

# Measuring service quality: perceptions of employees in the hotel industry during the Covid19 pandemic in Hungary

## A szolgáltatás minőségének mérése: a szállodaiparban dolgozók megítélése a magyarországi Covid19-világjárvány idején

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The focus of this research was to use the SERVQUAL methodology to examine the service quality of Hungarian hotels as perceived by their employees during the Covid19 pandemic. The paper concentrates on employees as internal customers and the crucial role they play in providing quality service. The SERVQUAL 5 dimensions were used to forecast hotel employees' expectation, perception, and satisfaction. Data were gathered via online survey throughout Hungary, using a modified SERVQUAL questionnaire. The online questionnaires comprised a total of 55 questions which were divided into 3 main parts (Demography, SERVQUAL Expectation and Perception, Employee satisfaction). The responses are all recorded using the 5-point Likert scale. The study investigated both expectation and perception levels of the employees in Hungarian hotel during the pandemic. The results regarding the first hypothesis indicated that there is a gap between employee expectation and perception using the mean analysis in Microsoft Excel. Pearson's correlation was used to investigate the relationship between employee perception and overall satisfaction. The results related to the second hypothesis also indicated that there is a strong relationship between the employee perception of service quality and the overall satisfaction. This research will provide an extensive understanding of service quality and employee satisfaction within the business process of an outsourced firm during the pandemic, with a primary focus on the Hungarian hotel sector.

A kutatás célja, hogy a SERVQUAL módszertan segítségével megvizsgálja a magyarországi szállodák szolgáltatásminőségét, ahogyan azt az alkalmazottak a Covid19-világjárvány idején érzékelték. A kutatás az alkalmazottakra, mint belső ügyfelekre és a minőségi szolgáltatás nyújtásában betöltött döntő szerepükre összpontosít. A SERVQUAL 5 dimenziója került használatra a szállodai alkalmazottak elvárásainak érzékelésére és elégedettségének előrejelzésére. Az adatokat online felmérés útján gyűjtöttük Magyarországon egész területén, egy módosított SERVQUAL kérdőív segítségével. Az online kérdőívek összesen 55 kérdésből álltak, amelyek 3 fő részre oszlottak (demográfia, SERVQUAL elvárás és észlelés, dolgozói elégedettség). A válaszokat 5 pontos Likert-skálán rögzítettük. A tanulmány a magyar szállodai alkalmazottak elvárásai és észlelési szintjét vizsgálta a pandémia idején. Az első hipotézisre vonatkozó eredmények azt mutatták, hogy az alkalmazottak elvárása és észlelése között különbség van. A munkavállalói percepció és az általános elégedettség kapcsolatának vizsgálatára Pearson korrelációt használtunk. A második hipotézisre vonatkozó eredmények szintén azt mutatták, hogy szoros kapcsolat van a szolgáltatás minőségének munkavállalói észlelése és az általános elégedettség között.

**Keywords:** service quality, employee perception, employee satisfaction, Hungarian hotel, Covid19.

**Kulcsszavak:** szolgáltatásminőség, dolgozói percepció, dolgozói elégedettség, magyar szálloda, Covid19.

### 1. Introduction

Covid19 is a challenge to our lives and livelihoods. The situation is unusual and proceeding at breakneck speed, but it remains profoundly

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unknown. The service quality from the hotel employees' perspective has not been extensively investigated (RAMSEOOK-MUNHURRUN et al. 2010). More importantly, during the pandemic where there is also a need of deeper understanding of employers' and professional organizations' perspectives in tourism industry (FORMÁDI-GYURÁ CZ-NÉMETH 2021). The hotel industry is primarily concerned with customer satisfaction and how to survive in this pandemic, with only a few employers considering employee job satisfaction. The new service standardization may have an effect on employee's perceptions. The hotel sector must have a proper measurement system in order to identify areas that require improvement and, as a result, have an impact on employee job satisfaction.

In today's competitive economies, service firms are constantly looking for new strategies to create a long-term competitive edge especially when we are in the resilient phase of the Covid19 pandemic. Quality has gained significant attention in service marketing research, with a focus on satisfaction. Despite several studies relating service quality to customer satisfaction, there has been little empirical work on measuring employee perception and satisfaction, especially within the hotel industry.

