SPA MANAGEMENT AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The spa industry has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many spa businesses struggled with long-term impact from COVID-19 crisis. Considering as an unexpected circumstance, it is imperative that spa businesses implement the right strategy to survive in this challenging situation. Therefore, this study aims at investigating problems and challenges of spa businesses during the COVID-19 crisis, exploring the opportunities to manage problems of spa using McKinsey's 7-S framework, recommending the preparedness of spas for the post-COVID-19 phase. The McKinsey's 7-S is adopted as the main framework for achieving objectives of this study.

Qualitative research approach is adopted as the main research methodology. In order to gain deep understanding and insights, in-depth interviews were conducted for gathering data from two hotel spas in Bangkok and Khon Kaen provinces. Empirical data was analyzed based on McKinsey's 7-S Framework. The findings indicated that hotel spas encountered a dramatic customer loss and the reduced number of staffs. The hotel spas adjusted their marketing strategy to attract more domestic customers and managed insufficient staff with a job rotation in which requiring multitasking skills. In terms of post COVID-19 preparation, the hotel spas need to ensure the staffs' health for hygiene and safety reasons. Additionally, spa businesses should consider recruiting more staffs to meet customer demands in the future. This study provides useful guidance and recommendations for spas businesses to survive the COVID-19 crisis and to prepare for future incidents.

Keywords: spa management, covid-19, spa, covid-19, pandemic

Introduction

The spa business is one of the world's largest leisure industries and spas have become one of the standard facilities in luxury hotels and resorts (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008). The spa business segment is also considered as the main driver of the wellness tourism growth around the world. It contributed $3.7 trillion dollars due to the growing wellness trends (Global Wellness Summit, 2017) and the number of total wellness industry revenue in the US was estimated to increase from $5.6 billion to $11.32 trillion between 2007 to 2021 (The Statistics Portal, 2015). Among countries around the world, Thailand has been recognized as one of primary countries for spa and wellness tourism in Asia apart from being a leading holiday destination in the world. The business has been greatly supported through the cooperation of the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Commerce which aim to establish Thailand as the "Health Tourism Hub of Asia" and the Wellness Capital of Asia" (Johnston et al., 2011). Despite the great support from the government sector and the rising trends of health and wellness tourism, the spa business is not always run as smoothly as expected since operators have to tackle challenges in various aspects such as the entry of new competitive spas, the development of spa service differences, and the creation of unique experience to attract targeted customers. More importantly, the spa business is more vulnerable to threats caused by reoccurring catastrophe and unprecedented pandemics like COVID-19.

COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) was declared by the World Health Organization as a global pandemic on 11 March, 2020. Originated in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei, China, the disease emergence occurred in late December 2019 and the disease spread rapidly across 203 countries around the globe as of 9 April, 2020, less than a month after the WHO's pandemic outbreak declaration (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2020). COVID-19 is caused by the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), an epidemic occurring during 2002 and 2003. However, COVID-19 has spread more easily and widely and caused more fatalities. Moreover, from global to local economy and from small- to large-scale businesses have been drastically impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19.

Several businesses have been forced to shut down as the current disease had led to dramatic changes in business practices and consumer behaviors such as social distancing and more time spending at home in accordance with mandatory regulations imposed by worldwide governments. Apparently, the current disease has had great impacts on tourism and hospitality sectors which are key pillars for economic growth in several countries due to the imposed disease outbreak control measures including travel restrictions and entry bans on travelers from countries with certain levels of active COVID-19 cases. According to the UN World Tourism Organization, as much as 96% of the world's destinations have implemented such measures to stem the spread of COVID-19 (World Tourism Organization, 2020). Besides the strict travel measures, people's fears and high

anxiety of the novel disease have caused cancellation of planned trips, flights, and hotel room bookings. 80% of hotel rooms globally become empty amid the COVID-19 crisis (Asmelash & Cooper, 2020). Countries dependent on arrivals of foreign travelers are more vulnerable and hugely devastated by the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis (International Labour Organization, 2020) due to the sharp decline of tourists from China and other countries around the world.

The spread of COVID-19 pandemic seems unlikely to stop in the near future. All entrepreneurs and operators of businesses including hotel spas may face several problems and challenges. They cannot help adjusting their business practices and operations to the new normal of COVID-19 in order to sustain during the crisis. The businesses have put a lot of their efforts to survive by adopting various business management models to adjust their business operations in response to the COVID-19 crisis. It is important that hotel spa operators understand the underlying problems, challenges and proper ways to handle these problems during this pandemic time. One of the effective business management tools useful for tackling challenges and handling all problems emerging during the crisis is the McKinsey's 7-S framework. Therefore, it is interesting that how do the business operators handle problems or difficulties through the McKinsey's 7-S framework, especially during the emergence of the unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak which has caused much greater impacts on numerous business sectors when compared with other pandemics in the past.

Since there is limited number of research thoroughly exploring the hotel spa business after experiencing the COVID-19 crisis, this research aims to fulfill the research gaps by investigating what problems hotel spas encounter by adopting the McKinsey's 7-S framework. This research also studies how hotel spa operators handle the problems caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 through the framework of McKinsey's 7-S. In addition, the research explores how hotel spa operators adapt to survive the COVID-19 crisis and how they prepare their business for the post-COVID-19 phase.

