Service failure creates opportunities to identify the level of performance and ways to improve service quality and service recovery (Susskind & Viccari, 2011). Therefore, managing service failure is important for improving guest loyalty through customer satisfaction, and positive word of mouth responses (Nwokorie, 2016). Hotel guests pay more for luxury hotel service, and as a result, their expectations of service are set high, potentially leading to service failure if these are not met (Loo & Leung, 2018).

2.5.2 Types and areas of service failure

The most severe type of service failure happens in the case of key service failure, and impacts the most important benefits (Kozub et al., 2014). The two types of service failures in the hotel industry are outcome failure and process failure (Fu et al., 2015). *Outcome failure* refers to the failure connected with the service product, or failure to perform the core service (Lee, 2018). This can result in a loss of economic resources (Li et al., 2016). An example of outcome failure occurs when a guest with a hotel reservation is unable to use the room due to overbooking (Lee et al., 2011). *Process failure* refers to when the delivery of the service is flawed and deficient (Lee, 2018), which can lead to a loss of social resources (Fu et al., 2015). An example of process failure occurs when a front desk agent is rude to a guest during the check-in process (Lee et al., 2011). HRM practice can therefore be implemented to recover from a process failure. Human resource management practices deliver positive outcomes on employee performance that lead to customer satisfaction and improvement of organisational performance (Chand, 2010).

Service failure can occur in several areas in luxury hotels (Fu et al., 2015). Lee et al. (2011) clustered service failure and recovery actions together in the hotel industry. Their results showed that most service failure areas were in guest arrivals and departures, room amenities, food services, variety of choices, service personnel, banquet services, general food and beverage services, and communication. Suprpto and Hashym (2010) analysed service recovery strategies and the impacts of these strategies. They concluded that most critical incidents of service failure are related to slow check-in/out, rooms not being clean, unfriendly and unhelpful receptionists, room facilities not working or not available, bathroom items missing or not available, slow or unreliable room service, and difficulties with the room keys. Au et al. (2014) analysed online customer complaints about hotels in mainland China and examined the relationship between culture and other factors that influence complaints. Their results showed that most complaints were about service quality, and related to unprofessional service staff, and inefficient service, poor attitudes,

unhelpful staff, poor communication, a lack of confidence in the services, a lack of knowledge, language barrier, and a lack of enthusiasm (Au et al., 2014); all these can be considered as process failures.

Kozub et al. (2014) investigated the service recovery experience in luxury hotels. They found that 45.6% of guests experienced service failures through front office employees, and nearly 25% said that service failure was associated with the check-in/check-out process. Finally, Ekiz et al. (2012) investigated complaints reviewed by guests who stayed in luxury hotels in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). The study results suggested that the highest numbers of complaints were about rooms, and staff, including staff being rude, and lacking knowledge. The studies suggest that service failures occur due to high interactions between guests and employees in the service delivery process (Lu et al., 2015). Therefore, service recovery acts as an effective tool in improving the service quality.

2.6 Service recovery

2.6.1 Definition of service recovery

It is a challenge for luxury hotels to avoid service failure, so they invest time and resources to recover from failures (Lee, 2018). *Service recovery* is defined as the actions implemented to diminish or repair the loss caused to a customer from a service failure during service delivery. Ford et al. (2012) suggested using Michel et al.'s (2009) definition of service recovery, even though it was created some time ago. *Service recovery* is also defined as the effective actions an organisation can implement to re-build customer satisfaction and loyalty after a service failure, to provide learning and process improvement from the failure, and to improve and compensate employees for better performance. According to Liat et al. (2017), service recovery is considered critical for the success of an organisation, and therefore, it should be included in the organisation's culture. Service recovery comprises economic recovery and psychological recovery (Tang et al., 2018). *Economic recovery* refers to a social exchange made to recover the failure, such as giving coupons and discounts, and *psychological recovery* refers to the emotional implementation of recovery such as communication, and an apology (Tang et al., 2018). The outcomes of service recovery are customer recovery, process recovery and employee recovery (Ford et al., 2012). *Customer recovery* refers to re-establishing customer satisfaction and loyalty following a failure, *process recovery* is the development and improvement of service, and *employee recovery* refers to training and improvement

of the performance and effectiveness of the employees (Johnston & Michel, 2008a). Therefore, service recovery can be effective when luxury hotels focus on employee recovery, because of the high level of interaction with guests.

2.6.2 Importance of service recovery

Effective service recovery is a crucial and important element to focus on in luxury hotels. Many scholars have observed that service recovery efforts deliver positive attributes to the luxury hotels following a failure (e.g. Cheng et al., 2019; Lee, 2018; Liat et al., 2017; Nwokorie, 2016; Suprpto & Hashym, 2010). Service recovery improves customers' perceptions of service quality, provides positive word of mouth responses, increases customer satisfaction, creates relationship with customers, and increases loyalty (Nwokorie, 2016). However, it is argued that the success of recovery will differ according to the type of failure and speed of recovery, which can affect guest satisfaction if recovery efforts are poor (Suprpto & Hashym, 2010). Customer expectations are commonly set high before the process of purchasing, and also occur during the recovery stage after a service failure (Hazée et al., 2017). Therefore, implementing a recovery period for guests will help guests be more responsive, and their understanding will raise the effectiveness of the strategy, reduce recovery costs (Tang et al., 2018). Hassan et al. (2014) suggested a service recovery system for hotels that satisfies customers in attempts to solve their problems, ensuring satisfaction during the recovery process, which could include improving complaints management, response speed, offering rewards, or improving staff skills (Hassan et al., 2014).

2.6.3 Service recovery strategies in luxury hotels

Service recovery strategies need to be effectively implemented, as customer expectations of recovery are greater than before the service failure experience (Lee, 2018). According to Suprpto and Hashym (2010), the elements that influence the effectiveness of recovery strategies, are the type of service that failed, its purpose, the type of failure, past experiences of service, and expectations of the service recovery process. Researchers have studied various recovery strategies implemented by hotel providers to develop customer loyalty (e.g. Lee et al., 2011; Nwokorie, 2016; Suprpto & Hashym, 2010). Suprpto and Hashym (2010) analysed service recovery strategies and the impact of the strategies on customer satisfaction. The results identified three strategies that are commonly used: make an apology, compensate, and speed up the recovery. Lee et al.

(2011) clustered service failures and recovery strategies in hotels and identified compensation, upgrade, explanation, apology, and passive reactions as some of the strategies used. Finally, Liat et al. (2017) investigated the influence of service quality and service recovery on satisfaction and customer loyalty. Their results identified service recovery strategies from an HRM perspective, noting that luxury hotels are required to offer training programmes to employees in delivering service and improving performance, as the employee are known to handle guest complaints (Liat et al., 2017). Another study identified some service recovery strategies based on HRM aspects that focused on the Sri Lankan hotel industry. Hewagama et al. (2019) explored the notion that HRM in hotels enhances service recovery performance and job satisfaction through employee empowerment. Their results showed that training is an important element for employees in service recovery performance, but empowerment can be mishandled by employees in luxury hotels (Hewagama et al., 2019). Nwokorie (2016) investigated service recovery strategies and its impact on customer loyalty in luxury hotels. The results focused on customer recovery strategies such as relationship marketing, apologies, assistance, and compensation, as well as on employee strategies that involved developing training programmes. Service recovery strategies tend to have an influence on employees and improving the process of service overall (Schumacher & Komppula, 2016).

2.7 Human resource management (HRM)

Human resource management practices have a significant influence on the performance of businesses such as luxury hotels, through employee development and behaviour. A definition of *HRM* is therefore stated next, along with a discussion of HRM practices in relation to service recovery in luxury hotels.