A literature analysis on the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic on the hotel sector in Hungary, internal service quality, and employee satisfaction was conducted to establish a foundation and theoretical framework for the current study.

This research concentrates on the demand side in order to add to the literature on the subject, as numerous scholars have done (MANNING et al. 2005, RAMSEOOK-MUNHURRUN et al. 2010, AL-ABABNEH 2016), which analyzed and measured employee perception within the tourism industry. Despite the fact that a significant amount of service quality research has focused on service customers' perceived service quality (PARASURAMAN et al. 1988, CARMAN 1990, PARASURAMAN et al. 1991), relatively little attention has been paid to exploring what factors influence service employees' behavior in terms of delivering service quality, and articulating the predictors of employee behavior to service quality perception and satisfaction.

By creating this research, the authors hope to investigate hotel employees' perceptions of service quality during the Covid19 pandemic in Hungary. Furthermore, the focus of this study is on employee satisfaction where it emphasizes the relevance of knowing about employee perceptions and opinions about work amid a crisis.

The main objective in this research is to identify the gap between the employee's perception

and expectation in SERVQUAL dimension. The research answers mainly to two research questions:

- What is the perceived level of service quality dimensions among the Hungarian Hotel employees during the Covid19 pandemic?
- Do service quality dimensions have a relationship with the Hungarian Hotel employees' satisfaction during the Covid19 pandemic?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. IMPACT OF COVID19 ON HUNGARIAN HOTEL INDUSTRY

On March 16th, 2020, drastic limitations were established in Hungary to limit the spread of the disease, effectively prohibiting hoteliers from conducting business as usual (HORWATH HTL 2020). On June 18, 2020, emergency measures were formally ended. In the worst cases, country lockdowns and stay-at-home orders triggered by the virus lowered tourism demand to nearly zero. According to (KSH 2021), the cumulative volume of the year 2020 saw a 41.6 percent decrease in overall tourist arrivals and a 43.4 percent decrease in overall tourism nights compared to the year 2019.

In 2019, commercial accommodation welcomed 12.9 million guests for a total of 31.5 million guest nights, with about half of them being international visitors (6.2 million foreign visitors with 15.8 million foreign guest nights). This appears to be well balanced, but a deeper inspection reveals that Budapest is far more reliant on international visitors, as 88 percent of Budapest's guest nights were reserved by foreign visitors in 2019 (BIRD & BIRD 2021). It needs to be noted that the Covid19 pandemic marked as one of the most unexpected events in hospitality industry was an innovative force in the well-established structural system of the Hungarian hotel market.

### 2.2. RELATION BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY, EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION AND EXPECTATION

The delivery of excellent services is the key to success in today's challenging competitive climate, and this will enhance the degree of customer satisfaction and customer retention rate (SPRENG-MacKOY 1996). Organizations seek to review and monitor customer satisfaction levels as well as repurchase for beneficial business results in order to improve the number of their customers, their loyalty, earnings, market share, and greater competitive advantage (GILANINIA et al. 2013).

In the literature on service marketing, service quality is generally defined as the customer's overall assessment of a service (ESHGHI et al. 2008). According to PARASURAMAN et al. (1985), service quality is "The discrepancy between consumer's perceptions of services offered by a particular firm and their expectations about firms offering such services".

According to GRÖNROOS (1988), service quality is commonly defined as the difference between the organization's service quality and the service performance that workers expected. Service quality is described conceptually as a global judgment or attitude linked to the overall excellence or superiority of the service (PARASURAMAN et al. 1988). They revised the SERVQUAL dimensions in 1988, which were reduced from ten to five dimensions as follows:

- tangibles (physical facilities, equipment, and personnel appearance),
- reliability (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately),
- responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service),
- assurance (employee knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence),
- empathy (caring, individualized attention provided by the firm to its customers).

On the other hand, according to TATUM (2024), employee perception is a factor that can have a significant impact on workplace quality. When workers have a favorable attitude toward their company, their job, and their connections within the workplace, there is a strong probability that they will be productive and stay with the business for a long time. Negative opinions of the organization and working environment may drive qualified people to look for other possibilities.