The research questions of this study are the followings:

What problems and challenges do hotel spas encounter during the outbreak of COVID-19?

How do the hotel spas handle/manage these problems during the outbreak of COVID-19?

How will hotel spas make preparations for the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak?

This research will investigate problems or difficulties which two hotel spas experience during the COVID-19 crisis and study how they deal with the problems through the McKinsey's 7-S framework in order to survive this unprecedented pandemic crisis. The research will explore case example of how the two hotel spas adapt their business to the crisis and prepare themselves after the COVID-19 outbreak.

This research will explore two registered hotel spa operators in two cities in

Thailand: Bangkok, a capital city, and Khon Kaen Province, a non-capital city. In this research, in-depth interviews will be conducted to collect responses on various aspects based on the idea of McKinsey's 7-S framework from three groups of respondents including management, staff, and customers from the two selected hotel spas.

Literature review

Spa

The meaning of spa

The word "spa" was derived from the Walloon word "espa" which was the name of the Spa town in Belgium, where a remedial, thermal spring was found in the 14th century". Later, "espa" became the word "spaw" in English and eventually became the update word spa. (Miller, 1996). The term "spa" originated from the Latin phrase "sanitas per aqua" which means "health through water". In fact, the concept of spa came from the period of the Roman Empire as the soldiers tried to recover from wounds, pains and sickness resulted from their military services.

History of spas in Thailand

Around the year 1994, spas were established in Thailand in response to the demand of foreign visitors at that time (Ninnar, 2006). At the beginning, the spas were popular and fashionable among the foreign tourists and expatriates. However, spas have recently become popular among the local Thais as new alternative therapy.

At the early stage, most spas in Thailand were located in luxurious or five-star hotels. However, due to the increase in the demand of the local people in different cities. Spas are located everywhere nationwide, especially famous tourist attraction. Nowadays, tourists can visit spas at all the major tourist cities in Thailand such as, Bangkok, Pattaya, and Chiang Mai. Moreover, Thailand has also been recognized as a spa capital of Asia thanks to the unique way of delivering a relaxing atmosphere, warm hospitality, service, and Thai therapists with welcoming personalities.

Because of the increasing popularity and growth of Thai spa industry, the Thai government established a policy to promote Thailand as Spa Capital of Asia in the year 2004 by launching five-year strategic plan to establish Thailand as 'Centre of Excellent Health of Asia'. There are three key areas that the strategy focused, that were, medical services, healthcare services and Thai herbal products. Besides the 5 years strategic plan for spa as initiated by the Ministry of Public Health, Thailand Board of Investment (BOI) has executed several economic incentives for spa, wellness, and related investors supported the Thai government policy to promote Thailand as a medical tourism hub during 2012 and 2016.

In order to promote and develop the spa industry in Thailand, the Thai Spa Association and the Thai Spa Operators Association were established as the main private sectors to promote and develop. The association has established a voluntary Thai Spa Excellence Quality Standard in 2011. It is an internationally-designed audit and certification program

specifically for spas, which seeks to offer regular and independent monitoring to enhance spa safety, reduce accident risks and set the highest standard of services, thereby providing an independent quality endorsement for spa. (Cohall *et al.*, 2013).

Types of spas

According to International Spa Association, there are 7 different types of spas: day spa, club spa, medical spa, mineral spring spa, resort and hotel spa, cruise ship spa, and destination spa (Quintela *et al.*, 2016). Brief information of each spa is given as follows (Wisnom & Capozio, 2012):

Day spa is a business that offers a variety of professionally administered spa services to day-use clients. Day spa is open to the public and offer a la carte spa service to customers who can enjoy one or two individual treatments or a full day treatment.

Club spa is a business that offers a variety of professionally administered spa and fitness services to its membership. Club spa is emerged from fitness club looking to provide more comprehensive wellness offerings to their customers. To receive services in a club spa, you are generally required to be a member.

Medical spa is a business that offers a variety of professionally administered spa services, including medical and wellness care, to day-use clients, typically with on-site supervision by a licensed health care professional. It is generally located in a hospital. This spa offers a blend of conventional and alternative medicine therapies in a clinical setting. Medical spa can include skin injections, cosmetic dental services, and laser skin care.

Mineral spring spa is a business that offers an on-site source of natural mineral, thermal or seawater used in professionally administered hydrotherapy treatment. Some of these spas may offer only hydrotherapy treatment, whereas others may offer a wide range of spa services, lodgings, fitness, and other opportunities. It is the 'spring' that makes this spa different from other types of spas.

Resort and hotel spa is a business that operates as a division of and within a resort or hotel. It provides professionally administered spa, wellness, and occasionally, medical services primarily to guests of the establishment. Resort and hotel spas operate in a similar manner to a day spa. Famous examples of hotel spas include Banyan Tree Spa and Kempinski the Spa (SCB Economic Intelligence Center, 2018).

Cruise ship spa is a spa that operates on board a cruise ship and provides professionally administered spa and wellness services to passengers. These unique spas serve exclusively those on a cruise vacation.

