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SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE OF HOTEL PERSONNEL AND SERVICE QUALITY

Abbreviations:

- ICC - interpersonal communication competence
- HSQ - hotel service quality
- DQA - deductive qualitative analysis

Investigating the efficiency of hotel operations necessitates a comprehensive analysis of all influencing factors, including service quality. Research on service quality ultimately enhances the satisfaction of hotel guests' needs and expectations, while also fostering customer loyalty.

The literature on service quality asserts that the quality of a product or service is defined as the customer's perception (Grönroos, 2015). This perspective aligns with the understanding that performance-based customer perceptions significantly influence their behavioural intentions (Cronin et al., 2000). These intentions include word-of-mouth recommendations, repurchase intentions, and the willingness to pay price premiums for services (Zeithaml et al., 1996), all of which substantially contribute to the profitability of a service firm (Cronin et al., 2000).

A scenario in which a guest arrives at a hotel after a long journey and encounters uncommunicative and unhelpful staff illustrates how the absence of effective interpersonal communication can significantly detract from the overall guest experience, even in a luxurious setting. This scenario highlights the critical importance of hotel staff's interpersonal communication skills in shaping the perceived quality of hotel services.

Despite extensive research on various aspects of service quality, the importance of hotel staff's interpersonal communication competencies (ICC) within the hospitality industry remains underexplored. Often, staff ICC has been interpreted narrowly and traditionally, leading to its classification as a minor subcomponent within broader constructs. These constructs include

personal factors, employee behaviour, and functional quality, as identified in Grönroos' model of total perceived quality (1984); service delivery, as part of Rust and Oliver's three-component model (1994); responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, as dimensions introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1990); and interaction quality, a primary dimension in Brady and Cronin's hierarchical model (2001), which is incorporated into Ekinci's service quality model for hospitality firms (2008). Generally, ICC has been equated with the overall level of service provided by staff (Wojciechowska, 2021; Kaveski Peres & Pacheco Palandini, 2021).

At the same time, the benefits of acquiring interpersonal communication skills, both generally and specifically within the context of hospitality services, have been highlighted by scholars and practitioners in communication science and hospitality management. Examples of such behaviours include demonstrating friendliness and courtesy (DeVito, 2023), maintaining appropriate eye contact (Milewska & Włodarczyk, 2018; Jarrett, 2016), providing clear information and explanations (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002; Mattila, 2001), effectively handling complaints (Milewska & Włodarczyk, 2018), issuing apologies (Sparks, 2001), soliciting feedback (Van Vaerenbergh et al., 2018), adjusting speech style (e.g., rate, volume, tone, pauses) to meet the interlocutor's needs (Harwood, 2007; Giles & Ogay, 2007), paying attention to interlocutors (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000), and demonstrating language skills (Roach, 2009; Gussenhoven, 2004; Burgoon & Bacue, 2003; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). The current body of knowledge on interpersonal communication encompasses a wide range of areas related to human needs (physical, relational, identity, spiritual, instrumental), culture, gender, self-concept, self-esteem, image management, self-disclosure, interpersonal perception, language, non-verbal communication, listening, human emotions, social relationships, conflict management, and deceptive communication (Floyd, 2011). These areas were less developed during the late twentieth century when seminal research on service quality was conducted (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1990; Rust & Oliver, 1994). As a result, researchers at that time did not have access to the more advanced concepts of interpersonal communication available to contemporary scholars. Therefore, early theories on service quality did not adequately consider the importance of staff's interpersonal communication competencies in delivering quality service.

In the light of the above, it should be noted there exists a significant paucity of research regarding the impact of hotel staff's interpersonal competence (ICC) on the overall perception of service quality by guests. This deficiency manifests in three distinct research gaps:

- The knowledge gap, related to the lack of theory and searched findings on the significance of staff's ICC for guest-perceived hotel service quality (HSQ).
- The conceptual gap, concerning the insufficient framework of concepts regarding

the individual aspect of staff's ICC, which contribute to guest-perceived HSQ.

- The practical gap, caused by inefficient theory and research findings that would help to address the HSQ issues resulting from poor staff's ICC.

