Service Quality Measurement: Expectation and Perception of North American Customers toward the Hotels in Bangkok

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Abstract—**This research focuses on measuring the gap between expectation and perception of North American customers toward the 3-4 stars hotels (rated by Thai Hotel Association) in Bangkok. The approach for measurement is adapting the SERVQUAL model to prepare the questionnaire for the North American customers to respond. The result shows that the Assurance dimension is the most concern dimension (highest gap) of the respondent. Then the recommendations are provided for the top 10 topics with highest gap for management to apply in order to improve the hotel service quality.**

Index Terms—**SERVQUAL, service quality, North American, service recovery**

I. INTRODUCTION

In service industry, the quality of service provided by service provider is the top priority of the company. Offering poor service quality to customers leads to revenue shrinkage, disrepute and unable to survive. Therefore, management has to concern whether the service quality provided is in the acceptable or beyond expectation level or not. Management sometimes ensure that they are strong in philosophy and practice in providing service and confident in quality of service provided, however the complaints and dissatisfaction are still coming from the customers. Based on many studies about the service quality measurement applying SERVQUAL model conducted by the researchers, gaps are always found between customers' expectation and perception toward the service quality provided by service provider.

To select the group of customer to study, North American customers are the majority among numbers of tourists visiting Thailand which also generate high number of income to Thailand. The exact figure from TAT shows the 611,972 North American people visited Thailand in 2010 and 684,073 in year 2011. For the first half of 2012, it is 379,430 North American people visited Thailand. While 114,678 Canadians (not appear in this table) tourists visited Thailand for the first half of 2012 and 103,669 at the same period of previous year [1].

Then this paper focuses on the gap between service expectation and perception of North American customers by applying SERVQUAL model. Then the recommendations for the top 10 highest gap topics are provided for the hotel to improve the service quality and bridge the gap.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Service Quality

Lewis and Booms [2] defines that the service quality is the way of providing the service to measure the gap between the performance provided by the service provider and the expectation of customers, the way that customer think or feel about product. Johnston and Robert [3] note that one of the core competitive advantages of the service provider is to enhance the capability of minimizing the gap between customer expectation before receiving the service and perception after receiving the service. The major mindset of the service provider is trying to offer beyond the expectation by improving the operational process and constantly resolve the problem to gain customer satisfaction.
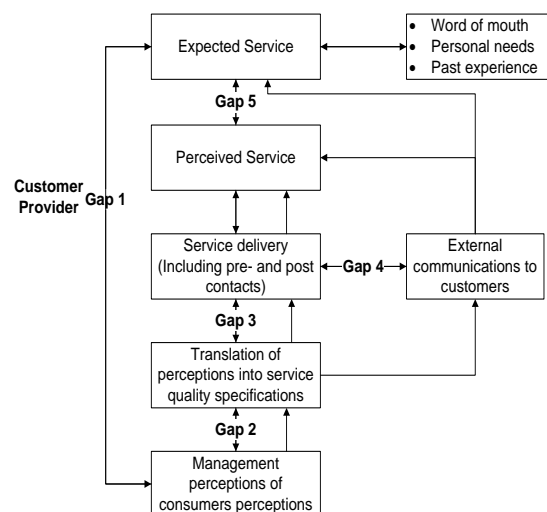

Figure 1.   Conceptual model of service quality; Source: http://www.degromoboy.com/cs/gap.htm

The analysis of SERVQUAL dimensions provided the 5 types of gap which can be called "Parasuraman 5 Gap

Model" developed by Parasuraman *et al* [4]. This model provides the conceptual model to measure the service quality on quantitative basis as shown in Figure 1. In this paper, the measurement focus on Gap5 between Customers' expected service and the service that customer perceived.

B. SERVQUAL Model

In order to measure the quality of the service, the models are implemented to apply as a tool to measure. One of the effective and most utilized tool called "SERVQUAL or Service Quality Model", implemented by Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berryet. al. [5], [6], and [7] is a tool selected to analyze the gap from customers' expectation and perception (Gap = Perception – Expectation) which measuring 5 dimensions of service quality (Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy and Tangibility).

- *Tangibility:* Refers to the tangible or physical dimension of service e.g. facilities, equipment or staff. This dimension also covers the ability to
- *Responsiveness:* Refers to the ability to perform service promptly and support the customers' need constantly. Customers are also easy to access for the service.
- *Assurance:* Refers to the ability to offer the service assurance by providing the service with understanding, knowledge, skills with good manner to the customers.
- *Empathy:* Refers to the ability to adapt the service quality to the individual.
- *Reliability:* Refers to the ability to provide the service based on promise to customer.

Applying SERVQUAL model to measure the gap is a popular method to measure several service business outside hotel e.g. Hospital, Restaurant or e-retail. [8]-[12].

C. Service Recovery Strategies

The Service Recovery Strategies, established by D. Gremler, M. Bitner and V. Zeithaml (one of the SERVQUAL founder) [13], is a framework consists of 8 strategies to provide the excellent recovery to the service in order to bridge the gap between customer expectation and perception.

After acquire the survey result by using SERVQUAL questionnaire, those data are to be analyzed for the gap and the weakest areas in 5 dimensions are to be depicted in the ranking of gap scores. Then, the recommendations will be provided by adapting the Service Recovery Strategies Framework combining with the hotel management approaches.

The 8 Service Recovery Strategies are as follows:
- *Make the Service Fail-Safe:* This strategy refers to "Do it right at the first time". Instead of suffering from the impact and then finding the remediation, preventive action should be implemented first to avoid customer dissatisfaction and cost for correcting the service error.
- *Encourage and Track Complaints:* In the service industry, it is impossible to find the measurement to

provide 100% service quality without error. Even the first strategy "Make the Service Fail-Safe" is implemented strongly, the error might occur. Tracking the complaints from customer in order to resolve the problem is one of the effective ways to find out the error that might occur. Moreover, some complaints from customer might indicate the error that the hotel never noticed before.

