



Receptionists' job satisfaction in hotels of Rovaniemi

Effects of unhappy and problematic customers

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**Bachelor's thesis
May 2009**

School of tourism and services management



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Author(s) HÖYNÄLÄ, Veli-Matti	Type of Publication Bachelor´s Thesis	
	Pages 69	Language English
	Confidential <input type="checkbox"/> Until _____	
Title RECEPTIONISTS' JOB SATISFACTION IN HOTELS OF ROVANIEMI Effects of unhappy and problematic customers		
Degree Programme Degree Programme in Facility Management		
Tutor(s) AUTIO, Anita		
Assigned by Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences		
Abstract <p>The purpose of the thesis was to discover how satisfied receptionists working in three hotels of Rovaniemi are with their work and how big effects customers' unhappiness and the ways they bring it out have on receptionists' job satisfaction. The subject was chosen because the job satisfaction of the employees' affects the level of service.</p> <p>The survey was carried out to the employees working in hotels' front office as receptionists, and three hotels took part in the survey. The hotels were City Hotel, Hotel Santa Claus and Scandic Hotel Rovaniemi. Altogether 16 questionnaires were delivered depending on the number of the receptionists working in each hotel. 11 questionnaires were received and the response rate was therefore 69 %.</p> <p>The results of the study showed that a general job satisfaction level among the respondents was good. The factors on job satisfaction were nice colleagues, the working environment and team spirit. The effects of receiving a negative feedback were relatively small but on the majority of the respondents the customers' disturbing behaviour had a negative impact. The impact on job satisfaction and motivation was still quite small.</p> <p>The information acquired from the study could be useful for the students who are going to work in a hotel environment or in hotels' front office. Also the hotels participating in the study can gain valuable information on receptionists' job satisfaction and which areas of the front office work require improvements.</p>		
Keywords Job satisfaction, motivation, receptionist, complaint, service		
Miscellaneous		

Tekijä(t) HÖYNÄLÄ, Veli-Matti	Julkaisun laji Opinnäytetyö	
	Sivumäärä 69	Julkaisun kieli Englanti
	Luottamuksellisuus <input type="checkbox"/> Salainen _____ saakka	
Työn nimi VASTAANOTTOVIRKAILIJOIDEN TYÖSSÄVIIHTYMINEN ROVANIEMEN HOTELLEISSA Tyytymättömien ja ongelmallisten asiakkaiden vaikutukset		
Koulutusohjelma Degree Programme in Facility Management		
Työn ohjaaja(t) AUTIO, Anita		
Toimeksiantaja(t) Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulu		
Tiivistelmä Työn tarkoitus oli saada selville, kuinka tyytyväisiä kolmen hotellin vastaanottovirkailijat Rovaniemellä ovat työssään ja kuinka suuri vaikutus asiakkaiden tyytymättömyydellä ja tavoilla, joilla he sen tuovat ilmi, on vastaanottovirkailijoiden viihtymiseen työssä. Aihe valittiin koska työntekijöiden työssäviihtyvyys vaikuttaa palvelun tasoon. Tutkimuksen kysely toteutettiin työntekijöille, jotka työskentelevät vastaanottovirkailijoina, ja kolme hotelliä osallistui tutkimukseen. Nämä hotellit olivat City hotelli, hotelli Santa Claus ja Scandic hotelli Rovaniemi. Yhteensä 16 kysymyslomaketta toimitettiin hotelleihin riippuen kunkin hotellin vastaanotossa työskentelevien työntekijöiden määrästä. 11 kysymyslomaketta saatiin takaisin, joten vastausprosentti oli 69 %. Kyselyn tulokset osoittivat, että yleinen työssäviihtyminen vastaajien kesken oli hyvä. Työssäviihtymiseen vaikuttivat mukavat työkaverit, työskentelyilmapiiri ja yhteishenki. Negatiivisen asiakaspalautteen vaikutukset olivat suhteellisen pienet, mutta suurimpaan osaan vastaajista asiakkaiden häiriökäytös vaikutti negatiivisesti. Vaikutus työssäviihtymiseen ja motivaatioon oli silti melko pieni. Tutkimuksesta saatu tieto voi olla hyödyllistä opiskelijoille, jotka aikovat työskennellä hotellissa tai hotellin vastaanotossa. Myös tutkimuksessa mukana olleet hotellit voivat saada arvokasta tietoa vastaanottovirkailijoiden työssäviihtymisestä ja siitä, mitkä alueet vastaanoton työssä vaativat parannuksia.		
Avainsanat (asiasanat) Työtyytyväisyys, motivaatio, vastaanottovirkailija, valitus, palvelu		
Muut tiedot		

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1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this thesis was to study how satisfied receptionists working in hotels of Rovaniemi are with their work and what effects customers' unhappiness, complaints and problematic customers have on general job satisfaction. It was also studied what the ways are for receptionists to handle these customers who are either unhappy with the service that they have received or cause distraction and how reclamations and customer complaints are dealt with in these hotels, and if these problematic customers have an effect on the employees' performance and motivation for the job. The main reason why I wanted to study this subject is because if an employee is dissatisfied at work and lacks a motivation to act in a profession which is so customer service related as hotels' front office job is it shows in the eventual level of service that a hotel customer receives and drops the level of quality.

With the term a *problematic customer* I mean a person who is clearly unsatisfied for some reason and makes this clear for the employee working in a hotel's front office. Employees' safety in the working place is one area that I wanted to study and therefore in my research I also ask the respondents how many of them have experienced feelings of unsafety and fear at work. Under the term a problematic customer I also count people who are not accommodating in the hotel at the moment but want to use the hotel's services such as a restaurant or a bar and start to behave badly towards an employee.

This kind of research is useful especially for people who are going to work in a hotel environment as a receptionist in the future. By doing this research I wanted to find out what were the negative and positive factors on receptionists' job satisfaction and motivation for the work. It will also give truthful information from the employees who have working experience in the branch concerning unhappy and difficult customers and experiences on dealing with complaints and reclamations. I also hope that students who are studying the hotel and restaurant business can have valuable information on a

hotels' front office work and the diversity that it includes in different working tasks.

I have been working in customer service related jobs all my life and as a receptionist in three different places so far. The first working place, where my tasks were mainly to take care of the in-coming and out-going customers was during the summers of 2001 and 2002 in Camping Tornio. The second working place was my practical training period in hotel Rantasipi Pohjanhovi in Rovaniemi where I really got familiar with the hotel business on the whole and how the hotel runs its daily operations. During this second job I really learned a lot about a receptionist's work and about all the tasks that are included under the working title of a receptionist. The reason why I wanted to explore this subject was because in the hospitality business employees have to deal with many kinds of customers and sometimes among normal hotel customers there are people who cause disturbance because they are under the influence of psychoactive substances and their behaviour can be unpredictable and offensive towards the employees.

I also wanted to find out if the receptionists working in hotels of Rovaniemi face difficult customer service situations in their daily working tasks and whether it has a straight impact on their personal level of satisfaction and motivation for the work. In customer service related jobs and especially in the hotel sector, drunken and problematic customers can also cause tensions, feelings of unsafety and even anxiety that a receptionist can start to feel towards the work.

During my practical training I learned through my own work and from my colleagues the fact that as a receptionist the worker has to deal with tens or even hundreds of customers daily who are all different and can have sometimes unusual requests and complaints regarding their stay in the hotel.

At the moment I am working as a receptionist in Hotel Cumulus Rovaniemi which also belongs to the same chain as Rantasipi Pohjanhovi and I find it necessary to point out the fact that even though the business idea, customer types and the size of the hotel can vary it does not change the fact that in the hotel business there are always unsatisfied customers and situations that

cannot be expected from the receptionists point of view. Because these two hotels are already familiar to me, I decided to do the research on three other hotels of Rovaniemi where I have not worked. The reason for this was that by analyzing the questionnaire answers from employees who I do not know beforehand I will be able to make better conclusions. I hope that by doing this research the hotels of Rovaniemi that take part in the research, City hotel, Hotel Santa Claus, and Scandic Rovaniemi, can gain valuable information on their employees' level of job satisfaction, how to improve it and what effects customer complaints as well as problematic customer service situations have on it.

1.1 Research structure

I start the thesis by introducing the hotels that are included in this research and some basic information on them. After this I will explain job satisfaction and the areas that contribute to it. Then I will move into a receptionists' role and tasks, skills required in the front office work and how they contribute to job satisfaction and the service process which shows at which point customer complaints and reclamations usually occur. The fourth chapter demonstrates the importance of having the right communicational skills in the job and how they effect on the employees' personal safety and therefore on job satisfaction. The fifth chapter explains safety risks in a receptionist's work and which issues lower an employee's personal safety which is one important area of job satisfaction.

The actual research was done by a questionnaire that was given to a certain number of reception workers in three hotels of Rovaniemi. These three hotels are located in the centre of Rovaniemi but they have differences in the size, format and business idea. I also want to point out that the questionnaire sheet was given to the employees who are working on the performing level of the hotels' front office and I will only analyze their answers in my research.

By analyzing their answers and using my own experiences as a viewpoint I will get a more truthful basis on the subject, also the reliability of the research grows because I have some experience in different accommodation facilities

as a receptionist and therefore have experienced similar situations in customer service with the respondents. The persons taking part in this research answered freely and used their own words. A qualitative research is usually more personal than a quantitative one and it contains more the researcher`s own discussion and analyzing based on the answers received.

1.2 Earlier researches about job satisfaction

I was able to find one earlier research about hotel employees' job satisfaction. This thesis was done by Riikka Laine and Sanna Parkkunen in 2003 at Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences. The thesis concentrated on stress levels and job satisfaction in a hotel environment among hotels' front office employees. The actual research was conducted for front office employees of one hotel in London and the research method was mainly quantitative. The results of that study showed that stress levels among front office employees were fairly low but there were differences in the answers between the reception employees and those who were working in managerial positions.

1.3 Hotels taking part in the research

All three hotels that are included in this research are located in the centre of Rovaniemi.

City hotel

City hotel was opened in 1978 and after this it joined the Point-hotels and Best Western marketing-chain. In 1985 the hotel was expanded with 33 rooms to its current capacity. The hotel has 92 rooms, two of them are suites with saunas, three are single rooms and 87 are double rooms. All rooms of the hotel are smoke-free. All the rooms have a shower, television, radio, phone, mini-bar and a hairdryer. A renovation was made in all rooms of the hotel in 2001. The hotel has two conference rooms called Joiku and Saga and they include basic conference equipment. The sauna department of the hotel is located on the top floor of the hotel and for an order it can be rented also for

conference and business customers. The restaurant Monte Rosa is the main restaurant of the hotel and it has taken influences from North America. City Hotel has also another restaurant/ pub called Kellari which is located in the basement of the building. (City Hotel, 2009)

Hotel Santa Claus

Hotel Santa Claus belongs to the Clarion hotel chain and it offers four star quality in a modern environment. It has altogether 168 rooms with most of them having a 3,5m room height. There are 151 double rooms with standard and superior quality, 11 deluxe rooms with own saunas, 3 Junior suites with own saunas, and three other suites which are larger in size. All the hotel rooms of Santa Claus include an Internet connection, Pay-television, mini-safe, air conditioning, water boiler, temperature controller, hairdryer, bath tub and a shower. The hotel has also several options for conferences and meetings with four different spaces which vary in size and purpose of the meeting.

There are three restaurants in Hotel Santa Claus, the main restaurant Gaissa, Bar & Grill Zoomup and Café & Bar Zoomit. (Hotel Santa Claus, 2009)

Scandic Hotel Rovaniemi

This hotel belongs to the Scandic hotel chain which has altogether 152 hotels in the Nordic countries and northern Europe. It has 167 rooms with standard and superior room classes. 134 rooms are smoke-free and the hotel also has a room service. The hotel has three restaurants and three conference and meeting rooms. The hotel's restaurant Atrium is located on the street level and it offers local specialities and Mediterranean delicacies. On the second floor there is an order restaurant which is suitable for groups of 20-80 persons. The hotel has a sauna department and private sauna with jacuzzi and steam sauna possibility. All guest rooms and conference rooms have a wireless Internet connection. There are 75 places in the hotels parking area with 40 places inside and 35 outside. (Scandic Rovaniemi, 2009)

1.4 Job satisfaction

Locke (1976, 1300) defines job satisfaction “as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one`s job or job experiences”.

“A common way of thinking about job satisfaction is in terms of the degree of “fit” between what an organization requires of its employees and provides for its employees and what the employees are seeking from the firm”.

(Mumford, 1972).

This kind of “fit” that the employees are looking for can be divided into many dimensions. They are intrinsic work interest, payment and rewards, social relationships, and level and type of control. Therefore the concept of job satisfaction becomes multidimensional where employees can be satisfied with their colleagues for example, but dissatisfied with the nature of the work itself. Having a workforce that enjoys their jobs is an advantage for an organization because absenteeism and turnover tend to be lower if job satisfaction is high among the employees. However, research studies have indicated that there is a relatively low correlation between work performance and job satisfaction. This means that the best workers are not necessarily the most satisfied with their jobs and poor workers can enjoy their jobs. The reasons for this are: the rewards from work are not always linked to work performance. People do not always know how good their work is. People may not feel they are being fairly rewarded for the effort they are putting into their work.

(Guerrier 1999, 113-116.)

Job satisfaction can mean different things to different people but generally the satisfaction that employees receive is dependent on whether the job itself and everything associated with it meets their needs and wants. The higher the employees satisfaction with the job is, the less likely it is that people will leave the organization. *(Cullen 2001, 177.)*

2. MATTERS THAT IMPACT ON JOB SATISFACTION

2.1 Motivation at work

Motivation is an employee's inner state which causes behaviour in a way that it ensures a successful accomplishment of goals and objectives. The term motivation originally comes from the Latin word *Movere* which literally means to move. While many definitions for motivation do exist no definition describes it adequately. For all employees the triggers and drivers of motivation are not the same. Some employees get motivation out of incentives, a pay-rise, bonuses, improvements in the working place or changes in the working shifts. Others get motivation from being valued as an employee or as a person in the working place, or possibilities for career opportunities. (Cullen 2001, 98-99.)

Motivation at work is about persons willingness to work. Wright (1991) defines it as "the willingness to expend effort on a particular task in order to attain an incentive or incentive of a certain type" (Guerrier 1999, 100.)

The factors motivating people at work can be divided into *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* factors.

Intrinsic (natural) factors are characteristics of the work itself such as how interesting the work is for the employee and how demanding it is. Extrinsic (outer) factors are related to the context of the work such as the physical environment, liking your colleagues/ superiors, salary and benefits. (Guerrier 1999, 108.)