The study aimed to address the aforementioned gaps through the following steps: 1) conducting a comprehensive literature review in service quality management, hospitality management, and interpersonal communication to confirm or refute the insufficiency of existing theory and research findings related to the identified research gaps; 2) reviewing literature on methods used for assessing hotel service quality (HSQ); 3) designing and implementing a research procedure to:

- confirm whether staff's ICC is a key determinant of guest-perceived HSQ
- identify which specific aspects of staff's ICC are most significant for guest-perceived HSQ
- compare the impact of staff's ICC on guest-perceived HSQ relative to other factors,
- determine the relative contribution of individual aspects of staff's ICC to guest-perceived HSQ

In order to meet this end, the following specific research objectives were formulated:

- RO1. To establish the state of the art concerning the knowledge of the relationship between staff's ICC and guest-perceived HSQ.
- RO2. To establish whether staff's ICC constitutes one of the key determinants contributing to guest-perceived HSQ.
- RO3. To establish which individual aspects of staff's ICC contribute to guest-perceived HSQ.
- RO4. To establish the contribution of staff's ICC to guest-perceived HSQ compared to other factors.
- RO5. To establish the relative contribution of individual staff's ICC aspects to guest-perceived HSQ.

These research objectives were pursued through the following specific research questions:

- RQ1. What is the state of the art concerning the knowledge of the relationship between staff's ICC and guest perceived HSQ.
- RQ2. Is staff's ICC one of the key determinants of guest-perceived HSQ?
- RQ3. Which individual aspects of staff's ICC contribute to guest-perceived HSQ?
- RQ4. What is the contribution of staff's ICC to guest-perceived HSQ compared to other factors?

RQ5. What is the relative contribution of individual staff's ICC aspects to guest-perceived HSQ?

To investigate research question RQ1, stemming from theoretical research objective RO1, a literature review was conducted in service quality management, hospitality management, and interpersonal communication. This review utilized resources available through the UE University library, as well as books and journals accessed via internet databases such as Emerald, JSTOR, SAGE Journals, Science Direct, Scopus, Springer, Taylor & Francis online, and Web of Science.

In order to answer research questions RQ2-RQ5, an empirical study was carried out. This study was conducted in two phases. Firstly, a qualitative content analysis based on deductive qualitative analysis (DQA) and sentiment analysis were conducted to answer research questions RQ2 and RQ3. In the second phase, a quantitative content analysis was conducted to answer research questions RQ4 and RQ5 by analysing the frequency of statements on particular topics related to specific aspects of the HSQ.

The scope of the study was related to the size of the area from which the research sample was obtained. The research sample comprised 645 opinions from 120 reviews, posted by hotel guests on the booking.com platform, concerning six resort hotels in Poland whose names contained the phrase 'Resort & Spa', namely:

- Lake Hill Resort & Spa
- Sopot Marriott Resort & Spa
- Lemon Resort & Spa
- Dolina Charlotty Resort & Spa
- Hilton Świnoujście Resort & Spa
- Hotel Polanica Resort & Spa.

The reviews were collected between 15th August 2021, and 31st August 2022.

The dissertation consists of four chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion. Additionally, it includes lists of abbreviations, tables, figures, and references to literature sources.

Chapter one of the dissertation delves into the fundamental components and attributes of service quality in the hospitality industry. It comprehensively examines the multifaceted nature of service quality through both theoretical frameworks and practical insights. The chapter emphasizes that quality is primarily shaped by customer perceptions, which significantly influence their behaviours and impact the profitability of service-oriented firms. Central to this discussion is the pivotal role of customer interactions, advocating for an approach centred on user-based

perspectives to ensure services consistently meet or surpass customer expectations, thereby fostering satisfaction and loyalty. The rationale for investigating service quality is articulated, highlighting its critical role in customer service experiences and the interconnected dynamics of quality, satisfaction, and value. The chapter differentiates between non-commercial and commercial hospitality sectors, elucidates typical hospitality behaviours across diverse facilities, and outlines the stages involved in delivering hospitality services. It further introduces the molecular model of hotel service, which integrates tangible and intangible elements to create a cohesive hospitality experience. Moreover, the chapter addresses the distinctive characteristics and challenges associated with Hotel Service Quality (HSQ), underscoring the inadequacy of traditional definitions in the context of upscale hotels offering extensive amenities. It stresses the essentiality of proficient interactions and effective communicative competence in attaining and sustaining high service quality standards within the hotel industry.