- *Act Quickly:* Not only gathering the complaints information from customer, but hotel also has to respond back quickly. The satisfaction of customer is not depending on how much the complaint the hotel gathers, but how fast them response back. To act quickly, the readiness or availability of the hotel staff is required.
- *Provide Adequate Explanation:* Resolving the problem on timely basis is the crucial strategy to gain trust from customer, however explanation is also one of the important thing that customer needs to understand rather than solving the problem in silence. Explanation can help diffusing the dissatisfaction of the customer and maintain the trust. In case that the problem is not fully resolved or not within the timely manner, the explanation can help reducing the customers' negative reaction.
- *Treat Customer Fairly:* The expectation of the customer toward this strategy is the outcome or the way hotel provides the solution to the problem. Every customer expects the consistency of the hotel to provide the solution to them. Treating some customers better than the others may cause dissatisfaction among the rest. Therefore, hotel staffs have to ensure they treat customer fairly.
- *Cultivate Relationship with customers:* The most important concept of the marketing is that "Retaining the current customer is easier and lower in terms of cost than seeking new customer". Therefore, the relationship is one of the most important strategies for the hotel to maintain with customer.
- *Learn from recovery experiences:* The previous problem both solved and pending or unsolved are lessons for the hotel to learn how to prevent and also how to provide the solution efficiently and effectively once it repeats again in the future. The root cause analysis should be conducted to identify the sources of problem and implement the preventive approach together with the solution flow.
- *Learn from lost customers:* Lost customers signal the dissatisfaction or unacceptable experience they perceive before leaving. Then this is one of the important information that the hotel should learn and identify the root cause they decided to leave because deciding to leave means they perceive bad experience enough to make the decision.

D. Hofstede's Cultural Dimension and North American Culture

Applying the same Service Recovery Strategies recommendations and actions to the customers without

considering the culture difference might not able to efficiently satisfy the customers or diffuse their dissatisfactions. In 1980 Geert Hofstede introduced the "Hofstede's model" [14] and continuously developed it until presence. Hofstede's model was established by conducting the research through the local or subsidiaries employee of IBM which covers more than 50 countries around the world. The scoring from research classifies each country into 5 dimensions which can be categorized as follows:

- *Power Distance* which focuses on social inequalities. Based on the Hofstede's index value, North American people are Small Power Distance.
- *Collectivism or Individualism* which focus on perspective over themselves and the society. Based on the Hofstede's index value, North American people are Individualism.
- *Femininity or Masculinity* which focuses on perspective over the distinctive between genders. Based on the Hofstede's index value, North American people tend to be Masculinity.
- *Uncertainty Avoidance* which focuses on how the people deal with the uncertainty or risk from unknown situation. Based on the Hofstede's index value, North American people tend to be Low Uncertainty Avoidance.
- *Long or short term orientation* which focuses on the perspective of people that focus on long or short term outcome. Based on result from the Hofstede's index value, North American people tend to be Short term orientation.

Outside the characteristics of North American people described by Hofstede's model, there are some necessary facts about North American culture from BERICH, LLC International Sales and Export Management Consulting [15] that the hotel should learn before providing the service to them due to some specific characteristics might cause the different between them and the customers from other countries.

- *Individualism:* The cultures of North American are high in individualism (as mentioned in Hofstede's score). North American often people keep the personal distance with one another. Especially, the expression of the emotion within the family is not obvious so sometimes it may look like carelessness of the family issue. Therefore, in cultivating the relationship with North American customers, it is easy to be considered as "too much" for them if the hotel staffs try to interact more that they should. Then giving little space between them and hotel staffs but not neglect is the proper way to provide the service to North American customers.
- *Time values and management:* Time values and management is one of the critical issues for the North American. "Time is money" is the usual quote known among North American and reflect the perception of how important the time is. Time values are not important only in business issue but also in

relationship manner. Therefore, in providing the service to North American customers, the timeliness issue should be considered as one of the top priority.

- *Comfort zone:* North American is a structured society with less expression of emotion. Therefore they would tend to maintain their comfort zones or personal space when interacting with other people. Getting close to North American people without knowing before might cause the nervous feeling to them. Therefore, dealing with North American customers, the hotel staff should respect to the personal space and be aware of being casual and relax in front of them unless they do it first.
- *Communication Styles:* North Americans are direct. They would love to communicate in a straight-forward manner. It is considered as wasting time if the person talking to them trying to beat around the bush. Be honest and hit to the point are the nature of North American people. Then when hotel staff needs to explain to the North American customers, get to the point and explain them with sincerity.
- *Sensitive matters:* North American people consist of many races, religions, beliefs or nationalities. Therefore talking about this issue should be avoided because they are very sensitive on these issues. However, North American people love sport especially the American sports such as: American football, Basketball or Baseball. Cultivating the relationship by beginning with the sport issue is the easy way to melt down the ice of the North American customers.

For the relationship between culture and service expectation of customers, A.S. Mattila and P. G. Patterson [16] conducted a research in 2004 to explore the difference of expectation between Western (American) and Eastern (Thailand and Malaysia) and found that cultures has impact on service expectation. The result of the research shows that the cultures has impact toward the customer expectation and cause the different among the expectation of the customer from each culture.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Sample Size

To analyze the gap between expectation and perception of customers, the 400 surveys are distributed to the 3-4 stars hotel and 308 were collected to analyze the result from the customers. To define the sample size, according to the Taro Yamane's formula [17] and [18], the formula applied to calculate the sample sizes as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \qquad (1)$$

While
n = sample size
N = total population
e = error of sampling

The total numbers of surveys distributed were 400 (N) due to the error of 0.05 (e). According to the total population of American and Canadian tourists visiting Bangkok in Figure 2.2, the numbers of tourists exceed 100,000 in only first half of a year; therefore the estimation of the number of tourist visiting Bangkok should be higher than 100,000 people. Therefore, the sample sizes to be distributed are 400 according to the Yamane's formula.