According to Abraham Maslow's Theory of Motivation there are five basic needs that are shared by all human beings. These five basic needs are: physiological needs, safety needs, social and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization. Relating Maslow's hierarchy to the work situation there are many ways in which organizations can attempt to satisfy the different needs of its employees.

Physiological needs: Basic wages/ salary, working conditions such as correct temperature. Adequate rest breaks and meal breaks.

Safety needs: Safe working environment, job security, pension and health care.

Social needs: Compatible work group (team spirit), friendly superiors. Opportunities to socialize, sports and social facilities. Parties and outings.

Esteem needs: Impressive job title, office, company car, feedback and praise for good work.
Work that offers challenges and is considered important.
Rewards that are linked to achievements such as an employee of the month.

Self-actualization: Challenging and interesting work that becomes a way for the employee to express him/ herself.
Work that becomes an important part of the employee's life. (Guerrier 1999, 104-105.)

Another motivation theory is Herzberg's two-factor theory.

Frederick Herzberg put forward the motivator-hygiene theory which emphasizes the roles of motivator factors and hygiene factors. The factors producing job satisfaction are called motivator factors because they satisfy an employee's need for self-realization. According to this theory the hygiene factors are important but they are not motivators.

Dissatisfaction: The hygiene factors are company policy and administration, supervision, relationship with team leader, relationship with peers, working conditions, salary, and relationship with subordinates.

Satisfaction: motivation factors are opportunity for achievement, opportunity for recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement and personal growth.

According to this theory when hygiene factors which are also known as maintenance factors deteriorate to a level that an employee considers acceptable, then dissatisfaction is present. Still even though by removing the causes of dissatisfaction it does not create satisfaction and will not motivate performance. (Cullen 2001, 101.)

Many managers still believe that money is a major motivator because of what can be bought with it. Others tend to have more complex views on the matter based on the theories of Maslow and Herzberg claiming that the employees' remain motivated towards the work because of a more composite package, including money, security, self-esteem, and job satisfaction. (Boella M.J 2000, 151.)

Herzberg's statement that "a fair salary is considered a hygiene factor" means that it is something that the employees need, to do their jobs. Other hygiene factors include adequate workstations, light, heat, climate controls and proper equipment to do the job. Even though employees have all the needed hygiene (maintenance) factors it does not mean that employees will do extra good results at work, it only ensures that employees can do what they were hired to do.

Herzberg also states that getting people to go above and beyond the call of duty requires the use of motivators such as praise and recognition, challenges at work, and growth and development opportunities. When hygiene factors are good and adequate the stage becomes set for motivational factors which help create job satisfaction.

(Cullen 2001, 102.)

2.2 Positive and negative strokes.

Strokes are units of attention and they contribute to motivation and morale. Stroking can be in a form of either positive or negative. Positive stroking comes in a form of praise or rewards which are strong contributing motivators to employees' morale. Negative strokes come in a form of reprimands or put-

downs and they are considered as demotivators. Positive strokes can be for instance: making eye contact, giving listening signals, handshakes, waving, using person's name, checking for understanding, making reference to past experiences, praising, greeting, thanking, and farewells. Perhaps the highest level of positive stroking is receiving praise in front of other employees or team members.

Negative strokes or demotivators are: inconsistent behaviour from the team leader or management, abusive or abrasive behaviour, poor working conditions, fearing the management or fear of losing job, lack of team atmosphere, lack of recognition, poor leadership, lack of incentives, ambitions and goals, use of ridicule or sarcasm, too much supervision and showing lack of trust, unfair job allocation, lack of communication and lack of respect between employees and management. (Cullen 2001, 104-106.)

2.3 Incentives and benefits

Competition in hotel business among employers to attract effective employees has increased in recent years. Not only the increased competition but also other factors such as the nature of the taxation system have forced employers to seek ways to make the total remuneration package more attractive for employees. Sometimes employers offer benefits such as free meals because other employers do so and sometimes incentives are offered to employees to focus their attention on the employer's business objectives. In a job that requires creative nature from the employee the prospect of incentive payments is considered unlikely to stimulate greater activity in the working tasks. Others say that incentives do influence productivity for instance in a selling situation where the possibility of earning commission will definitely stimulate greater selling efforts from the employee. (Boella M.J 2000, 151.)

In the hospitality industry there are many opportunities for employees to increase their earnings especially in selling areas, such as bar work, hotel reception, and catering. The main types of incentives used in the hotel and catering industry are tips, service charges, bonuses and commissions.

Financial incentives are intended to stimulate and promote extra productivity whereas tips and service charges are considered by many employees as a matter of right and something without which they could not have a reasonable living standard. (Boella M.J 2000, 152.)

Even though incentives usually mean money where an employee gets cash bonuses based on good and effective work performance or extra selling there is also another form of performance based incentives, the nonmonetary incentives. For instance many companies in the industry have recognition programs where employees receive plaques, novelty items, certificates, time off, vacations or refreshment possibilities or other noncash incentives. (Cullen 2001, 271.)

Benefits are noncash additions to employee's basic pay and the reason for paying benefits are to attract and retain employees of a right calibre for the company. Benefits enable a hospitality organization to compete for current and future employees with other organizations who are also offering benefits for their employees. Benefits are an indirect type of compensations that are given to members of the organization to improve commitment and membership towards the company. (Cullen 2001, 271-272.)

The total amount of different benefits offered today for employees is considerable and continuously growing because employers are trying to look for a new ways to attract employees. The three main types are: financial benefits, part-financial benefits and non-financial benefits. Under financial benefits can be counted the following: commissions, bonuses, profit sharing and share options. Part financial benefits include pensions, meals, cars, and subscriptions. Non-financial benefits include holidays, sick payment, and medical insurance. When considering benefits it is useful to realize that an incentive or a motivator that is regarded effective today might lose its motivational effect with time. Non –financial benefits have been playing a bigger role in employee compensation in recent years because these are taxed lightly or not at all. (Boella M.J 2000, 157-158.)

In Finnish hotels the employees are usually paid a monthly basic salary every two weeks or once a month. Incentives and financial benefits are not so common in Finland but non-financial benefits do exist more. Common employee benefits in Finland are lower prices in the hotel chains services such as accommodation, meals and drinks. Sick payment, medical insurance and holidays are also common in Finland. Other examples given regarding incentives and benefits apply more in other European countries and in hotels of UK.

2.4 Complaints

Customer complaints are common in receptionists work and hotels front office is the place that usually receives and handles them. An employee working in the hotels front office who receives complaints but is not able to handle them properly can start to dislike his/her work and therefore having to deal with complaints can have a negative impact on employees job satisfaction.

Dealing with complaints coming from hotel guests is an important applied social skill for a receptionist. Normal response for a complaint often starts with a denial such as "It's not my fault" or "It was not me" but what needs to be noticed is that these kinds of responses to a hotel guests complaint only achieves provocation of a further argument. When dealing with complaints the following points should be followed.

1. Listen to the customer attentively because it is necessary to show attention.
2. Interrupting the customer is not recommended because this encourages the complainant to continue louder and longer.
3. Employee should wait until the complaining person has finished his/her argument.
4. An apology is the first thing that a receptionist should offer. There should not be any elements of excuse or explanation and the apology should be clear and concise.

5. Speaking normally and not raising your voice even though the complaining guest might be doing this.
6. Summarising the complaint by repeating it. This serves two purposes which are: making sure that everything has been covered and that there is no misunderstanding about the cause of the complaint. A factual summary helps to defuse the situation.
7. Explaining what action will be taken and how quickly because it is important to give an explanation of action to the guest so that the guest does not get an impression of removing the responsibility to another employee or management of the hotel.
8. In a situation where the customer or guest is particularly infuriated it is advisable for the receptionist to remove the scene to somewhere more private place such as office or lounge.
By doing this the receptionist will remove the physical barrier that the reception desk creates for the confrontation because a desk or a table can also be a psychological barrier. (Dix, Baird 1998, 32-33.)

2.5 Complaints coming from a colleague

Complaints coming from employees concerning colleagues come to the forefront very quickly. Since it is a part of human phenomenon most people do not hesitate to complain about each other. Complaints about colleagues can be presented in a highly emotional way or in a cooler calculating manner but most often with a great deal of emotion which clouds and colours the facts involved. Important about these types of complaints in a working society is that the issue is being handled as soon as possible, because the longer the complaint remains unsolved, the more people get involved and the quality of work is affected. When the quality of work suffers it impacts immediately on customer satisfaction especially in a hotel environment.

The complaining employee should obtain a full and fair hearing from the management level and the ideal resolution of a complaint is to bring the situation around from where one loses and where one wins into a result that is called a “win-win” situation. To get to this point the following steps can lead to a satisfactory decision for both parties involved. Checking the team members

work history and getting the facts. Trying to understand the reasons why an employee has made the complaint and what the feelings are. Watching body language and observing facial expressions as well as giving a possibility to communicate freely and without interruption. Checking that the information is accurate when other people are involved and avoiding argumentative disposition when hearing the complaint. Recording the formal complaint by being specific and adding date, time, place, persons involved, type of complaint, and relevant facts. Preparing a written statement that includes the decision and the reasons for the decision. Finally seeking solutions and bringing the situation to a mutually agreeable state which includes steps for avoiding any future problems in the area of the complaint.

Sometimes complaints coming from employees are a way to draw attention and to send messages regarding unfair wages, poor working conditions, or discriminatory actions against colleagues on the basis of origin, gender or sexual preference. Complaints that are not handled quickly and efficiently can lead to problems of arbitration with labour unions. (Cullen 2001, 144-145.)

2.6 Handling of customer complaints and reclamations

There tends to be two types of hotel customer problems, those that the hotel has created itself and those that are created by external factors which are out of the control of the hotel. Some of the problems that the hotel has created by itself are for instance: the hotel customers are unfamiliar with the hotels policies and a good example of this kind of policy is when for instance a customer arrives to the hotel later than was mentioned in the reservation and therefore the hotel has already re-let the hotel room to another customer because the reservation was not guaranteed beforehand by the customer. The customer might be unfamiliar with the terminology that the hotel is using in its reservations and for instance might book a room with two single beds and the hotel has reserved a room with a double bed. This kind of misunderstanding might cause inconvenience especially during the high season when all the hotel rooms tend to be fully booked for certain dates and there is no possibility to change the room. Other problems that are caused by

the hotel are for instance impolite service by the receptionist towards the customer. Errors that the reception has done to the customers room reservation such as wrong room price, wrong kind of room, special requests regarding the reservation have not been followed, the guest receives slow service or the customer does not receive an early morning wake-up call that was requested beforehand. External causes for a customer's unhappiness or complaint include for instance lost luggage that an airline is responsible or the customer has mislaid his/her safe deposit key.

(Baker, Huyton, Bradley 2000, 261.)

When the receptionist starts to deal with the customers problem or complaints social skills are important but also the employees appearance and posture. Taking the complaint seriously even though the reason for the complaint might be very small and checking all the necessary information regarding it, as well as making notes about the complaint gives a good impression for the customer. From the hotels point of view it is always better that a customer does eventually complain about something that he/she might have been dissatisfied rather than leave the hotel unhappy or angry. The reason for this is that it creates bad publicity for the hotel when a customer tells to other people about his/her bad experience in the hotel.

(Baker, Huyton, Bradley 2000, 263.)

Reclamations are complaints or remarks made by the customers of the hotel and in most cases they concern either the level of service, the room bill or unhappiness towards the room. These reclamations should always be taken into consideration and handled as soon as possible by the hotel staff or management. In a formal reclamation answer that is being sent to the customer the hotel should always point out at least the following things: an apologize / regret for what has happened and an explanation why the mistake took place. As an addition the answer can include information about the compensation that will be given to the customer or the actual compensation itself as included. (Alen, Nenonen, Savola, Uusimäki 1997, 142.)

Customer feedback and complaints should always be taken care of immediately and in a way that the customer feels that his/her point of view has

been noticed. Customer complaints and problems that they have experienced in the hotel are a useful source of information for the hotel to develop its services to become better and more functional.

2.7 Stress at workplace

The two basic sources for stress are physical activity and mental or emotional activity and the physical reaction of the body to both sources is the same. Even though the hospitality industry can be a stressful environment for its employees not all stress is harmful. Positive stress is a feeling of exhilaration and achievement that can be associated with a successful, busy service period in the hospitality establishment when everything went well. Negative stress that is found in many organizations may cause employees to become ill and it is usually the result of pressure from increased responsibilities, heavy workloads and deadlines. When an employee faces negative stress at work some of the most common physical reactions that he/she may feel are a lump in the throat, sweaty palms, tense muscles, dry digestion and heart palpitations.

Some employees can find stress stimulating and respond with higher productivity and performance. These employees find frequently deadlines and critical situations as a challenge providing excitement and accelerated performance. Others react negatively displaying reduced performance and productivity. Some of the positive benefits associated with stress are: frequent pressure produces increased motivation and better work performance. When deadlines in working tasks are approaching some employees can tune all their mental energies on the problem and this promotes efficiency and increased productivity. Deadlines force employees to think out the problem and to make excellent decisions when time is of the essence. Original ideas often emerge under pressure and when an employee is pressed into action just before deadline the creativity may be at its peak. Even though positive stress at workplace can have its benefits, continual exposure to stress can be dangerous and not all employees experience the outcomes of positive stress. (Cullen 2001, 138-139.)

Distress is negative stress which can lead to physical and psychological problems. At workplace the result of distress is decreased productivity and typical symptoms of this are Insomnia, muscle tension, erratic behaviour, increased use of alcohol and tobacco, changes in appetite and eating habits, feelings of anxiety, frequent or constant fatigue, fear and nervousness, increased accidents, feelings of unhappiness, concentration problems and extreme emotional reactions. (Cullen 2001, 140-141.)

The most severe form of stress is considered to be burnout. Job burnout refers to a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment. Burnout can also be a response to a chronic emotional strain of dealing with other people, particularly when they are troubled or having problems. (Cullen 2001, 143.)

Also job conditions, changes in organizational structure and problems with other people promote tension which results in stress.

Work-related stress usually occurs from the following causes:

Technological change: When working equipments and technology develops and changes it creates uncertainty which leads to stress.

Heavy work load: excessive work load creates job stress and pressure for an employee when failing to keep up, as a result an employee can lose confidence and uncomfortness is created.

Underuse: assigned tasks are below employees' capability or an employee is overqualified. The element of challenge is missing, with stress and fatigue as likely results.

Job insecurity and fear of unemployment: both can lead to self-esteem and self-identity problems.

Inadequate training and orientation: poor training for working tasks leads to lack of confidence in their ability to perform well at work. This leads to frustration causing diminished sense of commitment and reduced productivity.