Chapter two conducts a comprehensive exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of interpersonal communicative competence (ICC). It scrutinizes the intricate dimensions of communicative competence, underscoring the prioritization of listening skills over message formulation and the creation of highly person-centred messages (HPCMs). The chapter underscores the pivotal role of nonverbal communication (NVC) in conveying emotions, attitudes, and social signals, advocating for an integrated approach alongside verbal communication (VC). It delineates the functions and components of NVC, encompassing vocalics (e.g., intonation) and non-vocal elements (e.g., facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and body posture). Additionally, the chapter examines individual differences that influence communicative competence, including knowledge, motives, attitudes, personality traits, emotional disposition, age, and gender, and discusses how these factors shape communication dynamics. The methods for evaluating communicative competence, such as direct behavioural observation, self-assessment instruments, and role-playing scenarios, are outlined in detail. This chapter serves as a foundational framework for the subsequent analysis of ICC within the context of customer service quality in the hospitality industry.

Chapter three aims to elucidate the theoretical foundations that explain the influence of interpersonal communicative competence (ICC) on service quality within the hospitality industry. This chapter seeks to delineate the mechanisms and pathways through which ICC contributes to outcomes in service quality. It explores various theoretical perspectives and models of service quality, with a specific focus on the role of ICC. The discussion encompasses prominent models such as Grönroos's total perceived service quality model (Grönroos, 1984a), the Three-component model by Rust and Oliver (Rust & Oliver, 1994), and the Gap model by

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (Zeithaml et al., 1988), among others. Additionally, the chapter delves into theoretical frameworks concerning ICC, such as the Theory of Conversational Implicature (Grice, 1975), Constructivism (Burlinson, 2007; Coopman, 1997), Theory of Politeness (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1987), Communication Accommodation Theory (Sparks & Callan, 1992), and Attribution Theory (Oliver, 2000). These frameworks collectively underscore the pivotal role of ICC in shaping positive service encounters and contributing to organizational success within the service sector.

Chapter four investigates the influence of staff's interpersonal communicative competence (ICC) on how guests perceive Hotel Service Quality (HSQ). It commences with a review of different methodologies utilized for evaluating HSQ. This section outlines contemporary methodologies for assessing service quality based on customer perceptions, justifying the research methods and design used in the dissertation. It distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative research approaches, explaining that qualitative research explores social experiences and their interpretations, while quantitative research involves numerical data analysis to describe and explain phenomena. Qualitative research is descriptive, focusing on how and why phenomena occur, and emphasizes social reality construction, while quantitative research seeks to establish causal relationships and generalize findings through objective measurements and statistical analysis. Both approaches can be combined in mixed methods to provide comprehensive insights, with qualitative research building or refining theory and quantitative research testing existing theory. This analysis provides a basis for arguing the choice of method used by the Author to achieve the research objectives.

While outlining the structure of the SERVQUAL questionnaire, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, designed to measure perceived service quality based on the gap model and various service quality dimensions, it was pointed out that SERVQUAL addresses indirectly several aspects of staff's ICC. The questionnaire covers service quality dimensions, such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Statements in the questionnaire highlight various aspects of service quality, such as modern equipment, visually appealing facilities, prompt and accurate service, employee courtesy, and individual attention to customers. Importantly, key items emphasize the importance of communicative behaviours and interpersonal skills in providing high-quality service, reflecting the significance of employees' ability to clearly express ideas, offer assistance, inspire confidence, show courtesy, and address customers' specific needs.

The outline of Mystery shopping, which aims to assess client satisfaction, training impact, policy implementation, and ensure consistent service standards also underpins the significance

of staff's ICC. The example checklist prominently features several questions related to interpersonal communication, such as offering assistance with luggage, greeting guests upon arrival, staff providing dining suggestions, receiving a friendly and genuine welcome at the restaurant, and staff answering the phone.