B. Research Instrument

To gain the data for analysis, the questionnaire is designed based on SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry to collect the sufficient data from customers. The Likert scales of the questionnaire are ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire is divided into four parts as follows:

- Part 1: General Information of Respondent
- Part 2: Expectations of customer before receiving the service from hotel (P)
- Part 3: Perceptions of customer after receiving the service from hotel (E)
- Part 4: Additional Questions

C. Data Collection

The data collection is performed by distributing 400 surveys to the North American customer since 14 September 2012 – 31 October 2012 to 9 hotels in Bangkok. At the end of data collection period, the researchers received for 308 completed surveys.

D. Research Methodology

After gathered the surveys and applied the SPSS statistical software to analyze the collected data in each criterion. The gaps are to be further analyzed for the conclusion and recommendation.

In this paper, the two-tailed pair t-test is carried out to analyze the expectation and perception data of the North American customers.

The confidence level is set by alpha value which is 95% ($\alpha = 0.05$). The hypothesis is set and tested as follows:

$$H_0 : \mu_e = \mu_p$$

H_0 = Hypothesis shows that the mean of expectation (μ_e) and perception value (μ_p) are equal.

$$H_1 = \mu_e \neq \mu_p$$

H_1 = Hypothesis shows that the mean of expectation (μ_e) and perception value (μ_p) are not equal.

- If P value $< \alpha$: Reject H_0 and accept
- If P value $> \alpha$: Accept H_0

The P value represents the materiality of the value to the statistics. If P value is more than alpha, the H_0 will be accepted due to there is no significant discrepancies between the average value of 2 groups and vice versa.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

After received the surveys from customer, we found that there were 308 usable surveys for analysis. The analysis is conducted based on the following criteria

- Demographic Information
- Perception of customer toward SERVQUAL Dimension
- Expectation of Customer (E)
- Perception of Customer (P)
- Gap analysis

The Technical Characteristics of the Study is shown in Table I.

TABLE I.   TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY

Sample population	American and Canadian tourists that visited Bangkok and stayed in 3-4 stars hotel.
Geographical scope	Bangkok
Sample size	308 valid surveys
Sample error	0 error sample
Confidence level	95%; $\alpha = 0.05$
Fieldwork	14 September 2012 – 31 October 2012

To measure the reliable of the data gathered, the Cronbach alpha test is applied to determine the reliability of data collection. All of the 22 topics are applied to analyze the reliability in both Expectation and Perception, the result shows both Expectation (E) and Perception (P) data are reliable with the score higher than 0.7 (E = 0.972 and P = 952)

A. Demographic Information

There are a total of 308 respondents of whom 207 are males and 101 are females. Mainly 88 respondents are between 26 and 30. The majority of the respondents are Single (140). One hundred forty five respondents are graduated in Bachelor degree and 84 of respondents are corporate employee. The incomes of the respondents are mainly between 2,500 and 4,999$ (113).

B. Perception of Customer Toward SERVQUAL Dimension

From the data collection, the similarity of the respondents from US and Canada is that they perceive Empathy dimension as the least priority for their expectations. Moreover, they also prioritize the Responsiveness and Tangible as the same rank, 2 and 4 respectively. For the first priority, North Americans pick the Reliability while Canadians perceive Assurance as their top concern.

C. Expectation of Customer

This part is the customer expectation prior to receive the service from the hotel. The scoring in this part is provided in a range score from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) for 22 questions. Table II shows the Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) of the result including the

average expectation of respondents from US (US AVG) and Canada (CAN AVG). The result shows that the both US and Canadian respondents expect the Responsiveness dimension as their first priority. Mean and standard deviation of each expectation topic are shown in Table II.

TABLE II.   MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF EACH EXPECTATION TOPIC

No	Topic	Dimensions	Mean	SD	US AVG	CAN AVG
1	Excellent hotels will have modern looking equipment.	Tangible	5.48	1.10	5.34	5.81
2	The physical facilities at excellent hotels will be visually appealing.		5.57	1.06		
3	Staffs at excellent hotels will be neat in appearance.		5.56	1.10		
4	Materials associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) will be visually appealing in an excellent hotels.		5.62	1.02		
5	When excellent hotels promise to do something by a certain time, they will do so.	Reliability	5.61	1.00	5.44	5.80
6	When a guest has a problem, excellent hotels will show a sincere interest in solving it.		5.68	1.04		
7	Excellent hotel will get things right the first time.		5.60	1.00		
8	Excellent hotels will provide their services at the time they promise to do so.		5.72	0.99		
9	Excellent hotels will insist on error-free records.		5.46	1.06		
10	Staffs in excellent hotels will tell guests exactly when services will be performed.	Responsiveness	5.69	0.98	5.61	5.93
11	Staffs in excellent hotels will give prompt service to guests.		5.72	0.95		
12	Staffs in excellent hotels will always be willing to help guests.		5.80	0.96		
13	Staffs in excellent hotels will never be too busy to respond to guests' requests.		5.81	1.02		
14	The behavior of staffs at excellent hotels will instill confidence in guests.	Assurance	5.64	1.08	5.53	5.90
15	Guests of excellent hotels will feel safe in their dealing with the hotel.		5.71	0.98		
16	Staffs in excellent hotels will be consistently courteous with guests.		5.71	0.99		
17	Staffs in excellent hotels will have the knowledge to answer guests' questions.		5.77	0.98		
18	Excellent hotels will give guests individual attention.	Empathy	5.68	1.02	5.55	5.84
19	Excellent hotels will have operating hour convenient to all their guests.		5.70	1.00		
20	Excellent hotels will have staffs who give guests personal attention.		5.64	1.03		
21	Excellent hotels will have the guests' best interests at heart.		5.72	0.96		
22	The staffs of excellent hotels will understand the specific needs of their guests.		5.68	0.99		

D. Perception of Customer

This part is the customer perception after receiving the service from the hotel. The scoring in this part is provided in a range score from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) for 22 questions. Table II shows the Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) of the result including the average perception of respondents from US (US AVG) and Canada (CAN AVG). The result shows that the both US and Canadian respondents still perceive the Responsiveness dimension as the area they mostly satisfy

for the service quality provided by hotel. Table III shows mean and standard deviation of each perception topic.