2.7.1 Definitions of human resource management

Human resource management can be difficult to define, as definitions differ depending on the approach, which can be from a personnel management, strategic management, or human resources perspective (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2005). *Human resource management* refers to a group of activities or procedures in relation to maintaining people within an organisation (Stone, 2011); this definition is generally accepted in the hotel and tourism industry. However, Boella and Goss-Turner (2005) defined *HRM* as “a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an

integrated array of cultural, structural, and personnel techniques” (p. 23). This indicates that there is a challenge inherent in HRM in relation to recruiting, rewarding performance, compensating, and motivating employees, in order to gain competitive advantage (Marco-Lajara & Úbeda-García, 2013). According to Nickson (2007), there are two approaches to HRM, namely hard and soft versions. *Hard* versions focus on economic, rational approaches to HRM (Marco-Lajara & Úbeda-García, 2013) as the strategies are followed to gain competitive advantage, and maximise labour costs (Nickson, 2007). The *soft* version is more focused on humanism and an enriching approach, which is likely to reflect an organisation’s high level of commitment to its employees (Nickson, 2007). The hard version is focused on recruitment, training and motivation for competitive advantage (Marco-Lajara & Úbeda-García, 2013). According to Schumacher and Komppula (2016), commitment to long term relationship with customers and the service improvement of employees is required for effective service recovery.

Human resource management practices are systems that attract, improve, motivate, and retain employees in order to secure the performance of an organisation and its employees (Otoo, 2019). Chand (2010) investigated the impact of HRM practices on service quality, customer satisfaction, and performance in hotels. The results suggested that HRM practices in hotels lead to developing quality service, and similarly, quality service delivers positive relationships between HRM and organisational performance (Chand, 2010) by developing employee skills, motivation and plans of work (Otoo, 2019). According to Nickson (2007), the HRM practices used are recruitment and selection, retention, teamwork, training and development, appraisal, reward, job security, and employee relations management generally. However, research supports the notion that recruitment and selection, training, and empowerment influence service recovery (Hewagama et al., 2019; Mohd & Mohd, 2019; Schumacher & Komppula, 2016; Tsaor & Lin, 2004; Vencatachellum & Mathuvirin, 2010).

2.7.2 Most important HRM practices for improving service quality

I. Recruitment and selection

Recruitment and selection involves searching for and attracting accomplished applicants and choosing an appropriate candidate for an available vacancy. The recruitment process provides information about a job or candidate through job analyses, job descriptions and person specifications (Nickson, 2007), for internal and external recruitment (Boella &

Goss-Turner, 2005). From a service recovery perspective, it is more effective to recruit internally, as internal employees are already aware of the service structure (Stone, 2011); internal recruitment is therefore an effective HRM strategy for service recovery.

It is important to hire the right people in order to deliver quality service and recover from service failures (Vencatachellum & Mathuvirin, 2010). According to Nickson (2007), the right candidate can be selected using the person specification model by Munro Fraser (1954), namely, the fivefold grading system of *impact on others* (appearance, speech, behaviour), *acquired qualifications* (education, experience, training), *innate abilities* (willingness to learn, quickness of comprehension), *motivation* (goal-orientation, consistency, determination) and *adjustment* (stability, ability to handle stress, ability to deal to customers). However, luxury hotel organisations seek candidates with good personalities and customer interaction skills for the delivery of high quality service (Nickson, 2007).

II. Training

Scholars have suggested that training is widely used in luxury hotels to improve employee performance and quality of service (e.g. Chand, 2010; Dhar, 2015; Mohd & Mohd, 2019; Nwokorie, 2016). *Training* is a group of activities that educates employees in the ways of performing a job or task best (Stone, 2011). Training has a significant influence on service recovery performance (Karatepe et al., 2014; Mohd Zahari, 2019). Effective training programmes lead to an impact on service recovery and service quality, as they are based on improving the skills and attitudes of employees (Koc, 2017). According to Ford et al. (2012), the five principles of training that influence service recovery are developing skills and knowledge, effective teaching, formal learning, multiple learning methods, and looking for continuous improvement. Generally, luxury hotels adopt effective training methods such as external training, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and cross-functional training (Ford et al., 2012), to develop effective recovery strategies. Well trained employees are able to manage failures or difficult situations (Norhamizan et al., 2018). However, according to Yao et al. (2019), error management training (EMT) focuses on improving performance after training. Error management training accepts that errors made by employees cannot be avoided, and focuses on how to handle the errors and their outcomes (Guchait et al., 2016a). Error management training helps to manage errors in an organisation (Yao et al., 2019) and involves “communicating about errors, sharing error knowledge, helping error situations, and quickly identifying and handling

errors” (Guchait et al., 2016a, p. 4). However, Guchait et al. (2015) found in terms of employee behaviour in service failure and recoveries, that many hotels adopt an appropriate approach for quick learning and handling errors, as this creates opportunities for employees to learn from errors or failures.

III. Employee development and empowerment

Many researchers have suggested that empowerment has a direct influence on service recovery performance (e.g. Hewagama et al., 2019; Mohd Zahari, 2019; Wamuyu et al., 2015; Zhang & Geng, 2019). According to Kazlauskaite et al. (2012), empowerment is a widely studied HRM practice but consists of different constructs, as it can be viewed as an HRM practice, employee perception, motivational tool, or a cognitive state. *Empowerment* is the privilege and the opportunity to make decisions and commitments that lead to high service quality (Zhang & Geng, 2019). It is important to have an effective combination of both empowerment and training in service recovery strategies, as employees can manage service failures through the immediate decisions they make (Wamuyu et al., 2015). Empowerment supports service quality and customer satisfaction mainly for service recovery, customer care, service culture and relationship marketing (Klidas et al., 2007). Hewagama et al. (2019) investigated the argument that HRM enhances service recovery performance and job satisfaction through empowerment to react to service failure in Sri Lankan hotels. Their results suggested that empowerment can be used to address service failures, but can be overused or misused by employee, which may lead to more issues (Hewagama et al., 2019). Zhang & Geng (2019) investigated how empowerment guides the actions of frontline employees in service recovery situations. The results showed a positive relationship between empowerment and service recovery by directly enhancing job engagement (Zhang & Geng, 2019).

2.8 Summary

This chapter reviewed academic literature on service failure and service recovery from an HRM perspective in luxury hotels. The chapter began by discussing the concepts of luxury hotels and service in luxury hotels. Previous studies on service quality, service failure and service recovery were discussed. Finally, the chapter focused on relevant information about HRM and its practices. There is limited information in previous studies on service recovery from an HRM perspective, in luxury hotels in Sri Lanka. Studies were reviewed on service failure areas, service recovery strategies in luxury hotels. As more

information is required on this aspect, this study investigates the areas of service failure and service recovery from an HRM perspective. Understanding the areas of service failure will encourage managers to identify important strategies. Human resource management practices have a significant role in service recovery for effective performance and service delivery. If the service delivery does not meet the expectations of guests, customer dissatisfaction is inevitable. Dissatisfied customers tend to spread word of their negative experiences in luxury hotels, engaging with online platforms such as TripAdvisor to disseminate stories of their experiences. The next chapter details the methodology and methods used to investigate the service failure in the Sri Lankan luxury hotels.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the interpretative qualitative methodology used in the study. Firstly, the chapter begins with presenting the research aims and questions. It then explains the research philosophy and the research paradigm, and the methods used for sample selection and data collection. The explanation of the thematic data analysis process is stated, and the chapter concludes with a summary.

3.2 Research objectives and questions

The aim of this study was to explore the most common areas of service failure in Sri Lankan luxury hotels and resorts, and recommend appropriate strategies for service recovery through HRM. To achieve this aim of the study, two research questions were established:

Question 1: What are the most common service failure areas in Sri Lankan luxury hotels?

Question 2: From a human resource management perspective, what are appropriate service recovery strategies for Sri Lankan luxury hotels and resorts?