Destination spa is an extended-stay resort with the primary purpose of providing guests with healthy lifestyle services. These spas have health, wellness, and 'spa-ing' as the focal point of the visit. Modern destination spas encourage stays of a week or longer, as well as provides a blending of health related activities such as spa treatment, wellness education, healthy cuisine and medical services.

Spa products and services

Spa products and services can be categorized into various types (Miller, 1999; Wisnom & Capozio, 2012) such as:

Hair services styling, cutting, coloring, scalp treatment

Nail services regular manicures, regular pedicure, oil massage for hands, feet, food spa

Facial treatments deep cleansing, exfoliation, masks, facial massage, facial nutrition, aromatherapy, layer, waxing, makeup

Body treatments hydrotherapy, exfoliation, masks, body massage, body tanning, wraps, foot spa/massage, sauna, thermal treatment

Mind therapy meditation, yoga, and relaxation classes

Fitness services personal training, general fitness and weight exercises

Educational programs nutrition counseling and stress management

Overview of Thailand's spa business

Spa business has become popularity in the past decade (Han *et al.*, 2017) due to the increasing demands of consumers to pursue a better quality of life and well-being (Quintela *et al.*, 2016). Spa business is directly associated with wellness tourism in that tourists spend some of their or leisure time) to receive the services enhancing their physical and mental well-being. The business has also contributed to Thailand's tourism sector. The overall value of Thailand's spa industry has seen a steady increase of 8% per annum during 2013-2015, increasing from 30 billion in 2013 to 35 billion baht in 2015 (SCB Economic Intelligence Center, 2018).

Spa market in Thailand has been rapidly growing for decades due to the increasing health-conscious consumers among Thais and internationals (Han *et al.*, 2017) as well as the reputation of high quality services, welcoming hospitality and inexpensive cost of living (Ministry of Public Health, 2013). These reasons consequently make Thailand be one of the largest spa destinations in the Asia Pacific region (Han *et al.*, 2017). Today, wellness tourism is one of the target tourism products under the government's Thailand 4.0 policy with the aims to accelerate Thailand's future economic growth and to earn higher incomes (Klaysung, 2016).

Thailand's spa industry has started to expand clearly since 2002 both in terms of the number of service users and spa service places. Most of the spa service places in Thailand are operated by small operators (Siam Wellness Group, 2018). According to the statistics of Thai Spa Association, it showed that during the years 2008 and 2012, Thailand had about 60% of the places of business being set up in the hotels and resorts and about 40% of the places of business, which were set up as Stand Alone. Moreover, Thai Spa Association forecasted that in the future, the ratio of the place of business of the two formats would switch to 50:50 due to the Stand Alone spa which started to embark on investment in the business format and increasingly expanded to more branches. (Siam Wellness Group, 2018). In 2016, the Ministry of Public Health counted 2,053

spa establishments being legally registered. Out of these establishments, 1,790 are located in Bangkok and 263 in other regions of the country, with 3 in the northern region, 23 establishments in the north-eastern region, 113 located in central Thailand and 124 establishments in the south (Ministry of Public Health, 2016).

The total market value for spa in 2018 is estimated to be approximately 4 billion baht, growing from 2017's sum market value of 3.85 billion baht. The growth of the spa market in Thailand is resulted from increasing demand from locals and foreigners. Similar expectation is also anticipated for the spa products market. The strategy is to maintain the unique Thai spa business and products in both the therapists and Thai herbs (Thai Spa Association, 2018). This goes in line with Tourism Authority of Thailand's policy of Discover Thainess, which targets quality leisure tourists. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports anticipated that the revenue from the tourism business will be 2.7 trillion baht (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018). For the local market, there is also expectation of strong growth as the economy continues to grow which results in higher income per capita and higher proportion of expenses on health related products. Moreover, people are taking better care of themselves. More than 48% of people in Bangkok use natural remedies for relaxation and rejuvenation (Kasikornbank Research, 2016). Thus, the health sector has potential positive growth.

Overview of Thailand's luxury hotel spa industry

International arrivals historically accounted for more than 60% of Bangkok total arrivals (Tourism Authority of Thailand Intelligence Center, 2016). Hotel spas provide services for a plenty of foreign guests, especially from Europe and America. The European and American guests once dominated the reservations in hotel spas; however, hotel spas are currently recording higher spa usage from Asian visitors. American and European guests still dominate bookings at Riverside Saps and Suburban Spas, located near Suvarnabhumi International Airport, accounting for 95% of total internal spa guests, referred to as those staying at the hotel. Meanwhile, due to the increase in the number of arrivals from China, the Chinese spa guests grew up by more than 26% in 2015 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2015). In addition, the percentage of Chinese spa guests at Downtown and Suburban Spas (other than by the international airport) accounted for 50% of total internal spa guests.

On average, between 70% and 90% of total spa guests stayed at the hotel where the spa is located. External guests, defined as nonresidential visitors to spa facilities, accounted for 10% to 30% of total spa guests, and these guests were Thai nationals or foreign expats living in Bangkok. Due to the large number of easily accessible day spas in Bangkok, hotel spas captured lower levels of external guests than hotel spas in other capital cities in Asia and The Middle East. Leisure guests historically accounted for 70% to 80% of total internal spa guests. Due to the nature of the hotel properties, Riverside Spas capture more leisure spa guests, whereas, Downtown and Suburban Spas capture a

higher percentage of business spa guests. Bangkok's MICE market is improving (4.5% growth in MICE arrivals in 2015) (Health & Wellness Market Reports Bangkok, 2016).