E. Gap Analysis

From the data gathered, the Assurance dimension is the highest gap dimension which means that the customer significantly perceived the service lower than expectation. This might be the implication from the North American customers that they are highly expect the hotel to provide the acceptable quality of "Assurance" service to them as the first priority. Then, this paper picks up 4 topics in the

Assurance dimension to analyze for the demographic factor that has high influence in causing the significant gap in each topic. The result can be summarized as in Table IV.

TABLE III. MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF EACH PERCEPTION TOPIC

No	Topic	Dimensions	Mean	SD	US AVG	CAN AVG
1	The hotel has modern looking equipment	Tangible	5.22	0.89	5.08	5.29
2	The physical facilities in the hotel are visually appealing.		5.19	0.91		
3	The hotel's staffs are neat in appearance.		5.12	0.91		
4	Materials associated with the services (such as pamphlets or statements) are visually appealing.		5.19	0.96		
5	When the hotel promises to do something by a certain time, it does so.	Reliability	5.13	0.91	5.12	5.32
6	When you have a problem, the hotel shows a sincere interest in solving it.		5.23	0.91		
7	The hotel gets things right the first time.		5.25	0.92		
8	The hotel provides its services at the time it promises to do so.		5.32	0.89		
9	The hotel insists on error-free records.		5.12	0.91		
10	The hotel's staffs tell you exactly when services will be performed.	Responsiveness	5.33	0.91	5.29	5.49
11	The hotel's staffs give you prompt service.		5.39	0.88		
12	The hotel's staffs are always willing to help you.		5.40	0.89		
13	The hotel's staffs are never being too busy to respond to your requests.		5.40	0.91		
14	The behavior of the hotel's staffs instills confidence in you.	Assurance	5.21	0.93	5.23	5.37
15	You feel safe in your dealing with the hotel.		5.32	0.89		
16	The hotel's staffs are consistently courteous with you.		5.35	0.92		
17	The hotel's staffs have the knowledge to answer your questions.		5.30	0.94		
18	The hotel gives you individual attention.	Empathy	5.26	0.91	5.19	5.39
19	The hotel has operating hours convenient to all its guests.		5.30	0.87		
20	The hotel has staffs who give you personal attention.		5.20	0.90		
21	The hotel has your best interest at heart.		5.40	0.90		
22	The hotel's staffs understand your specific needs.		5.24	0.90		

TABLE IV. DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS THAT HAS HIGH INFLUENCE IN CAUSING THE SIGNIFICANT GAP IN EACH TOPIC

No	Topic	Demographic Factor that cause significant gap
14	The behavior of the hotel's staffs instills confidence in you.	• Age: 36-40 • Degree: Bachelor • Occupation: Business Owner • Income: 2,500-4,999
15	You feel safe in your dealing with the hotel.	• Age: 36-40 • Status: Single • Degree: Bachelor • Occupation: Corporate Employee • Income: 2,500-4,999
16	The hotel's staffs are consistently courteous with you.	• Age: 36-40 • Status: Single • Degree: Bachelor • Occupation: Corporate Employee • Income: 2,500-4,999
17	The hotel's staffs have the knowledge to answer your questions.	• Status: Single • Degree: Bachelor • Occupation: Business Owner • Income: 2,500-4,999

The result shows that the factor causing significant gap in "Assurance" area are almost in similar demographic factor and are the majority of the respondents. The customers with income range 2,500-4,999$ are the group that are significantly dissatisfied in every assurance service area provided by hotel. The customers between 36-40 years old, single and graduated in Bachelor degree are also the important group for the hotel to focus as they are the major part of the customers that feel the service provided is still unaccepted.

Then, this paper will also pick the top 10 highest gap topics to provide recommendations; the ranks of gap per each topic are presented in Table V.

TABLE V.　Selected Topics Based on Highest Gap Scores

No	Topic	Dimensions	Gap (P-E)	Pair t-test	Sig	Rank
1	The hotel has modern looking equipment	Tangible	-0.26	3.99	0.00	
2	The physical facilities in the hotel are visually appealing.		-0.38	5.55	0.00	
3	The hotel's staffs are neat in appearance.		-0.44	6.13	0.00	2
4	Materials associated with the services (such as pamphlets or statements) are visually appealing.		-0.43	6.23	0.00	3
5	When the hotel promises to do something by a certain time, it does so.	Reliability	-0.47	7.37	0.00	1
6	When you have a problem, the hotel shows a sincere interest in solving it.		-0.44	6.37	0.00	2
7	The hotel gets things right the first time.		-0.35	4.84	0.00	
8	The hotel provides its services at the time it promises to do so.		-0.40	6.14	0.00	
9	The hotel insists on error-free records.		-0.34	5.22	0.00	
10	The hotel's staffs tell you exactly when services will be performed.	Responsiveness	-0.36	5.22	0.00	
11	The hotel's staffs give you prompt service.		-0.33	5.40	0.00	
12	The hotel's staffs are always willing to help you.		-0.40	6.08	0.00	
13	The hotel's staffs are never being too busy to respond to your requests.		-0.41	5.82	0.00	
14	The behavior of the hotel's staffs instills confidence in you.	Assurance	-0.43	6.15	0.00	3
15	You feel safe in your dealing with the hotel.		-0.39	5.62	0.00	4
16	The hotel's staffs are consistently courteous with you.		-0.36	5.38	0.00	5
17	The hotel's staffs have the knowledge to answer your questions.		-0.47	7.07	0.00	1
18	The hotel gives you individual attention.	Empathy	-0.42	5.91	0.00	
19	The hotel has operating hours convenient to all its guests.		-0.40	6.22	0.00	
20	The hotel has staffs who give you personal attention.		-0.43	6.59	0.00	3
21	The hotel has your best interest at heart.		-0.33	4.91	0.00	
22	The hotel's staffs understand your specific needs.		-0.44	6.77	0.00	2

To analyse on the highest gap topics perspective, from this table, this research will focus on the topic with the significant gap (sig <0.05) and has highest gap to analyze for the variable that might relate to the topic and cause the gap between customer perception and expectation.