Inherent job stress: some positions in hospitality industry possess more stress naturally. The higher the position in a organization the more responsibility and therefore also stress. (Cullen 2001, 140-141.)

2.8 Leadership at workplace

Leadership contributes to employees' job satisfaction in many ways. When the superior or the manager who has many employees as subordinates is able to motivate his/her staff to perform at work and treats them fairly and equally job satisfaction of the employees can be present. According to Guerrier (1999, 136) leadership is about influencing people and to make them do things they otherwise would not, as well as inspiring the group and being able to change attitudes.

Even though the traits and characteristics of successful leaders are mostly inconclusive the following characteristics are found to be useful in most situations.

1. Communication: the ability to communicate with all the people with whom the leader is in contact.
2. Decision-making: ability to make the right decisions in given situations and take responsibility as well as being accountable for them. Also understanding the consequences of action and seeing a wider perspective.
3. Commitment: includes a willingness to bring qualities such as enthusiasm, drive and ambition to a particular situation.
4. Concern for staff: leader should treat employees on a basis of equality and confidence. Respect, trust and commitment as well as ability to develop and understand employees should be present also.
5. Quality: a commitment on giving the customers quality service no matter what situation in hand. The staff also receives recognition of their efforts on making quality for customers.
6. A given set of values that others also identify. Only few managers or directors succeed by being all things to all people in all situations.

7. Personal integrity: including vision, enthusiasm, character, commitment, energy and interest. Also high standards of moral and ethical probity are included.

8. Positive attitude must be held by the leader and also transmitted to the staff and customers.

9. Mutuality and dependency. Good leaders know their own weaknesses and the importance and value of people that are involved. They also notice when and where to go for help and support in these areas.

(Pettinger 2000, 122.)

According to Fiedler's Contingency model whether having a task-oriented leader or a relationship-oriented leader depends on the "favourableness" of the situation. Fiedler was against the idea that there is only one best leadership style because one type of leader may be best in some situations but another type of leader may be more successful in other situations. It is better to choose a leader to fit the situation or alter the situation to fit the leader's natural style rather than ask the leader to change his/her approach.

(Guerrier 1999, 139-141.)

"Leaders need to fit their leadership style to the characteristics of the subordinates and the task environment in order to ensure that subordinates are fully motivated to achieve the organization's goals"

(Guerrier 1999, 140.)

The leadership functions model was developed by John Adair during the 1960's and 1970's. According to this model certain traits, qualities, capabilities and aptitudes must be present in leaders and that they must be translated into action. A leader addresses the key tasks of achieving the task, building the team and paying attention to the individual members where a balance between these three is required. If the leader concentrates only on the task by going all out for schedules and neglects training, encouragement and motivation of the group, problems of dissonance and dysfunction will emerge. On the other hand a leader who only concentrates on creating team spirit, while neglecting the job or individuals is not going to get a maximum commitment and involvement. The required leadership functions are

direction, planning, communication, appraisal, decision-making, coordination, control, creativity, assessment, development, and resourcefulness.

(Pettinger 2000, 124 -125.)

3. THE ROLE AND TASKS OF A RECEPTIONIST

When an employee is well aware of the tasks and areas of responsibility that needs to be fulfilled at work he/she can perform better and create own methods to fullfill these tasks. Job satisfaction of the employee can decrease if there are no clear guidelines or adequate training on how to perform in the working tasks. It is up to the management of the hotel and the employees' supervisor to make sure that the employee is aware from the beginning what is expected from him/her at work.

As hotels vary in size, shape and age, so does the exact role of the reception department differ from one hotel to another. The majority of hotels get their income and profits from the room sales so therefore it is essential that the reception department is well organized and adequately staffed to maximize sales. In smaller hotels the role of a receptionist can consists more tasks and duties than in bigger hotels which usually have more departments and staff. (Dix, Baird 1998, 6.)

The basic tasks of a receptionist is to handle the check-in and check-out procedures of hotel customers and to make sure that payments are handled in a correct way. The amount of tasks that a receptionist takes care varies depending on the size of the hotel, the services of the hotel and the basic business idea of the hotel. Other basic procedures that belong to the receptionist's job description are answering phone calls, making reservations, handling incoming and outgoing post, taking care of a lobby bar that is quite common in many hotels, cleaning tasks especially in the night shift when the amount of served customers is much lower than during morning and evening shift. Preparing breakfast is also a common procedure especially in the night shift and some other duties that I have coped with as a receptionist are updating the lobby areas brochures and magazines as well as taking care that

the convention board is updated daily so that it includes all the required information for conference and convention guests.

As it can be seen from these basic tasks that a receptionist deals with depending on the work shift the job description itself includes lots of skills that are required from the person working in a hotel's front-office. Because the amount of tasks and responsibilities of an employee working in a hotel's front-office vary depending on the hotel it also contributes to the employee's level of job satisfaction. I have come to the conclusion that a receptionist's work is multi-dimensional that requires from the worker most of all ability to handle pressure, ability to work under stress and hurry, polite behaviour towards customers, polished outlook, computer skills, language skills, ability to handle many tasks at the same time as well as patience when problematic situations occur. It can be said that a receptionist's working day is never exactly the same as the previous one because customers of the hotel are the ones who shape workload and upcoming tasks.

Also being responsible for the hotel's safety and most of all the customers' safety is an important part of a receptionist's work and usually the safety matters are introduced to a newcomer first. I think that the word "Gatekeeper" describes a receptionist's work quite well also because in a way the employee is the one who decides which customers are allowed in to the hotel. The employee also has to keep an eye on the customers living in the hotel and when necessary to intervene if a customer's behaviour is disturbing or otherwise suspicious.

3.1 Receptions service process

The next chapter explains the service process where customer problems usually appear.

1. The functions taking place in the hotel before the customer arrives.

Usually the customer makes the room reservation by phone or e-mail straight to the reception desk where the receptionist adds the reservation to the hotel

data-base. The reservation can be made nowadays also through internet-booking system and if the reservation is concerning a group or multiple persons it is often handled by the sales department of the hotel which then informs the reception about the reservation. If a customer's wishes or special arrangements concerning the reservation are not taken into consideration or booked properly it is hard to fulfill the actual expectations. The importance of proper telephone manners towards a customer cannot be underestimated as a sales tool and as a way to give a positive image of the hotel. There are different types of actual reservations that the authors of the book have introduced and they divided these into three categories.

- (1.) Single and individual reservations
- (2.) Group reservations
- (3.) Group series reservations

Pre reservations can be divided into four different reliability states which are: preliminary reservation which usually have a certain deadline or a date where the status has to be changed as a confirmed reservation. Unconfirmed reservations are made often by telephone where the status of the reservation is confirmed orally but a written document or a paper version of the reservation is missing. Confirmed reservations are already confirmed in writing either by e-mail or fax and often the hotel requires a deposition (pre-payment) from the person, group or company for these. Guaranteed reservations are so-called contingency reservations where the customer has already sent a written guarantee about the arrival. For these reservations it is natural that the hotel gets a full price of the booked hotel room from the customer, even though the customer would not even show up.

(Alen, Nenonen, Savola, Uusimäki 1997, 35-36.)

For already decades there has been a discussion going on in Finland concerning depositions. Internationally the basic rule has been that a hotel reservation without a deposition is only preliminary and only after the deposition has been paid by the customer it becomes a compulsory reservation. Especially in the business hotels in Finland depositions are not required from customers because customers' average stay in the hotel is only

1.7 days. Usually customers are from well known companies and therefore considered reliable for the hotels. Often competitors in the hotel business do not require depositions from their customers and therefore if one hotel or chain starts this policy it can have a negative effect on the image and profitability. Customers might also feel that requiring a deposition is a no-confidence motion towards them and often reservations arrive with such a short notice that it is even technically impossible to arrange the handling of depositions in a sensible way. (Huhtala 2004, 89.)

2. The arrival of the customer

As I mentioned already before the check-in phase is one of the most essential ones in the service process because this is the moment when the customer gets the first impression of the hotel and it also effects on the opinions towards other services that the hotel has to offer. The polished outlook of a receptionist is essential as well as the tidiness of the lobby and the reception area. At this moment a customer's reservation information is checked, the room key is given and also information about the hotels services is shared. Before the customer can start to accommodate in the reserved room he/ she needs to fullfill a passenger-card or an accommodation form where all the basic information is filled for later purposes.

(Alen, Nenonen, Savola, Uusimäki 1997, 39-42.)

Usually at this phase of the service process the customer is not unhappy about anything unless the reception has made some mistakes in the customer's room reservation or in the additional services ordered. Sometimes there can be misunderstandings in the way how the payment for accommodation is handled especially with business customers when the pre-reservation has arrived to the hotel from another route than from the customer him/herself.

Often arriving customers have travelled a long way and can be impatient and tired and therefore they want quick and efficient check-in procedures from a receptionist who is pleasant and courteous. To make a good first impression on the arriving customer a good functioning check-in procedure is essential and it also helps in establishing the hotel's image and reputation in the long run. Some important guidelines for the check-in procedure are: maintaining an

eye contact to the customer because it reflects attention and respect. Smile gives a warm and positive impression to the customer. Standing straight shows respect and attention for the customer. Maintaining neat and tidy appearance as well as making sure that the personal hygiene is taken care of. Speaking clearly to the customer and in a pleasant tone so that the customer understands your instructions and becomes impressed of your courtesy. (Baker, Huyton, Bradley 2000, 114-115.)

3. Customers stay in the hotel

The information that was given to the customer during the check-in phase creates the whole base for the stay in the hotel whether it is for one night or one week. If the customer is told properly about the services available and about the opening and closing hours it is much easier for him/her to enjoy the stay without having to ask multiple times about different issues at the reception desk. Obviously the hotel has lots of written information in separate places also such as in the rooms and on the notice board but the basic information concerning breakfast, sauna and swimming possibility and check-out time needs to be given orally. During the stay the customer can use various services that the hotel has to offer such as Pay-television in the hotel room, mini-bar, and room service. The customer can have all the bills from the stay transferred electronically to the hotel data-base so that all the bills are summed up and ready for eventual payment when the check-out phase becomes relevant. In some cases if the customer for instance is staying in the hotel for a long time and the bill from all the used services starts to grow big it is advisable and often a must that a receptionist asks for a "mid-payment" during the stay so that any possible payment problems or cheating is avoided. (Alen, Nenonen, Savola, Uusimäki 1997, 42-43.)

4. Customer leaving the hotel

In the check out procedure it is essential for a receptionist to settle the customer's financial transactions in a proper way before the customer leaves. At this point the customer has already experienced the stay in the hotel and usually at this point the customer also expresses dissatisfaction. If the customer is dissatisfied about something it is the receptionist who can make a difference in the customers mind by being friendly, courteous and efficient.

The final opinion of the customer about the hotel can still be changed at this stage from bad to good by for instance offering some sort of compensation or a discount on future services. (Baker, Huyton, Bradley 2000, 186.)

Often the most busiest hours with checking-out customers is between 07:00 – 9:00 AM and between these hours the receptionist must pay extra attention to payments so that all the bills of the customers are handled properly. To relieve the rush from this check-out phase receptionists often ask pre-payments from the customers who are just checking-in to the hotel so that when the check-out time arrives the customer can just leave the room key cards and leave from the hotel. Mini bar products that the customer might have used during the stay are based on trust where the customer him/ herself informs the reception about what products were used and then they are added to the final bill. The payment for the accommodation and services used can be made in multiple ways such as bank or credit card, Voucher (travel agencies), cash, invoice straight to the company, or in some cases the accommodation might have been already pre-paid for the hotel.

(Alen, Nenonen, Savola, Uusimäki 1997, 43 –45.)

In the hotels that I have worked it has been advised for the reception to inquire also from the customers about their possible next arrival so that if the customer wants to make a reservation for the next stay already at this phase. Often this is asked from mainly business customers who are Finnish or from the native country because foreign tourists most often visit Finland or in my example the hotels of Rovaniemi only once or twice a year in holiday purposes.

5. Functions taking place after the customer has left

The service process does not end when the customer has left the hotel but the actions taking place after the departure have a significant effect on the customer decision to accommodate in the hotel also in the future. The hotel can market its upcoming offers for instance by e-mail and personal letters/ invitations and for the regular customers offer discount on accommodation or create packages that might interest these customers. It gives a good impression for the departed customer when the hotel contacts him/ her almost

immediately and offers admissions if for some reason there has been some problems concerning the stay or services that the customer had used. This way the customer feels that his stay in the hotel has been noticed and it is important for the hotel to make up for a possible inconvenience that might have happened. (Alen, Nenonen, Savola, Uusimäki 1997, 45.)

If there have been problems with customers stay at the hotel and the customer has given negative feedback or presented a reclamation that the receptionist has not been able to take care immediately it can create a feeling of frustration in the employee and decrease the level of job satisfaction at least momentarily. The most common problems concerning customer's time of leaving the hotel that I have experienced usually concern the total bill and the additional services that the customer has used during the stay. These include: the phone-calls made especially to foreign countries which are expensive and the customer is surprised and perhaps not willing to pay such high phone bills because he/she was not aware of the phone call prices made from the hotel. Others are Mini-bar products, Pay-tv and restaurant services added to the room bill.

3.2 Skills required in reception work

The people who work in a hotel as a customer service persons whether they are in the reception, restaurant or lobby bar have an essential part on creating the image of the hotel in the customers mind. They are the ones who face and serve the customer and who can have either a positive or negative effect on the company image as a whole.

The abilities related to communication skills such as ability to receive customer feedback and share it to co-workers, ability to listen to customers complaints and feedback, ability to sense problematic situations in customer service situations and take preventive actions into use beforehand as well as abilities such as controlling your own emotions, politeness, and a natural way of communicating are needed in the work and play an important role in making quality service. All the abilities presented above are so-called abstract skills and in a way quite hard to measure. Perhaps also for this reason in Finnish

culture the people working as customer servants are not highly valued but it must be taken into consideration that even though the surrounding society or culture do not regard these employees highly it is important for the employee to value his/her own work and contribution for the hotels functionality. If the employee is not contributing to the tasks in hand fully and doing his best there is a danger that the customers of the hotel do not receive the best possible service eventually and might even notice it from the employees behaviour. (Alakoski, Hörkkö, Lappalainen 2006, 49.)

At times the reception work is hectic and the tasks in hand can change rapidly because the employee can, especially in the high-season time have multiple tasks to take care of at the same time. In the book the authors say that in the receptionists work there are two types of professional competence areas that require know-how: technical and commercial.

To be able to fulfill the reception tasks the employee must have good technical skills to be able to make reservations, and handle payments accurately. Even though these tasks that are made by computers most of the time can become routine tasks it is important to understand that handling them responsibly and accurately is part of quality.