Riverside, Downtown, and Suburban Hotel Spas, on average, realized between 5% and 10% revenue growth per year. On average, they generated between 3% and 5% of total revenue through the sale of spa retail products. Spas at the upper-end of the luxury range generated between 8% and 10% of total spa revenue through the sale of retail products. Between 20% and 40% of guests accessing Riverside, Downtown, and Suburban Hotel Spas (including guests not staying at the hotel) visit multiple times. Although Bangkok has a high number of spas, guests of Hotel Spas, internal and external, tend to demonstrate loyalty. (Health & Wellness Market Reports Bangkok, 2016).

In Thailand, one of the best hotel spas is The Spa at Lebua at State Tower, the winner of Thailand's Best Hotel Spa in both 2018 and 2019, rewarded by the World Spa Awards. Meanwhile, in 2016 and 2017, Anantara Spa at Anantara Siam Bangkok Hotel was the winner of Thailand's Best Hotel Spa in the World Spa Awards.

Spa business standards before and during the COVID-19 outbreak

Standards for the spa business are set up and identified into five elements as follows Ministry of Public Health (2014): 1) Service quality: This element will examine if the spa business provides customers with good services and quality as well as enhance customer satisfactions. 2) Spa staff: This element

will examine if the spa personnel have appropriate qualification to provide standard services and customer satisfactions. 3) Tool and equipment: This element will examine if the spa business provides tool & equipment in good quality and safety for customers. 4) Organization and management: This element will examine if the spa business has effective working procedures and further service development. 5) Environment: This element will examine if the spa business provides customers with good environment and customer well-being.

During the outbreak of the COVID-19 disease, spas are used with restrictions in accordance with relevant national guidelines. In particular, the following measures should be in place (World Health Organization, 2020):

• A maximum number of persons must be determined to ensure adequate physical distancing, and this maximum number should be displayed prominently for guests and users of the facility.

• Individuals using these facilities should follow national and/or local requirements for wearing of fabric masks in public settings such as these facilities.

• Each facility should follow the ventilation and air conditioning recommendations as described earlier in the document. It should be noted that in steam baths, ventilation is normally minimal, and therefore extra attention should be paid to physical distancing by restricting number of users, hygiene, surface cleaning and disinfection.

• Guest should have easy access to facilities for hand hygiene (soap and water and alcohol hand rub), especially in toilet and changing room areas.

• Towels provided must be for single use only. Provide a bin for guests to place their towel after use for laundering.

• Drinking water should be provided in containers for individual use.

• Changing rooms should be equipped with disposable tissue dispensers, disinfectant materials and containers with lids for waste.

Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect showers, changing rooms, toilets and high touch surfaces such as door handles, toilet handles, and faucet handles several times per day, depending on the frequency of use of these areas.

Impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on Thailand's tourism industry

Southeast Asian countries, especially Thailand are particularly exposed to events in China and the rest of the world through trade and tourism. Thailand also relies heavily on tourism and electronics and appliances for export earnings and exports account for more than two-thirds of GDP (Harvard University, 2018).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Chinese tourists that visited Thailand in March 2020 was only 57 thousand compared to 985 thousand in March 2019. In that period, the total number of international tourists in Thailand decreased by 76.40 percent compared to March 2019 (Statista Research Department, 2020). Thailand has been severely affected as the country depends heavily on the visits of Chinese tourists. From January – March, 2020 the number of foreign tourists was 6.69 million people, which is 38% less than

2019. The income generated from tourism, at 330 billion baht, is 40% less compared to the same period in 2019 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020). Tourism in April was at a complete stand-still with zero arrivals. The total income generated from international tourists was 333 billion baht in the first three months of 2020, down from 557 billion baht one year earlier, a decrease of more than 40%. (International Labour Organization, 2020).

In 2019, Thailand's labor force participation rate was at 67%, with a very low unemployment rate of 0.7%, total employment was 37.6 million, of which 45.6 per cent were women. However, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment increased to 34,000 persons, a decline of 59,000 persons employed and an increase of 92,000 in the number of persons outside the labor market from the fourth quarter 2019 to first quarter 2020 (International Labour Organization, 2020). The total number of work hours of labors in Thailand dropped by nearly 6% from the last quarter 2019 through first quarter 2020, equivalent to the loss of 2.2 million full-time jobs (assuming a 40 hour working week). The hours actually worked per week in Thailand declined in 2020, from both fourth quarters in 2019 and comparing the same first quarter in 2019 (International Labour Organization, 2020).

The decline in tourism numbers and revenues was across the board in terms of origin countries, but the largest decrease was resulted from the decline in tourists from China. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Government of Thailand, also the total income brought by international tourists

declined, corresponding to 293 million baht in the first two months of 2020, down from 381 million baht one year earlier, a decrease of more than 23% (International Labour Organization, 2020).

Thailand' s tourism sector, which accounts close to 15 percent of GDP, has been severely impacted with a near cessation of international tourist arrivals since March 2020. Finally, the mobility restrictions imposed in response to the outbreak, while critical to flattening the infection curve, has severely dented private consumption, particularly for retail and recreational services.