Therefore the topic with significant gap will be utilized for recommendation.

The 10 topics that have highest gap are topics number 3, 4, 5, 6, 20, and 22. For the Assurance dimension (topic no. 14-17), all topics are picked due to the highest average gap.

The 10 highest score topics represents the rank from only 1 to 5 due to some topics have equal score.

V. CONCLUSION

The SERVQUAL model provides the 22 topics of 5 dimensions of service quality. The objective of utilizing the SERVQUAL model is to find the gap between customer expectation and perception in order to provide the recommendation based on Service Recovery Strategies and culture of North American customers. After analyzing the gap, 10 topics (out of 22) with the highest gap score in terms of dimensions and topics were selected to provide recommendations. The recommendations are mostly to suggest the direction of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service quality provided by hotel including some examples from the other hotels to be more understandable.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

As the nature of hotel industry, the patterns or approaches to control the service quality in order to bring the best to customers are different among each hotel. Some hotels have unique cultures e.g. 4 Seasons hotel ; every time you meet the customer, no matter what you are doing or carrying, you have to stop or place what you are carrying down and greet the customers by the correct pattern of "Wai". Therefore, the recommendations will be provided in general for the adaptability of all 3-4 stars hotel based on the Service Recovery Strategies and cultures impact.

A. Recommendation for Top 10 topics

1) Topic 3: The hotel's staffs are neat in appearance.
- *Meaning*

This topic mentions about the staffs' professional dressing and having good looking for the customer.

- *Impact*

Staff with improper appearance may result in lack of trust from customers toward the unprofessional dressing staff.

- *Recommendation*

Neat and clean dressing is the general manner of the hotel staff. To recommend this topic, "Making the service fail-safe" strategy is the most related due to the dressing, in general perception of customers, is a must. Therefore, hotel should take the preventive actions. The formal procedure of staff dressing should be formally established. However, only procedure is not sufficient to control or enforce. The monitoring of staff dressing by responsible person should be in place. The award for the well dressing staff together with penalty for the improper dressing staff should be implemented.

- *Example*

The Dress code procedure is formally established and announced to all staffs in the hotel to comply. This procedure contains the dressing rules and guidance for staff in each division e.g. dressing for chef, reception, concierge or manager. Moreover, the chief of operation or supervisor is responsible for monitoring the dressing of the staff. Each staff has 100 points and will be deducted if they break the rules including improper dressing. The staff without any deduction or lowest deduction will be award as Staff of the month with special benefit rewarded to the staff.

2) Topic 4: Materials associated with the services (such as pamphlets or statements) are visually appealing.
- *Meaning*

To help providing information to customers without their efforts to ask from the reception or concierge, the materials with sufficient information related to the interesting matter e.g. hotel services or tourist attractions should be provide for customer in visible area.

- *Impact*

Lacking sufficient materials, customers might not acknowledge the critical information e.g. service provided by hotel or tourist attractions. Especially for the hotel services, without acknowledgement hotel services may lead to loss in opportunity to make profit from service.

- *Recommendation*

"Make the service fail-safe", the service materials with sufficient information should be provided in visible area for the customers to be easily acknowledged. However, if the customers need additional information outside the service materials, staff should "Act quickly" by providing additional information to the customers as quick as they can.

- *Example*

The list of hotel services or tourist attractions are published and provided in a booklet on the table in guest room with sufficient information e.g. service, service time, price and place in hotel. Moreover, the call tree of the hotel should be placed near the telephone in guest room for their conveniences.

3) Topic 5: When the hotel promises to do something by a certain time, it does so.
- *Meaning*

This topic deals with the promise that hotel given to customers for the specific matters. Response the promised matter to the customers with the quality in a timely manner to meet the customer expectation is a must from the hotel. Especially, the speed is one of the important things that the North American customers focus.

- *Impact*

Unable to respond that hotel promised is directly reflect the satisfaction of customers, especially this topic is ranked as number 1 therefore the hotel should be more intense in focusing the approach to avoid suffering from the impact. Moreover, the different matter in failure to respond the promise might lead to the different impact as following examples:

Customers have to wait for a long time for the treatment massage due to the bad queue arrangement. Customers dissatisfy and decide not to have treatment massage. The hotel loses the opportunity for the profit (Treatment massage fee).

Customer calls for fixing the water heater in the room, the hotel staff promises to call the engineer to fix within 1 hour. After 1 hour passed, hotel staff calls the customer

and explain that there is no engineer available in the hotel. The next shift of engineer is tomorrow so they will fix the water heater tomorrow morning. This will directly cause the dissatisfaction of customers and might result in not to visit this hotel again next time. Moreover, word of mouth may play the role in this issue and result in loss in revenue and disrepute.

Furthermore, refer to the North American culture that they are very sensitive over the time concern; fail to serve the North American customers in timely manner cause the higher disappointment and also in lower perception than the customers from other countries. Then the implication from North American culture might cause this topic to be the highest in gap.

- *Recommendation*

"Act quickly" is the most suitable strategy to resolve the problem from this issue. To act quickly on what they promise, the availability is the most important factor that the hotel should focus on. Hotel should prepare for the scenario that might happen all day e.g. the equipment needed to be fixed on 3 am. or the food should be continuously refilled during the buffet time.

By the way, "Making the service fail-safe" should be implemented on every issue found for preventive approach. To respond the customers effectively in a certain time especially for the North American customers that value the timeliness as one of the most important aspect, hotel staff should be able to respond or at least know how to contact the person that is able to solve the problem on a timely manner e.g. Customer ask the Bellboy for changing the bed sheet which is not the direct responsibility of the Bellboy. What should happen is the Bellboy contacts the maid to change the bed sheet of customer's room straight away.

Moreover, according to the different in culture, the tangible compensation should be provided to the North American customers when anything goes wrong in order to draw their satisfaction back. Not only the problem is resolved, adding some tangible compensation to the North American customers may increase the satisfaction perceptions toward the hotel.