(Alakoski, Hörkkö, Lappalainen 2006, 67.)

If an employee has the proper skills to handle the working tasks and also handles both competence areas well then the employee can start to feel that he/she is a part of making quality service to customers and can feel good about the work. If there are lack in either of these two competence areas that are important in reception work then problems will appear in the service procedures and can have a negative impact on employees personal job satisfaction.

Ability to use the equipment properly is one of the areas that belong to the so-called physical and technical quality dimension and the others under this are for instance the cleanliness of the reception and lobby area, and the technical equipment itself.

The other competence area is the interaction between the customer and the person delivering the service. This area of competence requires social skills

as well as ability to solve problems concerning customers in an effective and satisfying way. The interaction that the customer experiences is always personal and it originates from contacts between people. As its best a professional receptionist handles both of these two competence areas well and the customer feels that his/ her matter has been handled in a correct way and as a side effect it also creates security and certainty in the co-workers who can rely on the receptionist's professionalism.

(Alakoski, Hörkkö, Lappalainen 2006, 67-68.)

3.3 Internal marketing as part of making quality service

One part of creating quality service is to know your customers and fulfilling their needs and wishes in a best possible way. In modern days the hotels are using electronic databases and hotel programs which collect and serve information about the customer. These programs contain information regarding the person's previous stays, company he/she belongs, what rooms they have previously accommodated in, ways of payment and special wishes. By using this information from previous stays the receptionist can form an image about the customer and what might be needed and should be done before the customer arrives again. As the relation between a customer service person and the customer has changed in the past decades and in the last twenty years the relation has become demand based where there is more offering than actual demand. As people who are the hotel customers have more money to spend and more options to choose from where to stay, the competition has increased more and more and therefore the companies operating in the accommodation business need to put more emphasis on quality service and customer wishes.

In a service company and especially in a hotel that offers multiple services to customers all the employees have an effect on what kind of image the customer gets eventually about the company. Internal marketing is a method where the employees of the hotel are accustomed to the services that the hotel has to offer. To the readiness of internal marketing affect such things as: positive attitude from the management and commitment on developing the

personnel. The employees own will to develop themselves and be ready to commit on the company objectives and building up the image of the company. The purpose of internal marketing is to aim towards positive marketing attitude, good level of service, sufficient level of product knowledge and high level of motivation. When the employees have for instance tried and experienced the same services that the customers will be using they know more about the actual service products and have a deeper understanding on what is actually offered in the hotel.

One part of internal marketing is the fact that the new products and services that the hotel starts to offer need to be first "sold" to the performing stage employees. Even though the employees of the hotel might not have lots to say about what products will be sold to customers at different seasons it gives a better understanding and motivation to sell these newly coming products to customers when employees have already for instance tried or got used to the idea of a campaign. (Alakoski, Hörkkö, Lappalainen 2006, 80-81.)

4. GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS AFFECTING PERSONAL SAFETY

"Communication is defined as the exchange of interpersonal information between a sender and a receiver, and the inference (perception) of meaning between the individuals involved" (Kreitner, Kinicki, Buelens 2002, 289.)

The reason why I wanted to discuss about the importance of communication in receptionists work is because in all customer service related jobs where the employee is interacting and in contact with different customers and service requests the employee can improve his/her personal safety by being a good communicator. Having a safe working environment and affecting it with good social skills improves employees own job satisfaction as well the contribution that is put to the working tasks. In a problem situation when a customer is unsatisfied for some reason the communication skills of the receptionist play a significant role to make the customers unhappiness disappear. Many times the employee can be able to calm down an angry customer with social skills without having to call up back up or the services of security guard or police.

The way how a receptionist communicates with the customer is also an important factor on level of service. For instance if the receptionist does not have good communication skills to satisfy the customers service requests the customer can easily start to feel that the service level of the whole hotel is bad. If a customer feels that his/her problem or complaints is not being taken care of in a proper manner the situation can become bad and in a worst case scenario become a threat on the employee's safety. Receptionist needs to have good communication skills to be able to welcome the arriving customer in a proper way, to explain the services that are offered and to make all the issues regarding the customers stay in the hotel as clear as possible.

Good interaction skills are necessary especially in a service related works when an employee is interacting with customers, co-workers and co-operators. In case the receptionist does not yet have good interaction and communication skills the service procedures do not function as well and safely as they could. Interaction skills are also a good way to affect on the employees own work safety because if the receptionist or any customer service employee acts towards the customer in an irritating way it can have a straight path to the moment where the customer becomes angry or feels unappreciated. Employee's personal skills, level of knowledge and attitude as a part of interaction skills have an effect on each other.

(Hjelt-Putilin 2005, 29-31.)

Nonverbal or unspoken communication towards a customer who is clearly in an overwrought state of mind is part of making the customer calm down and solving a problematic situation. The important calming down messages of nonverbal communication are: open glance to the customer, keeping your hands visible, not keeping unnecessary items on hands, not going too close to the person so that he/she has space to move. Also parts of nonverbal communication are the speed of speaking and the tone of the voice.

(Huhtala 2004, 105.)

Many times the attitude and the way how a customer service employee acts towards a customer is depending on the customers nationality. Sometimes when the customer belongs to a minority group of people or the receptionist

for instance has earlier bad experiences towards this certain group of people or nationality it changes the way how the employee interacts and communicates from the normal way. The main reason for this is that the employees own personal attitude towards certain nationality or group of people who he/ she finds perhaps untrustworthy or otherwise problematic. Safe communication between a receptionist and a customer consists of areas such as the style of speaking, the tone and the voice, movements of hands and facial expressions as well as being as clear and simple when giving the information. Receptionist should always be able to maintain his/her temper and to be able to answer to customer in a polite manner even though the customer might be acting in an insulting way or perhaps is unhappy or angry for some reason.

4.1 Communication know-how in customer service

One area that contributes to employee's personal job satisfaction and motivation towards the work is communication skills. When an employee is a good communicator and is able to solve customers' problems smoothly the employee can feel good about the work and be certain that also the customers value his/her problem solving skills. If the employee's communication skills are not up to the standards it creates feelings of frustration and anxiety in the employee and has a negative impact on job satisfaction.

Hjelt-Putilin introduces in his book four levels of "communication know-how" that a customer service person can have. According to her these levels of communication know-how can be trained by the employee and they evolve along with the employee's amount of experience and working years.

1. Not being aware of personal incompetence.

This kind of person who is communicating with a customer does not notice his/ her own flaws in the communication process and might even unwittingly aggravate the situation to unsafe. For instance when a problematic customer service situation arouses and starts to go badly the employee can start to blame the customer or make excuses rather than taking notice on the way

how he/she is communicating towards the customer and whether it is an appropriate way on handling the issue.

2. The level of being aware of personal incompetence.

In this level the employee is already aware that there are flaws in the personal communication-safety and the fact that the employee knows this can cause tension and anxiety in him/her in an addition of feeling insecure when confronting problematic or unhappy customers. This level is the one where the employee can start to develop his/her personal communication know-how and usually without this phase the employee cannot take actions on developing the personal way of safe and professional communication. One option for the employee is to tell about the problem to the superior and try to get to a training where the communication issues are improved.

3. The level of being aware of competence.

In this level the employee is already able to modify his/her own verbal and unspoken communication skills through thinking and consideration. The employee also creates so-called readymade solution patterns for problematic customer service situations so that when one arrives the employee can act smoothly and the actual situation in hand does not feel anymore so surprising or agonizing. The problem in this level of communication know-how is the fact that it can take some time from the employee to think and consider the way to communicate when the situation arrives so that the customer can start to feel irritated already.

4. The level of subconscious communication know-how.

This level is when the employee already masters the skills of safe-communication so well that he/she does not have to use time on thinking and consideration in the customer service situation. The employee is able to fully concentrate on the feedback given, listening to the customer, keeping an eye on the changes taking place on the environment and on handling the interaction with the customer as safely as possible.

(Hjelt-Putilin 2005, 47-48).

My opinion is that this level of personal communication know-how can only be reached by those employees who have taken notice on their own way of communication and who have already worked in the industry for a longer time. As well as technical skills, the communication skills when handling problematic customers develop through time. Without experience and having already faced multiple tough situations in the working tasks it is impossible to reach this level.

Service situations can vary a lot and therefore it is essential for the employee working in customer service tasks to adopt many different patterns on his/her personal communication performance. People, tasks in hand, employees own and customer's state of mind as well as vitality change. Acting in a similar way and repeating the same communication pattern can lead to a situation where the actual communicational performance is inappropriate or does not fit to the situation. Flexibility in different situations requires multiple patterns in communication from the employee and obviously abilities and will to solve problems.

(Hjelt-Putilin 2005, 49-50.)

The author also describes four elements of safe communication which are included to the normal verbal communication skills. She has described these four elements as A4 factors and they are: *attitude, activity, initiativeness, and thinking.*

Attitude is the first element and it can be noticed from a person's acting, and communicating. Attitude towards some certain issue and prejudices can be learned from various sources and sometimes a person's attitude is hard to change. Since we are not born with attitudes and they are learned it is possible to have some sort of effect on a person's attitudes. In a working environment for instance the co-workers, management or through training and education a person with certain attitudes that might be harmful in a customer service oriented work can have a changing effect in a long run. If an employee's attitude towards hotels safety is bad or the mentality in general is that "it is not my problem" it lowers also co-workers safety and most importantly the customer's safety. The management of the company should

make sure that all the employees are aware of their responsibility towards hotels safety and that immediate actions need to be taken as soon as a problem has been noticed.

Initiativeness is the second element and when talking about it in communication it means taking the first step. For instance if an employee just decides to wait for other employees to make this first step in communication and is not initiative it is possible that the employee has to wait for a long time before anything happens and in the matter of safety this can have even fatal consequences. Sometimes an employee might have adapted a communication way where only rarely he/she takes the initiative and informs others about the problem in hand. This can be quite common especially among new employees who are not yet totally familiar with the hotel and its other employees. If an employee notices in the working area some areas or issues that are related to security and safety then it is advisable to make sure that also other employees and management of the company get the information as soon as possible. Employee who is active and takes the initiative when he/she sees a problem is also an employee who has an important role in hotels security. Initiativeness is also required when the hotel starts to create its own security plan. When the employees are taking part already beforehand to the security and safety issues it is easier for the hotel to create rescue plans and procedure rules that can be used when the actual happening takes place. This way the employees are already aware on how to act beforehand in certain security related issues because they have from their own part been along when it has been created.

Activity is the third element from the authors A4 diagram. She says that communicational activity is required in all activities related to security whether it was educational, security planning, talking about the issues, warning or even asking for help in case of emergency. People who do not observe their surroundings actively and persons who are interacting there are more prone to possible security threats than people who observe actively and are taking notice on even small details. Active observation in the workplace creates a better foundation on anticipation and preparing yourself for action. Talking with co-workers and management about possible problems and security issues

without hesitation creates conversation and this way also other employees can give valuable information and share their thoughts on the matters. It is always better to share the thoughts that are related to workplace safety and security and to point out problematic areas that a person feels are in need of observation. This way many people will give their opinions on the matter and more information will be shared as there are multiple viewpoints.

Thinking is the fourth element of the diagram and it means that the employee ponders the surroundings, the messages received through communication and knowledge. When talking about communication security, thinking is an element that in a way feeds itself. The way we think about the issues related to work and things that are relevant and not relevant we can raise our own awareness about the security. An employee who after confronting a difficult customer or a problematic situation starts to think about what had just happened most likely will find reasons for it and in a way analyses the confrontation so that he/she can be more prepared next time in a similar situation. (Hjelt-Putilin 2005, 57-64.)

4.2 Importance of information flow between hotel departments

Reception desk is the so-called “nerve point” of a hotel where all the hotel customers can get the information they need to enjoy their stay in the hotel. Reception is the information point where most questions and service requests are handled in different methods. In the hotels and accommodation places that I have worked the reception has always been open 24 hours meaning three shift rotation. When a customer arrives to the reception desk he/ she expects to get the information required without problems and this means that the reception worker needs to be aware of all the activities that are taking place in the hotel at that time and often also in the near future.

Therefore good communication between the reception workers at the shift change is essential. This is the time when the worker who has done his/ her shift gives the valuable information to the worker who arrives to the shift. If this conversation does not take place in the shift change moment the worker who

just arrived to the working place might and most likely will face unexpected and surprising situations during the spell. Lack of information between front office employees and other hotel departments causes inconvenience and misunderstandings with customers. When this happens it has a negative effect on employee's job satisfaction and motivation towards the tasks at work.

In most hotels that I have either worked or been a visitor the reception uses a diary where the previous worker writes and leaves notes and information about the shift that has just finished so that the new person who arrives to work at the reception can have a picture about how the shift went, whether there was some problems with the hotel customers, unusual service requests, things to remember, updates on programs or on meetings / conferences, information that needs to be forwarded for instance to the hotel management or to the property caretaker.

Because all hotel departments and sections are interrelated in their operations the work of one section or department is dependable on that of another. Therefore the departments must have a constant flow of information between them. The front office of the hotel is the centre of collecting and distributing guest information where other departments get the needed information to perform on their duties. (Baker, Huyton, Bradley 2000, 153.)

It is also essential that not only the reception workers share valuable information continuously between themselves but the other departments of the hotel share information with the reception desk and the other way around. Reception has to be in contact every day and during every shift with the cleaning department so that they know which rooms need to be cleaned and when, with the restaurant department when for instance dinner table reservations take place and on how many customers there will be dining in the breakfast next morning. Same applies to conferences, conventions and meetings that take place in the hotel if the hotel has resources or a separate department to take care of this. The conference department or the conference host needs to be aware about changes and timetables, amounts of people taking part and special requests that are often handled with phone or e-mail by reception workers. In situations where there have been problems in

communication and sharing information between hotel departments regarding customers stay, the misunderstandings usually get sorted out quite smoothly. It is still useful to notice that even a small “fracture” in the information chain can cause extra costs and also extra work after the customer has left the hotel. By extra work I mean that in many times the reception or the hotel manager/ management has had to contact the customer later on through e-mail or phone and explain the reasons for the misunderstanding and to make the customer feel welcome to the hotel again, also to use the services of the hotel in the future.

5. SAFETY RISKS IN A RECEPTIONISTS' WORK

Safety and security is one area that contributes to employee's job satisfaction. If an employee does not feel safe at workplace or has feelings of unsafetiness then the workplace becomes an unpleasant place to stay. When the employee feels that the workplace is an unsafe and an unpleasant place the motivation and contribution towards working tasks decreases.

