

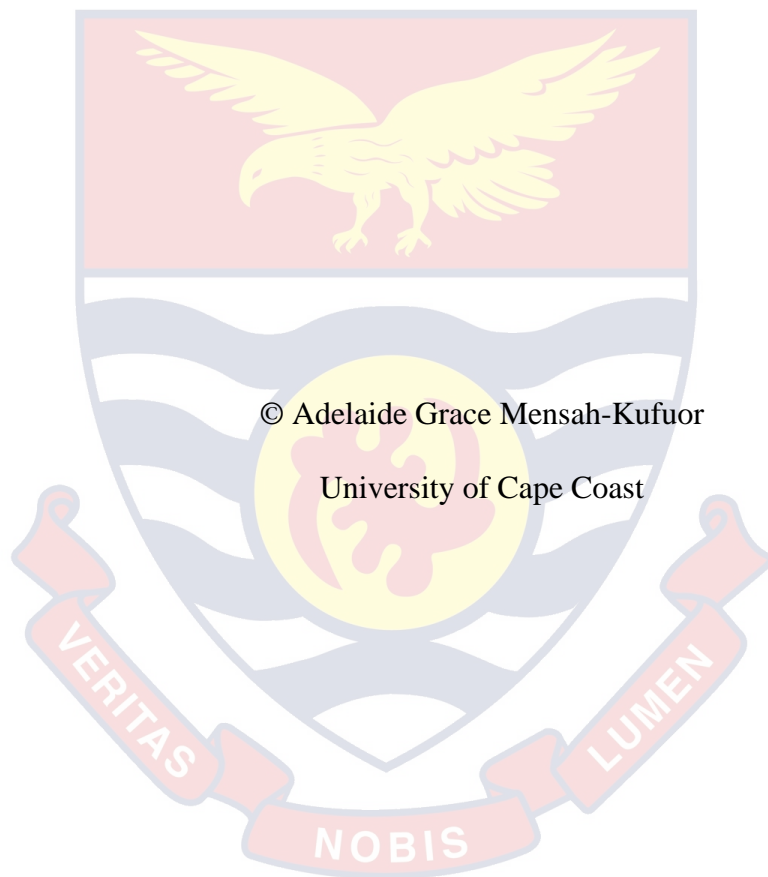
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

EMPLOYEE-GUEST INTERFACE IN SERVICE FAILURE RECOVERY  
EPISODES IN UPSCALE HOTELS IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS



ADELAIDE GRACE MENSAH-KUFUOR

2020

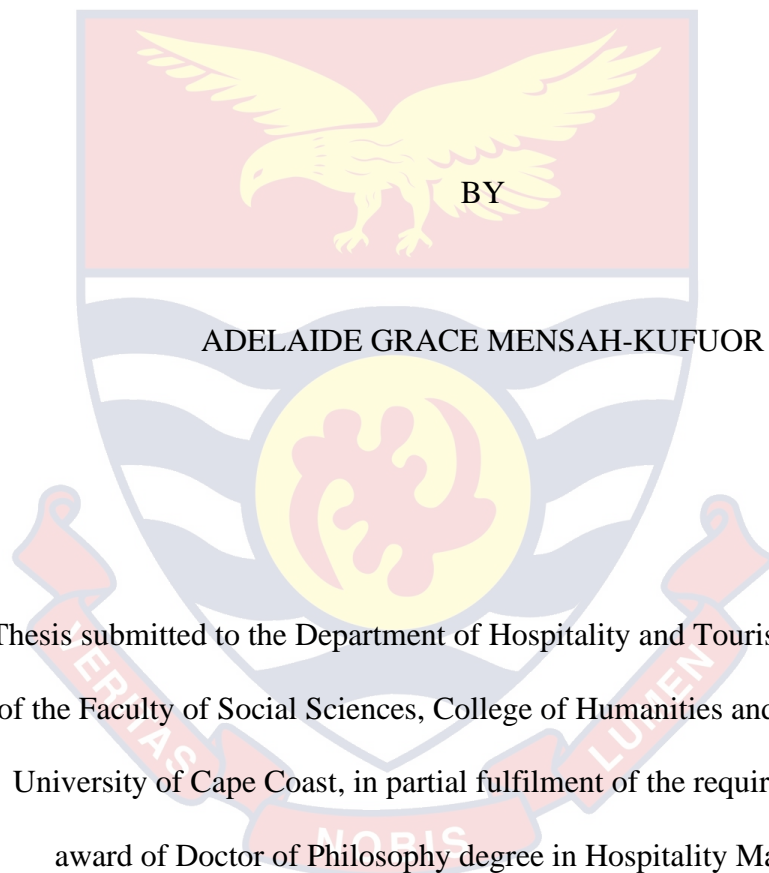


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EPISODES IN UPSCALE HOTELS IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS



This thesis submitted to the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management of the Faculty of Social Sciences, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree in Hospitality Management.

JULY, 2020

## DECLARATION

### Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature ..... Date .....

Name: Adelaide Grace Mensah-Kufuor

### Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature ..... Date .....

Name: Prof. Ishmael Mensah

Co-Supervisor's Signature ..... Date .....

Name: Dr. Edem K. Amenumey

## ABSTRACT

Frontline employee (FLE)-guest interface has been identified as a vital strategic issue in the literature given the fact that the encounter during service delivery could result in service failure which needs to be recovered. Based on the evidence that there is dearth of research examining the interface during service failure and recovery from a managerial point of view, this study assessed frontline employee-guest interface in service failure recovery episodes in upscale hotels in the Accra Metropolis. The study followed the pragmatism philosophy, and the mixed methods approach was used for data collection involving 400 respondents (hotel guests) for the quantitative study, a representative each of the FLEs and FLMs of 15 upscale hotels and two top officials from GTA and GHA totalling 32. The study revealed that the guests were satisfied with the tangible aspects of the hotels, but dissatisfied with the hotels' services because they did not receive the services promised them; this impacted negatively on their service recovery satisfaction. About 60% of them were dissatisfied with the compensation, yet indicated positive loyalty intentions because of the location of the hotels and some helpful and friendly FLEs. In resolving complaints, guest expected FLEs to be empathetic and responsive by dealing with their problems promptly, yet most of them were not fully empowered to promptly resolve them to minimise guests' dissatisfaction. It was further revealed that most of the strategies to enable FLEs handle guests' complaints emanated from the FLMs. It is recommended that a healthy FLE-guest relationship should be sustained to ensure quality guest service delivery, minimise service failures and recover guest service failures effectively by empowered FLEs to satisfy guests and to enhance their loyalty intentions.

## KEY WORDS

Frontline Employee-Guest Interface

Guest Perception

Guest Satisfaction

Loyalty Intentions

Service Failure

Service Recovery

Upscale Hotels



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## DEDICATION

To my family: Fiifi, Anne, Evelyn, Ekow, Stella, Josephine





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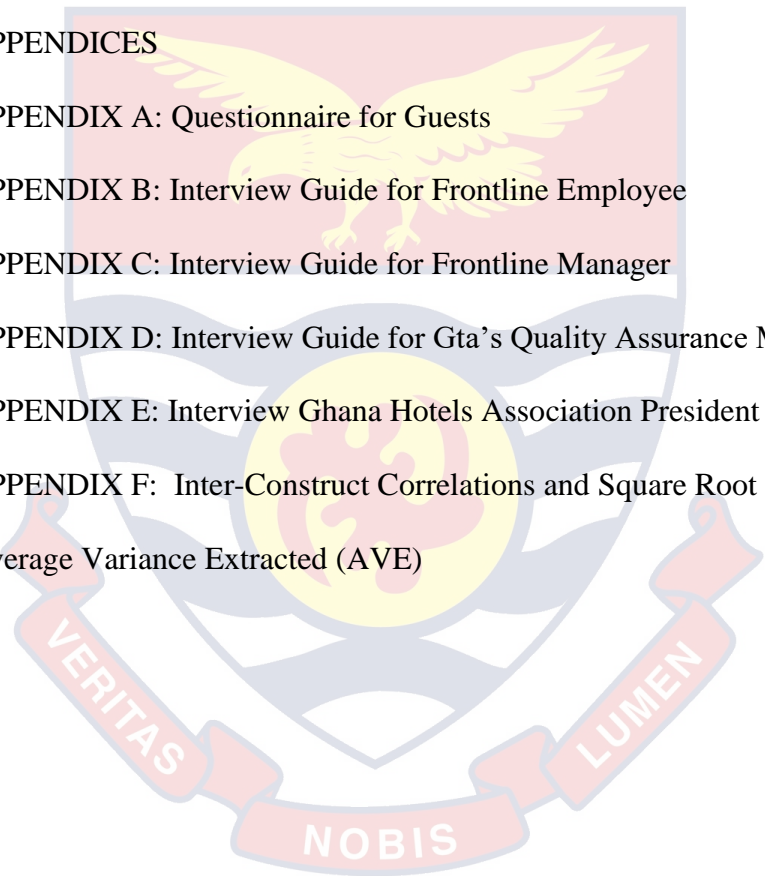
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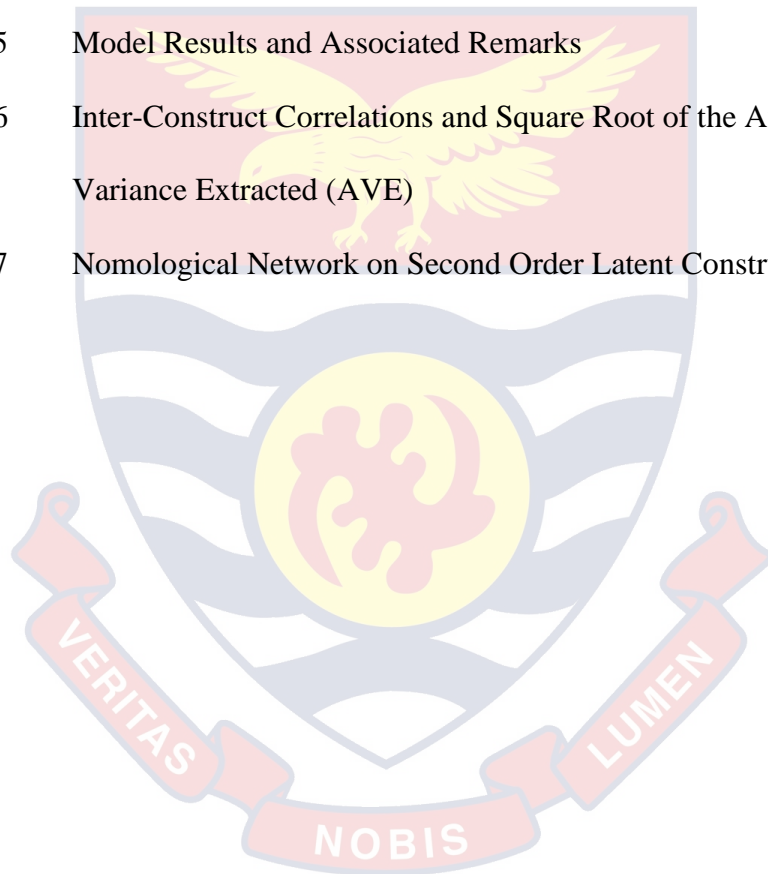


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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Air Condition
Adv Dip H Mgt	Advance Diploma in Hospitality Management
AGFI	Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index
AITA	International Air Transport Association
AMA	Accra Metropolitan Area
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structure
ANOVA	One-Way Analysis of Variance
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
C&G	City & Guilds
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CFT	Cross Functional Training
CNN	Cable News Network
CR	Composite Reliability
CRM	Customer Relations Manager
DM	Duty Manager
EHK	Executive Housekeeper
ESTS	Employee Satisfaction Tracking System
F/D	Front Desk
FLE	Frontline Employees
FLM	Frontline Manager
FLM-FLE	Frontline Manager-Frontline employee
FOM	Front Office Manager
GAR	Greater Accra Region

GCE O/L	General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level
GEM	Group and Events Managers
GFI	Goodness-of-Fit Index
GHA	Ghana Hoteliers Association
GHATOF	Ghana Tourism Federation
GM	General Manager
GRM	Guest Relations Manager
GRO	Guest Relations Officer
GSTS	Guest Satisfaction Tracking System
GTA	Ghana Tourism Authority
H&T Mgt	Hospitality & Tourism Management
HCIM	Hotel Catering & Institutional Management
HND	Higher National Diploma
HR	Human Resource
IHG	Inter-Continental Hotel Group
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Manager
IT	Information Technology
IUT	Institut Universitaire de Technologie
LEARN	Listen; Empathise; Apologise; React and Notify
LEAST	Listen, Empathise, Apologise, Solve the Complaint and Thank the Guest
LMX	Leader-Member Exchange
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MN	Multinational

MOD	Manager on Duty
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
NWOM	Negative Word-Of-Mouth
OJT	On-The-Job Training
OND	Ordinary National Diploma
PWOM	Positive Word-Of-Mouth
QA	Quality Assurance
QGSD	Quality Guest Service Delivery
QSD	Quality Service Delivery
RDM	Rooms Division Manager
REACT	React, Empathise, Apologise, Communicate and Train
RECOVSAT	Recovery Satisfaction
RHG	Radisson Hotel Group
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
S&M	Sales & Marketing
SEM	Structural Equation Model
SERVPERF	Service Performance
SERVQUAL	Service Quality
SFL	Standardised Factor Loadings
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SPC	Service Profit Chain
SRMR	Standardised Root Mean Square Error Residual
SSCE	Senior Secondary Certificate of Education
TDF	Tourism Development Fund

TELCOS	Telecommunication Companies
TLI	Turker-Lewis Index
TV	Television
UK	United Kingdom
WC	Water Closet
YRM	Yield and Reservation Manager



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background to the Study

The mere mention of the word *hotel* raises elating reflections such as busy lobbies filled with business and leisure guests, international dignitaries, celebrities, attendees of conferences and large receptions (Bardi, 2012). Most authors and authorities define a hotel as an establishment offering accommodation and other facilities, food and beverage in addition to services (Jones & Lockwood, 1993; Kasavana & Brooks 1995; Paige & Paige, 1992). Hotel guests, in this study, are travellers who benefit from, and pay for hospitality services such as lodging, food, beverage and other ancillary services to various lodging properties across the world.

Increase in travel spending globally, coupled with guests' spending and corporate profit had resulted in the Hotel Industry experiencing a healthy growth from 2008 to 2018 (Lock, 2020). Within this period, there was an increase from almost 14,300 hotels and 2.5 million hotel rooms throughout the world to a total of 184,299 hotels and 16.97 million hotel rooms in 2018 (Statista Global Hotel Count 2008-2018). Hence, the global Hotel Industry's market size from 2014 to 2018 increased from 466.57 to 600.49 billion dollars respectively (Lock, 2020). This was due to an improved economy especially in the developed world.

The leading six hotels worldwide in 2019 with a total of 40,088 properties ranging from economy to upscale lodging were Wyndham Hotel Group, leading with almost 9,300, Marriot International (7,484) and Choice Hotels International (7,118). The rest were Hilton Worldwide (6,160),

InterContinental Hotel Group (IHG) 5,895, and Best Western Hotels & Resorts 4,131 (Lock, 2020). Ninth on the ladder was Radisson Hotel Group (RHG) with 1,183 hotels. Four of these international brands namely, Marriot, Best Western, Hilton and RHG are currently in Ghana; the first two are in operation, while Hilton and Radisson Blu are still under construction.

The constant global competition among various brands in the Hotel Industry is as a result of the construction of new hotels and the acquisition or sale of properties of other brands which changes the number of their hotels. A typical example is Wyndham Hotel Group which added more than 900 hotels to its properties in 2019 when it acquired La Quinta Holdings (Lock, 2020). Yet, Hilton was the highest in ranking with respect to the most valuable and strongest of hotel brands as at May 2020, with a growth of 35% and a remarkable brand value of US\$10.8 billion (Annual Report of Hotels-50-2020). With respect to branded hotel market worldwide, the United States accounted for 32 out of the 50 brands supplied by seven (7) nations; France and United Kingdom (UK) followed up with seven (7) and four (4) brands respectively (Hotels-50-2020).

The past decade between 2008 and 2018 had also seen the growth of hotels in Africa in the expansion of several new hotel markets. A total of 319 deals were signed for the development of chain hotels in African cities from 2014 to 2018 (Ward, 2019). Ward of W Hospitality Group in 2019 also made mention of almost 200 branded hotels which were to be opened in 2019 and 2020 (W Hospitality Group, 2019). To this effect, the Executive Vice President and Chief Development Officer of RHG, Elie Younes (2020), stated that an addition of six new hotels to its number in Africa adds up to about 150 across 32 cities including Accra (Ghana):



*We believe in the vast potential of Africa. The addition of the six hotels, ... places us firmly on track to reach over 150 hotels ... across the continent within the next five years..., strengthening our presence in cities we've identified for scaled growth.*

While Sub-Saharan Africa recorded 276 hotels with 45,861 rooms in the pipeline, North Africa had 125 hotels with 29,294 rooms (Jumia Hospitality, 2019). This growth in supply was mostly necessitated by demands from the business segment, governments, diplomats, NGOs and leisure guests. A number of multinational (MN) investors and operators who had seen the potential in the African market were also considering the midscale segment; such an opportunity was to entice domestic demand of a growing middle-class population with more disposable income. The main focus of 43% of these investments was to develop new hotels, 36% for acquisition of properties, while 21% were for developing and acquiring properties in emerging markets such as Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana.