- *Example*

Refer to the cases mentioned above, giving the 20% discount voucher for massage to customer or offer to change or upgrade the room for the customer that his/her room has problem with water heating will be able to restore the good perception of the hotel back to their minds.

4) Topic 6: When you have a problem, the hotel shows a sincere interest in solving it.

- *Meaning*

The sincerity to resolve the problem is the signal of caring from the hotel. When the problem occurs, the hotel is dealing with the risk of customers' dissatisfaction. The only way to focus is trying to minimize the dissatisfaction or restoring their good perception back. Therefore, willingness of the hotel to solve the problem might be able to compensate the feeling of customers. On the other hand, the proactive actions sometimes change the tone of

perception to be impressive due to the sincerity shown from the hotel staff. Customers might not be in the situation of having a problem but the hotel staffs may proactively approach the customers and ask for any help or assistant before the customers have to contact the hotel staff.

- *Impact*

Without showing the willingness or sincerity to solve the problem, customer will be directly dissatisfied by the hotel and will further result in not coming back and spreading the word of mouth which may reflect the long term reputation and revenue.

- *Recommendation*

"Making the service fail-safe" strategy should be the first strategy to foster the willingness and sincerity to the hotel staff. The intensive trainings including service mind and creating the willingness cultures should be provided to the hotel staff. Moreover, the screening in recruitment process also plays the big part by eliminating off the employee without or having unacceptable level of service mind. In some hotels, the evaluators to evaluate the probation staff are not disclosed. The evaluators might be anywhere to monitor the performance of probation staff in all areas to be more candid in evaluation. Furthermore, "Cultivate relationship with customer" by having good relationship with customer at the first time they enter to the hotel is an important strategy to reduce the dissatisfaction of customers once the problem occurs.

According to the Hofstede's model that the North American people are the Short-term orientation which losing face is considered as their big concern. Therefore, hotel staff should increase their intensive in dealing with the problem of customers from North America.

Once the problem occur, the hotel staff should "Act quickly" as one of the sincerity signal to resolve the problem. According to the North American culture, "Provide Adequate Explanation" should be the critical process to follow after showing the willingness due to the nature of the North Americans are straight- forward . Hotel staff should direct the customers to the point of the problem e.g. what is the cause of the problem or how long will it take to resolve the problem. Furthermore, the tangible compensation should be considered if the problem causes the serious dissatisfaction to the customers.

- *Example*

Hotel staff in each area around the hotel should always be available and seeking to help the customers. Proactive action by approaching the customers that seems to need some helps is a good practice e.g. A lifeguard may offer a floating foam for the family that bring the children to the swimming pool or the customer that is served a raw steak is offered a new dish without charge and adding 1 free desserts according to the North American culture that prefer the tangible compensation.

5) Topic 14: The behavior of the hotel's staffs instills confidence in you.

- *Meaning*

Being Professional in providing service will increase the confidence of the customers. To be professional, hotel staff must be ready in terms of both personal appearances and skills to deal with customers e.g. when customer's arm is cut by broken glass, hotel staff should contact the first-aid division to heal the customer straight-away instead of being shock and getting nervous.

- *Impact*

In general, the professional behaviour is the basic expectation of customers; therefore improper behaviour will directly damage the satisfaction and confidence of customers to rely on the hotel staff.

- *Recommendation*

To prevent damaging the customers' satisfaction and confidence, "Making the service fail-safe" should be initially implemented. The culture and training about professional behaviour, service mind and sufficient skills should be fostered to the hotel staff periodically. Moreover, the culture and training can be done informally such as coaching from senior staff. To be intensive on enforcing the professional behaviour, the penalty for improper behaviour staff should be regulated.

- *Example*

The intensive training course e.g. the way of behaving professional should be provided to the hotel staff on periodically basis, the real-time monitoring of performance also includes the professional behavior as one of the staff KPI. Refer to the Topic 3 – Example, the deduction rules for the staff score should include the improper behavior.

6) Topic 15: You feel safe in your dealing with the hotel.
- *Meaning*

This topic is considered as one of the first priorities of hotel. In dealing with the hotel, the hotel staff should provide the service that guarantees the assurance to the customers throughout the staying period. The word "safe" in this topic refers to both physical and mental of customers from receiving the hotel service. Therefore this part also relates to the tangible dimension in terms of staff, physical facilities or equipment e.g. Security guards, access controls or CCTVs.

- *Impact*

Unable to satisfy customer satisfaction might reflect the customers in only bad experience or impression but unsafe environment might result in unsafe environment for their belongings or even customers themselves. Customers that the room is broken by the thief and their belongings are stolen will be angrier than being served the raw steak. Therefore, failure to deliver safe environment to the customers is considered as high risk for the hotel.

- *Recommendation*

To recommend this topic, "Make the service fail-safe" is a must. As mentioned above in "Impact" that the failure from this topic will cause huge damage to the hotel reputation, therefore, safe environment should be implemented in both physical facilities, equipments and staff. The security equipments should be installed and the security systems should be effective for the customer to rely on. Moreover, the hotel staffs have to build the

assurance to the customers in terms of knowledge, skills and confidence when providing service.

When failure occur, hotel staff should "Act quickly" by following up what happen and do the best in both detection and correction activities to remediate the situation.

- *Example*

The CCTVs are installed in every important corner to detect for unwanted event or any incident that might happen. The access control over the guest room should be effective e.g. card reading machine or a latch should be fully functioned. The skilled hotel staffs are well trained to provide the service with knowledge and confidence to make the customers feel comfort to rely their safety to the hotel.

Moreover, the equipments or facilities in the hotel should be reviewed and maintained on a periodic basis to ensure they are able to function with safety e.g. the springboard in the swimming pool is still usable or the CCTVs in an elevator are still working. For some equipment e.g. elevators or fire extinguishers, the Maintenance Agreement should be in place to ensure that the vendor will provide the check-up over those equipments for availability and safety.