3.3 Research philosophy

An interpretivist paradigm was used for the study. A *research paradigm* is an “established model or pattern as an organising framework, a broader philosophical position concerned to the nature of social phenomena and social structures” (Feilzer, 2010, p. 7). The research paradigm assists the researcher to determine appropriate research questions and methods, and the type of results sought (Jarvie & Zamora-Bonilla, 2011). Blaikie and Priest (2017) argued that paradigms are important for researchers and understanding research paradigms helps a researcher identify the appropriate methodology for the research (Gray, 2014). The paradigm chosen for the study was the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm was considered suitable, as it does not seek one objective truth, but accepts that there are multiple realities depending on the reasons, motives, and experiences of different individuals (Taneja et al., 2011).

The important features of a research paradigm are its ontology, epistemology, and methodological assumptions. *Ontology* refers to the assumptions or the individual's views of the nature of reality (Booyesen et al., 2018). *Epistemology* is the nature of knowledge, what comprises acceptable, valid, and appropriate knowledge, and the ways of exchanging the knowledge with others (Saunders et al., 2019). Finally, *methodology* refers to the science of research methods and the justification of the methods used (Booyesen et al., 2018). Ontological assumptions form the way the researcher sees and studies the research objects, and epistemological assumptions direct them to the methods to be used. (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.3.1 Research paradigm

Each paradigm is established on its own ontological and epistemological assumptions (Scotland, 2012). The interpretivist paradigm focuses on an individual's actions and subjective beliefs (Booyesen et al., 2018). The objective of interpretivist research is to provide unique, deep understandings, and analyses of individuals and their context (Saunders et al., 2019). The interpretivist paradigm is frequently used with a qualitative methodology that includes interpretative descriptive research (Gray, 2014). It provides insights and understandings of behaviours, interprets actions of the individuals, and explores their experiences and views (Scotland, 2012). In accordance with this approach, this research interpreted different guests' perceptions of their experiences in luxury hotels and resorts.

3.4 Qualitative research methodology

The most common way to describe research is according to whether it uses a quantitative or qualitative approach (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). This study adopted a qualitative methodological approach as it is compatible with the interpretivist paradigm. *Qualitative research* is the analysis of subjective meanings, or the social production of data on activities that is collected, by analysing texts, and images (Flick, 2018). A qualitative researcher investigates data in a "natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 28). Qualitative research highlights words rather than numbers in the process of data collection (Bryman, 2012). Qualitative research is mostly combined with an interpretative philosophy as researchers must consider the subjective and socially constructed meanings conveyed regarding the phenomena of their study (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, this

study sought to understand and illustrate guests' experiences in luxury hotels and resorts through interpreting their reviews of luxury hotel stays in Sri Lanka. In contrast, the quantitative research approach emphasises numerical data in the collection and analysis process (Bryman, 2012). It examines the relationships between variables, and their causes and effects are measured numerically frequently using statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, a quantitative research approach was considered inappropriate for this research, as the study did not set out to compare relationships or generate numerical data.

3.5 Research methods

Research methods are the sets of procedures, tools, and techniques used to collect and analyse data (Scotland, 2012). In this study, data collection was through secondary data from TripAdvisor guests' reviews. TripAdvisor is a large and popular online platform for international travellers to share experiences through reviews and ratings (Cordato, 2014). The sampling method used in the study was convenience sampling, in the reviews were chosen as according to specific criteria. The data analysis was the thematic analysis method.

3.5.1 Data collection

Secondary data can be both quantitative and qualitative (Saunders et al., 2019). Secondary data are those that were already collected for a different purpose, and are available through government publications, websites, books, journal articles, annual reports, and internal records (Ajayi, 2017). Secondary data are easily accessible, which leads to less costs, and saves time (Clow & James, 2013). Among the classifications of secondary data, are document data that are encountered physically (and digitally) such as texts, audio, and visual media (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, document secondary data were appropriate for this study, as the study sought to interpret textual reviews.

The TripAdvisor website comprises rich detailed information through reviews, and manages its reputation well, in relation to false reviews. (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019). It consists of travellers' information about accommodations, airlines, restaurants, and cruises, in order to support future travelers in making their travel decision (Khorsand et al., 2020). Reviews are easily accessible, valid, and reliable information about travellers' experiences, opinions, preferences, satisfaction, and

dissatisfaction (Stoleriu et al., 2019). The reviews convey factors and perceptions of guests' experiences, including negative guest reviews on luxury hotels.

3.5.2 Population and sampling

A population is a full set of cases or components from which a sample is taken (Saunders et al., 2019). Sampling from a population is therefore more practical than using an entire population, and the data are collected faster with lower cost (Turner, 2020). According to Saunders et al. (2019), when a sample is chosen for study, it needs to represent the population, in a practically accessible form and that can be explained in relation to solving the research question and meeting the research objective. In this research, the population was all the luxury hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka. According to the Sri Lankan Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) (Open Data Portal - Sri Lanka, n.d), there were 20 five-star luxury hotels and resorts at the time of the study. However, collecting data from an entire population of 20 luxury hotels would have been difficult for the researcher, being time consuming, so it was decided to select a representative sample for the study.

A sample is a part of the population that was chosen for the research (Bryman, 2012). There are two categorises of sampling techniques: probability and non-probability (Saunders et al., 2019). Non-probability sampling techniques are mostly used in qualitative research. *Non-probability sampling techniques* refers to the probability that the components selected from the population are not known or equal (Turner, 2020). This study used a convenience sampling technique to collect data from TripAdvisor reviews posted about guests' experiences of luxury hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka, that were easily available, and convenient to access (see Bryman, 2012). Etikan et al. (2016) explained that convenience sampling chooses the components that meet a selected criterion. In this study, the sample was selected based on the following criteria:

- Sri Lanka lacks a star classification system. However, the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) provides the five classifications of hotels that are generally accepted. Therefore, the sample included only those hotels classified by ICTA as five-star luxury hotels.
- A pilot study conducted prior to the main data collection showed that five-star luxury hotels with more than 350 accommodation rooms generated more reviews, so hotels with more than 250 rooms was used as a criterion.

- Hotels reviewed on TripAdvisor needed five negative reviews in order to provide sufficient data for the sample. There were five categories of guests' ratings: "excellent," "very good," "average," "poor," and "terrible." The reviews included in the sample were listed under "poor" and "terrible" as these expressed dissatisfaction, potentially due to service failures.
- Only negative reviews posted between January 2019 to January 2020 were collected. In the pilot study, different time intervals were checked (3, 6, and 12 months) for whether they provided an adequate number of reviews (more than 50 negative reviews) for analysis. There were 60 reviews posted between January 2019 to January 2020. This was considered a suitable minimum number of reviews to generate adequate data.

Four luxury hotels met the sample. These hotels formed the sample for this research, from which 60 negative reviews were collected (see Table 1).

Table 1

Sample of Four Luxury Hotels in Sri Lanka

| Hotel or Resort | Region | Grade | Rooms | Types of guests | Restaurants/ Bars/ Cafes | Negative Reviews |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Cinnamon Grand Hotel | Colombo | 5 | 501 | Family Friends Business | 13 | 20 |
| Cinnamon Lakeside | Colombo | 5 | 352 | Business Family | 8 | 19 |
| Hilton Hotel | Colombo | 5 | 382 | Solo Business Friends | 6 | 7 |
| RIU Hotel | Galle | 5 | 501 | Friends Family Solo | 9 | 14 |
| | | | | | TOTAL REVIEWS | 60 |

The above data collection methods are used to gather data in order to address research question one. Once the findings are gathered, it is then examined in relation to the

literature review in order suggest recommendation on service recovery strategies on HRM perspective.