Another discussed HSQ assessment method, referred to as The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) assesses service quality by gathering detailed descriptions of memorable customer experiences through face-to-face interviews, which are analyzed and classified. Defined as interactions between customers and service employees that result in significant satisfaction or dissatisfaction, critical incidents provide insights into the root causes of customer evaluations. In hospitality research, CIT uses self-completion forms, interviews, and group interviews to collect data. Analysis of such data reveals the impact of service encounters on customer satisfaction, highlighting the importance of employees' interpersonal communication and responses to service failures. The technique uncovers specific behaviours leading to customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction, offering a detailed understanding beyond typical surveys. Bitner et al. (1990) utilized the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to examine the impact of service encounters on customer satisfaction, analysing 699 incidents across airlines, hotels, and restaurants through content analysis of customer stories and responses. Their study categorized incidents into three main groups (1-3) and twelve detailed categories (A, B, C...) that influence highly satisfactory customer experiences. Group 1 highlighted instances where effective handling of service failures led to positive memories, contrasting with Group 1's dissatisfactory encounters where poor responses exacerbated negative evaluations. Group 2 focused on personalized service, from routine requests to extraordinary situations, showcasing the lowest rate of dissatisfaction (15.6%). Group 3 highlighted unexpected acts that greatly pleased customers, yet also detailed instances where unsolicited behaviours led to dissatisfaction (50.4%). These findings underscore the pivotal role of employee behaviours, including interpersonal communication, in shaping customer perceptions and satisfaction levels within service encounters. Example task wherein staff's ICC is significant include: acknowledging the delay in service and explaining its cause (1/B), acknowledging service failures and apologising, acknowledging special requests and displaying attitude revealing willingness to adopt service to customers' preferences, acknowledging customers' self-inflicted problems and assisting them in solving those problems in a way they will prevent them from feeling embarrassed, showing interest in the customer's comfort, and providing them with extra information, expressing courtesy or thoughtfulness, respecting cultural norms, such as equality, honesty, and fairness .

The advent of Web 2.0 technology has transformed internet users from passive receivers to active content creators, enabling widespread electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication. This digital form of consumer interaction, encompassing platforms like online forums, review sites, and social media, has become pivotal in shaping consumer purchasing decisions due to its perceived reliability compared to traditional advertising. Defined broadly as consumer-generated digital communication about goods and services, eWOM excludes professional reviews and advertising, focusing instead on peer-to-peer exchanges. Research highlights its significant impact on consumer behaviour, influencing perceptions of service quality in sectors such as hospitality, where analyses of eWOM reviews have identified crucial factors like staff service quality, including staff's ICC. This approach offers nuanced insights into customer preferences and satisfaction, underscoring the utility of eWOM in contemporary service evaluation and research methodologies.

Subsequently, the chapter outlines the research methodology adopted by the author to examine the impact of staff's ICC on guest perceptions of HSQ. The findings from both qualitative and quantitative analyses are then presented. Finally, the chapter discusses the implications of the research findings, draws conclusions based on the analysis, and provides recommendations for future research and practice in this area.

In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, a comprehensive overview of the study is provided, accompanied by an analysis and interpretation of the research findings. Additionally, the chapter discusses the implications of the findings, offers practical recommendations based on the research outcomes, acknowledges limitations encountered during the study, and proposes potential avenues for future research in the field.

After a thorough analysis of the literature, it was concluded that the theories and models of service quality discussed address ICC insufficiently. Therefore, with regard to the specific research question RQ1, it was concluded that the state of knowledge on the relationship between staff ICC and guests' perceived HSQ indicates a theoretical gap, as this relationship, although based on theoretical premises, has not been sufficiently confirmed through empirical studies.

In terms of the epistemological underpinnings used to design the research, the pragmatist approach advocated by Peirce, James and Dewey was adopted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to the principles of pragmatism, truth is not an absolute, but rather a flexible and useful construct for understanding the nature of reality (Given, 2008).

With regard to the first stage of empirical research, a qualitative content analysis in the form of deductive qualitative analysis (DQA) was conducted. DQA is a "qualitative methodology that facilitates theory development by providing researchers with a systematic way to

empirically examine existing theory” (Fife & Gossner, 2024, p. 2). The DQA procedure consists of four stages: 1) the development of a research focus and selection of a guiding theory (which have already been discussed earlier, 2) the operationalisation of theory through sensitisation of constructs or working hypotheses, 3) the collection of a purposive research sample (also previously discussed), 4) the coding and analysis of data and theorising.