FROST and KUMAR (2001) adapted the SERVQUAL scale questions to assess employee attitudes about service quality. It was dubbed INTSERVQUAL. Their research was carried out at a big international airline, and it examined internal consumers' expectations and perceptions. The results showed that the levels of front-line staff (customer-contact people) expectations of services and support and their perceptions of support personnel performance may be utilized to successfully measure the gap between front-line employee perceptions and expectations.

The study on measuring service quality has generally focused on how to meet or surpass the external customer's expectations, and service quality has been considered a measure of how well the supplied service level fits the consumer's

expectations. These viewpoints can also be extended to a company's personnel. It is fair to anticipate that the SERVQUAL model may be updated to assess internal service quality (KANG et al. 2002).

CHATSON (1994) used a revamped version of the SERVQUAL instrument to assess possible gaps in internal service quality. The findings revealed that there were gaps in service quality because departments prioritized efficiency over internal customer demands and took minimal interest in understanding internal customer requirements. YOUNG and VARBLE (1997) used the original SERVQUAL measures to assess internal service quality inside a purchasing context, and they concluded that the SERVQUAL instrument did offer the purchasing function with a suitable approach for gathering input from internal consumers.

### 2.3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND EMPLOYEES' SATISFACTION

There are extensive studies conducted by many researchers on this topic. Job satisfaction is defined as the "pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values" (LOCKE 1969:316). Put differently, it is a judgment of the perceived relationship between employees' expectations from their work and the perceived offering they receive (LUND 2003).

SPECTOR (1997) stated that job satisfaction is a measure of how much people enjoy their jobs. Some people enjoy their jobs and consider them to be an important part of their lives. Others despise working and only do so because they have to. Employee's general job satisfaction is made up of three components: satisfaction with their work, satisfaction with supervisory support, and satisfaction with promotion opportunities. GEORGE and JONES (2002) define work satisfaction as the combination of feelings and attitudes people have about their present employment and identify four criteria that might impact satisfaction: (1) Personality – a person's constant feelings, thoughts, and behaviors; (2) Values, especially intrinsic vs. extrinsic values, which represent a person's attitudes about results and how they should act at work; (3) Work conditions, i.e., tasks, people with whom the employee interacts, physical circumstances, and work environment; and (4) Social influence, i.e., the impact of other persons or groups (colleagues, family, cultural environment, etc.) on the employee's attitudes and behavior.

According to WEISS (2002), job satisfaction, or a person's assessment of his or her job and work environment, is likely the most researched attitude

in organizational behavior. It is an assessment of job characteristics, work environment, and emotional experiences at work. Employees who are satisfied with their jobs have a favorable opinion of their jobs based on their observations and emotional experiences. Job satisfaction is best understood as a set of attitudes toward various aspects of the job and work context. Job satisfaction is extremely crucial to the majority of employees. Other key drivers of subjective well-being from work, in addition to job satisfaction, prioritize employed individuals (AZIZAN-MAHMUD 2018).

HART (1995) and HESKETT et al. (1994) found that employees frequently rely on internal services offered by other members of the organization. Internal service quality is crucial to employee satisfaction because improvements in internal service quality are expected to result in improved exterior service quality. Having customer-focused workers is an essential, but not significant, requirement for providing quality service. Effective coordination between customer-contact staff and background support employees is also required (KANG et al. 2002).

The SERVQUAL instrument was employed to investigate the association between both the psychosocial working environment and internal service quality, and concluded that interventions to improve psychosocial work conditions were just as essential as other variables in promoting job satisfaction (EDVARDSSON et al. 1997).

Based on the collected literature, it can be inferred that comparatively little research has been done on identifying the variables that affect service employees' perceptions in regards to providing high-quality services and establishing employee behavior predictors to satisfaction and perceptions of service quality.