3.5.3 Data analysis method

This study used thematic analysis to analyse the chosen sample of reviews from TripAdvisor. Thematic analysis is one of the more common methods of qualitative data analysis and is compatible with the interpretivist paradigm (Bryman, 2012). Scharp and Sanders (2019) defined thematic analysis as the process of “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data” (p.117). It is systematic yet flexible and easy to use when analysing qualitative data (Joffe, 2011). This method is used on large as well as small data sets, and leads to rich and detailed descriptions of data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). In thematic analysis, the qualitative data are coded in order to identify themes related to the research question as it is the case in this study (Saunders et al., 2019). In this study, the researcher sought common themes in service failures related to HRM.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps process were used to guide the thematic analysis in this study. The process of analysing the reviews from TripAdvisor using these six steps is explained in the next section.

3.5.3.1 Data analysis process

The thematic data analysis process consisted of six steps, following Braun and Clarke (2006).

Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data

The first step requires the researcher to fully engage with collecting and reading the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research, a pilot study was carried out, in which all the reviews were read, in order to find the negative reviews. The researcher became familiar with the data through the process of deciding which were negative and which were positive reviews. This step involved repeated readings of the sample of 60 negative reviews.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Once the researcher was familiar with the data, ideas and the perceptions were listed in appropriate categories in line with Braun and Clarke's process. This step involved

generating initial codes that were related to answering the research questions. For example, a review that expressed a poor experience in food preparation was coded as *food and beverage*. As the text was reviewed, the common areas of service failures emerged and were coded. The initial codes were related to separate departments, for example, *food and beverage*, and *front office* departments.

Step 3: Searching for themes

This step involved grouping and sorting the codes into potential themes related to the type of guest complaint. The themes that emerged were related to sources of service failure, for example, *poor and slow service, unhelpful or inefficient staff, staff attitude, poor food quality, food not available, lack of amenities, cleanliness, old structure, interior too old, and air conditioning issues*.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Once all the reviews had been sorted into the appropriate themes, the themes were then refined. This step involves checking to ensure the themes support the codes and the entire data sets. The themes were *inefficient service, unprofessional staff attitudes, poor food quality, technical errors, poor room quality, poor room management, mechanical issues, and a lack of cleanliness*.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

After the themes had been finalised, the data were categorised into the themes. All the reviews provided enough support for each theme and the research questions. The themes that were identified emerged from the data and were related to the literature review conducted earlier.

Step 6: Producing the results

In order to address the research questions, the findings were presented. Illustrative quotes from the guests' reviews were presented with pseudonyms in order to protect the identities of the guests. The findings provided the foundation for later addressing the research question on the most appropriate HRM strategies for service recovery (see Chapter four).

3.6 Trustworthiness

It is important that a researcher produces trustworthy research results, as qualitative studies are based on assumptions about reality that are different from those in quantitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In order to establish what is trustworthy research, Pringle and Booysen (2018) recommended using the following four factors: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. *Credibility* and *confirmability* refer to the truth of the participants' views and the way the researcher represents this in the research (Booyesen et al., 2018). This chapter provided a detailed description of how data collection and analysis proceeded to show how the reviews are analysed in this study to interpret the views of the guests who stayed in luxury hotels. *Dependability* is concerned with the constancy of results (Sinkovics et al., 2008). In this study, a thematic analysis was conducted, in which the codes and themes were generated, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps. The coding and theme description were checked by the researcher's supervisor to see if they accurately represented the participants' views. Finally, *transferability* refers to how the findings can be applied to others relevant settings (Booyesen et al., 2018). It would be difficult to transfer the findings from this study, as it is a small-scale study, however, it may give useful insights into service failure in similar environments.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This study did not require ethics approval as secondary data were used to generate findings. Ethical issues may arise if the researcher has direct contact with participants (Babbie, 2013). This study did not require ethics approval as secondary data were used, so there was no contact with participants. However, to protect the identity of individuals who posted comments on Trip Advisor, the names of contributors and the hotels' identities were changed.

3.8 Summary

This chapter discussed the research philosophy, methodology, and methods used in the research. An interpretivist paradigm was used for the study. The research adopted a qualitative research approach. Data were collected from TripAdvisor negative guest reviews as secondary data. The data were collected through a convenience sampling technique. The sample consisted of four luxury hotels and resorts that had received 60

negative reviews within a year. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Chapter four presents and discusses the findings from the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Service failure in the Sri Lankan hotel industry is considered a major issue due to the lack of human resources development and training. This chapter introduces the significant findings that emerged from the data analysis. The chapter consists of two main parts. The first part of the chapter presents the principal areas of service failure in Sri Lankan luxury hotels and the causes for the failure. These were: food and beverage, front office, ancillary services, housekeeping, and facility maintenance. The findings are supported by relevant quotes from the 60 guest reviews. The second part of the chapter presents appropriate service recovery strategies for Sri Lankan luxury hotels from an HRM perspective, based on the findings presented in part one.

4.2 Service failures in luxury hotels by department

The findings revealed the sources of complaints focused on six specific hotel departments: food and beverage, front office, ancillary services, housekeeping, facility maintenance, and security. The department with the least guest complaints was security, which produced just 3.3% of the complaints in the study. The findings of each department are presented in order of the number of most complaints received, starting with the department that received the most – food and beverage.

4.2.1 Food and beverage

The majority of complaints were concerned with the food and beverage department, and formed 42.9% of the total number of guest complaints. The main influences on guest dissatisfaction were poor quality food (41%), inefficient service (38.5%), and unprofessional staff attitudes (20.5%). The causes for the service failure are presented next.

4.2.1.1 Poor quality food

Most complaints were about poor quality food. Guests were dissatisfied due to what they considered inedible food, poor standards, contamination, unsatisfactory portion size, and insufficient food. Reviews addressed a variety of problems, as revealed in the following quotes.

A Bolognese sauce at one hotel was not prepared to the guest's previous experiences at other luxury hotels, and revealed a lack of professionalism in food preparations.

The food is mediocre. I ordered room service and the pasta tasted awful, and the Bolognese sauce has nothing to do with the Bolognese and everything to do with horrible food. (Molly – Jan 2019, Hotel D)

Another repeat guest believed that the service standard had fallen from what it used to be. Service recovery could be improved with effective training.

...the food quality isn't as good as it used to be and there's no variety for the main menu, or it's the same variety of food repeatedly. (Allen – Jun 2019, Hotel B)

One serious complaint was received about food poisoning symptoms. This type of serious complaint results in more immediate negative impacts compared to those from less serious complaints in reviews.

Food was ordinary...we all had stomach problems the next day. (Saman – Sep 2019, Hotel B)

Service failures could be reduced by providing more menu choices, better quality and more nutritious food, and attractively presented food served at the right temperature.

Inefficient service

Complaints also showed that guests were dissatisfied because of late service, refused meal request, forgotten cutlery, and incorrect orders. Dissatisfied guests mentioned several different service problems. Service delays caused by waiters created a negative dining experience for one guest.

It took about 30 minutes for them to bring a baby chair and that we had to remind them. Cutlery wasn't on the table (Jessica – Jan 2019, Hotel A)

Another guest experiencing poor service from a waiter revealed a lack of attention in delivering the service expected.

The waiter messed up the order...no water refill – serving the bill took ages. (Trylar – Feb 2019, Hotel A)

When customers were frequently confronted with service failures, the responses of the hotels' management indicated a lack of accountability or genuine wish to improve. On

most occasions, guest complaints or comments were ignored, which suggests that staff lacked the capability or skills to satisfactorily resolve customer complaints.

4.2.1.2 Unprofessional staff attitudes

Guest reviews indicated that unprofessional staff attitudes led to guest dissatisfaction with the dining experience. Guests complained about rude staff, inefficient staff, and a lack of professionalism. One guest described unacceptable communication with a manager that made the guest feel uncomfortable and showed a lack of professionalism.