With respect to the second stage of the DQA, the operationalisation of the theory was carried out through the selection of relevant “sensitising constructs”. “Sensitising constructs” used for the purposes of this study include concepts related to the key determinants of the HSQ. More specifically, at this stage of the research, a pre-selection of key concepts in the form of general HSQ categories was made based on the theory of the subject, in particular the results of research based on reviews of hotels posted by guests on portals such as www.booking.com, (i.e. by means of eWOM – electronic word-of-mouth). The categories thus defined are:

- 1) service provided by staff
- 2) room/bathroom
- 3) cleanliness
- 4) hotel location
- 5) food quality
- 6) dining conditions
- 7) value
- 8) comfort
- 9) hotel properties
- 10) car park
- 11) Wi-Fi
- 12) recreation facilities

The HSQ categories listed above provide a certain frame of reference as a basis for analysing the content of the reviews included in the study. The selection of these categories was modified in phase four of the DQA through operations such as deleting individual categories, adding new categories, combining individual categories into broader categories, dividing broader categories into more specific categories or supplementing categories with specific subcategories. In stage four of the DQA, coding and data analysis was carried out. The coding procedure, leading to the establishment of the main quality criteria, is based on categorical distinctions that which “define units by their membership in a class or category by their having something in common” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 105). In the case of the research in question, a statement (or a fragment of a statement) was qualified as a unit of coding provided that this element represented an

opinion, or evaluation of the hotel stay, or an evaluation of the quality of service in relation to a specific hotel experience, or satisfaction with hotel services in global terms.

It should be noted here that in the case of hotel reviews, the opinions shared by customers often referred directly to specific insights about their observations and the associated degree of satisfaction. Consequently, there was no need to implement complex procedures to avoid problems of interpretation, which contrasts with studies in which content analysis aims to identify meaning units not explicitly expressed in the text (i.e. hidden meaning structures). Nevertheless, several of the reviews analysed contained unclear or ambiguous messages that required to be approached with greater interpretative depth and using an accepted system of coding rules. Therefore, the qualitative analysis was carried out manually, as the hotel guest reviews had to be interpreted based on context. This decision was taken to prevent possible misinterpretation of context-dependent messages, which could occur when using automatic text analysis software such as NVivo, Atlas, or CAQDAS. Automated text analysis ignores the context of the text source and what was written before and after the passage under analysis. With automatic text analysis software, the analysis focuses on the structure of the utterance or sentence, as well as the location, meaning and function of each word (Evers, 2018). Furthermore, automatised text analysis is unable to analyse the complexity of the text, making it difficult to assess hidden assumptions, allusions, ironies and suggestions that do not explicitly emerge from the text. Consequently, the meaning of abstract concepts in relation to the text author's intentions cannot be grasped using these tools (Adu, 2022).

The process of generating new categories, subcategories and codes, based on the units of coding, should be carried out in a cyclical manner (Saldaña, 2009). This means that the initial coding results had to be verified after a certain period of time and after recourse to theory, and then recoding had to be carried out again. The cyclical nature of the data analysis in this study is reflected in the fact that the coding process was carried out twice in the following stages:

- 1) During the first cycle of analysis, the colour-coded coding units extracted from the reviews were transferred to the data matrix, allowing individual coding units to be recorded in the appropriate category and subcategory, including sentiment, for each review. While transferring the units of coding to the data collection matrix, new categories or subcategories were generated and several previously defined categories were removed. The need to analyse sentiment was due to the fact that, despite the predefined (at www.booking.com) division into positive and negative opinion sections, a number of comments did not follow these designations, and consequently negative opinion units could be found in positive opinion sections and vice versa.

- 2) The second cycle of analysis, the re-coding process, was carried out as follows: First, the reviews were copied into a word processor. Then, the units of coding were extracted again and marked with spaces with separation symbols. Each of the marked coding units was described as matching specific categories and subcategories and sentiment values. Finally, the result of the second coding cycle was compared with the result of the first coding cycle to generate a refined version of the emerged constructs.