There can be many types of security hazards in a hotel environment ranging from missing items such as keycards to bombthreats. Hotel's lobby area is an area that is hard for a receptionist to keep an eye on regarding people and belongings especially during the busy hours when guests are checking in and out at the same time. Most hotels have made procedures on how to act in case of an emergency or a security threat and the staff should familiarise themselves with these on a regular basis. Minor incidents should be reported to the supervisor on duty while major incidents warrant raising an alarm. When all the employees in a hotel are vigilant, observant and paying attention to detail the hotel will be a safer place for everyone. Many specialist companies offer hotels lighting and video monitoring for vulnerable places such as parking place and other potentially well-known unsecure spots. Security systems can be often also modified according to the wishes of the hotel meaning that for instance surveillance cameras and alarming equipment can be as obvious or discreet as the hotel wants. (Dix, Baird 1998, 28-29.)

When an employee faces a drunken customer who is causing distraction and behaving in an intolerable manner he/she obviously starts to feel stress and tries to calm down the situation in hand with the best possible way. In most cases these situations are solved between the customer and the employee verbally in a way that the person who is under the influence of either alcohol or drugs or both of these at the same time understands to leave the premises without causing any more trouble. In some cases the employee might have to use physical strength to remove this kind of person or if the situation in hand has gone this far call for co-workers, security personnel or police to solve the situation.

Sometimes the case can be that a single employee cannot or is afraid to impress his/her anxiety towards the work to the management but often the employee can find a relief on the fact that also colleagues many times can have these same kinds of feelings of anxiety, fear and stress towards customer service work. When an employee or several employees have these kinds of feelings it is recommendable to organize a meeting between the employees and the management of the hotel to discuss the matters where also a psychologist and work company doctor are present.

A good example about this kind of meeting is a so-called psychological debriefing where all parties involved can ponder and handle the problems related to work. By arranging this kind of meeting the employees and the management of the company can find new ways to deal with problematic customers and solutions when something traumatic for instance has happened. Security and safety is always a common interest and taking care of both employees and customers feeling of safety is also part of company financial well-being. (Huhtala 2004, 11.)

An employee who is working in the service sector should have these four basic right or possibilities in the workplace in case of a threatening situation.

1. Possibility to take cover.
2. Possibility to escape.
3. Possibility to make an alarm and get help.
4. Possibility to record a threatening situation. (Huhtala 2004, 134.)

Working alone in the shift is one of the problems that has an effect on employees personal safety. Some of the main reasons for the fact that in reception work employees are working alone are the following: Since the days of regression in Finland in the early 1990`s the hotel companies were forced to make the business more efficient economically and for this reason the trend has become, where as much work as possible is being done with as smaller amount of employees to cut down the personnel costs and this way to make the business more profitable.

Because the competition in the branch has increased in the past decades the amount of companies in the hotel business has almost doubled. This leads to the fact that hotels services are being offered to customers with lower and lower prices and at some point the companies have to make reductions on working employees to remain profitable.

(Huhtala 2004, 14.)

According to a research that was done in 1998 for hotel employees, 87,1% answered that working alone in the shift causes emotions of stress in the workplace. Hotels are using more of the services of security companies and security guards momentary presence and daily visits in the hotels premises has improved hotel employees feeling of safety. Surveillance cameras, stickers and signs that tell to customers that the hotel has a contract with a security company has also decreased the amounts of robberies and violence towards hotel employees. (Huhtala 2004, 122.)

The forms of violence that receptionists and hotel employees can face.

According to the security research that was done inclusively in Finland in the year 2002 for companies operating in the accommodation business, one third (33,3%) of the respondents being hotel employees said that they had experienced mental threatening at work. This includes the following forms of threatening such as threats that have something to do with the person's employment in the company. Meaning that the customer has threatened the employee in a way that if the employee does not do this or that in a way that pleases the customer the employee will lose his/her job. Inappropriate implications concerning employees sexual tendency, implications about employees dishonesty towards the employer and co-workers, threats that are

related to employees “wrong” ethnical background and giving untruthful information about the employee to the hotels management.

(Huhtala 2004, 93.)

According to Huhtala (2004, 94.) the hotel employees had also experienced forms of physical threatening such as customer using international gestures towards the employee. Raising the fist and taking a threatening body position which includes taking of the shirt or a sweater, taking a classical boxing posture. Threats that included using multiple persons to confront the employee in some other place or after the work and breaking furniture as well as throwing objects towards the employee. In my opinion in the cases where the customer has started to threaten the employee physically the reasons for this often is that the person is under the influence of alcohol or other substances and has become angry to the hotel employee who most likely has been trying to remove the customer from the hotel or restaurant or suggested that the customer will not be served anymore.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research problem

The purpose of this thesis work is to find out how satisfied the receptionists working in three hotels of Rovaniemi are towards their work in general and how big impact customers' unhappiness has on receptionists' personal job satisfaction. Areas of customer unhappiness that I concentrated on are negative feedback, complaints, reclamations and problematic customers who behave in a disturbing way towards an employee. The study was conducted for front office employees working as receptionists. The three hotels that took part in this study are located in the centre of Rovaniemi and the study was conducted during March 2009.

6.2 Research method

The method that I chose for this study was a questionnaire sheet (Appendix 1.) that I delivered to receptionists working in three hotels. I chose these three hotels for this study because they were not familiar to me beforehand. The reason for this is that by analysing employees' answers who are not familiar to me this analysis becomes more objective. I delivered altogether 16 questionnaire sheets depending on the amount of how many receptionists were working in each hotel. To two of the hotels I delivered 5 sheets and to one hotel 6 questionnaire sheets. The respondents were given one week's time to answer to the questionnaire because this way I ensured that they would not forget to answer. After this I went to visit the hotels and collected the material from hotels front office myself. The results of the research are based on the answers of the employees and the results are both qualitative and quantitative.

The research method that I used for this thesis is mainly qualitative where the receptionist workers from different hotels were given space and time to answer with their own words on the questionnaire sheet and give their own views on the subject. Some of the questions are quantitative concerning job satisfaction. In the questionnaire sheet I ask the respondents questions about their own experiences regarding difficult customer service situations, how complaints/ reclamations are handled in their work place and what kinds of compensations the hotels use for the customers. I also clear out what the most common reasons for customers' disturbing behaviour are and what effects these have had on the respondents' personal job satisfaction and motivation for the work.

6.2.1 Description of fieldwork

The questionnaires were delivered to three hotels operating in the central area of Rovaniemi. These three hotels are City Hotel, Hotel Santa Claus and Scandic Rovaniemi. The survey took place in 17-26 of March in 2009. Altogether I delivered 16 questionnaires and received 11 of them back so the

response percentage was 69%. All the respondents were working in the hotels front office in three shift rotation and 6/11 respondents were working in all three shifts or more than one shift most of the time. 5/11 respondents were mainly working in one shift which was either morning, evening or in two cases only in night shift. What is also worth mentioning is that from the 11 respondents 10 were women and only one was male.

6.2.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix 1.) used in this study had 26 questions altogether. The first 6 questions were about respondents' basic background information and the next 20 questions included qualitative and quantitative questions. The scale used in three questions was from 1 to 4 and in most of the questions there was additional information enquiry and space left for comments concerning that specific question.

7. THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The material acquired from the questionnaires produced mainly qualitative and partly quantitative material that I collected and analysed using also my own experiences in front office work as a viewpoint to understand better the statements and comments that the respondents gave. I decided to divide the results of the research into four areas. Which are the background information of the respondents, general job satisfaction, the effects of negative customer feedback and the effects of problematic and disturbing customers on job satisfaction. Questions 1 –1.5 explain background information about the respondents and in many cases there were differences concerning job satisfaction compared to background information regarding the age, experience, and working shifts. Questions 2 –2.9 mainly concentrate on matters that have relevance on the employees' general job satisfaction. Questions 3 –3.2 concentrated on negative feedback and complaints coming from the customers. Questions 4 –4.6 were to find information on the customers disturbing behaviour and its impacts on job satisfaction. In the

questions where I used the scale 1-4, (1) means either bad/badly or no effect depending on the question and (4) means very well/ very good or big impact.

Background information about the respondents

The average age of the 11 respondents was 25,45 years ranging from 18 to 39 years. Most of them had already several years of experience in the hotel and restaurant sector and the average amount of work experience of the respondents was 5,3 years (5 years and 4 months). 6/11 (54,5%) were full-time employees and 5/11 (45,5%) were part-time employees and it surprised me a little that so many of them were working on part-time status. This can be explained by the fact that hotel industry and the service sector in general uses lots of part time employees, mainly students and trainees, too. None of the respondents was working on a seasonal employee status.

4/11 (36%) had graduated from a University of Applied Sciences or were studying there at the moment and 7/11 (64%) had an occupational education background in either the hotel and restaurant, tourism or commercial sector. 1/11 (9%) was working in all three shifts, 2/11 (18%) were working mainly in the morning shift, 3/11 (27%) were working in the morning and evening shifts, one employee (9%) was working only in the evening shift, 2/11 (18%) were working in both the night and evening shifts and 2/11 (18%) were working only in the night shift.

Question 2: How do you get along in your current job?

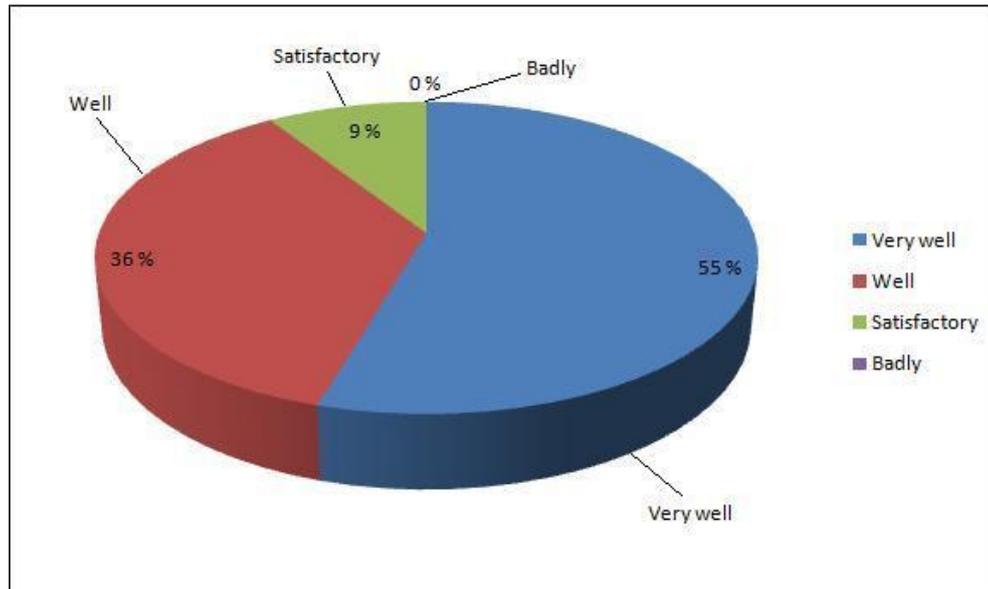


FIGURE 1. Get along in the current job.

For this question the average value of the replies was (3,45) which is between “well” and “very well”. This result indicates that the majority of the employees of these three hotels were getting along very well in their job. 54,5% of the respondents answered to this question with the grade 4 and 36% answered with the grade 3. Only one employee answered with the grade 2 (9%). Concerning job satisfaction the most common positive things that the employees stated in the additional open question were: nice co-workers / colleagues, good working atmosphere, and challenging and interesting job. Negative things for job satisfaction were: the nature of shift work, the uncertainty of working equipment, bad ergonomics / lacks in work ergonomics, the fact that according to the respondents there are not enough breaks at work, and the workload is too big.

“Comfortable and relaxing working atmosphere with nice colleagues”

“Especially during evening shifts and weekends there are not enough breaks”

Question 2.1: On what level is the team spirit and working atmosphere in your work place?

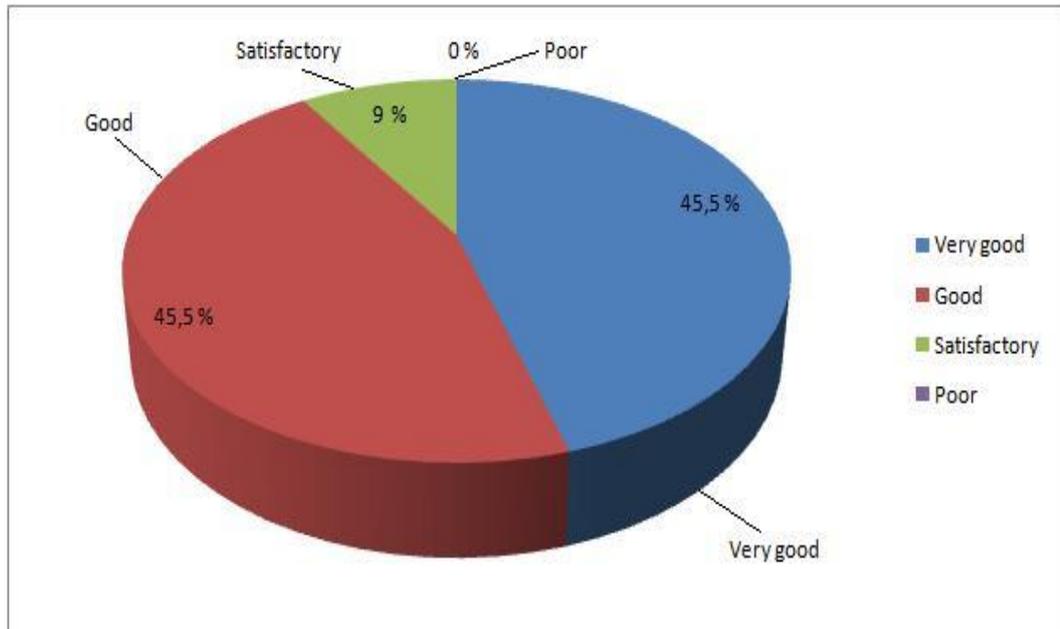


FIGURE 2. The level of team spirit and work atmosphere.

The average value of the answers for this question was (3,36) which also indicates that the team spirit and working atmosphere at the respondents' work places were between good and very good. 5/11 meaning 45,5 % of the employees answered with the grade 4 and the same number 45,5% answered with the grade 3. Only one employee answered with the grade 2. For the additional question on how they think that the working atmosphere and team spirit could be improved the respondents most common replies were: More open discussion and more communication between different departments. Also more free time activities and corporate meetings at work place were suggested.

Question 2.2: In what ways could your job satisfaction be improved?

To this open question the most common answers were related to the level of payment which could be improved and to making more changes in the working shifts. Working in the same shift or in the same shifts for a long time creates unhappiness among the employees. One employee said that the nightshifts are the hardest because of the sleeping rhythm and because of having to work alone during that shift. The results proved that variation on working shifts is required and the payment received for work should be higher especially among the younger employees who have not worked in the industry for a long time.