We had couple of glares from an older manager and then a young manager...the younger manager barges in and tells us that the room is only for 4 people and the furniture cannot be changed... When the manager said "next time you come you can't change things around," it was said not only in a rude tone, but it's safe to say there won't be a next time for us. (Chantel – Aug 2019, Hotel C)

Another guest felt that the waiters were not attentive to their needs or requests. This guest revealed that foreign guests received more attention than the locals, showing a poor staff attitude. More specifically, the term "rude" was often used by guests to describe negative responses from some staff in the luxury hotels. A possible reason for this was poor recruitment and selection processes, or a lack of training resulting in demotivated staff.

In the restaurant also, we had the worst response from the waiters. Most of them were focusing to serve foreign guests but were not paying enough attention towards local guests, including us. (Nathan – Dec 2019, Hotel A)

4.2.2 Front office

The second largest number of complaints was about the front office department, and formed 24.2% of all complaints. The main influences on guest dissatisfaction were inefficient service (54.5%), unprofessional staff attitude (35.4%), and technical failures (9.1%). The reasons for the service failure are overviewed next.

4.2.2.1 Inefficient service

Many of the guest complaints mentioned substandard service. Guests were disappointed with slow check-ins and check-outs, failure to deliver baggage, and incorrect billing. Poor service led some guests to make negative comparisons with previous experiences at other luxury hotels.

We came back to room then the hotel didn't deliver our luggage to our room at all, they still left it at the lobby, after waiting so long for the luggage, we came to the lobby but the luggage was still there. (Lucas – Jan 2019, Hotel D)

One guest felt upset that the duration of service delivery was so long. Efficient and timely delivery as well as effective responses to problems are important elements of service quality, and guests' needs must be met, even when the hotel is busy. The majority of guests wrote that excellent service increased their perceptions of the value received for the premium they had paid to stay at a luxury hotel.

My booking was not available in the system. They made me wait for almost 2 hours to check in and requested me to pay directly. (Kevin – Feb 2020, Hotel D)

4.2.2.2 Unprofessional staff attitudes

Unprofessional staff attitudes were expressed in reviews in relation to unfriendly and unhelpful receptionists, a lack of knowledge, poor attitude, language barriers, and a lack of enthusiasm. The welcoming process from the frontline staff was considered unacceptable by guests when compared to other luxury hotel staff interactions.

Front Desk Staff name Ben has been nothing but extremely rude and disrespectful. We have paid money in advanced and that is exactly not a welcoming attitude. Demanding for elderly person to walk up to reception counter and stand till he finishes a lengthy process of registration is not acceptable. Every word he used include SHOULD AND MUST but nothing courteous. (Sriyan– Aug 2019, Hotel D)

Another guest acknowledged the insufficient staff and negative attitudes. Guests tended to focus on the importance of positive social interactions when describing their feelings and expectations about service. Managers are recommended to pay more attention to identifying and selecting suitable employees with a passion for delivering excellent service.

It was a full house with very minimal number of staff attending to work with very impolite attitude of the service staff. (Reshani – July 2019, Hotel A)

4.2.2.3 Technical failures

The remaining guest complaints related to technical errors. These related to difficulties with room keys, and system failures generally. Guest were confused when the room key stopped working and they had to waste time waiting for a new one.

Our key card stopped working and we called reception from the common phone and they said they will be there with a new key card for us. We were locked out of the room for 20 mins and no one showed with the key card until we walked downstairs and they gave it to us. (Olivia – Jan 2020, Hotel B)

4.2.3 Ancillary services

The third largest number of complaints concerned the ancillary services department, and which generated 10.9% of the total number of guests' complaints. The main influences on complaints were inefficient services (60%) and unprofessional staff attitude (40%). Influences on guest dissatisfaction with ancillary services are presented next.

4.2.3.1 Inefficient service

Most complaints were regarding poor service. Guests mentioned a lack of confidence in service, and incorrect billing in the reviews. Guests were dissatisfied when they were not able to utilise hotel facilities, which affected the service quality.

Sun beds are too close, no drinks tables...entertainment was rubbish. (Bonnie – Feb 2019, Hotel D)

Poor quality entertainment facilities were also complained about, with one guest writing that their hotel was not up to the standard of luxury hotels, illustrating a lack of attention to guest needs. Managers and staff can offer personalised services using guest information to improve their perceptions of good service. This would develop guest loyalty by delivering what the hotel promises and what guests expect.

Paid a cover charge for the jazz evening at the lake side. But the hotel had clearly ignored the comfort of the guests since the outside marquee was fixed without any fans. (Rina – Nov 2019, Hotel B)

4.2.3.2 Unprofessional staff attitudes

The remaining complaints about ancillary services related to unprofessional staff attitudes. Guests elaborated on the inefficiency of staff, and on their rude behaviour. When the behaviour of staff was not up to the expected standard of luxury service staff, guests were disappointed.

Specially the POOL BAR staff, few girls working at the POOL BAR was quite alright but some senior guys were very rude with loads of attitude. (Reshani – Jul 2019, Hotel C)

4.2.4 Housekeeping

The fourth largest number of complaints was about the housekeeping department, which generated 9.9% of the total number of guest complaints. The main influences on guest dissatisfaction were poor quality of room amenities (55.6%), unprofessional staff attitudes (33.3%) and inefficient service (11.1%). These influences are presented next.

4.2.4.1 Poor quality of room amenities

Most housekeeping complaints were about the poor quality of room amenities. Complaints were related to the standard of the accommodation, bathroom items missing or not available, missing amenities, and a lack of cleanliness. The lack of amenities in the luxury hotel rooms disappointed guests, and showed poor luxury hotel standards.

No duvet, instead some plain sheets to wrap despite the cold weather. This is was not easy at night. As it was raining and the sea was bit rough, it was colder. So, the hotel now can think of putting some duvets instead of sheets. No amenities in the room: No dental kits, no vanity kits, no slippers just 2 pieces of soap and shampoo and shower gel dispenser. (Sriyan – Aug 2019, Hotel D)

Similarly, another guest felt that the room amenities were missing. Guests expected “extra” and “special” experiences to add value to their stay. Organising unique amenities and improving room and service quality reduces guest dissatisfaction. Improving amenities and training would incur extra cost. but are essential.

Like there are NO toiletries in bathroom not even a toothpaste! Only soap dispenser like a B&B hotel! (Amitha – Apr 2019, Hotel D)

4.2.4.2 Unprofessional staff attitudes

Guest comments also mentioned unsatisfactory staff behaviour. Reviewers wrote about a lack of professionalism, poor interest, and unhelpful staff. Unhelpfulness in staff can lead to guest dissatisfaction, and revealed a lack of responsiveness.

The room was musty. When we complained the staff did nothing about it other than Room spray. (Devin – Oct 2019, Hotel C)

One serious complaint related to an alleged burglary, and revealed a lack of confidence in the hotel’s management.

I have never come across a hotel where dishonesty and lies had been so apparent where the hotel has not taken this matter seriously. They clearly could have narrowed down the possibly of either 1 or 2 staff that entered the room and found the person guilty within the hour knowing I was 100% certain of leaving my ring but to obviously protect the image of the business they have had to rule it all out by concluding with no ring found. (Zohar – Mar 2019, Hotel D)

4.2.4.3 Inefficient service

Other guest complaints mentioned inefficient service in terms of cleaning and service speed. Guests were dissatisfied if their the rooms were not cleaned properly.

Asked for room cleaning, this is how they do the room... Just terrible. (Nimesh – Oct 2019, Hotel B)

4.2.5 Maintenance of facilities

The least number of guest complaints concerned the maintenance problems, and formed 8.8% of all complaints. The main reasons for guests to complain were outdated room facilities (66.7%), mechanical issues (22.2%), and inefficient service (11.1%).

4.2.5.1 Outdated room facilities

The majority of guest complaints about maintenance related to the management of rooms. Guest comments included complaints about old and tired furniture, out-dated room layouts, and rooms with no modern technology, resulting in a negative experience. The rooms did not always have the ambience expected in luxury hotel accommodation, compared to the guests' experiences at other luxury hotels.