The breakdown of hotel chains which were developed in 2016 for Sub-Saharan Africa were West Africa (45%), Southern Africa (26%), East Africa (24%) and Central Africa (5%). The number of rooms in West Africa appreciated from 16,500 in 2015 to 19,376 in 2016. The ten cities in Sub-Saharan Africa with a total number of 20,961 planned rooms included Accra (W Hospitality Group, 2016). Although South Africa dominated the number of Sub-Saharan African hotels, it had only 5% of hotel development projects in 2019, whereas those in West Africa was 35% (Toesland, 2019).

## Upscale Hotels in Ghana

The Ghanaian hotel industry has come a long way in its 60-year history (Acquaye, 2016). Ghana's strong drive for this growth predominantly aiming at business guests is conceivable with occupancies between 70% and 80%; although there is a healthy increase in hotel growth worldwide, that of the Ghanaian market is faster (Sheriff, 2013). Additionally, Kyriakidis (2018) and Heiden (2018), president/MD and VP respectively of Protea Hotels by Marriott (Middle East and Africa), also indicated the unprecedented economic growth in Africa, particularly that of Ghana. They affirmed that Ghana is proving to be an attractive and first-rate investment destination as a result of strong domestic demand, enhanced macroeconomic management and increased political stability, yet lacking the required number of branded world-class hotels. A Spokeswoman of Hilton (2016) confirms this by stating that:

*Although some hotel chains like Mövenpick, Holiday Inn and Best Western have, in the last few years, opened new hotels in Accra; we look forward to constructing one which we believe will significantly improve the accommodation being offered.*

Hotel guests take cognisance of brands, and this could work in favour of global hotel brands such as Hilton, Marriott and RHG in Ghana.

According to W Hospitality Group (2019), Ghana ranked ninth on the top 10 Hotel Chain Development Pipelines in Africa in 2019 with the entry of MN hotels which boosted the growth of hotels. With this achievement, 65% of the 1,971 projected rooms for nine (9) hotels, all in Accra, were completed; these included Hilton, Sheraton, Protea by Marriot, Accor's 363-room Pullman Hotel in Airport City and RHGs' 121 rooms and 54 hotel apartments which are

scheduled to open in 2023 (Atafori, 2020). Hence, Ghana is privileged to have these international brands through new developments (Accor), acquisition and partnership (RHG) with Ghanaian firms and franchisees to accommodate the expected growing business and leisure guest arrivals. In addition, there are some already established ones such as Kempinski, Marriott, Tang Palace and Mövenpick Ambassador which have developed new suites and luxury apartments in addition to the existing properties.

The exceptional growth, especially in Accra, has turned the city into a business travel destination bringing with it some prominent hotel brands. Another major factor which contributed to the growth in the number of hotels in Ghana, particularly in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, was the government's declaration of tourism as a priority sector (Akyeampong, 2007). One major limitation of this growth is the lack of 5-star hotels as there was only one with 104 rooms and 160 beds in 20 years (1991 to 2011). It was not until 2011 that the number of 5-star hotels increased to two, then three in 2015 with a total of 664 rooms and 778 beds as at December 2019. Most of the new luxurious hotels being constructed or refurbished are located in Accra. Other MN hotels are located in Kumasi such as Golden Tulip City Hotel whilst those in Takoradi are Best Western Atlantic Plus and Protea Select. These are mostly upscale hotels (3 to 5-star) with significantly greater quality and a range of facilities which support higher staffing levels to appeal mostly to business and international corporate guests especially MNs.

Additionally, there had been a consistent increase of formal licensed hotels from 2014 with 2,570 hotels, 41,331 rooms and 45,507 beds, and subsequent growth of a total of 3,577 licenced star-rated, guest houses and

budget hotels with 57,347 rooms and 60,854 beds as at December 2019 (Table 1).

**Table 1: Number of Licensed Hotels, Rooms and Beds in Ghana from 2014 to 2019**

Year	# of Hotels	# of Rooms	# of Beds
2014	2,570	41,331	45,507
2015	2,724	44,754	49,216
2016	2,982	48,015	52,448
2017	3,247	51,182	54,254
2018	3,472	54,784	59,570
2019	3,577	57,347	60,854

Source: Ghana Tourism Authority (2020).

There is going to be more vigorous competition in Accra with the arrival of other international chain hotels such as Mövenpick Ambassador, Kempinski, Marriot, Hilton and RHG. A feature in the hotel sector is intense competition which calls for improved service delivery, resulting in the development of sophisticated marketing strategies (O’Mahony, Lahap & Sillitoe, 2011). The current highly competitive service environment has made it virtually impracticable for hotels to exclusively compete on prices; this has resulted in most hotels looking for different ways of providing excellent services to guests (Hapsari, Clemes & Dean, 2016; Lu, Berchoux, Marek & Chen, 2015; Rashid, Ahmad & Othman, 2014). The provision of quality service has therefore become even more relevant for the existing hotels yet service delivery often

falls short of the expected reality as it struggles to meet international standards and international guests' expectations (Kanyan, Ngana & Voon, 2016; Lee, 2018; Ogechi & Igbojekwe, 2015; O'Mahony et al., 2011). This requires hoteliers to hire the right calibre of people as frontline employees (FLEs) and develop them into vital assets by providing them with the requisite support systems like training to deliver excellent services or recover service failures (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2008; Ye & Liang, 2010).

Guests' experiences in terms of quality could be judged by product quality, price value, surroundings and service; these four factors relate to each other (Loo & Leung, 2018; Rutherford & O'Fallon, 2006). An experience short of these factors will result in service failure. Service failure is when the service fails to meet the expectations of guests (Masdek, Aziz & Awang, 2011). Guest complaints which are direct feedbacks of service failures could emanate from FLE-guest interface as a result of services not delivered to meet guests' expectations.

Guests usually use a three-dimensional attributional scheme for service failure namely, the cause of the service failure, whether the hotel could have prevented it and how regular the service failure occurs (Bitran & Lojo, 1993). The service failure can be attributed to several reasons, but it is crucial to diagnose exactly where the failure, that is the gap, occurred. Thus, breaking down the service encounters into phases to establish the gaps between guests' expectation and perception of the experience would create a structure for an effective service recovery, an improvement on the overall guest experience and FLEs' performance.

The provision of service quality has therefore become even more relevant for the hotels in Ghana and yet the tourism industry in Ghana pays little attention to human resource training to equip employees to take care of guests' needs (Akyeampong, 2007; Sheriff, 2013). This can result in a lot of service failures and guest dissatisfaction during FLE-guest encounters or interface emanating from FLEs' negative attitude of offering inappropriate response to guests' request and being disrespectful, arrogant and unfriendly (Mensah-Kufuor, Mensah & Amenumey, 2015).

In fact, FLE-guest interface remains significant to hotels in spite of the use of electronic point-of-sale, self-service interfaces such as self-check-ins and self-check-outs. Such technology is strategically being used by service-oriented organisations to replace humans in order to reduce labour costs (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007; Proenca, Torres & Sampaio, 2017; Reid & Bojanic, 2011). The use of technological interfaces in place of FLEs reduces service costs but the opportunity to build healthy emotional connections with a healthy FLE-guest relationship which is so crucial for a successful service delivery would be absent. In addition, the promotion of a strong hotel-guest relationship which could in turn enhance guest satisfaction, trust and loyalty intentions would also be missing. Hence cutting off FLE-guest relationship would generate a new type of service blunder (Yim, Tse & Chan, 2008). Despite the use of technology to improve service delivery in hotels, there is no way FLE-guest interactions can be replaced with technology.

Some hotels suffer from over dependence on technology rendering FLEs redundant or uninspired to deliver exceptional service (Walker, 2010). Technology should rather be used as a tool to support the time-tested traditional

hospitality practice of face-to-face communication and interaction (Brudney, 2013). This is because hotels depend on the abilities and motivations of FLEs to relate to guests in order to positively influence the hotel's performance (King, 2010; Rothfelder, Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2013). FLEs who come into contact with guests in the provision of service represent the hotel and should have the requisite knowledge, conceptual, human and technical skills to augment the delivery system.

FLE-guest relationship is very crucial in hotels since excellent service delivery is necessary to support products for proper consumption (O'Mahony et al., 2011). Anticipated support from FLEs comprise behaviours in being courteous, empathetic, tolerant, enthusiastic, assuring and sympathetic (Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015). In addition are competencies in the ability to communicate effectively, resolve problems quickly, share technical knowledge, and guest perceptions of professionalism of conduct including image and appearance (Smith, 2012). Most hotels train their FLEs to be courteous towards guests as FLEs do not have the same status as guests who patronise the hotels; this results in FLEs' inability to express their true emotions when they are convinced that the guest might be wrong this time (Wilson et al., 2008). Again, the more demanding the expectations of guests, the more likely FLEs' job satisfaction will be negatively affected as they are sometimes expected to perform unusual tasks which create indecision and lead to conflict (Chiang, Birtch & Cai, 2013).

In a labour-intensive hotel industry, receptionists, waiters, cashiers, barmen and room attendants as FLEs are the recipients of guests' complaints. They are therefore expected to exhibit high levels of skills, elegance and

attention to detail to satisfy guests' needs. This is because they are perceived to be the most informed and exceptionally experienced in delivering service (Bardi, 2012). This heightens guests' expectation of FLEs to handle their problems, but how well they resolve them would depend on how skilled, motivated or satisfied they are with their jobs.

Basically, guests expect a warm welcome, rapid attention to their unique requirements, politeness and pleasantness. A feeling that the hotel cares and good security measures of which service is key, owing to its basic characteristics (Jones & Lockwood, 2009). The provision of these services and product enhancers by FLEs, which guests expect to be superior to that of other competitors', contribute to the development of a growing stable FLE-guest relationship for a positive guest experience. In addition, guests' desire in their interface with FLEs is instant and honest responses to their problems in order to develop trust and foster guest loyalty for repeat business (Bock, Folse & Black, 2016; Fields, 2013). Hence, management focusing on FLEs' job performance and job satisfaction is key to improving service for guest satisfaction.

Furthermore, management teams of hotels are expected to conform to the new paradigm shift in the hotel industry's philosophy. This shift accentuates the focus on guest-related services instead of the production aspect and from management functions to the empowerment of FLEs in giving them resources to perform, counselling and assisting them to think for themselves (Walker, 2012). Such discretion does not only help to restore FLEs' capabilities in addressing guests' needs or their ability to manage service failure demands, but also facilitate a sense of self-confidence, personal achievement and job satisfaction. It is therefore crucial that frontline managers' (FLMs) leadership



style, experience, knowledge and personality significantly influence FLEs' service delivery. FLMs are also supposed to monitor and transform FLEs' behaviour, train, appraise and inspire them to enhance their competencies to improve their performance for guest satisfaction (Brown, Bosselman & Foucar-Szocki, 2013; Hanks, 2014; Lahap, O'Mahony & Dalrymple, 2016; Rothfelder et al., 2013). Hence, hotels should enhance service delivery and develop unique products tailored towards guests' needs and satisfaction instead of concentrating on improving revenue (O'Mahony et al., 2011).

Hotels which engage experienced FLEs with positive attitude to deliver services to guests' satisfaction would attain and sustain their competitive edge over other competitors. They would also benefit by achieving their financial goals and contribute to the national economy through employment and tax revenue. Hence, the delivery system and performance must be effective; the FLEs must also be motivated to deliver services to meet guests' expectations. This is because most of these guests often evaluate hotels' service quality based on FLEs' attitudes, behaviours and performances (Farrell & Oczkowski, 2012; Hennig-Thurau, 2004). As such, FLEs should be reliable, responsive, empathetic and assure guests of professional service delivery or recovery to restore guests' confidence and trust (Wilson et al., 2008; Ye & Liang, 2010).

Ideally, FLEs should deliver service right the first time in a guest encounter as the first rule of absolute quality service and for successful business in hotels (Walker, 2010). However, services are more likely to fail due to their experiential nature and the difficulty associated with offering good services (Masdek, Aziz & Awang, 2011; Walker, 2010). Even upscale hotels cannot avoid making mistakes no matter how excellent the service standard is due to

its distinctive characteristics and nature such as inseparability or variability, resulting in service failures. It is especially true where both FLEs and guests are involved in the creation and delivery of service; yet the level of services rendered are based on FLEs' performance.

The fact that service failure will continue to occur cannot be ignored as a guest may end up complaining as an expression of dissatisfaction with the service when something done or not done upsets him/her (Bagley, 2014; Baig, 2012; Wright, 2014). For instance, the heterogeneity or variability of service may result in guests' indignant dissatisfaction and complaints when they perceive other guests are being favoured (Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015); such guests are very negligible. Most guests who encounter service failures normally take no action, take some form of public or private action to obtain compensation or express their anger and leave; this could damage a hotel's reputation hence, complaints should be well managed.

Numerous studies have revealed that service recovery which involves all actions and efforts taken by FLEs to respond to service failures requires doing things exceptionally right the second time (Ashill & Rod 2011; Love, 2018; Malhotra & Lages, 2014; Solomon, 2013). Such acts re-establish justice from the perspective of guests. In all cases, FLEs have another chance not only to resolve the problem to the satisfaction of guests, but to also convert such guests into loyal ones and/or even advocates for the hotels than average satisfied guests according to the service recovery paradox (Coombs, 2012; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2012).

Service failure recovery (SFR), a task involving three stakeholders namely FLEs, FLEs and guests, is vital for successful resolution of guests'

complaints (Ashill & Rod, 2011). It includes acts to solve guests' complaints, to change dissatisfied guests' adverse attitude and retain them. Service recovery effort/s of FLEs can have a profound effect on guests' satisfaction. In addition to the enhanced relationship with the FLE or hotel, such guests often tend to be loyal and recommend the hotel to friends and relations. Conversely, FLEs' inability to recover service failure infuriates guests more than service failures (Masdek, Aziz & Awang, 2011). Such situations result in dissatisfied guests who defect to other hotels. Such moves necessitate FLMs to empower FLEs to exceptionally assuage or promptly resolve guest complaints for guest satisfaction.

FLMs empowering FLEs involves the release of control to FLEs at a critical moment of guest encounter backed with authority to make decisions in favour of guests' perceived service failures (Bardi, 2012; Schumacher & Komppula, 2016). The likelihood of successful service recovery is increased if the initial contact (FLE) has the mandate and handles guest complaints in a timely and effective manner (DiGioia, 2018; Kennedy, 2018; Wamuyu, 2016). FLEs managing guests' complaints is an inevitable part of the FLE-guest interface, and a crucial element in the development of a lasting relationship between guests and hotel (Susskind, 2014). In such a labour-intensive industry which demands efficient outputs coupled with high job turnover, one would agree with Chiang and Birtch (2011) that a reasonable recompense scheme would certainly promote feelings of self-esteem and confidence to inspire FLEs to take initiatives quickly during service failure.

## Statement of the Problem

The steady growth of hotels in Ghana has contributed positively to the economy as a whole by creating employment opportunities, generating foreign exchange and creating other business opportunities. However, it has also intensified competition which has led to pressure to improve profitability which could cause service failure and elicit negative reactions from guests.

Again, there are inadequate and unsuitable human resource strategies to develop employees qualitatively and quantitatively (Sheriff, 2013; Ye & Liang, 2010). This often results in service failures. The findings of Ekiz, Khoo-Lattimore and Memarzadeh (2012) reveal that luxury hotels suffer from service failures caused by staff who lack experience, do not display professionalism when offering service and misbehave. Such unacceptable staff behaviours include not granting guests' requests, slow or delayed service delivery and overbilling of guests (Chua, Othman, Boo, Abkarim & Ramachandran, 2010; Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015). Effects of these service failures on hotels are loss of guests, revenue, profitability and negative word-of-mouth (NWOM), yet hoteliers are not paying the required attention to service failure issues in Ghana due to lack of policies, laxity in some systems and insufficient institutional linkages and capabilities (Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015). With the advent of the internet and social media, guests are turning to social media platforms such as Instagram or Trip Advisor to vent their frustrations thus, damaging the reputation of the hotels involved (Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015). Obviously, hotel FLEs are expected to play a critical role in addressing the issue of guest dissatisfaction resulting from service failure.

Additionally, although MN hotels are globally recognised for their high levels of management and operations (Dutta, Venkatesh, & Parsa, 2007), some affiliated or managed ones in Ghana do not effectively train FLEs to competently carry out their duties (Sheriff, 2013). Such hotels together with the new ones eventually poach the fairly trained FLEs of other hotels leaving the unqualified ones to worsen the poor service delivery situation (Akyeampong, 2007). Though the nation does not have a top-notch hotel school with first-class facilities and curricula to train hotel staff (Sheriff, 2013), there are tertiary institutions offering hospitality management programmes. This calls for effective collaboration between the hotel industry and academia to effectively employ competency-based training methods.