“In the nightshifts you are mostly alone and the customers are often drunk, variation on working shifts would be desirable”

Question 2.3: Do you get enough positive feedback from your superior and colleagues?

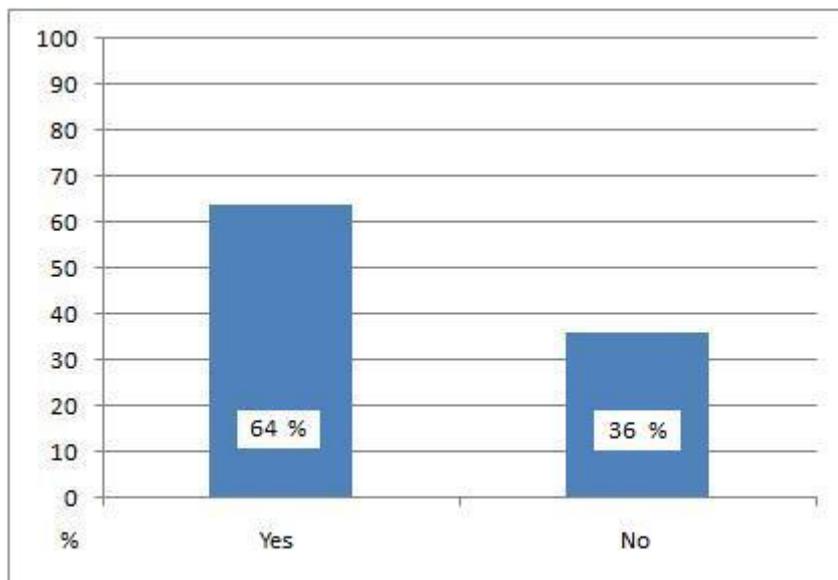


FIGURE 3. Getting enough positive feedback.

The results of this question showed that 4/11 (36%) answered “No” to this question and 7/11 (64%) answered “Yes” meaning that the majority of the

respondents did get enough positive feedback from their superior and colleagues but still over one-third felt that they did not get enough positive feedback. When an employee does not receive positive feedback at all or receives it very rarely, it can have a negative effect on the personal level of job satisfaction and motivation for the work. According to the respondents' additional comments, the ones who answered "No" to this question felt that the only time they receive feedback is when something negative has happened and therefore the feedback is not positive.

"I do not receive much feedback at all, unless there has been some kind of a mistake or something out of ordinary has happened"

Question 2.4: Do incentives/ bonuses improve your motivation for the work?

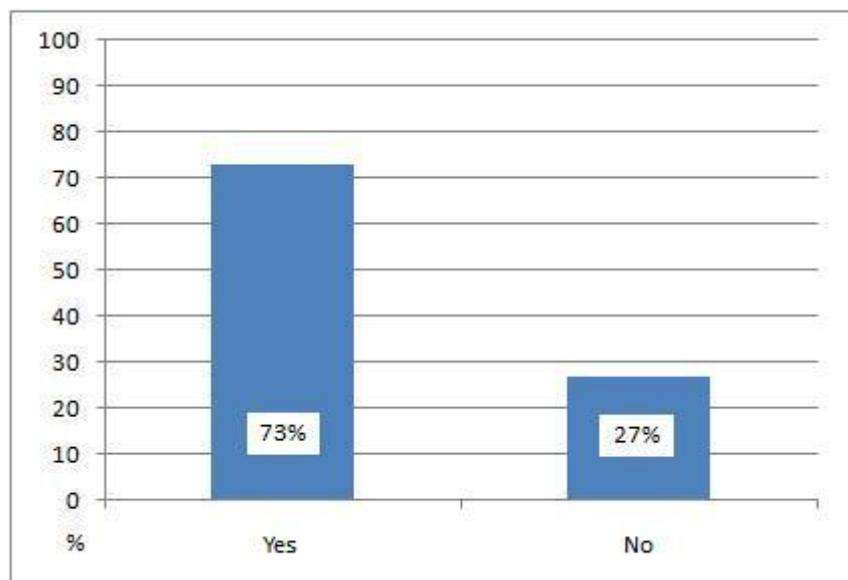


FIGURE 4. Improving effect of incentives/bonuses on motivation.

The majority of the respondents, 8/11 (73%) answered "Yes" to this question, which means that to most of them incentives and bonuses improve their working motivation. 3/11, (27%) answered "No" to this question meaning that to some employees incentives/ bonuses received from work do not have an improving motivational effect. What is also worth noticing from the responses to this question is that all three employees who answered "No" to this question

were relatively young employees in their early 20`s with an average of only a few years of work experience in the hotel and restaurant sector.

Question 2.5: Do employee benefits improve your motivation for the work?

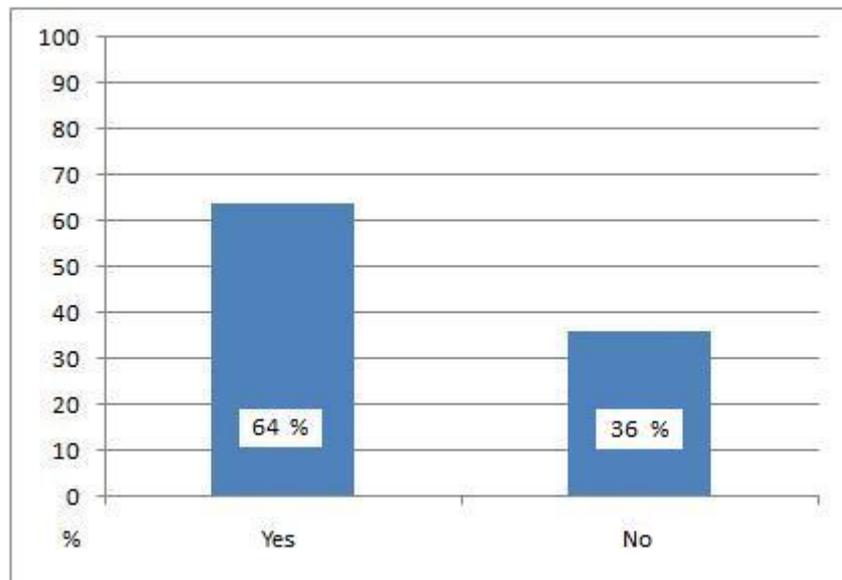


FIGURE 5. Improving effect of employee benefits on motivation.

Also to this question the majority of the respondents, 7/11 (64%) answered “Yes” which means that employee benefits do have an improving motivational effect on many of them. 4/11 (36%) answered “No” meaning that still over one third of the respondents did not feel that employee benefits had an improving effect on motivation. Worth mentioning is also the fact that those employees who answered “No” to this question were between the age of 20-25. This can possibly be explained by the fact that since they are relatively young and new employees they might not be aware of all the benefits that different hotels and hotel chains offer to their employees.

Question 2.6: Do you think that your work is mentally heavy?

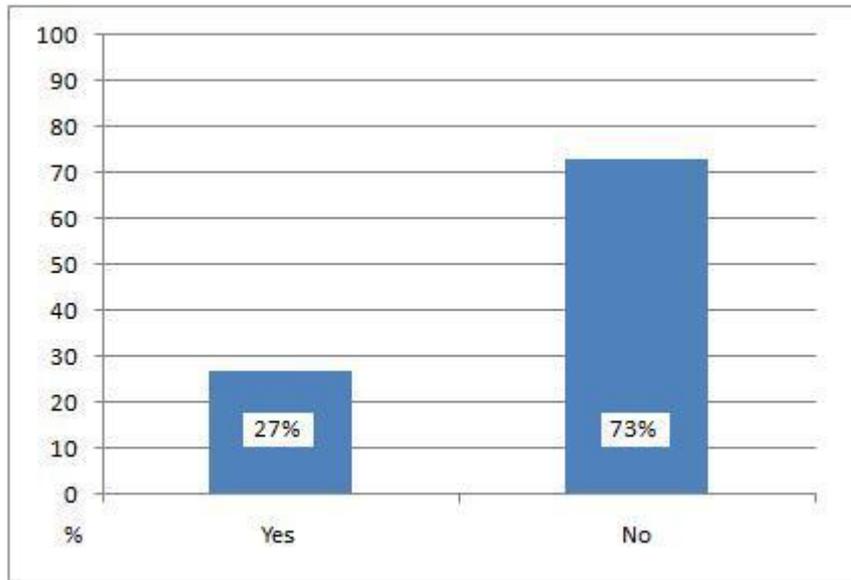


FIGURE 6. Work is mentally heavy.

When asked whether the respondents thought that work was mentally heavy the results show that only 3/11 (27%) answered “Yes” and 8/11 (73%) answered “No”. This clearly shows that the majority of the employees of these three hotels did not experience their work mentally heavy. The results of this question can be compared to questions 2. and 2.1 since the results of those two were relatively high. Because the average results of question 2. was (3,45) and question 2.1 was (3,36) it clearly shows that when the employees enjoyed their work and the working atmosphere and the team spirit was on a high level, the employees or the majority of them felt that the work was not mentally heavy either. The additional open question for those who answered “Yes” when asked in which ways the work was mentally heavy, the most common replies were related to the nature of three shift work and to difficult customers.

“The working times, being awake at nights and sleeping the days affects strongly on both physical and psychic side”

“Relationships suffer”

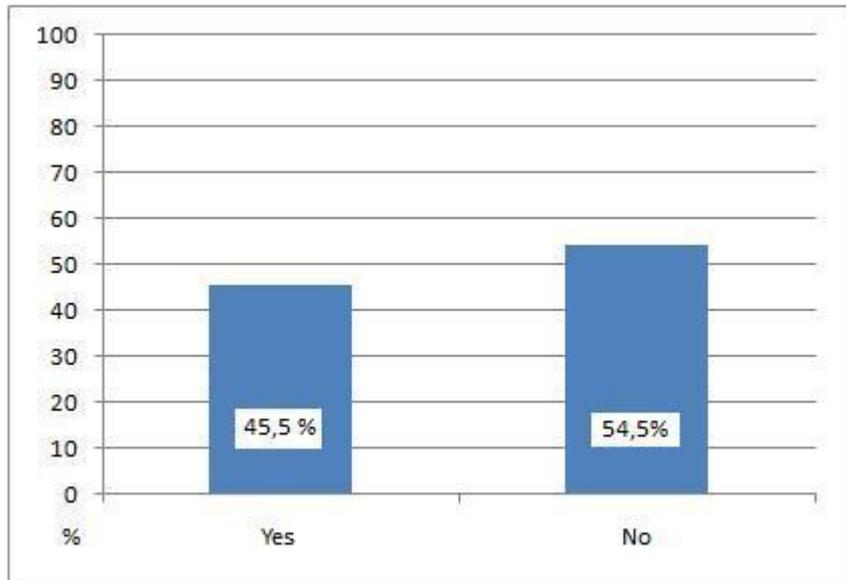
Question 2.7: Do you think that your work is physically heavy?

FIGURE 7. Work is physically heavy.

There was a great division when asked whether the respondents thought that their work was physically heavy. 5/11 (45,5%) answered “Yes” and over half, 6/11 (54,5%) answered “No”. This result shows that the reception work is physically more demanding than mentally for the employees that took part in this research. This can be explained by lacks in ergonomics, working position which is most of the time a standing position, and unsupportive working equipment used.

Question 2.8: Have you noticed any physical inconveniences that could have appeared as a result of work?

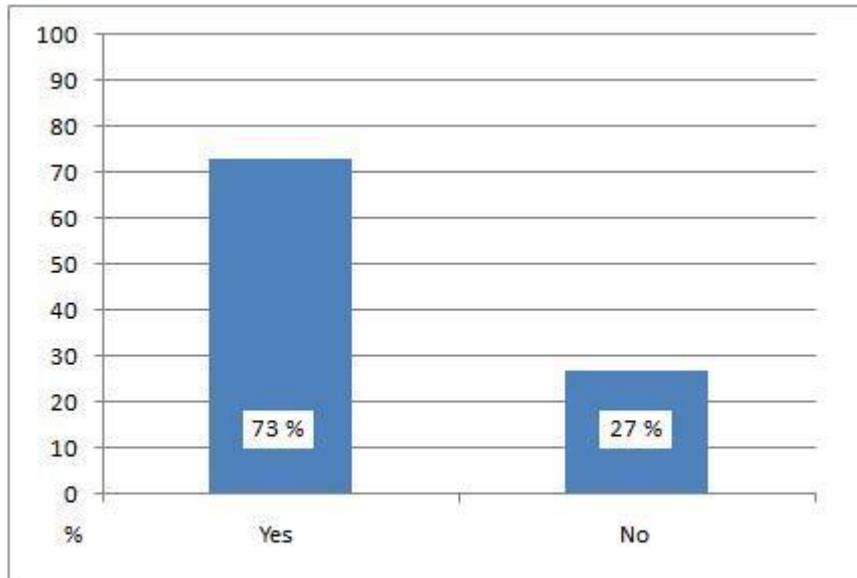


FIGURE 8. Physical inconveniences as a result of work.

When asked whether the respondents had noticed any physical inconveniences that could have resulted from work 8/11 (73%) answered “Yes” and 3/11 (27%) answered “No”. This result clearly shows that most of the respondents had experienced physical harms and some changes are required especially in ergonomics and in rotation of the working shifts. Some comments added by the respondents: *“Neck, shoulder, and back problems from standing and from a wrong working posture”*. *“The front desk keyboard is at a wrong height”*.

“Because of the night shifts, the rhythm is upside down and it affects physically your body, vitality and energy”

Question 2.9: Do the seasonal time and rush impact negatively on your job satisfaction?

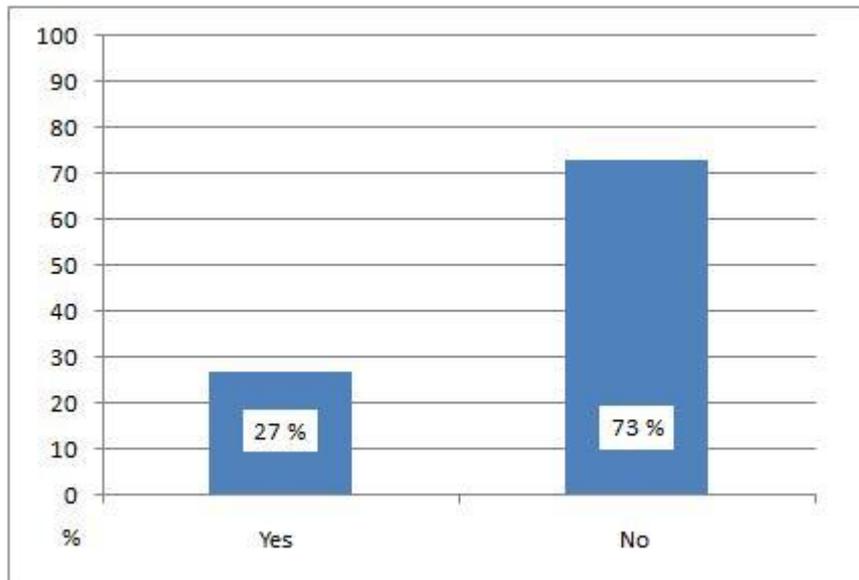


FIGURE 9. The impact of the seasonal time on job satisfaction.