This is an old hotel, where the furniture in the rooms is all beaten up, shabby bathrooms and just everything is very blah. (Troy – Jan 2020, Hotel C)

One guest complained of the tangible aspects of the room.

The rooms still have old fashioned tubs with overhead showers. The carpets are old and musty. (Pathum– Dec 2019, Hotel A)

4.2.5.2 Mechanical problems

Some of the guest complaints were about mechanical issues. Guests complained of air conditioning failures, and room facilities not working or not available. Guests were dissatisfied when the room facilities did not work.

The aircon in the room was noisy. (Anton – Mar 2019, Hotel D)

One guest complained of a lack of functional efficiency.

The ceiling fan is so slow it doesn't create any breeze at all and the air conditioning has been on full power for 5 hours and the room is currently 0.5c warmer than the outside temperature of 26c. (Dasith - Aug 2019, Hotel)

4.2.5.3 Inefficient service

The remaining guest complaints were about inefficient services. Guests complained of bad smells, messy floors in public areas, and unclean public bathrooms. Poor quality surroundings resulted in a negative guest experience.

In addition, the corridors were smelly, seems the smell was coming from the carpet whose replacement is long overdue. (Anton – Mar 2019)

4.3 Summary of findings

The first part of this chapter focused on addressing research question one: what are the most common service failure areas in Sri Lankan luxury hotels? Data analysis revealed the most common departmental areas of service failure, and the main causes of these failures. The departments with the most guest complaints were food and beverage, and front office. Other departments that generated complaints were ancillary services, housekeeping, and maintenance of facilities, which comprised less than 10% of the total number of guest complaints. Further analysis of the guest reviews indicated the main influences that determined guest dissatisfaction. The results showed that two common reasons for service failure that appeared in every department's complaints, were inefficient service and unprofessional staff attitudes. Other reasons for guest dissatisfaction were poor quality food, technical failures, poor quality of room amenities, outdated room facilities, and mechanical issues.

4.4 Discussion

The first part of this chapter presented the main sources of service failure that emerged from the negative guest reviews. The second part interprets and discusses these findings in relation to the literature. Lastly, the chapter provides recommendations for solving these issues from an HRM perspective, based on the findings and the discussion.

4.4.1 Principal sources of service failure in luxury hotels

The first aim of this study was to identify the main areas of service failure by investigating reviews of luxury hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka. Whilst exploring the causes of service failure was important, it was also beneficial to discuss the findings in relationship to the literature. Identifying the causes of service failure when responding to question produced a bias in terms of finding out which ones could be connected with human resource management procedures. The findings of this study revealed that the two most common areas of service failure in luxury hotels were food and beverage, and front office.

The data analysis showed that most guest complaints concerning food and beverages, were in relation to poor quality food. Chan et al. (2014) stated that product defects (e.g., inedible food, small sized portions, hair in food) are those most frequently reported in restaurants. The findings of this study tend to support this statement. Other guest complaints were about inefficient service and unprofessional staff attitudes. However, Dutta et al. (2007) claimed that a guest's experience is affected more by operational issues rather than employee interactions in service. This claim is contentious, and can be contradicted, as the key indicator for service quality is the employee's passion to provide excellent service (Lu et al., 2015). Similarly, the guest complaints about front office were also about inefficient service and unprofessional staff attitudes, as well as technical errors. According to Lee et al. (2011), guests' complaints are mostly related to service and the way of delivering the service; the findings of this study agreed with this view, as the majority of the guest complaints that were analysed were about inefficient service and unprofessional staff attitudes. Insufficient training of service employees affects the delivery of service quality (Ekiz et al., 2012). This conveys the idea that the findings of this study are consistent with the literature that reveals similar guest complaints.

Other sources of service failure were revealed as ancillary services, housekeeping, and maintenance of facilities. Li et al. (2013) reported that guest dissatisfaction in hotels is

strongly related to rooms; the findings of this study agree with this point, as the findings identified that guests were dissatisfied due to the lack of cleanliness in the rooms, old and tired furniture, and old layouts. However, Loo and Leung (2018) stated that the quality of the hotel tangibles were less of a concern, unlike service and staff behaviour. Other influences identified were mechanical problems which were linked to the core products, and a lack of cleanliness. Zhang et al. (2011) stated that cleanliness affects the guests' experience and selection of hotels, as luxury hotels are recognised for their superior service quality. Service quality generates guest satisfaction, which results in repeat guests, and increase in financial performances (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). In relation to this, the findings agree with the literature on the relationship between service quality and guest satisfaction. This is agreed with because superior service quality that includes the employees' service offerings, and the quality of tangibles, leads the guests to experience a quality and luxury stay, which increases their satisfaction. Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that the causes of service failure were related to HRM deficiencies and due to poor HRM procedures in the luxury hotels; these created service failures that resulted in guest dissatisfaction.

I. Types of service failure

The types of service failure are important for this study as they provide a clear classification of the identified failures in the findings. Chapter two of this study revealed that there were two types of service failure, namely, outcome failure and process failure. *Outcome failure* is defined as a failure linked to the delivery of a core product, or failure to provide the core product satisfactorily (Lee et al., 2011; Mensag-Kufuor et al., 2015; Villi & Koc, 2018). This failure is associated with financial losses in terms of money and time for the guests (Villi & Koc, 2018). A *process failure* occurs when the delivery of a service is flawed and deficient (Lee et al., 2011; Mensag-Kufuor et al., 2015; Villi & Koc, 2018). This results in social losses such as loss of esteem and status for the guests (Villi & Koc, 2018). This study revealed two types of service failure. Firstly, the main causes in relation to failures to deliver a core product, were poor quality food, technical failures, poor quality of room amenities, outdated room facilities, and mechanical problems, all of which were outcome failures. Secondly, the complaints that were associated with the way a service was delivered or performed, were inefficient service and unprofessional staff attitudes, both of which were process failures.

II. Service Quality Model

The literature discussed the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988), that measures service quality. The SERVQUAL model aims to assess the gaps between a customer's perception of the performance and their expectation in relation to the five dimensions of service quality (Rauch et al., 2015b): 1) tangibles, 2) reliability, 3) assurance, 4) responsiveness, and 5) empathy. The findings in this study of negative guest reviews indicated negative service quality gaps in all five elements.

Firstly, the *tangible dimension* refers to the quality of the physical facilities and resources of the hotels (Rauch et al., 2015b). In this study context, this refers to rooms, entertainment facilities, ancillary service facilities and other physical facilities in the luxury hotels. The findings revealed that the guest complaints that focused on the tangible dimension were about poor quality of room amenities, outdated room facilities, and mechanical problems. According to Kumarasinghe et al. (2019), the smallest service quality gaps generally related to the tangible dimension, as guests were not highly concerned about the physical facilities in the Sri Lankan hotels in their study. The findings of this study support this evidence, as there were only minor guest complaints about the physical facilities.

Secondly, *reliability* refers to the dependability and accuracy of the service performance (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). The findings of this study showed that the guest complaints about inefficient service related to the reliability dimension of service. Thirdly, *assurance* refers to the trust and confidence built with guests (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). Poor quality food relates to assurance and leads to failures in sensory quality, and result in a loss of trust in food preparation security. Fourthly, *responsiveness* refers to the employees' willingness to assist and provide guests with excellent service (Rauch et al., 2015b). Finally, *empathy* refers to the customised attention given to meeting the guests' requirements in luxury hotels (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). Kumarasinghe et al. (2019) emphasised that the largest service quality gaps in Sri Lankan hotels, were in relation to responsiveness and empathy. This indicates that the guest expectations of the service staff were higher than the actual performance provided by them, resulting in guest dissatisfaction as it fell below the generally accepted standard of service for luxury hotels (Kumarasinghe et al., 2019). The findings of this study agree with this conclusion, as the guest complaints were mostly concerned with the inefficient service delivered by employees, particularly their rude attitudes, and their lack of professionalism.