McKinsey's 7-S framework

Historical development of the McKinsey's 7-S Framework

The McKinsey's 7-S Framework was created during a meeting of four McKinsey & Company's consultants: Tom Peters, Robert Waterman, Richard Pascale, and Anthony Athos in 1978. In 1980, the McKinsey's 7-S concept was introduced in 1980 in the article entitled "Structure Is Not Organization", published in *Business Horizons* (Waterman *et al*., 1980). Later, the framework appeared in "The Art of Japanese Management" published in 1981 and investigated by Pascale and Athos who studied the huge success of Japanese businesses (Chimera Consulting, 1999).

The McKinsey's 7-S Framework is one of a managerial tools developed to get a structural approach to handle organizational problems, especially efficiency. The framework is also suited to analyze an organization's current situation, a proposed future scenario, or identify gaps to reach an organization's desired state (Waterman, 1982). The framework consist of seven essential elements that make up an organization. The elements include Structure, Strategy, Style, Systems, Skills, Staff and Shared values.

Seven Elements of McKinsey's 7-S Framework

The seven elements include strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, skills, and shared values (Waterman *et al*., 1980). The elements are also classified into "Hard S" and "Soft S". The 'Hard' elements consisting of strategy, structure, and systems are easy to identify or recognize in an organization since they are often documented in a corporate plans, organizational charts, and strategy statements. In addition, management can influence these factors directly (mindtools.com, 2011). Meanwhile, the 'Soft' elements including skills, style, staff, and shared values are harder to identify and more intangible. They seldom appear in corporate publications (Pascale & Athos, 1981). The factors are more influenced by a company's culture (mindtools.com, 2011). The following is a description of the seven elements of the McKinsey's 7-S Framework.
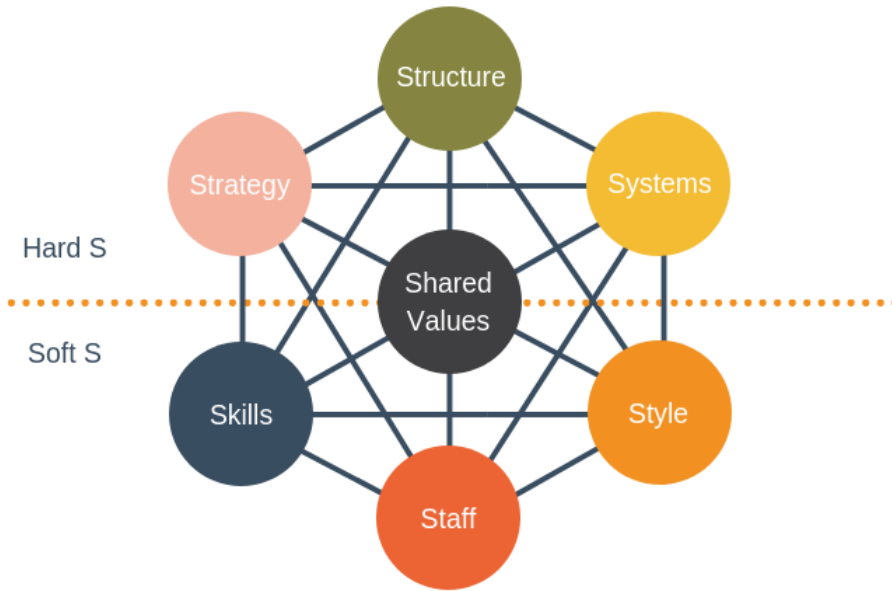
Figure 1 McKinsey's 7-S Framework (Waterman *et al*., 1980)

Strategy

Strategy refers to positioning and actions taken by an organization in response to changing external environment or to maintain and build competitive advantages over competitors (Pascale & Athos, 1981; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Kaplan, 2005). Strategy is also defined as the way how to allocate an organization's resources to achieve goals and to improve its position in order for maximizing strengths and gaining success (Crew 2002) . Strategy of an organization needs to be well communicated and strongly tied throughout the organization. If organizational operations are unaligned with the organization' s strategy, it definitely brings about strategic failure (*Johnson et al*., 2008).

Structure

Structure refers to distribution of authority, tasks, and reporting relationships within an organization (Kaplan, 2005). Organizations have different structures dependent on the organizations' goals and cultures (Waterman *et al*., 1980). In terms of decision making authority, it is essential that a firm makes strategic decisions which properly divide its resources, capabilities, and competences in competitive environment (Nemati *et al*., 2010). The type of organizational structure can also be referred to decision power distribution: centralization or decentralization. Considering decentralization, the vertical decentralization form is delegating decision-making rights to lower levels of the organization whereas the horizontal decentralization form is distributing decision-making authority equally across an organization. Moreover, structure is

also referred to a hierarchical or flat organization. The hierarchical structure is a very centralized and top-to-down decision making distribution while the flat organization is more decentralized. The structure is also how an organization's units relate to each other and how departments or teams, assignments or tasks, and responsibilities are coordinated (Waterman *et al.*, 1980). An efficient organization needs to have a clear structure which coherently establishes its sets of boundaries and internal units within the organization communicate and collaborate well (Hansen & Wernerfelt, 1989).