7) Topic 16: The hotel's staffs are consistently courteous with you.
- *Meaning*

This topic focuses on the "consistency" of the courteousness from the hotel staff. To be consistent, hotel staffs should act professional in terms of their personality and also EQ. From the beginning to the end of shift, hotel staff should be consistent in service mind, concentration and self control. Sometimes hotel staff might feel disappointed or upset from personal matter, they must control themselves not to let the feeling visible by the customers.

- *Impact*

Customers will not feel comfort in dealing with the unacceptable behaviour staff that is in the bad emotion. In fact, customers will not perceive that the individual hotel staffs (Mr. John) is not courteous, but they will perceive as a whole like "One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel" which directly reflect the reputation. Even worse, when this experience is shared by word of mouth through social network or internet, hotel will suffer a big lost even from only 1 bad experience cause by 1 staff in the hotel. Moreover, impact of unacceptable behaviour might spread wider when other customers witness one staff explodes to one customer and the other customers might be able to feel uncomfortable without dealing with that staff directly.

- *Recommendations*

Like other topics in "Assurance" dimension, "Make the service fail-safe" strategy should be the top priority to implement. The soft skill trainings or workshops should be provided to the hotel staff and the service mind culture should be fostered. However, when hotel staff shows unacceptable behaviour to customers, the other staff should sincerely apology to the customers straight away. Moreover, if the behaviour shown by hotel staff is too

harsh e.g. furious or aggressive, some tangible compensation should be considered to provide to compensate the customers according to the culture of North American customers.

- *Example*

Arrange the workshop that consists of activities for hotel staff in dealing with tough customers such as fussy, demanding, and quick-tempered or high profile customers. This workshop will let the hotel staffs deal with these types of customers and the feedback will be provided individually for improvement. Moreover, adding the specific cultures of the North American customers as well as the other cultures could be beneficial for the hotel staff e.g. the hotel staff that dealing with North American customers should give them personal space, not being more casual, try to be straight-forward and focus on timeliness when providing service to them.

8) Topic 17: The hotel's staffs have the knowledge to answer your questions.

- *Meaning*

As a service provider, the hotel staff must reflect the ability, knowledge and skill while providing service in order to fulfil the customers' need. In the "Assurance" dimension, this topic relates to the "trust" that they can fully rely on the hotel that the staff are always helpful and skilful. In fact, even hotel staffs have their own responsibilities but they must have sufficient knowledge or general information to answer the questions outside the area they are responsible for.

Sometimes the hotel staff might have no idea on the customers' questions. Answering "I don't know" is absolutely prohibited but that staff should find the way to provide the information to customers as quick as they can. Taking this approach, not only the customers get the information they want, but also the trust toward the hotel as the hotel staff is enthusiastic to answer the question.

- *Impact*

Fail to answer the customers' questions impact directly to the trust of the customers toward hotel. Customer will experience that the hotel staffs lack of availability and readiness to help answering the question. Moreover, refer to the North American culture, being reluctant or trying to beat around the bush to the question might cause more disappointment to them as their nature are straight-forward.

Missing some critical information might cause the impact of losing the revenue e.g. the customer asks the bellboy where the tennis court is and the bellboy says "I don't know. You should ask the other staff, not me." and then leave the customer. Then the customer changes the mind not to play tennis due to the disappointment to the hotel. Then the hotel suffers from losing trust, revenue and further reputations.

- *Recommendations*

As recommended above in the "Assurance" dimension, implementing the "Making the service fail-safe" strategy to prevent the risk of customers' dissatisfaction that might happen. The general and overall information should be included in training and orientation to all hotel staff e.g.

the location of each facility in the hotel or the list of service that the hotel has.

For the specific matter that required specific position or division to answer, the hotel staff must know the contact point. When hotel staff faces the unknown question, the strategy "Act Quickly" should be fostered in hotel staff's mind to find the information for customers straight away instead of letting the customers find the information themselves.

- *Example*

One of the examples is that Chef should be able to explain the way to the swimming pool to the customers. For the unknown question such as asking the bellboy which band will perform live music tonight in the hotel bar. That bellboy must tell the customers "Wait a few seconds" and find the closest telephone to contact the related division and ask for the answer, then give the information to customers straight away.

9) Topic 20: The hotel has staffs who give you personal attention.

- *Meaning*

The meaning of this topic is not providing special attention to one guest more than the others; it means the hotel staff should be available to give you attention and sometimes a little special might be provided as personal attention but not too obvious or still in the scope of "Treat Customer Fairly" strategy.

- *Impact*

Fail to provide the personal attention to the customers leads to customer dissatisfaction toward hotel. This topic is in the "Empathy" dimension which mainly focuses on the caring toward customers. Even the impact of this topic might not high as the topic in "Assurance" dimension but it does not mean to neglect especially the gap of this topic is significantly high.

- *Recommendations*

To provide sufficient personal attention to the customers, "Making the service fail-safe" strategy can be implemented through the "Service Ratio. Service Ration is a ratio between number of hotel staff and number of guests in hotel e.g. X staffs per Y customers". This ratio should be accurately planned and implemented for the staff for the availability to take care the customers. In particular, the attention might refer to "a little special" attention provided to the customer without any instructions or rules stated in any policy. Moreover, giving the personal attention relates to the "Cultivate Relationship with customer". Providing additional information or starting the conversation with American sport issues would be preferred by North American customers. However, in gathering the relationship with North American customers, the personal space should be given and try not to be more casual at the first time as they are high in individualism and require comfort zone.

- *Example*

"Making the service fail-safe" by forecasting the number and trend of customers toward the year to plan the Service Ratio and number of staff per each shift. The number of guest will be high in high season period,

therefore the number of hotel staff should be increase to maintain the ratio level e.g. The Service Ratio is 5 customers per 1 hotel staff. If the number of customer rises to 500, the hotel staffs in the hotel at that period should not be less than 100 people.

Moreover, as mentioned above about "a little special", followings are the example of the real situations that the hotel staffs from 4 stars hotel provide "a little special" as a personal attention.