Most of the respondents, 8/11 (73%) said “No” and 3/11 (27%) said “Yes” when asked whether the seasonal time and rush had a negative impact on their personal job satisfaction. This result shows that for the majority of the employees’ seasonal time did not have a negative effect on job satisfaction but to some it affected negatively. Because the seasonal time is the high season when the hotels in Rovaniemi make most of their profits also the customer numbers and rush are much higher than during other times of the year. From the respondents answers I also noticed that most of the employees who said that the seasonal time and rush did not have a negative impact already had several years of work experience in the branch and therefore had experienced several seasonal times during their careers.

Question 3: Does receiving negative feedback, complaints and reclamations have effects on your job satisfaction?

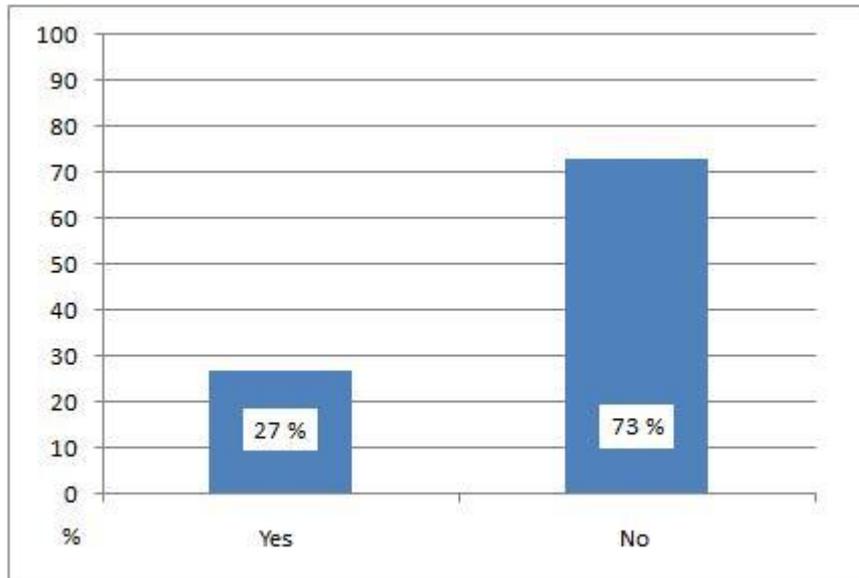


FIGURE 10. The effects of complaints and reclamations on job satisfaction.

The majority of the respondents 8/11 (73%) said “No” when asked whether receiving negative feedback, complaints and reclamations had an effect on their personal job satisfaction. Only 3/11 (27%) said “Yes” which means that for most of the employees having to deal with complaining customers, receiving negative feedback or handling reclamations had no effect. On the additional question where it was inquired what kinds of effects these had on job satisfaction a few of the respondents who had answered “No” also said that it did not have negative effects but rather it made them perform better and try harder.

“Especially if the feedback concerns me, I think about it for a long time and it has an immediate effect my work”

Question 3.1: What are the most common reasons for the customers' unhappiness and negative feedback in your opinion?

The most common answers to this open question were about problems concerning the room and the room temperature. In many replies the customers had been unhappy because the room was either too hot or cold depending on the time of the year. Also the level of service that the customers had received was one reason that appeared many times in the answers and the expectations of the customers about the hotel did not meet the reality. Other reasons that the respondents gave were about slow service especially during the high season because of rush, bad first impression and misunderstandings with reserved rooms and services.

"Customers' own condition, tiredness, irritability or drunkenness affect and often the reason for this is negative service or some adversity"

"Misunderstandings and lack of communication"

Question 3.2: What kinds of compensations have you given to the customers when they have expressed their unhappiness?

When asked by this open question what kinds of compensations the respondents had given to the customers when unhappiness was present, the most common replies were: a discount on the room price and changing the room or upgrading the level of the room, free drinks and drink tickets, breakfast tickets and free sauna shifts. These replies show that the compensations that the receptionists had given to unhappy customers were relatively small with not so big financial value. When the employee can change the customers' unhappiness with a small compensation without any greater efforts or the involvement of the hotel management or the superior, the situation can be handled with more ease and quicker.

“With bigger issues I ask the customer to leave his/her contact information and a possible report about what has happened in written and inform that our hotel director will contact him/her”

“We try to make the customers experience better through speaking, perhaps a better room will be given to the customer the next time”

Question 4: Have you experienced feelings of insecurity or fear in your work?

Question 4.2: What are the most common reasons for the customers’ disturbing behaviour in your opinion?

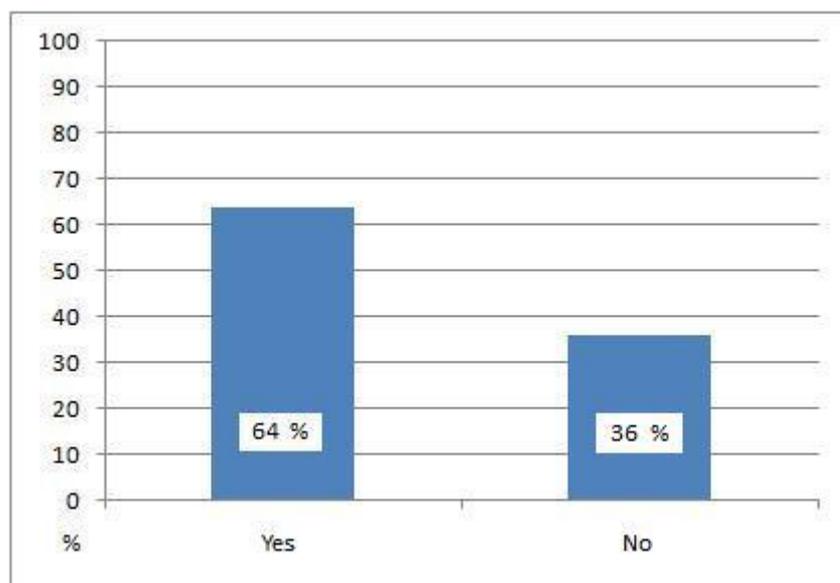


FIGURE 11. Feelings of insecurity or fear at work.

Quite many of the respondents 7/11 (64%) answered “Yes” to this question, which shows that many employees had experienced feelings of insecurity/ fear at workplace. 4/11 (36%) answered “No”. This result indicates that the respondents’ personal safety and security at workplace should be on a better basis. If an employee feels unsafe at workplace even momentarily, it can have negative effects on the personal job satisfaction. When asked in the question

4.2 what are the most common reasons for the customers' disturbing behaviour, the answers were mostly about drunkenness, drug abuse, mental illness, and unhappiness of the services.

"Usually alcohol is related, unhappiness with the services can sometimes cause strange reactions"

Question 4.1: In your work, have you experienced bullying or physical attacks coming from a customer?

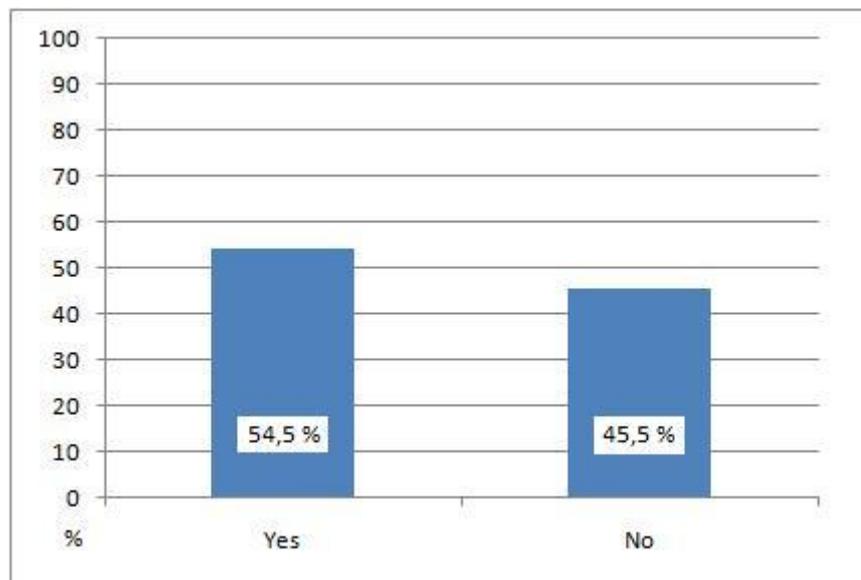


FIGURE 12. Experienced bullying or attacks coming from a customer.

Over a half of the respondents had experienced bullying or physical attacks coming from customers at work. The result, 6/11 (54,5%) who answered "Yes" to this question is quite alarming in my opinion and actions to improve personnel safety should be considered. 5/11 (45,5%) answered "No" but what I noticed from the answers is that those employees who answered "Yes", no common factor could be found. They were from all age groups and some had more work experience than the others. There was no difference either whether

the employee was a part-time or a regular employee. As question 4.2 showed, the most common reasons for the customers' disturbing behaviour, the same reasons were present also among those employees who answered "Yes" to this question.

Question 4.3: Do you think that the customers' disturbing behaviour increases during the seasonal time?

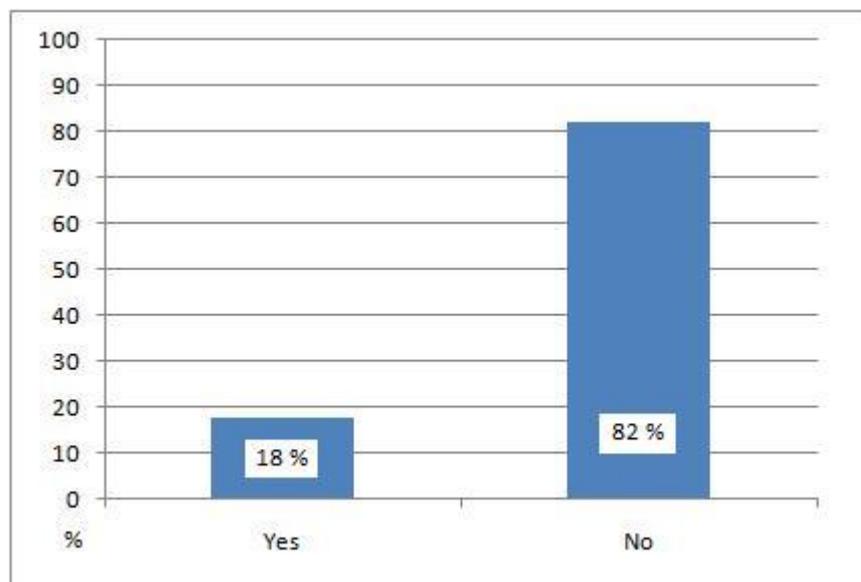


FIGURE 13. Increase of disturbing behaviour during seasonal time.

The majority of the respondents 9/11 (82%) answered "No" to this question and only 2/11 (18%) replied "Yes". This result shows that most of the respondents did not think that the customers' disturbing behaviour increased during seasonal time even though the customer numbers are greater at that time. The seasonal time in Lapland lasts from approximately November to April and in this period most of the foreign tourists come and stay also in hotels of Rovaniemi. During this period there are lots of holidays, leisure time parties as well as Christmas and Easter holidays. What was surprising is that even though the customer numbers of the hotels were much higher during this

time than at other times of the year, the disturbing behaviour, according to most employees did not increase.

Question 4.4: Does the customers' drunken and disturbing behaviour have a negative effect on your job satisfaction?

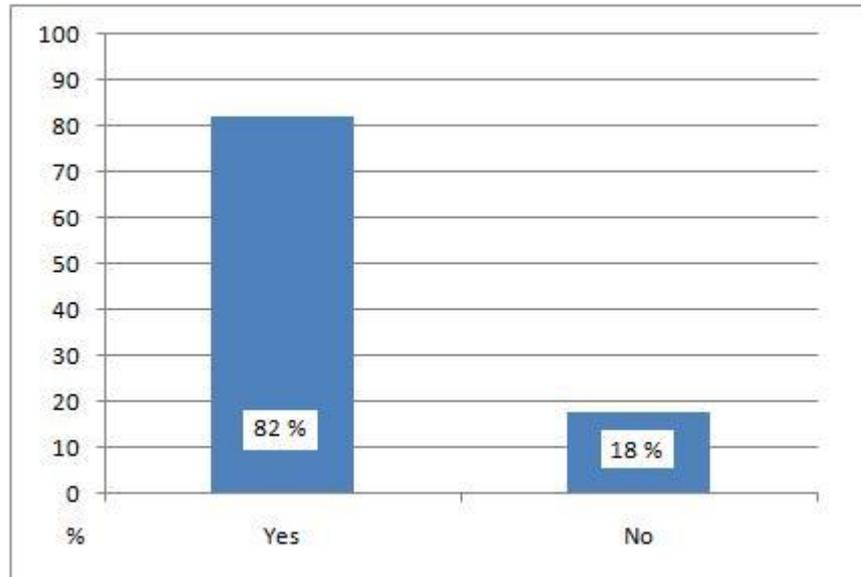


FIGURE 14. Negative effect of disturbing behaviour on job satisfaction.

This result shows clearly that to the majority of the respondents 9/11 (82%) customers' drunken and disturbing behaviour had a negative effect on their personal level of job satisfaction. Only two (18%) respondents answered "No" to this question but from these two responses no common factors could be found because they had significant differences in the age and working experience.

Question 4.5: What kinds of customer situations hamper most your job satisfaction?

When asked in this open question what customer situations hamper most the respondents' job satisfaction, the common answers were about problematic customers who were either drunk or under the influence of drugs. Also situations where the customer had been angry for some reason or was behaving in a disturbing manner were mentioned. The answers received to this question show that most employees feel that customer situations where the customer had been either drunk, behaved badly or was in a confused state of mind had, the most significant negative effect.

“Customer situations when you have done everything to make the customer feel satisfied and still they are unhappy”

“Drunken customers, drug abusers who do not understand when they will not be served anymore”

Question 4.6: How big effect does customers disturbing behaviour has on your job satisfaction and motivation for the work?