4.4.2 Human resource management strategies for service recovery

Research question two of this study was to identify appropriate service recovery strategies from an HRM perspective, for luxury hotels in Sri Lanka, where the types of service failure were connected with poor HRM processes. Umasuthan and Park (2018) stated that the luxury hotel industry in Sri Lanka is experiencing challenges with a lack of human resources, and a lack of training. This suggested poorly experienced and limited labour, and a lack of HR competence. The literature states that effective service recovery strategies result in three types of positive outcomes: customer recovery, process recovery, and employee recovery (Johnston & Michel, 2008; Schumacher & Komppula, 2016). *Customer recovery* focuses on recovering a customer's satisfaction after a service failure, affecting the recovery of loyalty, customer pleasure, and revenue (Ford et al., 2012). The majority of the literature on this topic concentrates on customer recovery strategies, which are short-term, and use an instant recovery process (Bradley & Sparks, 2012; Casidy & Shin, 2015; Nwokorie, 2016). *Process recovery* refers to improvements in processes that focus on profiling service failures and financial outcomes, by collecting and analysing service failure data (Schumacher & Komppula, 2016). Lastly, *employee recovery* focuses on training and rewarding employees as a part of the recovery process (Schumacher & Komppula, 2016). The literature revealed that the main impacts of the recovery process were on the employees and process recovery, which was determined by analysing guest complaints (Johnston & Michel, 2008b). The findings of this study disagree with the literature, as the negative guest complaints showed only a minor impact on process and employee recovery. Therefore, it is recommended that HRM strategies focus on positive customer, process, and employee recoveries, achieved through long-term improvement.

I. Recruitment and selection

This study found that unprofessional staff attitudes are a result of poor recruitment and selection strategies in the HRM departments of the luxury hotels. According to Ekiz et al. (2012), luxury hotels are a “people business”, that is, a business in which people are served by people, so it is necessary to hire the right people to deliver quality service. The findings of this study agree with this, as most of the guest complaints mentioned poor service delivery, unhelpful behaviour, and a lack of professionalism, indicating that the HR departments were not attentive in hiring the right employees to deliver the service. Vencatachellum and Mathuvirin (2010) suggested that hiring the right people comprises targeting the best candidates, and aiming for service skills and a service tendency strategy

that includes attracting suitable candidates with skills, knowledge, a professional approach to the job, and an interest in performing quality service delivery.

The Sri Lankan hotel industry has a lack of available human resources (e.g. unqualified labour), which is a significant challenge (Jayawardena, 2013). The findings of this study support this, as guest complaints were based on a lack of staff empathy, responsiveness, and staff generally. The literature revealed two types of recruitment, namely internal and external recruitment (Stone, 2011). *Internal recruitment* refers to filling the vacant positions within an organisation through promotion and advancement (Stone, 2011). Based on the findings of this study, it is considered that internal recruitment has positive attributes, as internal job candidates are already aware of the services and processes of their hotel. *External recruitment* can be considered if the right candidate cannot be found within the organisation. This means recruiting the right candidate from outside the organisation, through employment exchanges, university and college services, and employment agencies (Tzoumas, 2013). Recruiting professional, skilled, and well-behaved staff, will improve service delivery in hotel departments.

To respond to the problem of unskilled staff in the Sri Lankan hotel industry and in order to hire the right employee, it may be useful to apply the person specification model developed by Munro Fraser in 1954, a fivefold grading system that can be used to identify and select the right candidate (Nickson, 2007). This involves the characteristics to look for when interviewing or hiring a candidate: *impact on others* (appearance, speech, behaviour), *acquired qualifications* (education, experience, training), *innate abilities* (willingness to learn, quickness of comprehension), *motivation* (goal-oriented, consistency, determination) and *adjustment* (stability, handle stress, ability to deal to customers) (Nickson, 2007). However, these characteristics were not evident in the study, due to the apparent lack of human resources development and training in the Sri Lankan luxury hotels in the study. Therefore, hiring a candidate to deliver a professional service and provide a positive impact on others, is as important as providing training opportunities to improve their skills and experience.

II. Training

The literature revealed a relationship between service quality and HRM practices (Chand, 2010; Mohsin et al., 2011). The findings of this study showed that issues with service and staff behaviour which training can be an appropriate strategy for service recovery.

According to Hewagama et al. (2019), training helps employees become competent, develop a sense of autonomy, and have a positive impact on their department. The findings suggested that in the Sri Lankan luxury hotel context, these problems can be overcome through employee training. Dhar (2015) stated that training has a key role in delivering quality service and improving service performance. The findings suggested that improved training would rectify the service failures identified from the data analysis. Previous studies such as those of Tsaur and Lin (2004), found a positive relationship between employee training and employee service performance. Norhamizan et al. (2018) also suggested that effective training improves and develops the service and the staff attitudes, resulting in improved guest satisfaction. The findings of this study revealed that inefficient service, unprofessional staff attitudes and other failures, were major concerns in the luxury hotels in this study. Therefore, providing training programmes would instigate change in both service and staff behaviour problems. The literature showed that error management training for the employees also influences service recovery performance (Guchait et al., 2015; Guchait et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2019). Error management training helps to manage failures in an organisation (Yao et al., 2019) and involves communicating about failure, expanding knowledge, helping failure situations, and quickly identifying and handling problems (Guchait et al., 2016b). This type of training focuses on service failures, and leads to highly involved participation, improving performance in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitude (Yao et al., 2019). The findings of this study support this concept as a way to improve service and staff attitudes. Sri Lankan hotel employees experience poor training, which is an HRM challenge, and poor training and facilities (Umasuthan & Park, 2018) result in service failures and guest dissatisfaction. Based on the findings of this study, employee training is recommended for improving hygiene, restaurant service standards, communication skills with guests, and managing difficult service failure situations generally. Chand (2010) suggested that employees and managers can be trained through on-the-job or off-the-job training methods, both of which can create opportunities for improvements in service quality delivery (Chand, 2010).

III. Employee development and empowerment

The review of the literature found that employee development for high performance work practices, aims to improve employee knowledge, and competence. Employee

development programmes can be influenced through employee empowerment, which in turn leads to employee motivation and organisational benefits (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2012).

A further recommended development initiative is therefore employee empowerment (see Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2012). Much of the literature on this topic reported that empowerment has a positive influence on service recovery performance (Walsh et al., 2015; Zhang, 2019), for example, by motivating employees to perform and deliver excellent service. Zhang and Geng (2019) referred to *empowerment* as the privilege and ability to make decisions, and a dedication that results in high service quality assurance. Empowered employees have the benefit of a resource that enables them to react instantly to dissatisfied customers without the need to involve others. The findings of this study, reveal that guests were largely dissatisfied with staff attitudes and performance, in which case empowerment might not be suitable in the Sri Lankan hotel context as it involves at high risk in terms of trust and building confidence in the employees. Hewagama (2015) further reported that empowerment in resolving service failures is important in hotels, but needs to be cautiously handled. The findings of this study suggest that hotels that require high levels of empowerment for employees to recover service failures, also require that those employees are effectively trained. Table 2 presents the rationales for the recommended strategies based on its criteria:

Table 2

Reasons for recommended recovery strategies

| Service failures | Recovery strategies | Rationales |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| 1 Poor quality food | Training | Effective training will improve the presentation and the preparation of the food to the standard expected of five-star hotels. |
| 2 Inefficient service | Training Empowerment | Employee may be demotivated to provide a high standard of service due to low wages or poor empowerment. Appropriate empowerment and training will develop new skills and improve service quality. |
| 3 Unprofessional staff attitudes | Recruitment and Selection | Hiring the ideal candidates for the position is important. Professional recruitment and selection methods will attract hospitable employees. |

| Service failures | Recovery strategies | Rationales |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| 4 Technical failures | Training Empowerment | Appropriate training will develop skills that help avoid any technical issues and improve employee performance. Empowerment can also be an effective strategy to help employees to take immediate actions or decisions on problems. |
| 5 Poor quality of room amenities | Training | Management training will improve the management's ability to invest appropriately. |
| 6 Mechanical problems | Training | Training will help to deal with guest complaints as well as investing in better facilities such as air conditioning. |

4.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the key findings from the data analysis. In terms of the research's aim, the findings indicated that in Sri Lankan luxury hotels, the common areas that experienced the most service failures were food and beverage, and front office. Other departmental areas that experienced failures, were ancillary services, housekeeping, and maintenance facilities. This research revealed that the main source of service failures in all departments were inefficient service, and unprofessional staff attitudes that related to HRM issues. These sources were classified as process failures. Other causes of service failure were identified as poor-quality food, technical failures, poor quality of room amenities, outdated room facilities, and mechanical problems. These causes were classified as outcome failures.