Systems

Systems refer to routine processes and procedures that an organization's staff members follow. Examples of organizational processes and flows are information systems, capital budgeting systems, manufacturing processes, quality control systems, and performance measurement systems (Waterman, 1982). Systems show how a firm works and gets things done and systems are seen as the manual of organizational procedures (Pascale & Athos, 1981). From an organizational perspective, systems can be used to establish organizational focus, cohesion, learning and execution of selected strategies (Shang & Seddon, 2002). Meanwhile, from a managerial perspective, systems can be used as an instrument for making decisions like resource allocation and monitoring and assessing a firm's operations (Shang & Seddon, 2002). Systems need to be evaluated, maintained, and developed to create a firm's value and efficiency. A firm with well-established systems that are evaluated, developed, and maintained to suit its strategic purpose has

competitive advantage (Irani, 1999). Moreover, an importance of the evaluation of a firm's existing systems is the systems respond to the firm's overall goals, not the individual needs of employees. (Shang & Seddon, 2002).

Style

Style refers to top or senior management's leadership styles. In other words, the style of leadership means how top or senior managers spend their time, what they focus attention on, what questions they ask of employees, and also organizational culture (Kaplan, 2005). What kind of decisions top managers make and how they allocate, combine, and develop resources has a great impact on corporate culture (Waterman *et al.*, 1980). Leadership styles also have a huge impact on the coherence of overall strategy (Waterman, 1982). Leaders or managers can create a certain environment based on the decisions they make and leadership behaviors or patterns can shape organizational culture. For example, if a leadership style is collaborative, which means staff members are given freedom for decision making and providing feedbacks, it is easier for leaders to gain engagement from staff members who have established their trust towards the management through this pattern of leadership. It is clear that the importance of leadership styles is how leaders apply strategies to ensure trust and support among staff members and how they manage individuals to be counted for tasks or projects (Erskine, 2013).

Staff

Staff refers to both the staff itself and demographic characteristics of people within an organization (Drucker, 2007;

Pascale & Athos, 1981). Staff is also defined as people's backgrounds and competencies and an organization's staff recruiting, selecting, training, managing, and promoting processes (Kaplan, 2005). This staff element can be linked to the Human Resources function of an organization. Recruitment processes should find suitable employees who have the right commitment and proficiency to match an organization (Ulrich *et al*., 2008). An organization has to hire staff members, train them well, and assign them to right jobs. Other key issues in this element include motivation, recognition, and reward (Crew, 2002). Motivation tools can be related to tangible rewards such as financial means and intangible incentives such as professional development and knowledge enhancement (Gottlschalg & Zollo, 2017). It is also evidently important for a firm to find and develop staff members to match overall strategy in order to achieve the firm's goals. Staff should also have right mindset towards a firm and feel motivated and committed to reach the firm's goal. Motivation tools and recruitment processes are important procedures for staff alignment with a firm.

Skills

Skills refer to distinctive competencies or capabilities of an organization and key personnel who carry out the organization's strategy and the ways of how an organization differentiate themselves from its competitors (Pascale & Athos, 1981; John, 2005). The skills element also refers to what an organization does best along dimensions such as people, management, processes, systems, technology, and customer relationship (Waterman, 1982; Kaplan,

2005). In addition, skills are defined as capability in organizational management by entire employees, not individual capability (Peters and Waterman, 1982). To create capabilities and competencies, education and training is fundamental (Senge, 1990). Training and development are essential in ensuring personnel how to do their jobs and keep up to date with the latest techniques and technology (Crew, 2002; Fox, 2002).

Shared values

Shared values refer to the core or fundamental set of values shared within an organization and serve as guiding principles of what is important including vision, mission, and value statements which provide a broad sense of purpose for all employees (Pascale & Athos, 1981; Kaplan, 2005). In fact, the core values of an organization, as shown in its corporate culture and general work ethic, were called "superordinate goals" when the framework was first developed (Waterman *et al*., 1980). This Shared Values element is essential to develop all other elements in the framework; that is, if Shared Values change, all other factors are directly affected (Waterman, 1982). Shared values are expressed at high levels of abstraction. Shared values can mean very little for outsiders who do not know the organization well; however, they are significant or mean a lot for employees of the organization.

Research methodology

This research uses a qualitative method to gain deep understanding and insights on problems, challenges, management, and preparation of hotel spa management and operations during the COVID-19

crisis. The case study research design is often adopted in an exploratory or descriptive research and answers questions including "How", "Why", and "What" (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2011). As a result, the case study is suitable for this research in order to get both a clear and accurate focus and in-depth understandings of hotel spa management during the COVID-19 crisis. In this study, a case study of two hotel spa will be conducted.

One of appropriate sampling techniques for qualitative research is purposive sampling (Boenhnke, 2011). The technique suggests researchers to choose the samples with actual experiences. The selected samples in this research possess appropriate knowledge and real experiences contributing to the completion of spa management during the crisis.

In this study, we use purposive sampling to sample two hotel spas to gain insight on one spa in a capital city, i.e., Bangkok and a non-capital city, Khon Kaen province. Both Bangkok and Khon Kaen are similar in terms of a gateway for both local and foreign tourists. Bangkok and Khon Kaen have an airport which can accommodate Thai and international passengers. Khon Kaen, in additional, has been developed and promoted to be one of MICE or Meetings, Incentives Travel, Conventions, and Exhibitions city centers besides Bangkok.