Based on the ordering of the coding units identified in the surveyed hotel reviews, seven HSQ categories and one sub-category 'emerged' from the study:

- 1) staff's performance (comprising 1/a staff's ACC)
- 2) room
- 3) location
- 4) dining
- 5) infrastructure
- 6) housekeeping
- 7) recreation.

Regarding research question RQ2, this finding affirms that ICC of staff is a significant factor influencing clients' perceptions of HSQ. Thus, the answer to research question RQ2 is affirmative. In addition, the result of the DQA research procedure indicated that ICC of staff is a sub-category under the category: staff's performance.

Concerning research question RQ3, seven distinct categories have emerged regarding specific aspects of staff's ICC. These categories encompass:

- 1) courtesy
- 2) kindness
- 3) attentiveness to guests
- 4) responding to problems
- 5) informing and explaining
- 6) nonverbal communication
- 7) language skills

At first glance, the concepts of courtesy and kindness appear closely intertwined. However, within the context of guest-perceived HSQ, this distinction holds significance as it pertains to distinct aspects of communication behaviour during service delivery. Courtesy, in its essence, denotes the formal politeness and respectful demeanour exhibited by hotel staff towards guests. This includes gestures such as warmly greeting guests, addressing them with appropriate titles, maintaining a professional demeanour, and promptly responding to requests. Courtesy

establishes a framework for positive interactions and contributes to the overall hospitality atmosphere within the hotel. Conversely, kindness transcends mere formalities and involves genuine empathy and care towards guests. It encompasses acts of compassion, understanding individual needs, and ensuring guests' comfort and satisfaction. While courtesy is an expected element of professional conduct, kindness adds a deeper layer of warmth and emotional connection to guest interactions.

The quantitative survey revealed that with regard to the specific research question RO4, the behaviour of staff manifesting ICC was the subject of 13.5% positive and negative feedback combined, making ICC of staff one of the three most important factors next to meals (17%) and location (15.3%). Positive feedback was most common for location (25.5%) and meals (21%). Negative opinions were most common for the room category (21.3%) and the behaviour of ICC-related staff (20.6%).

With regard to the conceptual gap mentioned at the outset, in terms of the impact of individual ICC aspects of staff on guests' perceived HSQ (RO5), courtesy emerged as the most significant aspect, with a high frequency of both positive (61.3%) and negative (32.8%) opinions. Responsiveness to problems was significantly emphasised in negative opinions (29.9%). Kindness, paying attention to visitors and informing and explaining were commented on less frequently, with comments limited to negative feedback (10.4%, 10.4% and 9% respectively) with the exception of kindness where positive feedback was frequent (29%). Nonverbal communication and language skills were also commented on, but less frequently (4.5% and 3% respectively for negative feedback and 9.7% for positive feedback on language skills).

With regard to the theoretical gap, the staff's ICC has been found to be significant for the global perception of HSQ by guests. In the survey, it was the third most frequently mentioned topic, after meals and location.

Owing to the fact that the main goal of the research discussed in the dissertation is to examine the significance of staff's ICC for guests' perceptions of HSQ, it may be concluded that this research is of an interdisciplinary nature. Interdisciplinary research involves integrating information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, or theories from multiple disciplines or fields of specialized knowledge. This approach is undertaken by an individual scientist or a team of scientists with the aim of advancing fundamental understanding or addressing problems that cannot be solved within the confines of a single discipline or area of specialized knowledge (National Academy of Sciences, 2005 as cited in Menken & Keestra, 2016). The benefits of adopting interdisciplinary approach to research include: fostering a holistic way of perceiving

and understanding a problem, leading to novel solutions, giving rise to useful technologies that did not exist before (Paranjpe 2019).

With regard to the practice gap, results of the study could be used to build a tool based on a set of statements regarding the behaviour of hotel employees (e.g. front desk staff) in direct contact with hotel guests. These would be statements related to specific ICC categories of staff that emerged from the qualitative research with some modifications (e.g. the category ‘attention to guests’ in terms of conversational skills would be replaced by ‘attention’). Examples of statements within each category are as follows:

- Courtesy:

“This is a person of high personal culture.”