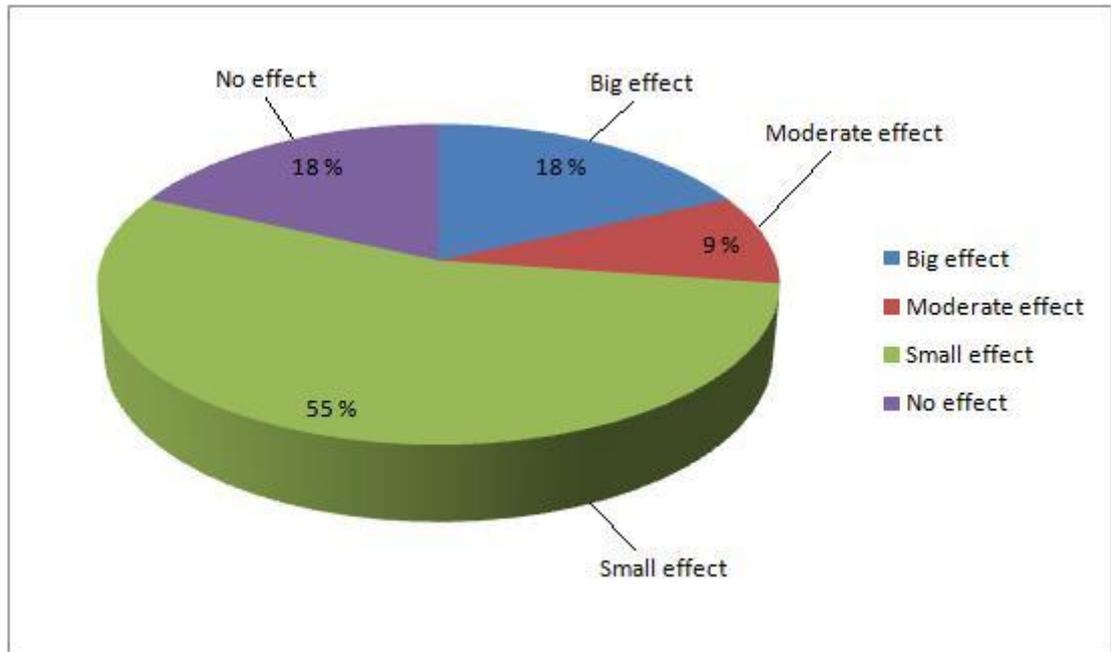


FIGURE 15. How big effect disturbing behaviour has on job satisfaction and motivation.

The results of this question show that on a scale from 1-4 when (1) indicated no effect, and (4) indicated a great effect only 18% of the respondents answered with the grade 4. Over a half of the respondents (55%) said that disturbing behaviour has a small effect on their job satisfaction and motivation for the work. The average value of the answers was 2,273 which is just over small effect when all the respondents' answers are counted. The effects do not seem to be very large in this question on job satisfaction and motivation but still two respondents said that it had a big effect with the grade 4. One common factor between these two employees, who answered that it had a big effect is that they were both relatively young at age, but they both had already many years of work experience in the hotel and restaurant sector.

8. CONCLUSION

Job satisfaction is a multi dimensional issue that is a sum of many factors. As it was discussed in the theory part these factors include a motivation for work, forms of stress, difficult customers and complaints coming from the customers, leadership, personal safety, employee benefits, as well as positive and negative feedback. Being satisfied at work and having a motivation to perform as expected is a sum of many things and there are differences in which certain issues have more relevance to some employees than to others. An employee working in a hotel's front office needs to have proper communicational and technical skills to manage well in work tasks. Without these skills problems with colleagues and customers will occur and decrease the employees' job satisfaction as well as motivation for work. For instance, the employees who were young and had fairly little work experience in the hotel and restaurant area did not feel that employee benefits and bonuses improved their motivation as much as those employees who had been working in the branch for a longer time.

The results of the research show that the general level of job satisfaction among the receptionists in three hotels of Rovaniemi was very good. The most common things that had a positive effect on their job satisfaction included nice colleagues, a good working atmosphere as well as challenging and inspiring work. Negative factors on job satisfaction included bad working ergonomics, the nature of shift work, unreliability of working equipment, and a lack of breaks in working shifts. The majority of the employees also felt that they do receive enough positive feedback from their superior and colleagues and this result also has a straight connection on having a good work atmosphere and team spirit at the workplace.

The areas that required improvements were the physical side of the work since over a half of the respondents said that they had experienced physical inconveniences resulting from their work. The most common symptoms were neck, shoulder and back problems. For this reason the hotels that took part in this research should concentrate on their employees' ergonomics and find out

whether working equipment supports working tasks well enough. Only few respondents felt that their work was mentally heavy even though working in the night time constantly was mentioned to cause negative symptoms.

The results showed that the majority of the respondents did not feel that receiving negative feedback, complaints and reclamations had effects on job satisfaction but some of them rather felt that receiving them makes them try harder and perform better.

The most common reasons for customers' unhappiness and negative feedback according to the results were somehow connected to hotel rooms and problems associated with them. Other reasons were problems in the level of service that the customers had received meaning slow service at seasonal times or the fact that the customers' expectations did not meet the actual level of the hotel or the services available.

The level of impact that the customers' disturbing behaviour had on the employees' job satisfaction was fairly low but there were differences between the employees who had more experience in a receptionist's work and those who were relatively young with less experience in the work. It had a greater negative effect on younger employees and according to the results those with more experience felt that it did not have so much relevance to their job satisfaction. This result shows that with more working experience and more customers encountered also the negative effect of disturbing behaviour is much smaller. The majority of the receptionists had experienced feelings of unsafety or fear at work and over a half of them had also experienced threatening or physical attacks coming from a customer. The reasons behind customers' disturbing behaviour were mostly associated with alcohol and drugs as well as mental illnesses. Since most of the respondents who answered the questionnaire were women it is also worth mentioning that they had experienced personal comments regarding their appearance coming from drunken male customers. Threatening behaviour and anger of the customers were also mentioned as issues that had the most disturbing effects on the employees' job satisfaction.

I chose this subject for my thesis because job satisfaction of the employees working in hotels front offices interested me and because I have worked as a receptionist in three places so far myself. The reason why I wanted to concentrate on the effects of customers' unhappiness and situations where a customer behaves in a disturbing manner towards an employee was the fact that I did not find any other studies about this particular subject. The validity of the results received has some problems because all the respondents did not answer all of the open questions but in those parts I used the material that was available. I might have been able to receive more replies if I had given more time for the respondents to answer the questionnaire sheets but on the other hand I felt that by giving a little over a week's response time I ensured that they would not forget to answer. Before delivering the questionnaire to the three hotels mentioned I discussed research problems and questions added to the questionnaire with my colleague from the hotel where I had been working earlier and her thoughts and opinions were pretty much in line with the answers received from the respondents too.

I believe that this study can be useful to people who are studying the hotel and restaurant branch and are going to work in a hotel environment or as receptionists in the future. Also the hotels that took part in the research can get some information about the effects of customers' unhappiness and disturbing behaviour on their employees' job satisfaction. This study also shows the areas of employees' job satisfaction that do require improvements.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

-This questionnaire and the answers received will function as a information base in my thesis work where I study receptionists job satisfaction in hotels of Rovaniemi. It will give me information about the effects of unhappy customers, customers complaints, and disturbing customers on receptionists job satisfaction. All the answers received will be handled anonymously and the research will be done for receptionists in three hotels of Rovaniemi. My wish is that all the employees taking part in this research would answer the questions as truthfully as they can and using their own experiences and viewpoints.

With best regards: Veli-Matti Höynälä. Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences.

1. Age _____

1.1 Gender _____

1.2 Amount of work experience in years. Hotel and restaurant sector

1.3 Educational background

1.4 Are you a permanent employee, a part-time employee or a seasonal employee?

1.5 In which shift do you mainly work in? (Circle the right option)

Morning shift Evening shift Night shift All of the three shifts

2. How do you get along in your current job? (Circle the right option)
1=badly, 4= very well

1. 2. 3. 4.

Positive things for job satisfaction?

Negative things for job satisfaction?

2.1 On what level is the team spirit and working atmosphere in your work place? (Circle the right option) 1=bad, 4= very good

1. 2. 3. 4.

How do you think it could be improved?

2.2 In what ways could your job satisfaction be improved?

2.3 Do you get enough positive feedback from your superior and colleagues?

Yes No

2.4 Do incentives/ bonuses improve your motivation for the work?

Yes No

2.5 Do employee benefits improve your motivation for the work?

Yes No

2.6 Do you think that your work is mentally heavy?

Yes No

If you answered "Yes" on the previous question could you clarify in which ways the work is mentally heavy?_____

2.7 Do you think that your work is physically heavy?

Yes No

2.8 Have you noticed any physical inconveniences that could have appeared as a result of work?

Yes No

2.9 Do the seasonal time and rush impact negatively on your job satisfaction?

Yes No

3. Does receiving negative feedback, complaints and reclamations have effects on your job satisfaction?

Yes No

What kinds of effects?_____

3.1 What are the most common reasons for the customers' unhappiness and negative feedback in your opinion?

3.2 What kinds of compensations have you given to the customers when they have expressed their unhappiness?

4. Have you experienced feelings of insecurity or fear in your work?

Yes No

What was the reason for this? _____

4.1 In your work, have you experienced bullying or physical attacks coming from a customer?

Yes No

4.2 What are the most common reasons for the customers' disturbing behaviour in your opinion? _____

4.3 Do you think that the customers' disturbing behaviour increases during seasonal time?

Yes No

4.4 Does the customers' drunken and disturbing behaviour have a negative effect on your job satisfaction?

Yes No

4.5 What kinds of customer situations hamper most your job satisfaction?

4.6 How big effect does customers' disturbing behaviour have on your job satisfaction and motivation for the work?

(Circle the right option, on scale 1-4) 1 =no effect, 4 =big effect

1. 2. 3. 4.

-Thank you for your effort.

Liite 2. Kysymyslomake

-Tämä kysymyslomake ja saadut vastaukset toimivat tietoa antavana pohjana lopputyössäni jossa tutkin vastaanottovirkailijoiden työssä viihtymistä ja tyytymättömien ja häiriötä aiheuttavien asiakkaiden vaikutuksia työssäviihtyvyyteen. Kaikki saadut vastaukset käsitellään nimettömänä ja tutkimus toteutetaan 3:n hotellin vastaanottovirkailijoille Rovaniemellä. Toiveena olisi että työntekijät jotka osallistuvat tutkimukseen vastaisivat kysymyksiin mahdollisimman totuudenmukaisesti sekä omia kokemuksiaan ja näkemyksiään hyödyntäen.
Ystävällisin terveisin: Veli-Matti Höynälä. Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulu.

1. Ikä _____

1.1. Sukupuoli _____

1.2. Työkokemuksen määrä vuosina hotelli ja ravintola-alalta.

1.3. Ammatillinen koulutustausta

1.5 Oletko vakituinen työntekijä, osa-aikainen vai sesonkityöntekijä?

1.5 Mitä työvuoroa pääasiassa teet? (Ympyröi itseäsi koskeva vaihtoehto)

Aamuvuoro Iltavuoro Yövuoro Kaikkia kolmea vuoroa

2. Kuinka viihdyt nykyisessä työssäsi? (Ympyröi vaihtoehto, asteikolla 1-4)

1= huonosti, 4= erittäin hyvin

1. 2. 3. 4.

positiiviset asiat työssä viihtymisen kannalta?

negatiiviset asiat työssä viihtymisen kannalta?

2.1 Millä tasolla työpaikkasi yhteishenki ja työilmapiiri mielestäsi on?

(Ympyröi vaihtoehto) 1 =huono, 4 =erittäin hyvä

1. 2. 3. 4.

Kuinka mielestäsi voisi parantaa? _____

2.2 Millä tavoin työssä viihtyvyyttäsi voitaisiin parantaa?

2.3 Saattoiko mielestäsi tarpeeksi positiivista palautetta esimieheltäsi ja työkavereiltasi?

Kyllä Ei

2.4 Parantavatko mahdolliset tulospalkkiot / bonukset työskentelymotivaatiotasi?

Kyllä Ei

2.5 Parantavatko mahdolliset henkilökunta edut työskentelymotivaatiotasi?

Kyllä Ei

2.6 Onko työ mielestäsi henkisesti raskasta?

Kyllä Ei

Mikäli vastasit edelliseen ”Kyllä” niin voitko tarkentaa millä tavoin työ on mielestäsi henkisesti raskasta? _____

2.7 Onko työ mielestäsi fyysisesti raskasta?

Kyllä Ei

2.8 Oletko havainnut fyysisiä vaivoja jotka voivat aiheutua työstäsi/ fyysistä kulumista?

Kyllä Ei

2.9 Vaikuttaako sesonki ja kiireinen aika negatiivisesti työssäviihtyvyyteesi?

Kyllä Ei

3. Onko negatiivisen asiakaspalautteen, valituksien ja reklamaatioiden vastaanottamisella vaikutuksia työsi mielekkyyteen ja työssäviihtymiseen?

Kyllä Ei

Millaisia vaikutuksia? _____

3.1 Mitkä ovat mielestäsi yleisimmät syyt asiakkaan tyytymättömyyteen ja negatiiviseen asiakaspalautteeseen?

3.2 Millaisia hyvityksiä tai kompensatioita olet antanut asiakkaalle kun tämä on ilmaissut tyytymättömyytensä?

4. Oletko kokenut työssäsi turvattomuuden tunnetta tai pelkotiloja?

Kyllä Ei

Mistä johtui? _____

4.1 Oletko joutunut työssäsi uhkailun tai fyysisen hyökkäyksen kohteeksi asiakkaan toimesta?

Kyllä Ei

4.2 Mitkä ovat mielestäsi yleisimmät syyt asiakkaan häiriökäyttäytymiseen?

4.3 Lisääntyykö asiakkaiden häiriökäyttäytyminen mielestäsi sesonki-aikana?

Kyllä Ei

4.4 Vaikuttaako asiakkaan humala ja häiriökäyttäytyminen negatiivisesti työssäviihtyvyyteesi?

Kyllä Ei

4.5 Millaiset asiakastilanteet haittaavat eniten työssä viihtymistäsi?

4.6 Kuinka suuri vaikutus asiakkaan häiriökäytöksellä on työssäviihtyvyyteesi ja motivaatioosi työntekoa kohtaan? (Ympyröi vaihtoehto, asteikolla 1-4)

1= ei vaikutusta, 4 =suuri vaikutus

1. 2. 3. 4.

-Kiitokset vaivannäöstäsi.