Research populations and samples

The population are the all spa businesses located in the 4-5 star hotels located in Bangkok and Khon Kean provinces. The

spas have to be operated before, during, and after the COVID-19 outbreak.

The samples are the two spa cases. One is in Bangkok, and another one is in Khon Kaen. Within the case, the purposive sampling technique will be used to recruit potential interviewees. In-depth interview on a one-on-one basis is used to collect data from the samples in response to the research objectives. In general, interviews consist of data of meaningful expressed through words, pattern and impacts (Saunders et al., 2009).

Total of 14 respondents will be sampled based on convenient basis. Respondents will be divided into three groups including 1 hotel spa manager from each spa, 3 hotel spa staff from each spa, and 3 customers from each spa. Hotel spa managers and staff have to be on duty before, amid, and after the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research instrument

The interview contains open-ended questions based on the McKinsey's 7-S Framework. Open-ended questions enable respondents to include more information including feelings, attitudes, and understanding of issues (Kothari, 2004); therefore, they are useful for researchers to collect qualitative data in order to gain a better understanding of certain issues and more insightful interpretation of research results. Based on the McKinsey's 7-S Framework and the situation of the COVID-19 crisis, the open-ended questions in the in-depth interview are developed from Gaspar (2017), Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (2015), mindtools.com (2011), and The Organizational Strategist (2011).

The interview questions are divided into two sections as follows:

Section A

This section contains the open-ended questions asking the respondents about their position in the organizational structure, their roles or responsibilities, and their total years of work experience among hotel spa management and staff. For hotel spa customers, this section contains the questions asking about general demographic information including gender and age.

Section B

This section contains questions based on the McKinsey's 7-S Framework in response to the research objectives: 1) problems and challenges experienced by hotel spa managers, hotel spa staff, and hotel spa customers during the COVID-19 outbreak, 2) ways to manage/handle the problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, and 3) preparations of hotel spa managers, hotel spa staff, and hotel spa customers for the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Data collection

The primary data was collected from in-depth personal interviews administered through open-ended questions based on the McKinsey's 7-S Framework. The key informants included hotel spa managers, hotel spa staff, and hotel spa customers from two hotel spas in a capital city, Bangkok, and a non-capital city, Khon Kaen Province. To gather the data, the interview was recorded by note taking, voice, and visual recording if agreed by the respondents. Data collection was conducted during November 2020 – December 2020 (after the outbreak of COVID-19 or after the hotel spa reopening). In addition, the personal interviews on a one-on-one basis were conducted in accordance with the World Health Organization's preventive measures including hand and respiratory hygiene and physical distancing for preventing transmission of COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). The researcher and the respondents had to wash hands with soap or alcohol-based hand-rub before and after the interview, wear a face mask throughout the interview, and keep a distance of at least 1 meter between each other during the interview.

Data analysis

The primary data collected through the in-depth personal interviews was transcribed and analyzed based on content analysis which is a systematic replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories (Krippendorf, 1980). Since the open-ended question interview approach was applied in this study, the interviewees were able to fully express their answers in as much details as they want, so a comprehensive data coding process was necessary. In fact, coding is a way of developing and refining interpretations of the data in qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014). The data coding purpose is to make categories and concepts become smaller analyzable units by compressing extensive data sets in a systematic way. The content from in-depth interviews of the respondents was analyzed through the content analysis.

Research findings

The names of all in-depth interview respondents including hotel spa managers, staff, and customers were not revealed. The hotel spa manager in Bangkok was referred to as "M1" and the hotel spa manager in Khon Kaen was referred to as "M2". The hotel spa staff in Bangkok were referred to as "S1, S2, and S3" and the hotel spa staff in Khon Kaen were referred to as "S4, S5, and S6". The hotel spa customers in Bangkok were referred to as "C1, C2, and C3" and the hotel spa customers in Khon Kaen were referred to as "C4, C5, and C6".

Problem management of spas during COVID-19 crisis

7-S Elements	Problems	Management
1. Strategy		
Bangkok	•Loss of international spa customers from the Middle East and some Asian countries	•Adjust marketing strategies and offer special deals to attract more domestic customers
	•Customers became not confident with safety of close-contact spa service	•Assuring customers of spa service safety during COVID-19 with the SHA certificate
Khon Kaen	•Temporary hold on the ongoing Traditional Esan Massage project to create Khon Kaen's spa identity	•Stay in touch with project organizers through LINE app to get updates about the project resuming
	•Customers became not confident with safety of close-contact spa service	•Assuring customers of spa service safety during COVID-19 with the SHA certificate
2. Structure		
Bangkok	•Spa staff were required to work across department due to the decreased number of hotel employees and they were unfamiliar and unconfident with a security guard role	•Spa manager kept encouraging the spa therapists and emphasized their personal strengths to make them feel confident and keep them patient with their new task
Khon Kaen	•Spa staff were required to work across department due to the decreased number of hotel employees	•All spa staff normally stand by to replace one another when someone is required to help another department
3. Systems		
Bangkok	•Suspension of web-based spa management application due to limited budgets	•Use a manual system by writing spa customer bookings and staff schedules on paper
Khon Kaen	•Spa receptionist sometimes misses spa customer phone calls because he needs to do other tasks and cannot always stand by at the spa	•Spa customer calls are automatically transferred to the hotel's front desk when the spa receptionist is away in order to receive all incoming spa customer calls