### 3. Research objectives and hypotheses

#### 3.1. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As the tourism industry is still one of the most negatively impacted during the Covid19 pandemic, most of the tourism businesses focus mainly on the external service quality rather than internal service quality. Service quality from the perspective of employees in Hungary's hotels has not been well investigated, particularly during a crisis scenario, such as the Covid19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on the hotel business. This study attempts to address that gap by modifying the SERVQUAL model to investigate the factors affecting hotel employees' satisfaction.

In the beginning of this research, the authors made the assumption that the perception of the employee may be below expectations; therefore, it could also affect their overall satisfaction and employee loyalty as well. During this crisis, the authors have learned that there are employees in the tourism industry who have been laid off from their jobs and moved to other fields of work since the working insecurity is relatively high. The main objective in this research is to identify the gap between the employee's perception and expectation in SERVQUAL dimension. This could help improve the organization's internal service quality and have the exact focus on which field that they should prioritize on. Research questions for this study:

- What is the perceived level of service quality dimensions among the Hungarian Hotel employees during the Covid19 pandemic? In light of the Covid19 pandemic's issues, this question seeks to understand how Hungarian hotel employees perceive various aspects of service quality. Obtaining a comprehension of their perspectives allows organizations to determine areas that may require to be changed or improved in order to satisfy growing customer demands while maintaining the wellbeing of employees.
- Do service quality dimensions have a relationship with the Hungarian Hotel employees' satisfaction during the Covid19 pandemic? This question investigates the potential relationship between Hungarian hotel staff satisfaction levels during the Covid19 pandemic and the perceived level of service quality dimensions. Through the analysis of this relationship, the authors aim to comprehend how, in the context of the pandemic's unprecedented challenges, elements such as tangibles, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and reliability either positively or negatively impact employees' satisfaction.

#### 3.2. HYPOTHESES

In this research, the authors have established 2 hypotheses. There are also formulations based on these hypotheses in the literature review part of this research as well.

- H1: There is a gap between employee's expectation and perception in the Hungarian Hotel Industry during the Covid19 pandemic.

The main objective of hypothesis one is to find the existence gap between employee's expectation and perception using the SERVQUAL dimensions (PARASURAMAN et al. 1988) in which 22 questions within the 5 dimensions are to be asked.

This hypothesis aims to investigate the perception of the employee during the pandemic. Since there are some changes in standardization and service delivering of the hotel, it leads us to the second hypothesis:

- H2: There is a relationship between service quality and employees' satisfaction in the Hungarian Hotel Industry during the Covid19 pandemic.

The main objective of the second hypothesis is to find if there is any relationship between the employee perception of service quality and the employee's satisfaction. The employee perception and job satisfaction may have an effect on each other. An assumption has been made that the employees will be satisfied with their job if they have a good perception of the service quality in the organization.

### 3.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, the authors have assessed this research using an online survey. Online questionnaire method was chosen via Google Forms, because it is easy to be contributed and provides convenience in the data collection. The questionnaires took approximately 7 minutes on average to be completed. The online surveys were delivered to hotel staff throughout Hungary. The SERVQUAL model's elements were adjusted to obtain data from workers who worked or are still working in the Hungarian Hotels during the epidemic.

The research approach was based on the five dimensions of service quality identified by (PARASURAMAN et al. 1988): tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Although certain changes were made to the SERVQUAL 22 items, the authenticity of the original questions was preserved in order to suit the hotel business context and to assess the expectations, perceptions, and satisfaction of internal service quality of hotel employees. Each item was rephrased to reflect internal service quality rather than outward service quality. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The respondents' demographic information was collected in the first part. The second part of the questionnaires was meant to assess respondents' expectations and perceptions of the five service quality dimensions. Followed by the last part, the overall satisfaction regarding the service quality was asked.

Respondents were requested to score their expectations and perceptions, as well as their satisfaction for the hotel, for each of the 22 SERVQUAL categories on a 5-point Likert scale

ranging from "1 = strongly disagree", "2 = disagree", "3 = neutral", "4 = agree" and "5 = strongly agree," as indicated by (BABAKUS-MANGOLD 1992).