In addition, there is the need to understand factors influencing FLEs' response to service failures, examine their service recovery performance and the challenges they face in the course of recovering service failures. Moreover, with the increase in the number of world class hotels on the Ghanaian market, especially in the Accra Metropolis, the competition among these hotels has intensified. However, while many hotels appear to be concerned with service recovery, a few seem to be good at it or gain the benefits of service recovery (Michel, Bowen & Johnston, 2009). Hence, as FLEs interface with guests, it is imperative that they have the ability to recover service failures by having the required knowledge, skills, attitude and resources to competently recover such service failures.

Furthermore, FLE-guest interface is identified as a vital strategic issue in the literature, given the fact that the encounter during service delivery could result in service failures which has to be recovered. Surprisingly, evidence from

the literature has revealed that there is scarcity of research examining the interface between FLEs and guests during service failure and recovery and its vital role from a managerial point of view. Most literature on service in the hospitality industry have focused on customers or guest complaints (Karatepe, 2006; Kim, Wang & Mattila, 2010); guests' perception of service encounters (Hancer & Kim, 2013; Sarlas, 2017; Taleb & Karmar, 2013); guests' perception of service failures (Hedrick, Beverland & Minahan, 2007; Yu-Shan Liu, 2013), service recovery, satisfaction and guest retention (Mensah & Dei Mensah, 2018; Rashid et al., 2014; Waterhouse, 2012; Yunus & Ishak, 2012). Others are FLEs' service recovery (Masdek, Aziz & Awang, 2011; Malhotra & Lages, 2014; Van Vaerenbergh Van Den Broeck & Larivière, 2014) and manager or employee satisfaction in relation to guest satisfaction (Dimitriades & Papalexandris, 2011; Hanks, 2014; Kruger, 2014; Panjakajornsak, 2009; Rothfelder et al., 2013).

Also, according to Tsarenko and Strizhakova (2013) and Zablah, Franke, Brown and Bartholomew (2012), future research should incorporate service provider responses to gain a better understanding of the guest coping process in service failures. This is because most studies have assessed service failure and recovery from only guests or FLEs' perspective creating the need to study the totality of guests, FLEs and other hotel stakeholders. This also signifies the lack of clear understanding of FLE-guest interface in service failure and recovery; consequently, this study examines these linkages together with other hotel stakeholders and addresses the gaps in the literature by developing and testing a conceptual framework based on the service profit chain (SPC) model and attribution theory to understand the determinants of FLE-guest interface in service recovery performance.

The focus at this point is on the FLEs who play active role in service failure recovery, but whose perspective on the subject matter has been rarely examined, especially within the context of hotels. Some studies (Koc, 2019; Lu, Berchoux, Marek & Chen, 2015; Magnini & Ford, 2004; Proenca et al., 2017; Schumacher & Kimppula, 2016; Villi & Koc, 2018) also reported of little research into luxury hotel guest satisfaction using qualitative methodology, which provides a richer understanding of the experiences of the interviewees than quantitative design.

Another identified gap in the available literature is the need for further studies on the training given to FLEs (dos Santos Claro, 2013; Waterhouse, 2012). Additionally, there is a suggestion to employ a two or three-sample research design to ascertain the guest-oriented perceived performance relationship with FLEs (Hancer & Kim, 2013; Zablah, Franke, Brown & Bartholomew, 2012). By employing a three-sample research design with FLEs and FLMs, guests and other stakeholders, this study responds to the reported limitations and fills the gaps in the literature which recommended the use of data from guests, employees and other stakeholders in research. This methodological response also clarifies how each sampled group contributes to service failure or service recovery in the three-sample research design.

### **Research Questions**

The study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What forms of service failures do guests experience in upscale hotels in Accra Metropolis?
2. How do FLEs recover service failure in upscale hotels in Accra

Metropolis?

3. What challenges do FLEs face during service failure recovery?
4. How do guests perceive the service recovery performance of FLEs' of upscale hotels?
5. What strategies have FLMs put in place to facilitate service failure recovery by FLEs?
6. How do guests' satisfaction with FLEs' performance of service failure recovery affect their loyalty intentions?

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study was to assess FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery episodes in upscale hotels in Accra Metropolis.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the forms of service failures guests experience in upscale hotels.
2. Investigate how FLEs handle guests' service failure recovery in upscale hotels.
3. Examine the challenges which FLEs face during service failure recovery.
4. Examine guests' perceptions of FLEs' performance in service failure recovery in upscale hotels.
5. Investigate the strategies employed by FLMs to facilitate service failure recovery by FLEs.
6. Evaluate the effect of guests' satisfaction with FLEs' performance of service failure recovery on their loyalty intentions.



## Hypotheses

1. H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between guests' expectation of FLE' service delivery and their perception of service failure recovery.
2. H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between guests' expectation of service delivery and recovery satisfaction.
3. H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between service recovery satisfaction and guests' overall satisfaction.
4. H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between guests' overall satisfaction and their loyalty intentions.

## Significance of the Study

This study provides useful information which hospitality researchers, policy makers, practitioners, academicians and other stakeholders need to be mindful of. It contributes to both theory and practice as it investigates the relationship between FLEs and guests during service failure/recovery and its vital role from FLMs' point of view (Mensah & Dei Mensah, 2018; Sarlas, 2017). The findings serve as a benchmark for interested hoteliers to benefit from positive FLE-guest interaction and inform them on what needs to be done to augment guest service delivery. The findings will assist hoteliers to formulate evident-based interventions, policies, regulations and standard operating procedures (SOPs) which are more likely to enhance the competitiveness, effectiveness and efficiency of hotels' operations when implemented. Such contributions from the study are expected to help address service failures and facilitate successful service delivery/recovery in order to gain higher guest satisfaction, trust, loyalty and profitability from guests.

Practically, it has important managerial implications as it identifies, investigates and facilitates an understanding of the problems associated with FLE-guest encounter during service delivery and FLMs' strategies for FLEs' service failure recovery. This is because while FLMs think they are doing their best to train FLEs to deliver excellent service and product for guest satisfaction, some guests have cause to complain about poor service. Given the fact that service failure is inevitable, the SOPs generated from this study's findings have the potential of assisting FLEs to improve their performance and recover service failures should the service delivery fall below guests' expectations. The outcome of such progress is an appreciable quality service delivery (QSD) by FLEs of the hotel industry.

Contrary to previous studies which were conducted in different service sectors such as banks, airlines and telecommunication companies (TelCos), this study was conducted in hotels. Empirically, the study is different from previous studies on service failure and recovery. In contrast to the numerous published researches on service failure and recovery, this research fills the gaps in the literature on hotel FLE-guest interface in upscale hotels. This is because guests' narration of their service failure experience and what makes them loyal to the hotels are captured in open-ended questions; the interview of FLEs as service providers with their FLMs and other official stakeholders such as Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) and Ghana Hoteliers Association (GHA) also make the difference unlike most studies which assessed service failure/recovery from only guests or FLEs' perspective (Tsarenko & Strizhakova, 2013; Zablach, 2012). Thus, this research adds to literature in highlighting the factors influencing FLEs' efforts to promptly respond to guests' service failures, their

service recovery performance and the challenges they face in the course of recovering service failures. It also enriches the literature on FLE-guest interface, service failure/recovery and loyalty in the hotel industry.

Additionally, this study utilises a three-sample research design with guests, FLEs and FLMs as the direct service providers, and other national stakeholders (GTA and GHA) which results in a better understanding of the guest and FLEs' coping process in service failure recovery, satisfaction and loyalty (Hancer & Kim, 2013; Zablah et al., 2012). Moreover, exploring guests' expectations, ascertaining their perceptions of service delivery or failure recovery helps FLMs to understand quality guest service delivery (QGSD) and FLEs' challenges during service recovery in order to formulate policies and implement strategies to bridge the gaps of service quality (Luk & Layton, 2002).

Finally, as very little has been done in the context of a developing country, this valuable study would contribute to the hospitality research which would further new concepts with Ghana by providing the strategic knowledge of recovering service failures and prompting further research in this domain.

### **Organisation of the Study**

The study has been organised into ten chapters. Chapter One comprises the introduction which delves into issues such as the background of the study, problem statement, research questions, objectives, hypotheses and the significance of the study. Chapter Two delved into empirical theories and models relating to the topic and presented the conceptual framework to guide the study. Specifically, the theoretical and models underpinning the work were discussed. The service recovery and dynamic interactions among customers,

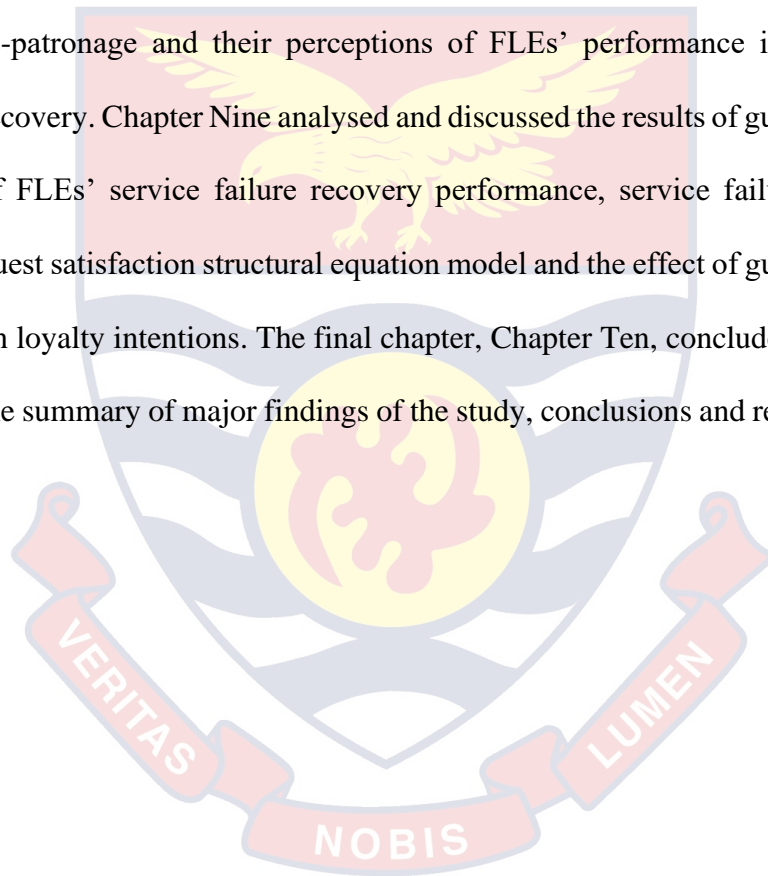
servers and management frameworks and the service profit chain (SPC) model which were adapted for the conceptual framework for the study were presented in the concluding part of the chapter.

Chapter Three focused on the literature review related to FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery such as FLE-guest interface in hotels, service failure and recovery, FLEs' service failure recovery performance and the challenges they face. The rest were managers' perceptions of FLEs' performance, measures they have put in place to facilitate FLEs' service failure recovery, guests' perceptions of FLEs' service failure recovery performance and the effect of their satisfaction on loyalty. The chapter ended with the conceptual framework formulated from both the empirical reviews of this chapter and the Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks in Chapter Two. Chapter Four presents the methodology of the study which comprises the profile of the study area, research philosophy guiding the study, the research approach and the research design employed in the study. Other issues covered in the methodology were sources of data, sample frame, sampling procedures, research instruments, pre-testing, methods of data collection and data analysis, ethical considerations and limitations. Results from the field were presented, analysed and discussed in the next six chapters.

Chapter Five discussed the basic characteristics of guests, the common service failure complaints made by them and what attributed to the service failures. Other issues discussed and analysed were respondents' reporting channel of service failure, whom they reported to and the extent of their satisfaction with how their complaints were handled. Chapters Six and Seven of the study discussed and analysed FLEs' performance of guests' service failure

recovery, the influence of their training and competence in handling guests' complaints. The effect of FLEs' motivation, job satisfaction and retention on their performance of guests' service failure recovery and the challenges which confront them in the execution of service recovery for guest satisfaction were also discussed.

Chapter Eight addresses the issues of FLMs' strategic support of FLEs with measures put in place to facilitate FLEs' service recovery for guests' re-patronage and their perceptions of FLEs' performance in service failure recovery. Chapter Nine analysed and discussed the results of guests' perceptions of FLEs' service failure recovery performance, service failure/recovery and guest satisfaction structural equation model and the effect of guests' satisfaction on loyalty intentions. The final chapter, Chapter Ten, concludes the thesis with the summary of major findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the theoretical and conceptual issues underlying the study. The issues reviewed in this chapter attempt to provide some theoretical explanations to the subject of service failure recovery within the frontline employee-guest interface. Theories reviewed include the attribution and justice theories. The review also focuses on the dynamic interactions framework as well as the functional flexibility, Gap and RECOVSAT models. The chapter concludes by discussing the service profit chain theory which was adapted for the service recovery framework, the conceptual framework for the study.

#### Attribution Theory

The attribution theory attempts an explanation of human behaviour in terms of how people explain their daily occurrences and how these explanations affect their perceptions and satisfaction with those occurrences. This theory was stimulated by the early writings of Heider (1958) but other authors such as Jones and Davis (1965), Jones and Nisbett (1987) and Julian Rotter (1966) have made significant contributions towards the extension and application of the theory (Martinko, 1995). According to Kelley and Michela (1980), it is a number of different attribution perspectives that shape the theory of attribution.

Though popular in social psychology, the attribution theory has been applied in other social science disciplines. Heider's (1958) main argument is

that within any given situation, people have the internal desire to understand and control their environment. He uses the term 'naïve psychologists' to describe the function of people in their effort to develop an explanation of the causes and effects of events they are confronted with. Attribution theorists suggest that what people believe as the causes of an event influences their expectations which eventually shape their subsequent behaviour, thus perception towards the event (Jackson, 2019; Martinko, 1995). In other words, a person's own perceptions regarding what contributes towards the success or failure of an activity will determine the amount of effort the person will exert in engaging in that activity in the future (Jackson, 2019).

Key issues (dimensions) highlighted in the theory include locus of control or causality, level of stability, degree of controllability and globality of cause (Weiner et al., 1971). The causality looks at the location of the cause, whether the individual considers the cause of an event to emanate from themselves or outside themselves. The issue of the level of stability refers to the individual's expectations regarding the permanency or temporal nature of the cause and further, whether the cause is static or can change. Degree of control refers to the extent of control the individual has over the cause while the globality of cause looks at the extent to which the identified cause can be generalised across given situations (Weiner, 2010). Based on these four dimensions of attribution, we have four specific attributions categorised as ability, effort, task difficulty and chance/luck.

Associated with the attribution theory is the issue of biases. According to Weiner (2010), individuals often attribute their successes to themselves and attribute their failures to others. The biases, namely self-serving attribution bias,

ego-enhancement, and most prominently, the hedonic bias, which arise from this disposition have become topical issues for research. The ideas behind attribution theory have overtime been integrated into explaining organisational behaviour and by extension, examining guests' reactions to service failures and recovery (Bitner, 1990; Chan & Wan, 2008, Mitchell & Wood, 1980). The attribution theory has been mostly used in studies relating to guests' dissatisfaction or complaining behaviour where guests rationally process information or a situation to seek reasons why a purchased outcome did not meet their expectation (Bitner, 1990; Chan & Wan, 2008; Folkes, 1989).

Although attribution theory provides some indications for understanding guests' reaction to the service failure recovery process during the FLE-guest interface and its implications on positive word-of-mouth (PWOM), repeat visit and guest loyalty, its reductionist assumption of the rationality of the individual in causal attribution is its major flaw. There are social, cultural and historical factors which also account for causal attributions (Graham, 1991). Despite its shortcoming, this study adopted the theory in partly exploring hotel guests' evaluation of the service delivered, its failure and recovery process as well as the possible outcomes of these evaluations.

### **Justice Theory**

The justice theory seeks to offer an explanation to the issue of fairness in the distribution of resources and in social interaction. The theory has its groundings in political philosophy and ethics, sociology and psychology and several people including Plato, Aristotle, Adams (1963) and Rawls (1971) who have made contributions towards its development. In the literature, there are



three dimensions to the theory of justice, namely interactional, distributive and procedural.

The theory has been extensively employed within the service delivery-failure recovery knowledge domain. Most studies position service failure as an issue of injustice done to guests who initially had needs which they expected service providers such as hotels to meet (Maher & Sobh, 2014; Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015; Tsai, Yang & Chen, 2014). Hence, guests' dissatisfactions and complaints are manifestations of injustice done them. In supporting this stance, some researchers (Chang & Chen, 2013; Ellyawati, Purwanto & Dharmmesta, 2012; Kim & Jang, 2014) have posited that guests undergo a sense of injustice after service failure which may cause negative emotions.

In dealing with this injustice, FLEs upon the receipt of guests' complaints are expected to initiate appropriate service recovery strategies to resolve the problem (Zhao, Liu, Bi & Law, 2014) or compensate guests to their satisfaction (Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2017). It takes only an appropriate service recovery effort to address such feelings of injustice. In the context of this study, the question which arises is how do FLMs and FLEs proactively recover service failures in order to ensure guest satisfaction and loyalty intentions?