4. Shared Values		
Bangkok	•Shared values remain the same as the pre-COVID-19 phase, except some unaccustomed behaviors of Thai customers such as late arrival	•Maintain commitment to the global etiquettes to offer customers the best service experience, keep customer satisfaction a top priority, and enhance service quality by double to meet domestic customers' expectations
Khon Kaen	•Shared values remain the same as the pre-COVID-19 phase such as focusing on customers	•Hold the shared values principles including keeping customers a top priority and maintaining both the hotel's spa standards of excellence and the spa industry's required standards.
5. Style		
Bangkok	•Lack of face-to-face communication with staff during temporary spa closure	•Devoted to staying in touch with staff through the LINE application to give encouragement to staff
Khon Kaen	•Lack of face-to-face communication with staff during temporary spa closure	•Devoted to staying in touch with staff through the LINE application to give encouragement to staff
6. Staff		
Bangkok	•Spa therapists have workload due to the insufficient number of staff •Spa staff became uncertain about career and financially insecure	•Make a phone call to other available therapists who take leave of absence without pay to help on a busy day •Keep communicating with staff to encourage them during temporary closure and continue to provide employee benefits such as free 3 meals and monthly relief grants to ease staff's financial burdens
Khon Kaen	•Spa staff became uncertain about career and financially insecure	•Keep communicating with staff to encourage them during temporary closure, provide employee benefits such as free 2 meals and protective equipment, and hold special events to appreciate staff's hard work and dedication
7. Skills		
Bangkok	•Lack of actual work practice and discontinued trainings cause spa therapists to forget some massage postures and steps	•Allow spa therapists to work part-time jobs at other spas in order not to lose skills during temporary closure and receive skills retraining from senior therapists after reopening
Khon Kaen	•Only spa receptionist is unable to provide information of spa services and products	•Read through all details in a spa service brochure and study about all products and services

Preparations of spas for the aftermath of COVID-19

Hotel spa in Bangkok

The hotel spa respondents stated that they have to rely more heavily on domestic or Thai customers after the COVID-19 crisis. They need to put more emphasis on publicizing their products and services through channels, particularly social media such as Facebook and Instagram in order to raise customers' awareness of the hotel spa. They also prepare to run sales promotions offering special deals and discounts more frequently to attract Thai customers to use spa services and share their hotel-standard spa experiences to friends or acquaintants.

" We expect that Thai customers will know more about our hotel spa through word of mouth after we promote more on social media," expressed by M1.

Moreover, since Thai customers have become a major customer group, they prepare to learn more about preferences, needs, and expectations of spa goers in Thailand in order to adjust services to meet the Thai customers' needs and expectations. The hotel spa's staff also plan to upskill to provide a wide range of massage and treatments which are mainly for relaxation purposes.

" I'd like learn about therapeutic or remedial massage to be different from other spas because our hotel spa mainly provides relaxation massage and treatments," expressed by S1.

"Apart from the spa receptionist's role, I'm now capable of only foot massaging and facial and body scrub treatments. I want to learn more about Thai or deep massage and want to get certified," expressed by S3.

Hotel spa in Khon Kaen

The spa manager stated that the most important thing of the hotel spa to prepare is the number of spa therapists to serve the possible increase of spa customers in the future. In case that the number of customers increases in the post-COVID-19 phase, the hotel spa considers hiring more staff to work on a part-time basis. Moreover, part-time therapists are also required to undergo intensive trainings to meet the hotel spa standards of excellence apart from other common qualifications.

"Currently, there are totally 142 hotel employees. Due to the decreased revenues, the hotel can't hire full-time staff over 142 people. New employees have to work part-time only," expressed by M2.

The two spa therapist respondents stated that in preparation for the post-COVID-19 phase, it is necessary to maintain good health and the best sanitation practices such as regular handwashing and mask wearing because safety has become customers' top of mind after the pandemic outbreak.

"I will have to do exercises regularly in order to keep good health and to make customers feel confident and safe from using our spa services," expressed by S4.

"Before the COVID-19 outbreak, customers didn't mind when we had a little cough. But during the current pandemic outbreak, only a little cough can scare off customers," expressed by S5.

Managerial implication

As for managerial implications, the findings from this research suggested that the hotel spas have adapted by means of rethink, reduce, revive, reskill, and retain. Rethink means to shift its focus to Thai customers whom the hotel spas have to currently rely on or pay more attention to and to adjust products and services to meet their needs and expectations. Reduce means to cut down unnecessary operating costs and to be able to perform tasks with the decreased number of staff during the COVID- 19 crisis. Revive means to bring back confidence of customers with hygiene and health safety of spa services and also confidence of staff with their career. Reskill means the hotel spa staff need to learn other new skills, not only job- specific skills since a job rotation scheme is necessary to be implemented during the COVID- 19 crisis. Retain means to keep staff who are valuable assets to deliver products and services by providing them with various forms of support and benefits and to keep domestic customers' satisfaction as a top priority.

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