The generated questionnaire was pilot examined, and no major issues were detected; nevertheless, respondents proposed a few small adjustments to the language and length of the assessment. During the Covid19 epidemic in April 2022, the online survey was given to hotel employees who are now working/were working in the Hungarian hotel sector. A total of 150 online surveys were distributed. A total of 102 were deemed suitable for data analysis in this investigation. The data was analyzed using SPSS 22.0 for Windows. To study the service quality gaps, descriptive statistics were employed. The differences in scores seen between ratings of each perception measured item and the ratings of the associated expectation statement was identified as the gap measure. SERVQUAL 5 dimensions impacting total hotel employee overall satisfaction were identified using correlation analysis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. DEMOGRAPHIC RESULTS

The female to male employee ratio in this survey was 58.8% to 41.2%. More than 71% of responses were between the ages of 18 and 25, with the age range 26-35 accounting for more than 25%. It has been found that the majority of Hungarian hotel employees are of the young age. Approximately 65% have a Bachelor's degree as their highest level of education, with more than 22% holding a Master's degree and more than 11.8% of the respondents have graduated from High School.

The majority of respondents (more than 35%) work in a three-stars hotel and on Hungary's territory and around 27% work in a four-stars hotel and 11% of the respondent work in a five-stars hotel, 8% work in non-classified hotel and lastly only 2.9% work in one-star hotel. The majority of the respondents work in hotels located in Budapest (59%). 10% of the respondents work in Balatonfüred and 8% of the respondents work in Balatonalmádi and the same percentage for Sopron. 6% of the respondents work in Siófok and there are also respondents from Debrecen 4%. We have also received responses from Tihany with 3% and, Veszprém and Gárdony with 1% each. A total of 44% of the respondents work in the front desk department (Receptionist) and 40% work in the Food and Beverage department. Almost 11% of the respondents work as the department supervisor and 5% in Housekeeping.

#### 4.2. HYPOTHESES TESTING

H1: There is a gap between employee's expectation and perception in the Hungarian Hotel Industry during the Covid19 pandemic.

While the primary goal of the study was to tackle the issue of Hungarian hotel employees' perceptions of service quality, it was indeed beneficial to evaluate the usage of the modified SERVQUAL instrument for evaluating service quality in this service context. *Table 1* shows the mean scores for the 22 expectations and perceptions questions, as well as the mean service quality gaps.

Table 1 also indicates the cumulative mean scores for the five Service Quality dimensions based on expectations, perceptions, and gaps. The gap scores allow the service manager to analyze current service quality as well as quantify existing gaps. It is shown that the gap scores for the five dimensions were all negative, showing that hotel employees' expectations in Hungary were not being fulfilled. It is also revealed that the gap scores for Empathy (-0.86) are much greater than the gap scores for Assurance (-0.76), Reliability (-0.73), Responsiveness (-0.70), and Tangible (-0.66). The Empathy gap scores might be used to prioritize system and process changes, while the