A review of the literature indicates that the dimensions of the theory of justice have varying focuses on how fairness should be measured. The first dimension of the justice theory is interactional justice. It is related to guests' assessment of the degree to which they experienced justice from hotels' FLEs. This borders on the interpersonal treatments FLEs give to guests during the service failure recovery process (Blodgett et al., 1997; Ellyawati et al., 2012). Some researchers have argued that interactional justice is imperative in service

failure recovery as it is a strong predictor of guests' trust, satisfaction and improves guest retention by increased guest satisfaction (Namkung & Jang, 2009; Tax, Brown & Chandrashekar, 1998). This is because guests expect the FLE-guest interface to reflect greater concern for their problems in the form of empathy, courtesy and respect, rendering an apology and explaining the situation when the need arises (Choi & Choi, 2014; Kuo & Wu, 2011; Lin & Huang, 2010; Mansori, Tyng & Ismail, 2014; Smith et al., 1999; Wang & Chang, 2013).

The second dimension of justice theory is procedural justice. It is about policies, procedures and systems put in place to address service failure, the speed at which the service failure is corrected or complaint resolved and how guests perceive the fairness in the service recovery (Gelbrich & Roschk, 2011; Karatepe, 2006; Kuo & Wu, 2012). Researchers have identified six subsets of procedural justice which are also used in measuring it, namely, timeliness, promptness, flexibility, procedure control, acceptance of responsibility and right policy and execution (Blodgett et al., 1997; Lin & Huang, 2010; Lovelock et al., 2009; Mansori, Tyng & Ismail, 2014; Rashid et al., 2014). In addition to these elements is the accessibility or availability of guests to seek redress. In other words, procedural justice encompasses the process of dealing with service failure which arises during service delivery until the recovery of the problem and its follow-up.

Distributive justice, which is the third dimension of the theory of justice, highlights the role of ascribed fairness in determining outcomes of transactions (Ellyawati et al., 2012). It looks at the justice evaluation of the allocation of resources or the issue of equity in the distribution of resources. Guests' ultimate

expectation of distributive justice is the compensation offered owing to the inconveniences suffered or losses caused by service failure (Lovelock, Wirtz & Chew, 2009; Rashid et al., 2014).

According to Smith et al. (1999), guests prefer service recoveries of the same magnitude as the service failure or even better. Recompense can be monetary and/or non-monetary such as repairs, discounts, refunds or upgrading of guestrooms to negate guests' dissatisfaction experienced owing to service failure, to exert a positive influence on guest satisfaction (Bambauer-Sachse & Rabeson, 2015; Choi & Choi 2014; Lopes & da Silva, 2015; Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2017; Sparks & McColl-Kennedy, 2001). Such compensations would normally foster guest satisfaction or even re-patronage and recommendations. However, if guests perceive the recovery outcome as not equitably or justifiably recovered, they experience discontentment. Distributive justice in service recovery is usually measured by fairness, need, value and reward of the given compensation (Lin & Huang, 2010; Smith et al., 1999; Wirtz & Mattila, 2004).

The discussions in the literature however point to the fact that there is no consensus on the form of justice which carries the most weight within the context of service failure recovery (Ellyawati et al., 2012; Hoffman & Chung, 1999; Meyer-Waaden & Sabadie, 2012; Smith & Mpinganjira, 2015; Sumaco & Hussain, 2011). Orsingher et al. (2010) for instance noted that interactional and distributional justices have a stronger impact on guests' satisfaction and behavioural intentions than the procedural justice which plays a weaker role or is almost insignificant (Table 2).

**Table 2: Form of Justice and Guest Satisfaction**

S/N	Author(s)	Interac- tional	Proce- dural	Distri- butive
1	Bambauer-Sachse & Rabeson, (2015)			√
2	Lopes & da Silva (2015)			√
3	Smith & Mpinganjira, (2015)	√	√	√
4	Chen, Lee, & Weiler, (2014)	√		√
5	Siu et al., (2013)		√	√
6	Chang et al., (2012)	√		
7	Ellyawati et al., (2012)	√	√	√
8	Komunda & Osarenkhoe, (2012)	√		√
9	Kuo & Wu, (2012)	√		√
10	Meyer-Waarden, & Sabadie, 2012)	√		√
11	Nikbin et al., (2012)		√	√
12	Waterhouse, (2012)	√	√	√
13	Kwortnik Jr. & Han, (2011)	√		√
14	Orsingher et al. (2010)	√		√

Source: Author's Construct (2020)

Conversely, other studies have conclusively shown that all three dimensions of the justice theory positively affect service recovery satisfaction (Ellyawati et al., 2012; Smith & Mpinganjira, 2015; Waterhouse, 2012; Wirtz & Mattila, 2004). Consequently, this study sought to contribute to the on-going debate by considering all the three dimensions of the justice theory and their influence on the service failure recovery process and by extension its possible outcomes. Lopes and da Silva (2015) also indicated that only the distributive justice in service recovery affects guest satisfaction. But does this imply that guests are not so much concerned about the justified procedure of the recovery

so far as they receive an equitable recovery? Does this speak the same of loyal guests?

### **Functional Flexibility Model**

During the 1980s in the midst of the recession, heightened competition and uncertainty, the issue of flexibility became central to firms' operations; labour engagement and segmentation was not an exception (Pollert, 1988). This flexibility is conceived as the ability to adjust under fluctuating and uncertain circumstances (Blyton & Morris, 1992). Building on this concept, Atkinson (1985) propounded the functional flexibility model. The key thrust of the model is that a firm's ability to adapt to expansion, contraction or change in its product market is dependent on its employees offering two different kinds of flexibility, namely functional and numerical. While functional flexibility borders on employees' ability to possess multiple skills and work across different departments, the numerical flexibility refers to status of the employees (full-time or part-time) when demand rises or falls (Atkinson, 1985; Pollert, 1988).

In examining the model from the perspective of the FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery, previous studies have laid emphasis on functional flexibility of staff (Almeida & Davis, 2013; Atkinson, 1985; de la Lastra, Martin-Alcazar & Sánchez-Gardey, 2014; Kelliher & Riley, 2002; Knox & Walsh, 2005; Lai, Soltani & Baum, 2008). Functional flexibility eliminates skills and rules out barriers to make it easier for FLEs to take up other responsibilities within the same operation. The functional flexibility, according to Smith (1994), could either be whole job substitution or boundary loosening. In job substitution, FLEs would be expected to take over other jobs when the need

arises, while with boundary loosening, FLEs' jobs could be amalgamated so that the duties can be moved from person to person.

Consequently, these studies have shown that to assuage demanding areas such as departments of hotels during busy periods, there is the need for FLEs to have in-depth knowledge about the firm's processes and culture and trained to have a variety of related skills or multi-skilled to enable them to perform other duties or to be multi-tasked besides their own when the need arises. This will make it possible for hotels to avert or quickly recover service failures, control labour costs, satisfy a hotel's demand for labour and respond to possible fluctuations in manpower needs during peak or lean seasons (Lai et al., 2008).

The main criticism against this model in terms of functional flexibility is with respect to the issue of 'humanisation of work'. One approach hammer on the risk to identity, signs of job security, less commitment to job due to intensification of duties performed with its little motivation and the stress suffered by employees, especially hotel FLEs, resulting in service failures. Hypothetically, guests may view FLEs trying to be versatile and taking care of almost all their needs instead of encountering specialised individuals as offering seamless services and playing '*Jack of all trade but master of none*' which could result in poor service delivery. In contrast, some guests would be relieved of the devoid of rigid demarcation of 'barriers' or the re-deployment of other FLEs to take care of their needs during demanding times at the front office or any other service department.

Although Knox and Walsh (2005) maintain the general belief that hotels depend on poorly-paid numerically-flexible and disposable labour force, they

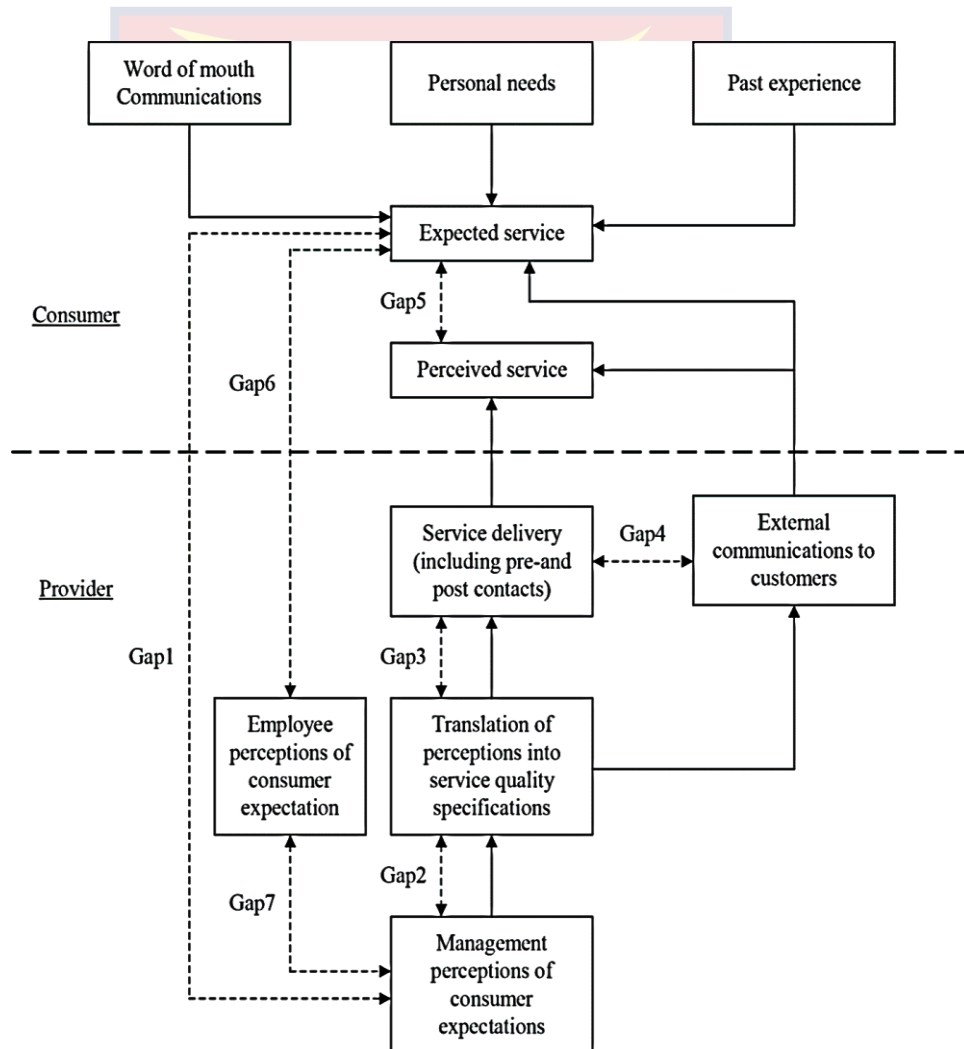
conclude that upscale hotels espouse functional flexibility initiatives to strategically strengthen their internal labour markets through Human Resource Management (HRM) techniques. Almeida and Davis (2013) are also of the notion that being responsible for multiple related roles is less stressful as compared to daily inflexible work schedules. This might be due to the variety of duties performed instead of the specialised but monotonised duty.

Irrespective of the ongoing debate, this study adopted the model to explore hotel FLEs' evaluation of functional flexibility when the need arises during service failure recovery and the possible outcomes of these evaluations. The assumption is most of these FLEs might have gone through cross-functional training (CFT) to be multi-skilled in order to promptly and effectively recover guests' complaints.

### **The Gap Model**

The Gap Model of service quality as presented in Figure 1 was proposed originally by Parasuraman, Zithaml and Bitner (1994). This model which originally has five gaps serves as a framework for measuring service quality through the deduction of a guest's perception of service received from what was expected. The Gap Model was modified by Luk and Layton (2002) with the addition of two more gaps resulting in seven major gaps in the service quality concept. Through this framework, a deeper understanding of service failure is developed by defining the variance between guests' expectation of service prior to the experience and the perception thereafter; this determines the appropriate means to close the gap (Abey, 2011).

Expectations are normally formed based on advertisements, PWOM, guests' past experience and their needs or wants. According to Abey (2011), the gaps in service quality are caused by the hotels not knowing guests' expectations through lack of marketing orientation, inadequate communication from FLEs to management and several management levels. As indicated in the figure below, the model identifies seven types of gaps. The first gap is the knowledge gap.



**Figure 1: Model of Service Quality Gaps**

Source : Parasuraman et al. (1985) ; Luk & Layton (2002).

The knowledge gap implies that the hotel might not understand what guests expect or what a guest considers relevant might not be so to a hotel



(Abey, 2011; Gržinić, 2007). In the second gap (standard gap), hotels assume the setting of service quality specifications for guests such as an accent on technical quality instead of guests' need for excellent service delivery (Abey, 2011; Blešić, Ivkov-Džigurski, Dragin, Ivanović & Pantelić, 2011); they may comprehend guests' expectation yet not develop a system or method of delivering guests' desired quality (Nitin et al., 2005); or management may evaluate and develop guests' expectations to satisfy them, yet FLEs may ignore the specifications thereby causing service failures (Blešić et al., 2011; Gržinić, 2007).

The third gap which is the service gap is vital as the quality of guests' products depend on employees behind the scenes whilst the service delivery to a greater extent depends on FLEs who do so in the presence of guests as services are inseparable. The fourth gap which relates to communication as a result of hotels' limited communication or exaggerating promises at a website or in an advertisement may not meet guests' expectations. The fifth gap, customers' gap, ensues at the occurrence or combination of any of the first four gaps (Abey, 2011; Gržinić, 2007).

The sixth gap depicts the discrepancy between guests' expectations of service and FLEs' perception, while the seventh gap is the difference between employees' perception and management's perception as a result of the differences in the understanding of guests' expectation between FLMs and FLEs (Luk & Layton, 2002).

The gap model of quality service or products delivery portrays the right grounds for an objective assessment of guests' expectation and perception of service delivery as against that of management (FLMs) and FLEs'. The

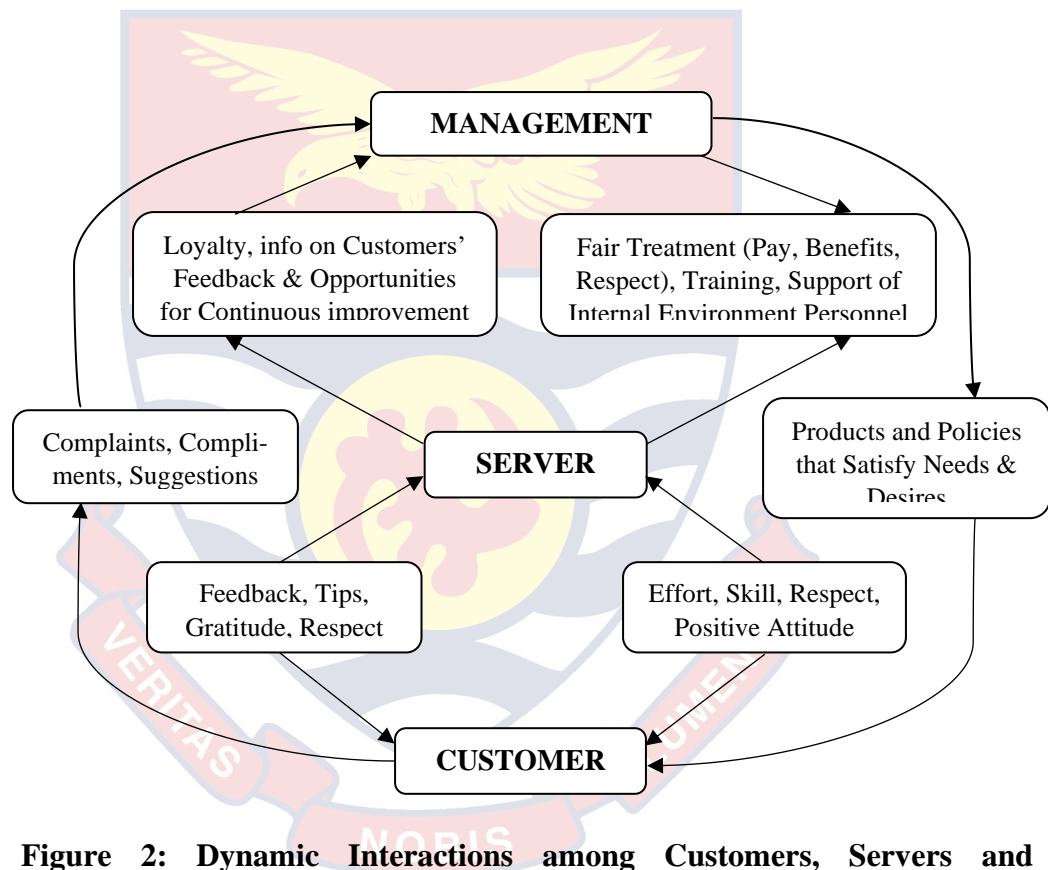
disclosure of the gaps would inadvertently streamline policies and SOPs in addition to the applied SERVQUAL for complete quality management in hotels, a successful FLE-guest interface, curb service failures and enhance guest satisfaction.