In terms of this study's research question, the findings suggest that implementation of service recovery strategies from an HRM perspective. Previous studies have focused on short term recoveries that concentrate on customer satisfaction recovery. The findings of this study lead to recommending three strategies for recovery in Sri Lankan luxury hotels: improved recruitment and selection, training, and employee development and empowerment, all of which focus on long-term processes and employee-centred recoveries. Effective recruitment and selection is an essential strategy for recovery, as hiring the right candidate with the potential to acquire skills, knowledge and competence, will deliver quality service without resulting in service failure. Training was also suggested in previous studies, as this develops the knowledge and skills of the employees,

which are currently lacking in the Sri Lankan hotel industry. Finally, employee development and empowerment focus on the employee ability to resolve service failure recovery at the time of occurrence, and the literature agrees that empowerment has a positive influence in service recovery. However, the findings of this study indicated that in order for the employees to be empowered, the hotels must first provide effective training and development, to ensure empowerment is not misused by the employees.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion to this study, which explored the main sources of service failures in Sri Lankan luxury hotels and provided appropriate strategies for service recovery from an HRM perspective. The chapter begins by reviewing the research aim and questions. Then the key findings of the study are presented, and the theoretical and practical implications of the study reviewed. Finally, the chapter discusses the limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research.

5.2 Research questions and main findings

This study explored the main areas and the sources of service failure in the luxury hotels in Sri Lanka. Human resource management strategies were provided for service recovery, based on the findings of the study. The research questions were as follows:

Question 1: What are the most common service failure areas in Sri Lankan luxury hotels?

Question 2: From a human resource management perspective, what are appropriate service recovery strategies for Sri Lankan luxury hotels and resorts?

In order to achieve the research's aims and answer the research questions, the study collected 60 negative guest reviews from TripAdvisor to explore the main departmental areas and sources of service failure. Findings indicated that the departments with the most service failures in the luxury hotels where the reviews were from, were food and beverage, and front office. The other departments that experienced failures, were ancillary services, housekeeping, and maintenance facilities. The findings revealed that the main sources of service failure were inefficient service and unprofessional staff attitudes, which occurred in all departments. Other sources of failure were poor quality food, technical failures, poor quality of room amenities, outdated room facilities, and mechanical problems.

Data analysis revealed that the important sources of service failure identified in this study were inefficient service and unprofessional staff attitudes, which resulted in service delivery being flawed or deficient. This was determined to be the result of poor HRM procedures. Ekiz et al. (2012), suggested that service failures in luxury hotels occur due

to poor human resources management, poor training, unprofessionalism, and inexperienced staff. The findings of this study agreed with this, as the Sri Lankan luxury hotel industry struggles with such HRM problems.

The findings of this study revealed that service failures in the departments of luxury hotels can be resolved with effective HRM strategies in the long term. The literature on this topic has focused on instant recovery strategies that support immediate customer satisfaction recovery (e.g. Bradley & Sparks, 2012; Casidy & Shin, 2015; Nwokorie, 2016). However, for the Sri Lankan hotel context, long term capacity building through improved HRM processes will address the problems highlighted in the findings. As a result, this study recommends long-term strategies of employee development and process recovery. Appropriate HRM procedures for service recovery were identified as recruitment and selection, training, and employee development and empowerment. The findings highlighted that for recruitment and selection out to benefit service recovery strategies, it is important to hire experienced, qualified, and skilled employees, to avoid service failures. This will benefit the Sri Lankan hotel industry. However, this may be difficult due to the limited experienced and qualified labour available. The most important strategy, however, is training, as this results in improving the employees' knowledge, skills, and performance for delivering service and handling guests' complaints. A further recommended strategy is to utilise employee development and empowerment, giving employees the authority to perform the actions needed to achieve service recovery. However, employees that are empowered in this way, must also first receive effective training, as empowerment can be misused.

5.3 Theoretical implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study aimed to fill some of the gaps identified in the extant research on service failures and service recovery strategies in Sri Lankan luxury hotels. Previous studies mostly focused on the main influences on service failure in hotels. This study fills the gaps in the literature on service failures, by focusing on departmental areas in luxury hotels, providing valuable understanding and insights. This will illustrate which departments suffers with the most service failure, which will help managers develop employees and overcome the failures. Secondly, the study aimed to fill the gaps in the literature by addressing service recovery strategies from an HRM perspective, as most previous studies are focused on immediate recovery strategies for dissatisfied customers. In consideration of the lack of research on Sri Lankan luxury hotels generally,

the findings of this study improve our overall understanding of the specific service problems encountered in the luxury hotel sector.

5.4 Practical implications

The findings of this study also provide practical implications for hospitality organisations and their employees in Sri Lanka. Revealing the main areas and causes of service failure in a representative sample of luxury hotels may help direct improvement strategies for hotel management. For example, food and beverage and front office departments, were the most common areas of service failures and the main influences on guest dissatisfaction were poor service and unsatisfactory staff behaviour. These failures result not just in guest dissatisfaction, but also in reduced service performance and revenue. These failures can be overcome with the implementation of HRM strategies for the service recovery. More effective HRM strategies will attract a pool of experienced, skilled, motivated, competent employees to the workplace, that will increase both the service quality and the positive financial performance. As a result, the Sri Lankan luxury hotels can improve guest satisfaction, and have less guest complaints, good service performance, and effective and skilled employees.

5.5 Limitations

Several limitations of this study have been highlighted. Firstly, the data that were used to explore the common departmental areas and main sources of service failure, were secondary data from online reviews on TripAdvisor, rather than data from interviews or questionnaires, as interviews and questionnaires require involve human participation in the data collection. This can be problematic as it is time consuming to analyse responses, and obtain ethical approvals (Saunders et al., 2019). Secondly, because the data were collected from TripAdvisor, platform bias (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019) may have occurred. Thirdly, one of the sample criteria used to select guest reviews was those listed in the “poor” and “terrible” categories, thus expressing guest dissatisfaction. However, it was observed that positive guest comments were also present in some negative reviews. Finally, the sample size of 60 in this study of four hotels may not represent the wider population. Therefore, the generalisability of the results could be limited.

5.6 Recommendation for future studies

Based on the findings and the limitations of the study, recommendations for future studies are provided. Firstly, future studies can further investigate HRM problems in luxury hotels in Sri Lanka using interviews. Secondly, it would be fruitful to explore levels of tolerance of service failure in different age groups of guests. Thirdly, based on the insights of the findings from this study it is recommended to compare local and foreign guests' perceptions of service failures in hotels. Furthermore, studies can be conducted to extract data from other different platforms such as booking.com. Following these recommendations for future studies in Sri Lanka will result in positive outcomes for the hotel industry, and lead to greater understandings of the effect of service failures for hotel managers in relation to guest demand for luxury hotels in Sri Lanka.

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