Table 1

#### Gap differences between employee expectation and perception of Service Quality

<b>Tangible Dimension</b>	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Perception</b>	<b>GAP (P-E)</b>
<i>We have up to date equipment.</i>	4.54	3.93	-0.61
<i>We are always well-dressed and sanitized.</i>	4.59	3.96	-0.63
<i>The working environment is comfortable and appealing.</i>	4.58	3.86	-0.72
<i>The facilities consistent with the hotel industry.</i>	4.60	3.94	-0.66
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.58</b>	<b>3.92</b>	<b>-0.66</b>
<b>Reliability Dimension</b>	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Perception</b>	<b>GAP (P-E)</b>
<i>When we promise to do something by the certain time, we do so.</i>	4.63	3.93	-0.70
<i>We show sincere interest on solving our guests' problems.</i>	4.65	3.82	-0.83
<i>We provide correct/accurate information to our guests.</i>	4.67	4.03	-0.64
<i>We respond to the guest within the timeframe.</i>	4.61	3.82	-0.79
<i>We are dependable.</i>	4.60	3.89	-0.71
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.63</b>	<b>3.90</b>	<b>-0.73</b>
<b>Responsiveness Dimension</b>	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Perception</b>	<b>GAP (P-E)</b>
<i>We provide prompt service to our guests. (Quick and ready)</i>	4.67	3.96	-0.71
<i>We are committed to help our guests.</i>	4.63	3.98	-0.65
<i>We are never too busy to respond to our guests' request.</i>	4.47	3.71	-0.76
<i>We inform the guest when services will occur.</i>	4.55	3.88	-0.67
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.58</b>	<b>3.88</b>	<b>-0.70</b>
<b>Assurance Dimension</b>	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Perception</b>	<b>GAP (P-E)</b>
<i>We are trust worthy.</i>	4.71	3.99	-0.72
<i>We are polite to our guests.</i>	4.73	4.00	-0.73
<i>We protect our guests' confidential information.</i>	4.71	4.00	-0.71
<i>We have the required knowledge and skills to assist our guests.</i>	4.72	3.84	-0.88
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.72</b>	<b>3.96</b>	<b>-0.76</b>
<b>Empathy Dimension</b>	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Perception</b>	<b>GAP (P-E)</b>
<i>The hotel gives individualized attention to our guests.</i>	4.91	3.81	-1.10
<i>We give individualized attention to our guests.</i>	4.61	3.80	-0.81
<i>We understand our guests' specific needs.</i>	4.55	3.83	-0.72
<i>We have our guests' best interest at heart.</i>	4.55	3.81	-0.74
<i>We have convenient working hours.</i>	4.54	3.60	-0.94
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.63</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>-0.86</b>
<b>Overall combined scores of 22 items</b>	<b>4.63</b>	<b>3.89</b>	<b>-0.74</b>

Source: own editing based on Excel output

other four gap scores could be utilized to create internal training activities and enhance the service experience. The overall gap score (-0.74) indicates that the overall service quality fell short of the expectations of the employees.

H2: There is a relationship between service quality and employees' satisfaction in the Hungarian Hotel Industry during the Covid19 pandemic.

In the second hypothesis, a thorough investigation in the correlation between the respondent average and overall satisfaction in each dimension of service quality has been conducted. The authors use Pearson's correlation in this hypothesis testing in order to find out the strength of the correlation between the variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient is the most common sort of correlation coefficient. Pearson's correlation (sometimes known as Pearson's R) is a correlation coefficient that is frequently used in linear regression (SHT 2022).

Table 2

**Correlations between the average respondent in SERVQUAL context and overall employees' satisfaction**

		Total Average Respondents	Overall Satisfaction
Total Average Respondents	Pearson Correlation	1	.566**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	102	102
Overall Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.566**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	102	102

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: own editing based on SPSS output

According to Table 2, the overall respondent average has a positive strong correlation with employee overall satisfaction of the service quality dimensions. The correlation between them is 0.566 and it is significant because its significant level is 0.000.

## 5. Discussion

It is a big concern that most of the studies only focus on the external service quality and pay less attention to the internal service quality especially during the Covid19 pandemic crisis. As the tourism industry worldwide was greatly affected by the pandemic, the hotel sector also suffered a big loss in terms of income and its human resource. The

main focus for this study is to find the gap between the employee expectation and perception in their workplace. During the pandemic, as it comes as a shock for everyone, it affected everyone mentally and the authors would like to investigate if that could affect their working performance, perception and satisfaction toward their workplace.

The goal of this study was to look at the correlations between the five SERVQUAL dimensions and Hungarian hotel employees' overall satisfaction. This study's online questionnaires consist of 3 main parts. The online questionnaires were contributed to more than 150 people and 102 responses were suitable for the analysis. The first part investigated the demographic of the respondents. As more than 70 percent of the respondents are in the age group of between 18-25 and more than 58 percent of the respondents are female. More than 65 percent of the respondents have obtained bachelor degree and more than 22 percent have obtained master degree. It is shown that the new generation of Hungarian hotel employees are fairly young but are very educated and have enough knowledge in order to be able to deliver a good service quality in the hotel. 35 percent of them work in 3 stars hotel and 27 percent work in 4 stars hotel. Almost 60 percent of the total respondents work in Budapest, around 20 percent of the respondents work in settlements of the Balaton region such as Balatonfüred, Balatonalmádi, Siófok and Tihany. This means that most of the hotels located in the main tourist destination of Hungary operated during the Covid19 pandemic. More than 44 percent of the respondents work in the front desk department (receptionist, reservation etc.) and more than 40 percent work in the Food and Beverage department (Waiter/waitress, cooks etc.). These jobs require mainly personal contact with the guests and proper skill and knowledge. Unfortunately, around 30 of the respondents have stated that they have been laid off during the Covid19 pandemic in 2020 as the hotel did not receive as many guests as before the pandemic. Fortunately, in 2021, the situation got better and some of the employees returned back to their work in the same hotel.