### **Dynamic Interactions Framework**

The dynamic interactions framework is credited to Bitran and Lojo (1993). The framework which seeks to offer a context for analysing service operations by focusing on their strengths and weaknesses has three components, namely external environment, internal environment and the customer interface. A firm's external environment can be equated to its historical, cultural, economic and social settings. As shown in Figure 2, within a firm's external environment are its customers and competitors. The external setting involves management discerning and strategizing customers' needs and scoping the opportunities and threats of the competitive environs. In dealing with the external environment, management of firms need to know and understand the needs of their customers and tailor products to meet these needs. It is also within this external environment that management has to deal with competitive forces.

The internal environment, as described by Bitran and Lojo (1993), is the context which directly contains and supports the firm's activities. It is in this environment that key decisions such as resource planning, procedures, system design and implementation, production and supply are taken and implemented. The internal atmosphere excludes the guest, exhibiting only what is related to the establishment. The third component, the guest interface, is the most critical segment of the framework and portrays the firm's 'moment of truth'. This is

where the interaction during service delivery shapes guests' perception by confirming or negating their expectations. This interface which involves an encounter with a guest could be face-to-face, by telephone, mail—especially email, fax or a combination of any of these. It is at this point that the need arises for service operators to pay heed to what Gremler and Brown (1998) highlight as the key interpersonal bonds, namely familiarity, care, friendship, rapport and trust.



**Figure 2: Dynamic Interactions among Customers, Servers and Management**

Source: Bitran & Lojo (1993).

Relating this framework to this study, FLE-guest interface can be conceptualised as an interrelationship among three major actors, namely management (FLM), server (FLE) and guest. Management (FLM) formulates the policies and procedures employed by FLEs to render services to guests. The

FLEs, as the link between management and guests, deliver services to satisfy the needs and desires of guests. Guests, depending on their expectations of FLEs' services and their perceptions of the services rendered by FLEs, may be satisfied and compliment or dissatisfied and complain. This feedback may get to FLMs through FLEs who are fairly treated though trained and assisted by colleagues at the back-of-the-house. They are expected to be loyal to the operation, put in all their effort to exhibit positive attitude when delivering service. This yields positive feedback from guests to FLEs in the form of gratitude, which may be relayed to FLMs. This dynamic performance among guests, FLEs and FLMs is an effect of a successful causal relationship in the whole cycle owing to FLEs' job performance.

Further, Bitran and Logo (1993) noted that FLMs, when designing and managing service delivery systems in a FLE-guest interface, should consider the attitude and behaviour of the two parties in addition to other factors which influence their encounter. This is because a positive or negative reaction from a party may equally meet the same from the other. The entire setting of the hotel and the rest of the employees though not in direct contact with guests can influence the FLE-guest interface by enhancing or marring the relationship. FLMs, though not directly involved in the interface, have powerful influence over it as their reaction to the participants of the encounter would be observed and imitated. Hence, FLMs have to be conscious of the encounter, especially issues relating to respect in the FLE-guest interface because it determines guests' perception and satisfaction of services and products delivered. As such, it is imperative for FLMs to be courteous and pay attention to FLE training as well as issues of control and empowerment.

The main shortfall of the framework is that it is not clear on the place of service failure and its attribution perceived by the guests which would dictate the level of appreciation of the service recovery. Furthermore, it does not present a feedback should the guests become dissatisfied with a service recovery, or the level of satisfaction experienced by guests after the recovery. Nevertheless, the dynamic interactions framework, which clearly illustrates the FLE-guest interface with management, guided the assessment of this interface within the context of the study.

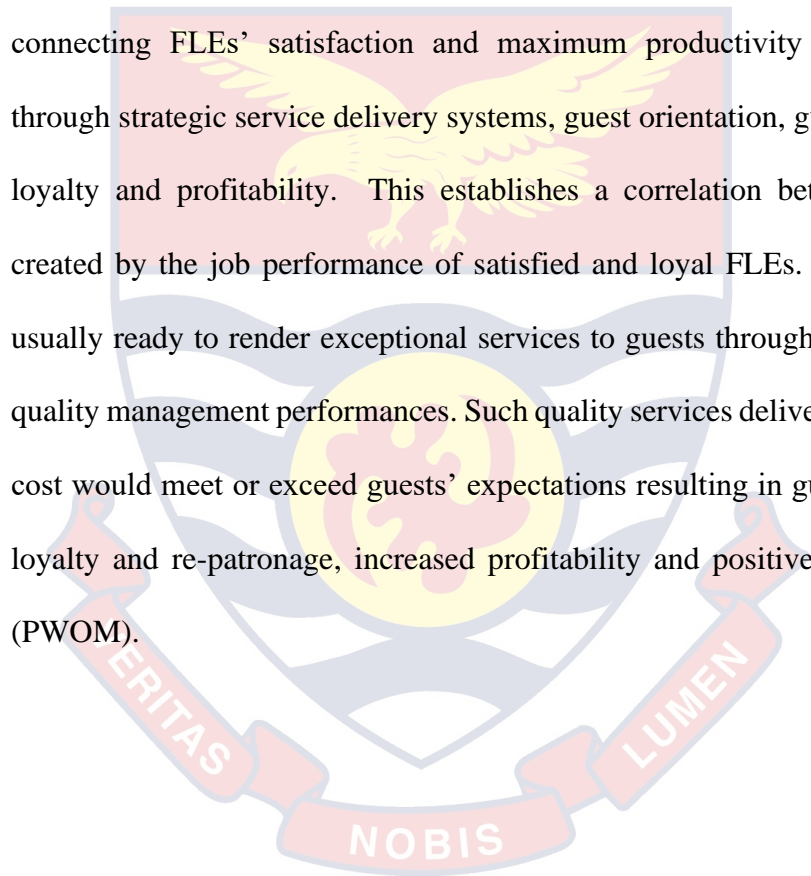
### **The Service Profit Chain Model**

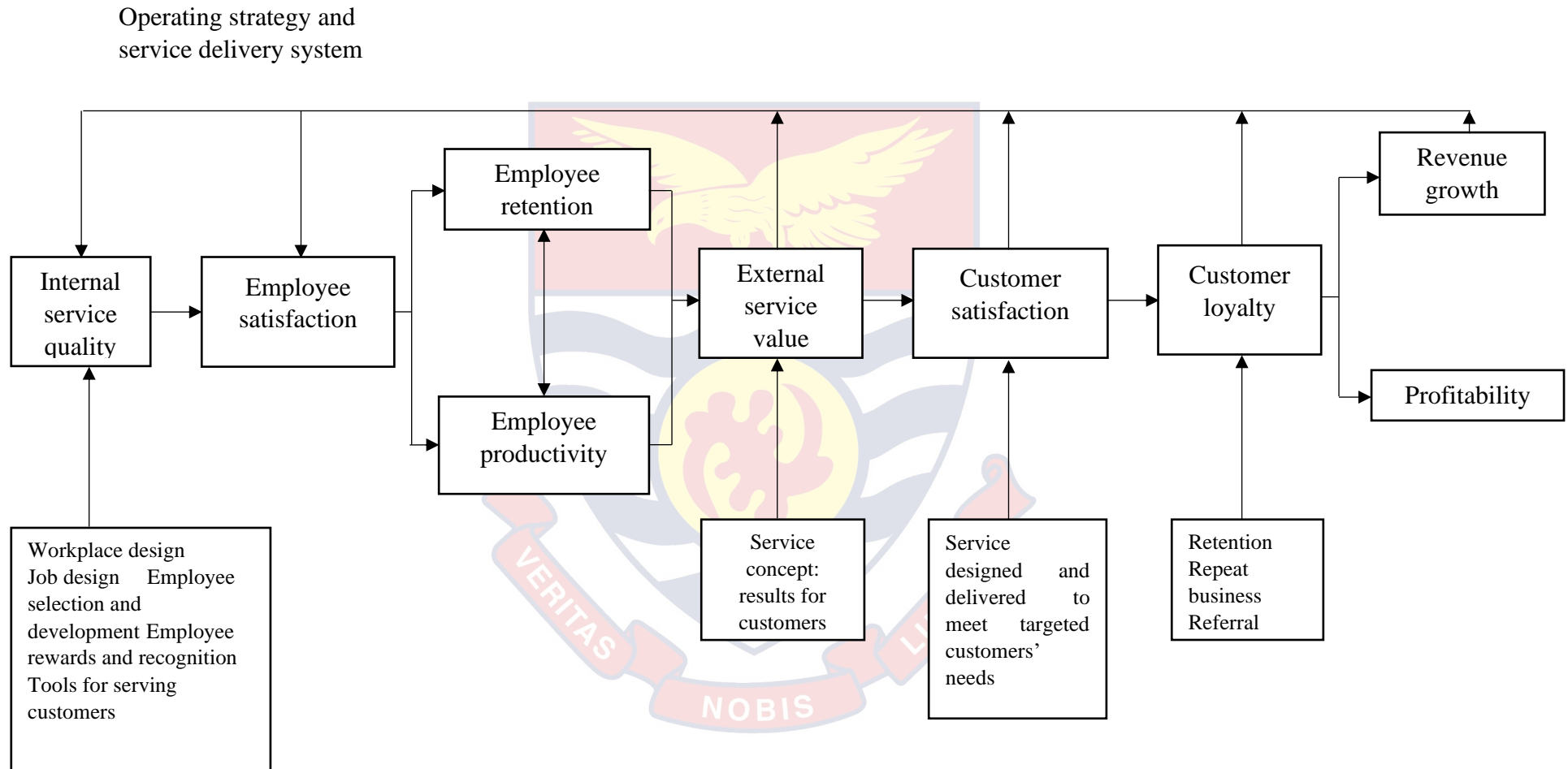
The Service Profit Chain (SPC) model was originally published by Schlesinger and Heskett (1991). It was later expanded by Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser and Schlesinger (1994) and reviewed by Heskett et al. (2008). The model, as presented in Figure 3, provides a framework which posits a relationship between profitability, customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, loyalty and productivity. There are five main tenets of the model. The first is that profit and growth are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty. The second tenet is that loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction. The third tenet is that satisfaction is largely influenced by the value of services provided to customers. Again, value is created by satisfied, loyal and productive employees and finally, employee satisfaction in turn results primarily from high-quality support services and policies which enable employees to deliver results to customers (Heskett et al., 1994).

The issue of leadership is very important within the service profit chain model (Fig. 3). A leadership approach which centres on positively supporting

both the customer and employees will lead to higher productivity and growth and overall success of the chain. Relating the service profit chain in successful service failure recovery in hotels, it is expected that a hotel which offers superior internal service quality to its FLEs through strategic human resource development (HRD) and treating them as guests build loyalty in its employees.

These FLEs in return also maximise satisfied and loyal guests by delivering services designed to meet targeted guests' needs. This is realised by connecting FLEs' satisfaction and maximum productivity after the HRD through strategic service delivery systems, guest orientation, guest satisfaction, loyalty and profitability. This establishes a correlation between the value created by the job performance of satisfied and loyal FLEs. These FLEs are usually ready to render exceptional services to guests through internal service quality management performances. Such quality services delivered at the lowest cost would meet or exceed guests' expectations resulting in guest satisfaction, loyalty and re-patronage, increased profitability and positive word-of-mouth (PWOM).





**Figure 3: The Service-Profit Chain**

Source: Heskett et al. (2008).

Wilson et al. (2008) also demonstrated that profitability and growth are primarily stimulated by guest loyalty as profit is a result of guest loyalty created by guest satisfaction, a function of value delivered to guests. This in turn has been identified by Heskett et al. (1994) as a major contributing factor to FLE satisfaction and loyalty, which is directly related to the internal quality or value created for FLEs. In other words, FLMs' intention to increase the financial performance and growth of an operation begins the measurement of causal relationships in the entire chain, driven by FLE satisfaction (Heskett & Sasser, 2010). Treating current FLEs customarily to be satisfied, committed and loyal to their job will invariably create the future's satisfied, committed and loyal guests and ultimately, profitability and growth. However, FLMs should know when to serve FLEs well and when to dismiss one in order to boost the hotel's business and revenue (Heskett et al., 1994).

Some researchers who provided empirical studies of the entire SPC supported Heskett et al.'s (1994) original proposition of the creation of lifetime guests through the intricate relationship between FLE satisfaction, guest retention and profitability. Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2006) support the view that hotels which endeavour to continually exceed guests' expectations normally gain competitive advantage over their competitors.

Most studies reviewed emphasise the importance of each FLE, guest and the resultant profitability with the correlation of the SPC portraying a significant and substantial statistics. However, its effect will vary significantly according to the kind of service operation and the level of service being offered. This has resulted in the SPC being criticised by a number of researchers. Hogleve, Iseke, Derfuss and Eller (2017) assert that there is the need to incorporate harmonious



paths in the SPC framework; they also challenge the implicit SPC basis that companies should capitalise on FLE satisfaction and external service quality to increase a firm's performance. Hogleve et al. (2017) again draw attention to the fact that the meta-analytic structural equation models indicate that internal service quality translates into service performance through several mechanisms beyond FLE satisfaction; they also highlight the importance of service encounter and guest relationship features for guest responses.

The SPC model clearly illustrates the FLE-guest interface with respect to the relationship among the internal and external guests of hotels and outputs of QSD. It also consists of the most appropriate variables for this study as compared to other examined service improvement theories. However, the SPC model has a number of limitations such as the illustration of more service quality without the imminent service failure and its recovery for the service industry. Service failure could occur owing to the human-related hotels, a service sector for which the SPC is being recommended. Coupled with this is the unique attributes of service such as perishability, spontaneity and intangibility of service processes and outputs in service delivery.

Although there are some studies which support all the linkages, there is a need for a study to test the linkages in the chain by simultaneously collecting data from FLEs, guests and hotels' FLMs on service failure and its recovery for a stronger support for the extended SPC. Also, while it highlights how FLEs' service performances directly affect their satisfaction and guests, it excludes drawbacks such as guest dissatisfaction, NWOM and loss of revenue to the hotel which extends beyond the SPC chain. Another problem with the SPC framework is its failure to come out with dimensions guiding the study or the

service failure attribution perceived by guests which dictates their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of a service failure recovery. Furthermore, it does not present a feedback, should guests become dissatisfied with the service recovery.

Despite the shortcomings of the SPC, the model would be adapted for this study by proposing an expanded version of the framework where new predictors of FLMs and FLE-guest associated outcomes would be added—a new dimension to the SPC theory. It will also define the relationships better and equip the hotels with a clearer notion of achieving revenue growth. Finally, although researchers have ascertained that FLE QSD is ultimately related to guest fidelity and a hotel's profitability, it is necessary that an empirical study is conducted to gain an even footing with other theories or models in the Ghanaian context.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a review of theories and frameworks underpinning the study. The chapter was in two sections. The first section discussed and critiqued the application of the attribution and justice theories in understanding the FLE-guest interface in the service failure recovery process in hotels. Selected models— Functional flexibility model, Gap model and Dynamic Interactions Framework— used in service-related issues were also examined. The chapter ends with a discussion of the service profit chain model adapted for the conceptual framework of the study, namely the FLE-guest service failure recovery framework. The next chapter reviews the extant empirical literature on the FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery in hotels.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES-GUESTS INTERFACE IN SERVICE**  
**FAILURE RECOVERY**

**Introduction**

This chapter presents an empirical review on issues relating to hotel frontline employees (FLEs) and guests' interface in service failure recovery. Issues discussed include service failure, service failure recovery strategies, challenges encountered by FLEs in service failure recovery and measures put in place by managers to facilitate FLEs' service failure recovery. Other issues explored are the influence of FLEs' training on their service failure recovery, guests' perception and satisfaction with FLEs' performance in service failure recovery and benefits of service failure recovery.

**FLEs-Guest Interface in Hotels**

FLE-guest interface is very critical for the delivery of quality service in hotels. Hence, various researchers (e.g., Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo & Vázquez-Carrasco, 2014; Melero-Polo, & Vázquez-Carrasco, 2014; Mousavi, Ashraf, Rajaey & Toosi, 2011; Proenca et al., 2017; Thurau et al., 2010) have looked at this interface, though from different perspectives. Their findings accentuate the fact that this interface is very prominent in-service encounters.

Hotel guests often know that service delivery is not always excellent, yet they have become accustomed to expect hotels to do everything in their power to avert the occurrence of service failure during service delivery. In this regard, the role of FLEs becomes pivotal in ensuring that hotel guests are

satisfied with the hotel's services (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2014). FLEs who deliver the service or co-produce it with guests have to deal with every situation including service failure recovery. FLEs are expected to carry out their responsibilities very well so that guests would want to revisit, and even recommend the hotels to relations and friends.

In highlighting the importance of this interface within the context of upscale hotels, Bock et al. (2016) noted that FLEs' positive behaviours during the service delivery evoke guests' gratitude, whilst negative behaviours might evoke liabilities for the hotel. In a similar vein, Wetzel, Hammerschmidt and Sablah (2014) and Xia and Kukar-Kinney (2013) revealed that guests' gratitude emanating from supportive FLE-guest encounters promotes mutual behaviours beneficial to the hotel and the guest. While the hotel stands to gain from repurchase intentions, revisits, recommendations and positive word of mouth (PWOM), guests' interest would be looked out for by FLEs without any string attached and FLEs will be willing to meet or exceed guests' expectation.