Example 1: During the high season, the queue of guests to register at the reception was quite long due to the 3 tourist groups checked in at the same time. Therefore, other customers had to wait for a long time which the concierges thought it might cause the risk of dissatisfaction. Then the concierges contacted the beverage division and sport club staff. A few minutes ago, glasses of delicious orange juices were brought from kitchen and served to each customer in the queue which was able to create smiles on customers' face.

Moreover, staff from sport club brought toys for the children that came with the family that waiting in the line. Those kids felt happy and forgot their disappointments.

Example 2: One customer in the bar was drinking until the closing time (2 a.m.). However, that customer still didn't leave but asked the bartender to drink and chat with him. This customer was not stay in the hotel, but dropped by to the pub only. That bartender had to drink and chat with that customer after got approval from Shift manager.

After that day, this guest came back to the hotel again to stay for 2 nights and had a chance to chat with that bartender again. He explained the reason he chose this hotel to stay because of that day, the staff showed the attention to him and didn't force him to leave the pub and he impressed. After that, this guest came back to be the customer of the hotel every time he visited Bangkok province and recommended this hotel to his friends.

10) Topic 22: The hotel's staffs understand your specific needs.

- *Meaning*

To understand the specific needs of the customer is not too hard for the hotel staff. Sometimes the assumption and proactive approach can gain higher customer satisfaction. Then this topic mostly deals with the "value-added" or "add-on" service provided by the hotel. However, the general demand of the customers should be acknowledged and responded by the hotel staff also.

- *Impact*

The impact of this topic might not be high comparing to the rest topics due to it is a "specific" needs that is considered as an opportunity for the hotel instead of the risk to impact the hotel reputation. These specific needs can be satisfied via "add-on" or "value added" service provided by hotel that might increase the opportunity of customers' good experience toward hotel.

- *Recommendations*

For this topic, it is almost intangible to be trained or teach from person to person. However, personal observant and psychology are important factors including in the service mind to satisfy the specific demand of customers

more effectively. Therefore, "Act Quickly" strategy should be followed after the personal observant. To make it easier, "Cultivate Relationship with customers" might imply some specific needs that the hotel staff can offer or fulfil.

- *Example*

A receptionist might offer to add a small bed for the customers with infant or swimming pool staffs gives the buoy to 3 years old boy without any requesting from the parents. Sometimes, proactive approach can increase customers' satisfaction e.g. approaching the foreign customers that are searching the way to tourist attractions in their map to offer a help. Moreover, the hotel staff might also have a chance to offer the service such as tour program from the hotel or a car rental service of the hotel which create opportunity of hotel income.

Furthermore, remembering the customers' preference or "Cultivate the relationship" may imply the specific needs of each customer. Following example shows how the hotel staff cultivate the relationship which further bring the satisfaction of customer and also hotel revenue

Example 1: One of the bellboys carried the luggage of the customer that wearing Chelsea shirt, then he mentioned about Chelsea last week victory and the customer felt happy. That night he met that customer again. He proactively approached that customer and gave information that the live coverage of Chelsea match tonight was available in the hotel bar. Then the win-win situation happened. That customer felt glad and went to the bar to watch the Chelsea match and bought 3 drinks, the hotel earned income from Food and Beverage.

B. Summary of Recommendations

From 22 topics, 10 are selected to provide recommendations based on 8 Service Recovery Strategies and cultures of North American customers. However, the recommendations provided in each topic focuses on the most outstanding strategy for each. Therefore, there will not be all 8 strategies per each topic. However, it doesn't mean that the rests are not important. In example, "Treat Customer Fairly" should be implemented to all topics.

Treating one customer better than the others may trigger the inequality feeling to the other customers. "Encourage and Track Complaints" is the detective strategy that covers the overall topics. In fact, it is impossible to provide the service without any error or mistake happen. Therefore the complaints from customers are the nature of service industry. Integration between Hotel Management and Information Technology by implementing effective complaints tracking system is one of the recommendations for the hotel. The effective complaints tracking system provide the invaluable information to the hotel to help remediating what they did wrong. Followings are the example of the information that can be provided from this system:

Category of complaints e.g. Room service, Facilities, Restaurant, Staff etc.

Solution or remediation to each complaints: The solution to remediate each complaints are filled by the hotel staff. Once the complaint is remediated, the remediation method is recorded in this system and the other staff can query this information if the same complaints are made by customers again in the future

Customizing Report to view the complaints e.g. Top 10 complaints from the customers to prioritize the topic the hotel should set the top priority to remediate or pending complaints that are not yet remediated.

Moreover, Information system can be applied to the "Learn from Recovery experience" strategies also. The Problem Management System is one of the tools to learn from the recovery experience. This system is also able to help the hotel manage the problem. Following is the example of how this program helps the hotel in managing the problem.

When the problem occurs, the hotel staff opens the problem ticket in the system and records the detail of the problem e.g. Date, Time, Problem Description, Responsible Division, Responsible Staff etc. The status of the problem shows "Pending" until the problem is resolved. After the problem resolved, the staff that resolve the problem has to fill the solution to resolve the problem in the ticket and close the ticket.

Then the next time the problem repeated, hotel staff is able to query the solution that might be available in the system to solve the problem more effectively. Furthermore, this system might be used in terms of report viewing for many purposes e.g. pending problems that never been solved or Top 10 staff that resolve the problem successfully to provide some awards.

To "Learn from Lost Customers", it might be tracked from both Complaints Tracking System and Problem Management System or research method to gather the information and improve from why the hotel lost their customers.

VII. LIMITATION AND FURTHER STUDY

A. Limitation of the Study

The study about the customers' expectation to the service and perception after receiving the service has the following limitations:

- The populations of respondents are the North American people that visited Thailand during the 14 September 2012 – 31 October 2012 only.
- The covering period is in the low season period of travelling; therefore the level of service provided to customer might be better than the high season period due to the number of hotel employee to number of tourist is smaller than high season period.

B. Future Study

This study may further extended in the following ways:
Extending the covering period to throughout the year in order to gain samples from the high season period.

Apply the information of North American people for the comparative analysis between North American and another country in order to compare the difference between the expectation, perception and gap between 2 countries.

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