In the second part of the online questionnaires, the first hypothesis of this study was investigated, namely the perception of the employees during the pandemic. The 22 SERVQUAL questions used in this study were adapted to assess internal service settings in the context of the Covid19 pandemic. Employee perceptions at Hungarian hotels were substantially lower than their expectations in all of the 5 dimensions, according to the findings (Table 1). These negative gaps demonstrated that internal service quality was well below employee service quality standards, and that service quality

improvements in the hotel business in Hungary require a reform as quickly as possible.

In the third part of the online questionnaires, the second hypothesis of this study was investigated. The main objective of the second hypothesis is to find if there is any relationship between the employee's perception of service quality and the employee's satisfaction. The employees' perception and job satisfaction have an effect on each other. The results of Pearson's correlation analysis for service quality perception and overall employee satisfaction showed that these two variables have a positive correlation between each other (Table 2). Therefore, employee's perception of the service quality in their hotel has a relationship with their overall satisfaction. This could lead us to have a better understanding of the importance of the employee perception in the organization and how it could affect the employee satisfaction. When employees are willing to be dedicated to company goals, their viewpoint can have a favorable impact on organizational productivity (SAGEER et al. 2012). Employees can demonstrate willingness and dedication to their jobs if their perspectives are considered in organizational decision making. Thus, in order for management to gain employees' commitment to accomplish their job correctly, individual employees should not be treated in isolation, but involved in concerns affecting them and the business (GREGORY 2011). When employee perceptions are taken into account, staff absenteeism is decreased, organizational commitment is increased, performance is enhanced, turnover is minimized, both customer and employee satisfaction are also increased (BULGARELLA 2005, RESEARCH CLUE 2017).

## 6. Conclusions and limitations of the study

During the Covid19 pandemic crisis, the study revealed the results of the expectations and perceptions of internal service quality for the hotel industry in Hungary. According to COMM and MATHAISEL (2000), employee satisfaction is critical since it determines whether the customer's experience is successful or unsuccessful. In this study, an online survey was used to measure the gap of employee expectation and perception in the context of service quality within the Hungarian hotel industry during the Covid19 pandemic.

In this study, the negative gap between employee expectations and perceptions of service quality was discovered. The five SERVQUAL characteristics were also shown to have substantial positive associations with an employee's overall satisfaction. These findings should assist

Hungarian hotel managers to identify specific areas for quality management that will have a direct impact on employee satisfaction as they are the organization's most valuable asset.

Regarding this research findings, it can be concluded that Hungarian hotel employees have demonstrated that the service quality dimension has an influence on their level of satisfaction and management should approach this concern. They should dedicate their resources toward strengthening human services, particularly in the empathy aspects of service quality, where the hotel provides customized attention not only to its customers but also to its workers. According to the findings of this study, the SERVQUAL instrument may be adjusted to assess the quality of internal customers. Assessing staff service quality in Hungarian hotels during the Covid19 pandemic and understanding how different aspects impact total service quality should help service companies to effectively and efficiently develop the service delivery process, resulting in improved service to external clients and gain in revenue.

This study has significant limitations that must be addressed. The study's findings are particular to the Hungarian hotel business during the Covid19 pandemic; thus, the findings may be restricted to the hotels in Hungary exclusively and may not represent the service quality of other hotels in other countries. The five SERVQUAL service quality dimensions were considered in this study; additional research may explore other service quality variables that may have an indirect impact on overall satisfaction. The external element of the Covid19 pandemic might also affect the decision making and perception of hotel employees; hence, further research should take this into account before completing the study on employee perception of service quality in their workplace.

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