A review of the empirical studies on the FLE-guest interface shows that a number of issues shape the formation and the interaction between the two key actors. For instance, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) in a study of the impact of new media on customer relationships revealed that the tremendous rise of media has highly disrupted the management of hotel (FLE) and guest relationships. The interference of current media channels like Google, TripAdvisor, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter continuously affect operations' marketing messages negatively, making it more difficult to control brand images and relationship outcomes, especially that of the FLE-guest in hotels.

Conversely, the proliferation of the electronic media has also equipped guests as active market players and co-producers in the FLE-guest interface, to contribute meaningfully towards services rendered to them and the growth of hotels through recommendations and complaints (Thurau et al., 2010). Although the interference of current media may have a negative effect on the FLE-guest interface, Cambra-Fierro et al. (2014) have indicated that the interaction between FLEs and guests can curtail guests' movement to other competitive hotels.

Furthermore, Gazzoli, Hancer and Kim (2013) and Van Vaerenbergh et al. (2014) found that FLE job satisfaction and commitment towards the FLE-guest relationship mediates the relationship between FLEs' level of guest orientation and guests' perception of interaction quality. The quality of the interaction positively relates to guest satisfaction. This might be because satisfied and committed FLEs with positive attitude and conduct would be ever ready to go the extra mile to creditably offer quality service to guests, resulting in a greater guest satisfaction. However, the findings of Chiang et al. (2014) on the influence of job demand variability and the moderating roles of job content and job context factors revealed that FLEs often felt unsatisfied or stressed during the interface with the hotel guests. They noted that FLEs working in three 5-star hotels in Hong Kong felt stressed whilst rendering services to guests because of their dependence on their FLMs in decision-making. FLEs could jeopardise their careers by not consulting their managers during guest encounters as it was considered as subverting the FLM's authority.

In a similar vein, Brown and Lam (2008) report of FLEs feeling stressed because their interactions with guests sometimes caused them emotional labour

with negative repercussions. This is because FLEs are expected to smile frequently, be friendly and enthusiastic in all their service interactions, which sometimes affected their psychological well-being. Some FLEs found it difficult to contain their true feelings or emotions when serving guests. Tensions between FLEs' inner feelings and the requirements of outward display do cause stress and burnout, defeating the essence of their duty to take care of guests' needs, even after a service failure.

### **Service Failure in Upscale Hotels**

Service quality remains a critical issue in the hospitality industry. Although upscale hotels are globally recognised for their excellence in management, high standards, operations and innovations, they are not insulated from service failures. Lewis and McCann (2004) have conceded that service failures are inevitable both in the process and outcome of service delivery. Even though hotel guests often know that service delivery is not always excellent, they have grown to expect upscale hotels to do everything in their power to avert the occurrence of service failure during service delivery. This may perhaps be due to the higher price guests pay to enjoy the services of these upscale hotels (Loo & Leung, 2018). Hence, logically, they expect value for money. It is against this backdrop that a lot of attention is being paid to the subject of service failure within the hospitality industry.

Hence, Ghana government's enactment of the Legislative Instrument (L.I.) of 2016 for Accommodation Enterprise (L.I. 2239) and Food and Beverage Enterprise (L.I. 2238) for GTA Quality Assurance department. These LIs are in accordance with section 32 of the Act to ensure that service and

product standards are maintained. Non-compliance of these LIs which do not meet guests' expectations require hotels to receive and address guests' complaints when service failure occurs. As the law explicitly requires hotels to comply with the statutes, management have to engage polite, pleasant, professional and skilled staff properly trained for their duties, and to especially pay attention to individual guests' needs. Other requirements are suitable ambience and décor of the hotels, AC system muffled for sound, electrical facilities and hygienic conditions maintained, guestrooms and other areas subjected to appropriate pest control measures, and a complimentary Wi-Fi throughout the hotel.

A number of studies claim guests evaluate service quality by comparing what they feel hotels should offer against the actual service performance; this could be a success or failure (Blešić et al., 2011; Lewis & McCann, 2004; Sarlas, 2017; Wilson et al., 2008). Ford, Sturman and Heaton (2012) for instance in their study of hotel guests in the United States noted that both new and repeat guests had certain expectations which drive quality and value evaluation of their experiences. These expectations bordered on what the hotels could or should do in offering services; how they should be done; how the tangible settings should appear and even how the FLEs providing the service should appear and behave. Guests also envisage what capabilities they should have to perform their roles or tasks in co-producing their experience and what the value of the successfully delivered service should be.

Looking at the subject of service failure within the hospitality industry (Abou Taleb & Abou Kamar, 2013; Mensah-Kufuor et al, 2015; Kanyan et al., 2016; Lee, 2018; Ogechi & Igbojekwe, 2015), it can be concluded that service

failure occurs when there is a mismatch between what guests expect, what they actually get and what they perceive after the experience. Thus, hotels breaking the service expectation promise is the single most significant way guests could be dissatisfied (Sarlas, 2017). An examination of related empirical studies points to the fact that there are four main categories of failures. These relate to service system failures, employee attitude, guest-related and unusual problems.

Researchers such as Abou Taleb and Abou Kamar (2013), Lewis and McCann (2004), Mensah-Kufuor et al. (2015) and Ogechi and Igbojekwe (2015) have noted that a flaw in the service system delivery can and does negatively impact upon the service delivered to guests. Issues of service or product defects, erroneous guest bills, unavailable service, and inadequate support of technological services have been cited severally to this effect. Lewis and McCann (2004) for instance in a study of the hotel industry in the United Kingdom found out that slow service was a challenge for hotel guests. This slow service was experienced both in the restaurant and during check-in/out processes. In a similar vein, Loo and Leung (2018) identified that the challenge with Taipei's luxury hotel industry was failures of its product offerings. They further explained that the guests were generally unsatisfied with the rooms, breakfast and facilities of the hotels. Guests also complained of the unpleasant smell inside the hotel, poor lighting of corridors, soundproofing problems of rooms, tasteless meals and uncomfortable beddings.

Regarding employee-associated service failures, FLEs' behaviour with respect to their arrogance, inefficient and poor response to guests' needs and lack of knowledge of the hotel's services and products were severally reported (Abou Taleb & Abou Kamar, 2013; Ekiş, et al., 2012; Lewis & McCann, 2004;



Loo & Leung, 2018; Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015; Ogechi & Igbojekwe, 2015). This category of failures are the most frequently reported cases by guests (Berezina et al., 2016). Choi and Chu (2001) have noted that there is a significant relationship between service encounters between hotel guests and FLEs and hotel guests' perception and satisfaction with hotels. This implies that if the service encounter is negative, perception and satisfaction are negatively impacted on and vice versa.

For instance, the results of Ogechi and Igbojekwe (2015) in evaluating service recovery strategies in 11 4-star and 5-star hotels in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria, showed that most of the service failures were attributed to the hotels' front desk FLEs. The major causes of service failures were how FLEs responded to guests' needs and requests, inadequate technological support, guests' failure to use services or products as informed, and lack of good communication skill by the FLEs. Similarly, from the Taipei case stated above, Loo and Leung (2018) reported of hotel FLEs who were inattentive and unhelpful to guests. Guests also complained of unprofessional FLEs who conversed loudly while guests were around.

Evidence from the literature further suggests that the behaviour of other hotel guests can result in service failure for other guests. Even though the behaviour of some hotel guests may sometimes be outside the sphere of control of the hotel, it can significantly impact on the hotel's service quality perception held by guests. Researchers have provided evidence to suggest that a guest's dissatisfaction with a hospitality firm can emanate from their interactions with other hotel guests (Finsterwalder & Kupperlwieser, 2011; Grönroos, 2020; Grove & Fisk, 1997; Harris & Reynolds, 2003; Mensah & Dei Mensah, 2013).

Grove and Fisk (1997) for example in their study of customer experiences in a Florida theme park noted that the behaviour of guests such as talking loudly, smoking, jumping queues, negatively affected other guests' service experience. Huang (2008) also reported of a guest who complained of encountering another guest smoking in a non-smoking area in a café. FLEs or FLMs can monitor and/or manage these situations by diplomatically cautioning guests to curtail such behaviours by guests who dissatisfy others (Finsterwalder & Kupperlwieser, 2011).

From a different perspective, Smith et al. (as cited in Lee, 2018) also identified two types of service failures, namely outcome and process. They described outcome related failures as occurring when the service provider does not deliver the core service they are mandated to deliver. In this case, the guest has an expectation of the service provider to deliver in a particular manner. When the service provider fails to meet that expectation, service failure occurs. The system failures discussed earlier (Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015; Ogechi & Igbojekwe, 2015) fall under this category of service failure.

The process related failures on the other hand relate to the service failures emanating from the manner or procedure of service delivery. A typical example given for this failure was inattentive and unfriendly FLEs not attending to the requests of hotel guests (Lee, 2018). The empirical evidences examined under the employee-associated service issues earlier (Abou Taleb & Abou Kamar, 2013; Ekis, et al., 2012; Lewis & McCann, 2004; Loo & Leung, 2018; Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015; Ogechi, & Igbojekwe, 2015) fall under this category of service failures.

## Service Failure Recovery Strategies in Upscale Hotels

Service failure recovery has to do with the service recovery performance which requires firms to rightly offer service or products the second time after a service failure. Since it can be challenging for hotels to consistently provide satisfactory services to guests, service failure recovery has been recognised as a solution to the problem (Cheng et al., 2018; Wen & Geng-qing Chi, 2013).

A number of service failure recovery strategies in hotels have been catalogued in the literature. The dominant themes explored within the service failure recovery literature include: evaluation of hotels' service recovery strategies (DiGioia, 2018; Kennedy, 2018; Lewis & McCann, 2004; Love, 2018; Ogechi & Igbojekwe, 2015; Suprpto & Hashym, 2010); guests' preferences for service recovery (Lee, 2018); implementation of service recovery (Lewis & McCann, 2004; Schumacher & Komppula, 2016); explanation of 'if', 'when', and 'how' service recovery is aided (Bradley & Sparks, 2012; Lockwood & Deng, 2004) and FLEs' perspectives, empowerment, service recovery and guest loyalty (Schumacher & Komppula, 2016; Wamuyu, 2016).

The concern of hotel managers is most often to ensure that a problem is immediately corrected (Lockwood & Deng, 2004) as this could affect guests' loyalty to their businesses (Hoffman & Chung, 1999). The highly competitive nature of hotel business requires that hotels promptly recover failed services in order to continually meet their guest's expectations (Liat et al., 2017).

Hotels basically employ two main categories of recovery strategies, namely FLE service effort and monetary incentives (Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2017) or monetary and non-monetary compensation (Fu et al., 2015) to recover

service failures. With regard to the FLE service effort which is also non-monetary in nature, the strategies employed range from acknowledgement, apology, correction of problem, provision of an explanation of why the service failed, FLE follow-up and finally, the hotel taking responsibility.

Ogechi and Igbojekwe (2015), in evaluating service recovery strategies in Nigerian hotels, discovered that all the hotels utilised strategies such as responding to complaints, apologies and empowerment of FLEs to handle guest service failures and/or promptly resolve the problems. In a study of hotel guests and service recovery in Hong Kong, Lee, Singh and Chan (2011) reported that apologies were the most frequently used recovery strategies. They further noted that FLEs also adopted the tactic of explaining service failure incidents to guests

On the other hand, monetary incentives as a form of recovery comprised of financial compensation, food or drink offered, discount given and refund made. In the same study conducted by Hoffman and Chung (1999), hotels offered on-the-spot discount, providing guests with discount coupon for future exchanges, and free upgrades for guests. In addition to the implementation of compensatory recoveries to guests, Suprpto and Hashym (2010), in investigating service recovery strategies and guest satisfaction in Yogyakarta-Indonesian hotels, found that compensation was an effective strategy in handling service failure. These hotels also showed that a reflection of the role of distributive, procedural and interactional fairness congruently were partially or wholly used to recover service failures. In effect, although the three strategies were effective with the most effective being apology (interactional), followed by recovery speed (procedural), then compensation (distributive), guests also expected to be treated with courtesy and respect.

Similar findings on compensation were also made by Wamuyu (2016) about 5-star hotels in Kenya. The study revealed that distributive justice in conjunction with other service recovery strategies had a significant influence on guests' overall satisfaction with the service recovery. Compensation is found to be the most powerful determinant of guest satisfaction as it signifies seriousness of the hotels in valuing their guests and their eagerness to have them revisit their hotel. Although the respondents were satisfied with the compensation of a discount and room upgrade recovery, majority indicated that they were not in the same state prior to the service failure and complaint.

While the findings from empirical studies point to the fact that guests consider monetary compensation (distributive justice) to be the most effective in recovering failed services, hotels are less eager to implement such strategies but rather prefer corrective measures (Ogechi & Igbojekwe, 2015). For the guests, monetary compensatory recovery strategies denote the hotels and FLEs' earnestness and eagerness in valuing their guests and has the tendency of making them more loyal to the hotel. But for the hotels, offering such compensation might not add value in a situation where the recovery process is well implemented. Secondly, to the hotels, the cost implications for compensatory recovery strategies make them less favourable to adopt.

Nevertheless, Roschk and Gelbrich (2014) have opined that monetary compensation may not be an optimal method if the service failure results in a psychological loss to the customer. In their paper on 'identifying appropriate compensation types for service failures: a meta-analytic and experimental analysis', they argued that when guests suffer lack of attention from FLEs, the guests suffer psychological loss which threatens their status and self-esteem.

This situation cannot be resolved with monetary compensation but rather apologies in order to re-establish the self-esteem of the guests will be more effective.

### **FLEs' Handling of Service Failure Recovery in Upscale Hotels**

Service failure and recovery are very important issues for hotels. As discussed earlier, regardless of how hotels operate, service failures will definitively occur. Hence, service recovery remains a critical second chance for hotels to satisfy and possibly retain their guests (Chen et al., 2018; Daskin & Kasim, 2016; Koc, 2019; Schuckert, Liang, Law & Sun, 2019). In the pursuit of service recovery, the role of FLEs cannot be overlooked. The literature abounds with several theoretical and empirical studies which have examined the role of FLEs in this cause (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2014; Suprpto & Hashym, 2010) and the resultant effect of their actions on customers and the company's operations (Cadwallar et al., 2010; Gounaris, 2008; Tax et al., 1998).

Boshoff and Allen (2000, p. 1033) describe employee service recovery act as a 'process by which employees self-consciously attempt to recover service failures in an effective manner'. Liao (2007, p. 476) also looks at it as 'behaviours which customer service employees who directly handle customer complaints engage to recover customer satisfaction and loyalty after service failures.' It is therefore important that hotels manage FLEs' attitude and performance because they play an important role in delivering and recovering service (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2014).

A number of factors shape FLE's service failure recovery efforts. These factors include, but are not limited to, FLEs motivation, skilfulness (from all

forms of training) job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational support. First of all, the literature is indicative that FLEs' performance in service failure recovery is dependent on how motivated and skilful they are in handling service failure complaints (Masoud & Abu Hmeidan, 2013). It has been found that trained FLEs relatively perform on the job better than their untrained colleagues (Boudreau et al., 2001).

Furthermore, Ashill et al. (2008), Tax and Brown (1998) and Babakus et al. (2003) have posited that FLEs trained in guest service have higher job satisfaction. This may be due to the fact that the trained FLEs feel they are better equipped to handle situations with regard to guest service and hence, are more committed to ensuring that service failures are dealt with. Sweetman (2001) further extended the argument by stating that trained FLEs are more committed to their organisations and thus, have a higher sense of making things work for the guest in order to retain them with the business. Gassoli et al. (2013) found that FLEs who are competent and confident about their capabilities find pleasure in delivering the required guest service for guest satisfaction.

### **Challenges Encountered by FLEs in Service Failure Recovery in Upscale Hotels**

While it has been established that service failure recovery is desirable, its implementation is not without challenges. FLEs are confronted with a myriad of issues in their efforts in recovering service failures. For the purpose of review, these issues established in the extant literature have been categorised into three, namely the FLE, other employees and management/organisational structures and procedures.

At the individual level, some FLEs have been found to lack the requisite personal and on-the-job skills to effectively recover service failures (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Liao & Chuang, 2004). For example, most jobs require emotional labour from the FLEs as they constantly interact with guests. FLE actions, according to Johnston and Michel (2008), are amongst the least causes of service failures. However, these employees bear the brunt of dealing with dissatisfied guests. In the absence of appropriate service recovery support system for FLEs, they can become stressed and negatively disposed to assist aggrieved guests. Hence, the service failure and recovery process can put a lot of strain and stress on the FLEs (Koc, 2017) and those who do not have the skills to emotionally deal with the situation may not be able to address the concerns of the guests.

The second issue observed was the challenges emanating from guests. Bitner, Booms and Mohr (1994), in their study of 'critical service encounters from the employee's viewpoint', reported that some guests, due to intoxication, create problems for other guests as well as for the FLEs. Verbal and physical abuse by guests towards other guests and FLEs were also noted. Lewis and Clacher (2001) also made similar observations in the UK. In a case involving a customer and a FLE at McDonald's, a fast-food chain, a customer physically attacked a FLE over the absence of a drinking straw at the condiment section of the facility (CNN, 2019). Bitner et al. (1994) further reported of guests who broke company policies or rules and generally uncooperative guests. In almost all the instances, the FLEs were not able to deliver satisfactory services to the guests' unruly behaviour. Even though guests may not always be right, firms often project this view by overly focusing on the treatment accorded them. This



unconsciously puts the FLEs in a helpless situation where they need to constantly shield their emotions and frustrations with the guests. This can eventually affect the FLE-management relationship.