“This person does not refer to the interviewee with respect.”

“This person has a very friendly disposition.”

“This person often uses polite phrases (e.g. please, thank you, sorry).”

- Kindness:

“This person shows patience when listening to the interlocutor.”

“This person is critical or dismissive towards their interlocutor.”

“This person encourages to ask questions and report any problems.”

- Attention:

“This person is not interested in what is being said to them.”

“This person listens carefully to what is being said to them.”

“This person confirms their understanding of interlocutor’s words by expressions: ‘I understand’, ‘of course’, ‘yes’, etc.”

- Responding to problems:

“This person shows commitment and tries to help the interlocutor.”

- Informing and explaining:

“The information and answers provided by this person are ambiguous.”

“This person uses words that are difficult to understand.”

- Nonverbal communication:

“This person has a friendly tone of voice, expressing warmth and concern.”

“This person avoids eye contact.”

“This person speaks too quietly.”

“This person speaks clearly and modulates the pitch of the voice emphasising the meaning of the utterance.”

- Language skills:

“This person chooses his words aptly.”

“This person speaks in a clear, transparent manner.”

“This person accurately refers to the content that has been given to them.”

During a test in the form of a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, the evaluators observing the conversation would mark on a Likert scale the severity of the trait in question between two poles labelled: very undesirable vs. very desirable. The number of statements within each category would be proportional to the percentages for each category obtained in the quantitative analysis. The statements presented above, which are examples of high or low ICCs, are taken from the analysis of the subject literature and the Author's research findings.

The limitations of the empirical research carried out relate in particular to the scope of the study and methodological aspects. Firstly, the study is limited by the size of the research sample in the form of 645 opinions from 120 reviews of six resort hotels in Poland. This potentially limited the possibility to generalise the results beyond the context related to cultural characteristic of our country. From a methodological point of view, the coding process was carried out by a single researcher, which raises concerns about a potential lack of objectivity in the coding process, while, as already mentioned, the reviews were mostly clear in terms of the authors' intentions and did not require difficult decisions to be made regarding the interpretation of the content. It is also important to note that there are authors who express reservations regarding conducting interdisciplinary research by one person, as they claim that while we aim to manage multiple areas of expertise simultaneously, it is inevitable that we will not become experts in every field our work touches upon. This may impact the quality of our research in those fields with which we are less familiar. Consequently, the work of an interdisciplinarian is likely to be more superficial in some aspects compared to that of scholars who possess deep knowledge in a particular field that the interdisciplinarian has not fully explored or intended to cover comprehensively (Cheas 2021). Referring to these remarks, however, it should be emphasised that the Author of the reserach spent several years studying the literature on the disciplines covered by the study, and that the qualitative and quantitative methods used in this study did not require advanced knowledge or specialist software, because the qualitative method based on the analysis of hotel reviews (in the form of eWOM) related directly to the phenomenon under study, and the relatively simple quantitative method (in the form of frequency analysis) was, in the light of the research objectives, a natural consequence of the qualitative research conducted earlier.

A final limitation related to the reliability of the study may be that the author's inexperience in conducting qualitative and quantitative research, creates potential shortcomings in the design and implementation of the study. These limitations may have affected the research procedures, including data collection, analysis and interpretation.

Due to the significant importance of staff ICC for guests' perceptions of HSQ, it is advisable that this subject of research is further extensively analysed on a theoretical and practical level in areas such as service quality management, hospitality management, quality planning, quality assurance, quality control, quality improvement, etc.

The contribution of individual ICC aspects of staff (i.e. courtesy, friendliness, attention to guests, responsiveness to guests' problems, information and explanation, nonverbal communication and language skills) to guests' perceived HSQ requires continued research.

Based on the conclusions of the reported research, the author plans to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the contribution of individual ICC aspects to guests' perceived HSQ in subsequent research based on studies covering Resort & Spa hotels in Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Such empirical research would allow for a more accurate analysis of the impact of each ICC aspect in terms of perceived HSQ. The results of this research would enable the construction of the above-mentioned diagnostic tool to profile the respondents in terms of ICC, taking into account the individual aspects of these competences. This tool could be used in the recruitment process of hotel employees and in the implementation of an employee development programme.