### **FLMs' Support for FLEs' Service Failure Recovery Efforts**

Beyond the challenges FLEs encounter during service failure recovery performance is the need for FLMs to provide the necessary support for FLEs' service recovery efforts. These supports could be in the form of empowerment, performance appraisals, motivation and rewards. Reward management schemes can be used to motivate FLEs to deliver (Fay & Thompson, 2001). Motivation has also been identified as a key determinant in altering FLE behaviour and is vital in improving FLEs' job performance (Fay & Thompson, 2001).

Apart from rewards, FLEs' motivation sometimes stems from their perception of their hotel's (FLM) support for them and the jobs they perform (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Kraimer and Wayne (2004) described these organisational supports to be in the form of policies, practices and treatments targeted at FLEs which convey a sense of the organisation's concern about employee welfare or not. Organisational policies and structures have been found to be a challenging factor in FLEs effort to recover service failure. Lewis and Clacher (2001), in their study of theme parks in the UK, indicated that employees were sometimes unable to respond to customer enquires or failures because they either did not have the knowledge or the authorisation to respond to the situation. Sometimes, employees are not given the responsibility and authority to act towards recovering the failed service.

In reporting on perceived organisational support and its relation to FLEs' work-related attitude and outcomes, Conger and Kanungo (1988) argue that when FLEs have access to strategic directions of the hotel for instance, it creates within them some sense of meaning and purpose which enables them to act in manners which align with the hotel's goals. Under the subject of organisational support is the issue of FLE empowerment. It is very critical in-service recovery and has been found to positively impact upon service recovery performance (Yavas et al., 2010). FLEs are able to deal with service failure incidents efficiently when empowered (Schumacher & Komppula, 2016).

Empowerment is concerned with the autonomy given to FLEs in order to take decisions at work. This autonomy can be looked at from two perspectives, namely structural and psychological (Proenca et al., 2017). From the structural perspective, the emphasis is on the policies, practices and organisational structures which grant FLEs the power to act when the need arises. From the psychological point of view, it is the FLEs' perception of how much power or control they have with regards to taking decision within the sphere of their work.

Areas in which hotels empower their FLEs is by granting them access to information, (Kouzes & Posner, 2003), access to organisational resources such as materials, budget, time and space (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). They also gain the support from superiors in the form of aid, approval and legitimacy of decisions taken. Thus, it is expected that empowered FLEs contribute in ultimately recovering service to ensure guest satisfaction (He, Li & Lai, 2011). In effect, Ashill et al. (2001) argue that when FLEs are empowered to work, they exhibit more control over the process. Boshoff and Allen (2000), in their

study of FLEs in the banking sector, also noted that empowered employees dealt more effectively with service failures hence the opposite can also exist.

Again, FLEs' performance influenced by hotels' support and/or their empowerment has been positioned as a predictor of job satisfaction and commitment within the literature. This means that FLEs who enjoy their work are likely to perform better on the job and be more committed to their hotels (Prentice et al., 2018). Prentice et al. (2018), in a study on 'Performance driven outcomes - the case of FLEs in the hospitality sector', found that where FLEs' sense of achievement was high, they felt more satisfied with their job and by extension delivered high service quality and recovery.

Performance appraisal is another support that FLMs can give to FLEs. Performance appraisal, according to Deb (2009), looks at the assessment of an employee's performance. Performance appraisals are desirable because they provide an opportunity for FLMs to encourage FLEs desirable performances and discourage the undesirable ones. This is possible because of the close connection between behaviour and feedback during the appraisal process. The process also enables employees' voice to be heard and make input into their job roles. The essence of FLEs' service performance assessment is to aid and improve upon their performance. However, there are variances in how managers and subordinates, in this case FLMs and FLEs, rate the performances of FLEs in service failure recovery.

Kim and Carlson (2016) noted that the existing literature substantially shows that there are weak levels of agreement between FLEs and their FLMs with regards to the performance of these FLEs. Fleenor et al. (2010), for instance, noted that FLEs tend to rate themselves higher than their FLMs did.

Sedikides et al. (2003) noted that it is to be expected that employees evaluate their performance more positively than their managers will. Therefore, Love (2016) has posited that in order to ensure the clarity of FLEs' role in service failure recovery, there is the need for FLMs to be especially consistent and clear with an establishment's message on how the service delivery should look and feel; this goes a long way to add the 'wow' factor to the services offered.

Sarlas (2017) suggests that the normal service standards expected by guests should be meaningfully stated by FLMs for FLEs to effectively carry them out. For example, Sarlas' (2017) study shows that standards, if well-conceived, would guide and energise FLEs in four ways, namely to focus on guests, clarify the service task, convey a sense of priority and provide benchmarks against which FLEs can judge their own performance. In effect, while service standards orient FLEs' day-to-day reality of service delivery on guests, FLMs can equally assess FLEs' and the hotel's performance. Lahap et al. (2016), for example, found that regular discussions between FLMs and FLEs is essential to ensure organisational success. However, their research reports that majority of the hotels' FLMs in Malaysian hotels did not have regular discussions with FLEs on matters relating to their job differences or they rarely discussed the problems encountered during service delivery. It was also revealed that most FLEs do not know their hotels' goals or the purpose for which they were employed other than profit. Lahap et al. also noted that FLMs pay little attention to FLEs' problems with guest service delivery.

Furthermore, a common erroneous assumption by FLMs is that FLEs understand guests' service expectations of service recovery and priorities by virtue of them being hotels' boundary liners (Sarlas, 2017). His study revealed

that FLMs had more accurate grasp of guests' service recovery expectations than FLEs. Obviously, if FLMs are more aware of guests' needs but not directly responsible for delivering service to guests' expectations, and FLEs who are supposed to do so are not sure of how to deliver excellent service or they think they know how but are wrong, then the FLMs do not really care about FLEs delivering or recovering service failure to guests' expectations.

Subsequently, Mensah-Kufuor et al. (2015) suggest FLMs should create an atmosphere which encourages guests to voice their concerns, capitalise on regular guest surveys, provide outlets for complaints, such as guests' comment cards and train receptionists who should be ready to listen to guest complaints. Such undertaking would furnish FLMs and FLEs with vital data, which when effectively utilised would enhance their understanding of guests' needs and behaviours. Also, it would assist hotels' management in designing systems for an efficient service delivery for guest satisfaction.

To conclude, the absence of FLMs' support for FLEs becomes a problem for FLEs' effective service failure recovery. Hartline, Maxham and McKee (2000) have reiterated that the existence of FLMs' concern and support provides a working environment of trust and helpfulness. Hence, FLEs who perceive greater support from FLMs have a higher sense of obligation to reciprocate and vice versa.

### **Effect of Training on FLEs' Service Failure Recovery in Upscale Hotels**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century FLE plays a vital role in uplifting the image of his/her respective hotel, especially upscale ones. If FLEs are competent enough to perform tasks, there will be positive outcomes for hotels especially in the area

of quality service provision and consequently increase the hotel's productivity. It is therefore necessary to develop FLEs' knowledge and skills to enable them effectively and efficiently perform their duties should the need arise for them to recover services which did not meet guests' expectations.

Service recovery training is crucial for hotel associates because it is impossible to eliminate all mistakes. Many hoteliers now utilise service recovery training programmes (Brown, 2000). For example, Ritz-Carlton trains a core value set called 'the gold standards' which encompass the '20 basics' which serve as guideposts for FLEs' recovery actions (Brown, 2000). Also, numerous hotel companies train the LEARN process (listen, empathise, apologise, react and notify) or the 'five steps to better service recovery' (REACT), namely react, empathise, apologise, communicate and train (Love, 2018). One company stated that its objectives for training were to 'encourage' and enable trainees to provide 'exceptional' and 'personalised' service consistently and evenly to guests for them 'to leave here anxious for the next customer complaint' (Sturdy, 2000, p. 1089). The concern here is to instil a mind-set in the employees to seek continuous service delivery improvements.

Kanyan (2016) indicated the need for all FLEs of a restaurant to go through training and development to enable them effectively offer high quality service to meet guests' expectations. She also found that it would enhance the FLE-guest relationship and that of the hotel. In addition, FLEs' skills developed and nurtured are vital to meet the long-term goals in embracing guests' expectations through innovation and consistent quality guest service delivery (QGSD).

Even though there are several training programmes and modules designed for FLEs, there appears to be some challenges with their suitability for the intended target. It emerged that most of the training programmes focused on knowledge acquisition and proficiency to the detriment of exhibition of skill sets. For instance, a study conducted by Brown et al. (2013) revealed that most hospitality programmes and courses were not structured to be in tune with hotels' desired training objectives but rather satisfy the academic knowledge mostly. The absence of hotel schools in Ghana and minimal collaboration between the hospitality industry, especially hotels, and most technical and vocational institutions offering hospitality programmes with respect to curriculum and internships might have contributed to this disorder.

Furthermore, Chapman and Lovell (2006) reveal that it is not just about the level of knowledge and proficiency, but also the exhibition of different types of skills suitable for the specific guest segment and the characteristics of the business establishment, such as hotels. For instance, a waiter may proficiently carry plates, but would not be suitable for a 5-star hotel's restaurant due to the hotel's qualitative level of service. Consequently, Muller (2009) reveals that upscale hotels' training should start with the recruitment process where the required knowledge and skills to carry out the duties are spelt out.

Walker (2010) reveals five main types of FLE training which upscale hotels select from, namely apprentice training, simulation, certification, corporate-required and on-the-job training (OJT) which most hotels usually carry out in FLEs' training programmes. Equally crucial for FLEs' training is cross functional training (CFT). These programmes effectively maintain SOPs

to meet hotel guests' expectations. In addition, Brown (2000) mentioned skill demonstrations, role-playing and commercially prepared video training films by the Educational Institute of American Hotel & Lodging Association and Cable Hospitality Training Television, a hospitality educational operation in Louisville, Kentucky, which provides satellite training broadcasts to hotels.

Other training programmes are Lobster Ink, a unique training website for Kempinski, Accor, Marriott International, Hilton and Mandarin Oriental hotels' global workforce. The blend of operational curriculum of hotel industry-accredited training courses covers a wide range of role-specific training needs of upscale hotels designed to accelerate experience across common job functions. It was developed by leading subject matter experts to empower multinational teams globally with specific knowledge and skills and build their competences to guarantee QSD across departments. The online training sessions are accomplished with examinations and follow-ups to ensure that the skills necessary to meet guests' expectations have been studied, demonstrated, practiced and mastered by FLEs for guests' notable experiences.

Consequently, the erratic volume of guests' notable experiences and the availability of competent FLEs to carry out prompt service failure recovery to guests' satisfaction calls for their CFT in order to be multi-skilled. For instance, Walker (2006) found out that FLEs require cross-functional supervised practical training to exhibit professionalism and ethical standards. CFT equips FLEs to be functionally flexible and redeployed to another position to perform other duties whenever the need arises (Almeida & Davis, 2013; de la Lastra & Sánchez-Gardey, 2014). The study of Taiwanese hotels by Chen and Tseng (2012) revealed the benefits of CFT as service quality, staff retention, job



satisfaction, higher remuneration and promotion. These findings provide some vital ideas for attracting and retaining staff due to their viable, multi-skilled and career progression opportunities and for the differentiation of these hotels from other competitors (Chen & Tseng, 2012; Crick & Spencer, 2011; Davidson, McPhail, & Barry, 2011).

One notable issue with the empirical findings of the relationship between FLEs' training and performance is the resultant consistencies. For instance, Sami and Mohamed (2014) posit that it appears high quality hospitality education and training are increasingly becoming necessary for improving hotel and/or FLE performance, especially in franchised hotels as compared to the others. This might be due to consistent training. Also, the results of Kattara and El-Said (2014) reveal that the international hotel chains studied were found to be more innovative with service delivery/recovery performances than the independent ones due to their tried and tested even system of training and SOPs. Coherently, Nickson (2009), in examining staff training, also found that successful hotels, as a vital development strategy, constantly train FLEs as a key instrument in implementing HRM practices and policies. Researchers have consistently informed the service sector, especially hotels, that FLEs lacking the necessary job and interpersonal skills to deal with guests' grievances will not be up to the task to deliver a high level of service (Ashill et al., 2005; Boshoff & Allen, 2000). They additionally suggest the dire need of hotels to train FLEs in job-related and behavioural skills so as to offer excellent service quality (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Hart et al., 1990).

Likewise, the findings of Choi and Dickson (2009) point out the need for FLEs to undergo training, as FLEs through labour play a vital role in service

delivery with a human touch which is inseparable from the operation (Kruger, (2015). Sommerville (2010) also reports that although training could be extremely arduous, it should be in-depth as lack of or poor training results in poor service or product delivery, FLE job dissatisfaction and high turnover.

An evidence of López-Cabarcos, Göttling-Oliveira-Monteiro and Vázquez-Rodríguez (2015) in relation to FLEs' training focused on three main approaches to enable hotels set their performance in strong business strategies which assures viable competitive plusses. These approaches are knowledge development and technical expertise, efficient and effective service and product delivery management open to innovation, and technological capabilities investment. Kruger (2015) opines that such a package to improve FLEs' performance will certainly increase profitability. Although the resultant increase in profitability is obvious, the implementation of development strategies such as FLMs and FLEs' knowledge and education are a major challenge for other hotels (Sami & Mohamed, 2014).

Given the above issues, Mathies and Viet Ngo (2014) conclude that experienced, long-tenure FLEs normally have better service knowledge and understanding, are more efficient, and have built rapport with guests. These benefits should further reinforce positive relationships among FLEs' training and job performance, and guest satisfaction (Sami & Mohamed, 2014). Furthermore, Kanyan (2016) found that the HR department could use OJT method which provides hands-on skills and knowledge under normal working settings. OJT, adjudged as the most effective means of facilitating learning at the workplace, also enhances the FLM-FLE relationship, especially with new FLEs during and after the training.

Jaworski, Ravichandran, Karpinski and Singh (2018), in their study on the effects of training satisfaction, employee benefits and incentives on part-time employees' commitment in the U.S., found that training in hospitality firms is normally related to several benefits. Examples of such benefits are consistency in FLE job performance, greater job satisfaction, higher guest satisfaction and reduction in business costs for service failure recovery. Notwithstanding these benefits, most hotels do not put in much effort to achieve effective training, especially for part-time employees (Jaworski et al., 2018). Their findings also revealed that OJT and job shadowing had significant positive impact on training satisfaction commitment of FLMs to FLEs and that of FLEs to the job; such obligation can also assist hotel FLMs make effective staff allocation decisions. Additionally, the length of training and whether or not there was a follow-up after the training had no impact on the overall training satisfaction (Jaworski et al., 2018).

On the contrary, Uen, Chang, McConville and Tsai (2018) argue that mentoring as a social learning process could assist FLEs to quickly merge into the industry. Their findings from new FLEs and supervisors in 4 and 5-star hotels in Taiwan revealed that supervisory mentoring roles as a powerful strategy have significant positive impact on new FLEs' innovation. Thus, task autonomy and supervisor capabilities strengthen the supervisory mentoring functions and newcomer's innovation performance relationship. Additionally, innovation performance when developed through mentoring processes and structures enhance the development of imagination, creativity, interaction and communication between FLEs. This shows the importance of knowledge sharing and social learning as being vital for FLEs' motivation in leader-

member exchange (LMX) expectations, and efficiency and effectiveness in QGSD in the competitive hotel business (Uen et al., 2018).

Existing empirical evidence has shown that hotels are currently using exceptional strategies to take care of employee training needs by outsourcing FLMs and HRMs' training functions to consultants (Abbey, 2014), and Ghanaian hotels are no exception. These specialists who have upper hand of the best industry practices by virtue of the varied patrons they serve improve service quality and increase output by boosting FLEs' performance. Such bold decisions taken by hotels objectively align the training with the hotels' strategic objectives which centres on guests' expectations decreases and tracks training costs (Abbey, 2014). Furthermore, Abbey (2014) reveals that the training should cover areas where service delivery and products fall short of such expectations as per guests' response to departmental questionnaires.

However, a major drawback with outsourcing FLEs' training according to Abbey (2014) is the absence or loss of team spirit which normally develops between FLEs and FLMs in the process of the latter training their own employees. Train (2009) sums the findings of Abbey (2014) by adding that internal training provides and forms accurate work specification based on policies and SOPS, and the passion of work in a healthy atmosphere.

### **Guests' Perceptions of FLEs' Performance in Service Failure Recovery**

Understanding the service recovery performance from a guest's perspective is key to the successful design and management of services. The importance of such an understanding has been voiced for decades in the field of service design (Mager, 2009; Polaine et al., 2013; Stickdorn & Schneider,

2011). It is worth noting that guests view hotels' FLEs as the representatives of these hotels. Hence, they tend to base their service failure recovery evaluations of the hotels on the performance of their FLEs (Liao, 2007). Hotel guests expect to be treated fairly in service encounters. A number of studies have employed the justice theory in examining guests' evaluation of service recovery performance. Justice, according to Tax et al. (1998), refers to the propriety of decisions and the discussions within this section are patterned according to the dimensions of the justice theory which are distributive, procedural and interactional.

Distributive justice, according to Baker (2017), involves the perceived fairness of an outcome of a process. Kelly, Hoffman and Davis (1993), in their study of Domino's pizza, using the distributive principle of justice, revealed that customers wanted service corrections that were commensurate with the service failures they encountered. Hence, in the case of late delivery of their pizza, they preferred a \$3 discount on their purchase price to a free pizza.

Tax et al. (1998) also indicated that in addition to equity in their service recovery response, customers are also interested in the fairness of compensation based on what they previously experienced from the organisation, their awareness of other customers' compensation as well as their own perception of their loss in the service failure encounter. They further noted that some customers perceived apologies from FLEs as insincere. In instances where resolutions were not found to customers complaints, they remained dissatisfied. This means that providing procedures for lodging complaints may not be effective if resolutions to the complaints are not made.

Procedural justice on the other hand refers to justice perceived during the course of service failure recovery. It embodies process control, timing, speed with which service failure is recovered and the flexibility associated with the process control. Guests, for example, complained about the cumbersome nature of the complaint procedure, thus creating an impression of the hotel and its FLEs wanting to escape from addressing the service failures (Chen et al., 2014).

The third parameter of justice theory, which is interactional justice, is defined as justice emanating from the behaviour of service providers (FLEs) towards guests. Components such as honesty, empathy and kindness are what guests expect from their interactions with FLEs within the course of service failure recovery. Blodgett, Hill and Tax (1997) found out that guests who complained and felt treated rudely do not return to patronise the services of the hotel and discouraged others from doing so regardless of the compensation offered.

Ha and Jang (2009) noted the perception of distributive justice in service failure recovery mostly affects people's revisit intentions and intentions to share PWOM about hospitality services and facilities. However, within the service context, interpersonal justice may be more important in aiding the understanding of guests' expectations when service fails and attempts are made in recovering it (Fu et al., 2014). Suprpto and Hashym (2010), in investigating service recovery strategies and guest satisfaction in Yogyakarta-Indonesian hotels, found that a reflection of the role of distributive, procedural and interactional fairness congruently were partially or wholly used to recover service failures. In effect, although the three strategies were effective, within some contexts, apology and show of courtesy and respect (interactional) may

be more effective, followed by recovery speed (procedural), then compensation (distributive).

## **Guest Satisfaction and Guest Loyalty: The Role of FLEs in Upscale**

### **Hotels**

The concepts of guest satisfaction and guest loyalty have been defined and studied as outcomes of QSD. Both concepts have received a lot of attention by researchers (Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu & Okumus, 2016; Cai & Chi, 2018; Komunda & Osarenkhoe, 2012; Prasad, Wirtz & Yu, 2014). Cheng et al. (2018) describe customer satisfaction as an important requirement in developing customer loyalty. Tefera and Migiro (2018) further add that customer satisfaction is one of the key determinants of customer loyalty.

According to Olivier (2010, p. 256), satisfaction is a ‘consumer’s fulfilment response and a judgment that a product or service feature, or product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under or over fulfilment as being consistent with the conceptual and empirical evidence’. Guest loyalty on the other hand refers to a customer who repurchases from the same service provider whenever possible, and who continues to recommend or maintains a positive attitude towards the service provider (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). Cheng et al. (2018) describe customer loyalty as an intensely involved commitment to consistently re-buy or re-patronise goods from the same service provider in the future.

The attributes which enhance customer satisfaction and ensure customer loyalty are very important for hotels (Magnini & Ford, 2004). In fact, from a

service quality perspective, when the guest's expectation and perception of the hotel's services are met, then they become satisfied. On the reverse, when these expectation and perception are not met, dissatisfaction sets in. The literature generally acknowledges that guest satisfaction has implications for revisit intentions and PWOM recommendations (Berezina, et al., 2016). Gefen (2002) noted that it is cheaper serving loyal customers than new customers. Besides, loyal customers spend more and frequently refer new customers (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). It is worthy to note that customer satisfaction is affected by both tangible and intangible aspects of service quality (Prentice, 2013; Torres & Kline, 2013).

The intangible elements which affect customer service include assurance, customer service and empathy. It is the FLEs who primarily act to deliver these intangible elements. Berezina et al. (2016) argued that FLEs are very prominent in ensuring guest's satisfaction. This is because their actions and inactions will impact upon their service delivery which will ultimately influence the guest's satisfaction - by extension - guest loyalty. The tangible elements on the other hand are related to the physical facilities of the hotel such as appearance of hotel personnel and cleanliness of the room (Ramanathan & Ramanathan, 2011).

Mostert et al. (2009) posited that the service recovery effort put in by the airlines to correct service failures really influenced their relationship with the airline in dictating their re-patronage. Migacz et al. (2017) also, in examining air travellers on service failure recovery assessments with justice theory, found that all the three justice dimensions had effect on their level of satisfaction of service recovery, PWOM, and future intentions. On the other



hand, dissatisfied customers indicated a weakened or severed relationship with the airline by either flying less frequently or abrogating the relationship altogether due to the service failure (Mostert et al., 2009). In another vein, Choi and Choi (2014), in exploring this relationship with undergraduate students who had experienced service failures, concluded that poor service failure recovery can worsen the relationship between businesses and their customers with customers defecting to other businesses.

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

Given the extent of this study, the choice of only one of the models, theoretical or conceptual frameworks mentioned in chapter two to assess FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery with its related antecedents and outcomes would not have been possible. A more feasible way to achieve the required results was to incorporate the empirical review of this chapter on issues relating to hotel FLEs and guests' interface in service failure recovery, and the viewpoints of different researchers, namely Service Profit Chain Theory (Heskett et al., 2008), Attribution (Heider, 1958) and Justice (Rawls, 1971) theories. The others are Dynamic Interactions Framework (Bitran & Lojo, 1993); Functional Flexibility (Atkinson, 1985); Gap (Luk & Layton, 2002; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988); SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1985) and RECOVSAT models. This is because the concepts fit into the context of this study, while some of the variables have been adopted or modified to suit the objectives of the study.

Subsequently, this study proposes a conceptual framework (Fig. 4) which illustrates the domains of FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery

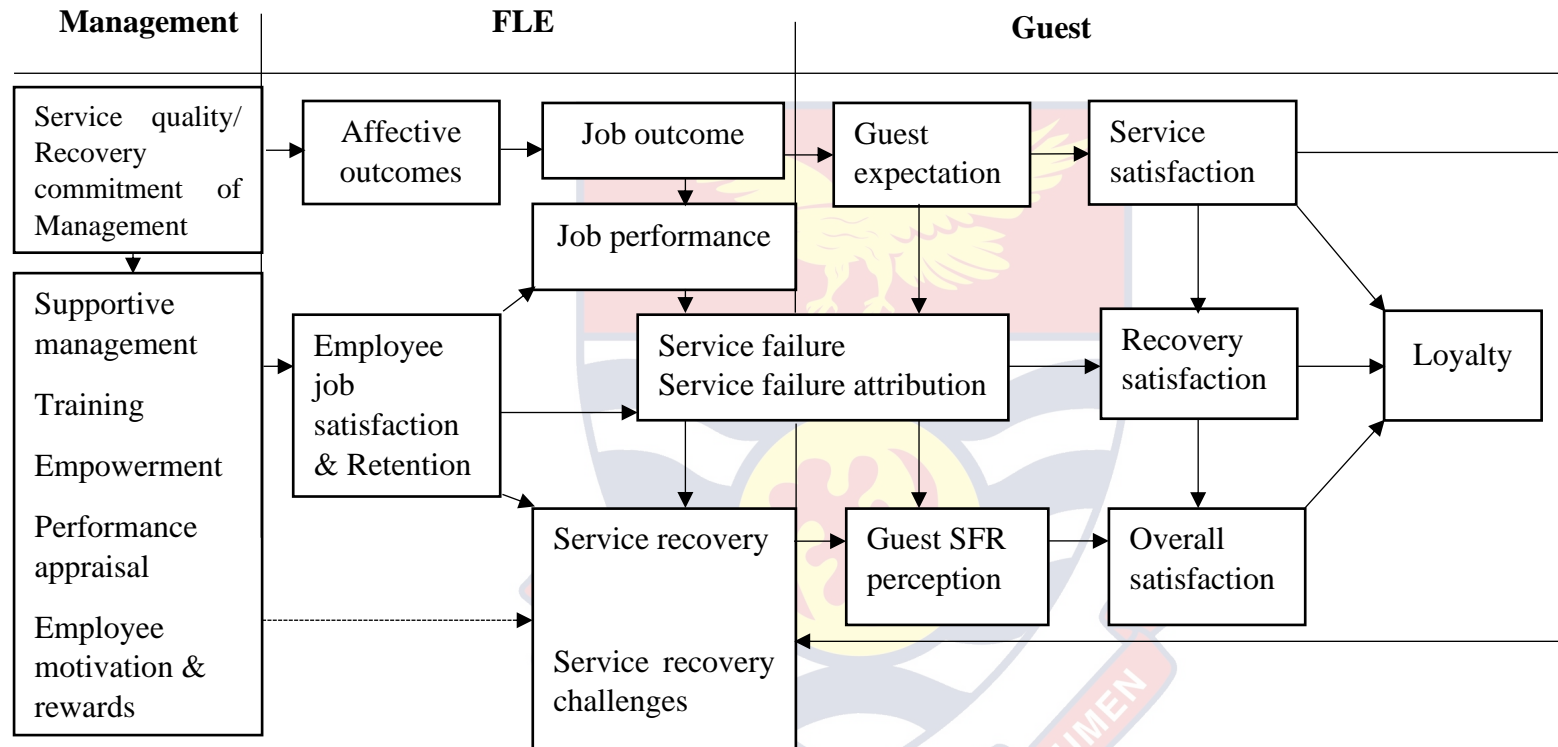
and the relationships between management, FLEs and guests as well as the variables. Some of these variables are guest expectation, service failure and recovery, guest perception, satisfaction and loyalty; others are employee job satisfaction and service failure recovery and challenges as shown in Figure 4. It comprises five components, namely service quality or service recovery commitment of management; affective outcomes; job outcome; guest expectation; service satisfaction and loyalty. The conceptual framework depicts managements' commitment and concerns in facilitating FLEs' effective and judicious service delivery/failure/recovery. The conceptual framework is also in consonance with GTA quality assurance's regulation of 2016, L.I. 2239 and L.I. 2238 which ensure that service and product standards are maintained, or else the guest seeks redress. This is achieved by FLMs supporting FLEs through training to enhance their skills, appraising their performance, empowering and motivating them through rewards and promotion.

FLEs' who are motivated would equally feel mandated to reciprocate by improving their performance and remaining loyal to their establishment. Such commitments by management would invariably result in FLEs' job satisfaction and improved performance. However, the performance of employees may or may not meet guests' expectations. They may therefore perceive it to be a service failure/success.

A negative perception (service failure) also illuminates guests' perception of the service recovery value which may or may not meet their expectations. This process then registers a successful outcome (satisfaction, recommendation, repeat business and loyalty) or unsuccessful outcome (dissatisfaction, further complaints, NWOM, or defection).

A second attempt based on the feedback should then be made by FLEs to recover the initial unsuccessful service recovery to ensure guest satisfaction. Further to this is the guest who may look beyond the service failure if the failure is recovered to their satisfaction, in which case it would influence their overall satisfaction, result in PWOM and loyalty intentions.





**Figure 4: Conceptual Framework for The Study**

Sources: Adapted from Atkinson, (1985); Bitran & Lojo, (1993); Heskett et al. (2008); Luk & Layton, (2002); Parasuraman et al. (1988; 1985).

The entire process from managements' commitment to FLEs' QGSD and recovery would improve FLEs' competence, confidence and job satisfaction; this may equally influence the quality of the services offered guests to meet their expectations, or recover them to guests' satisfaction should the service fail. This study hereby proposes a conceptual framework relating to FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery.

### **Chapter Summary**

The chapter focused on the empirical review of the various dimensions of the FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery. First, the chapter discussed the nature of the FLE-guest interface. Next, empirical studies on service failures in upscale hotels were discussed as well as the range of strategies employed in recovering them. A review of empirical works on FLEs' performance in service failure recovery process was then looked at from two perspectives, namely the guest and FLMs of upscale hotels. The challenges FLEs encounter were also discussed. The review looked at FLMs' support for FLEs' service failure recovery efforts and the influence of training on FLEs was presented. Additionally, the role of FLEs in guest satisfaction and guest loyalty and the benefits associated with service failure recovery in upscale hotels were also discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion of the study's conceptual framework for FLE-guest Interface in Service Failure Recovery. The next chapter is devoted to the methods employed in carrying out this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

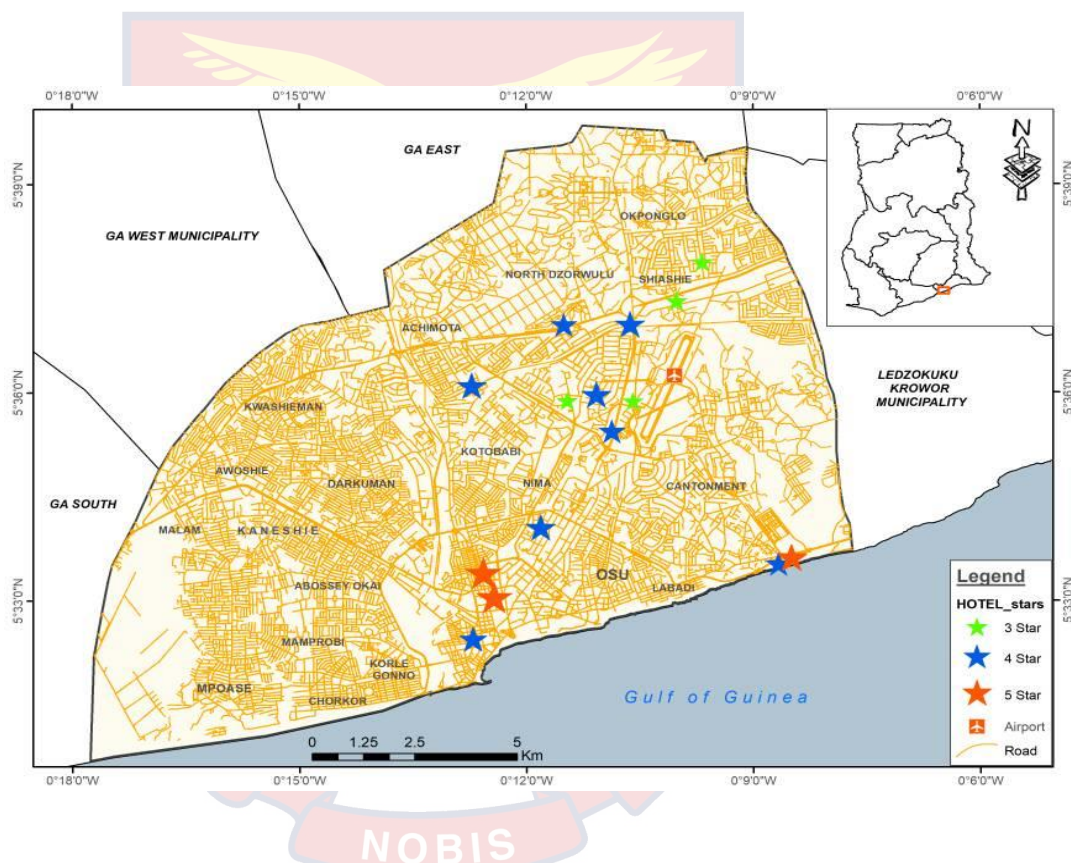
This chapter describes the methods employed for the study. The specific issues covered include the description and justification of the study area, the research philosophy, research design and the sources of data. Other issues covered were the population and sample frame, target population, sample size, sampling procedure, research instruments, pre-testing of research instruments, fieldwork, ethical considerations and the methods of data analysis and presentation.

#### Study Area

The study area is the Accra Metropolitan Area (AMA) in the Greater Accra Region (GAR). AMA was chosen as the study area because it is the capital city and the largest city in Ghana with the highest number of upscale hotels. AMA serves as the economic and administrative hub of the country. Accra has metamorphosed into a modern metropolis with modern skyscrapers, apartments, multinational and national hotels. AMA which covers a total land area of 3,000 km<sup>2</sup> stretches along the Atlantic coast and extends north into the country's interior; it is bound to the north by the Ga East Municipality, west by the Ga West and Ga South Municipalities, east by the *Ledzokuku Krowor* Municipality and South by the Gulf of Guinea, which serves as the beachfront of the city (Cities Alliance, 2015). AMA which lies in the dry equatorial climatic zone has a coastline of approximately 225 kilometres stretching from *Kokrobite* in the

west to *Ada* in the east.

AMA has the only international airport in Ghana, Kotoka International Airport, and the country's main gateway for inbound travel. In addition, the city boasts of the headquarters of a number of businesses and tourist attractions such as the National Museum and Osu Castle. Located in the AMA are most of the upscale multinational and national hotels in Ghana. Examples of such national hotels are Accra City Hotel, La Beach and La Palm Beach Hotels.



**Figure 5: Map of Accra Metropolis Showing the Hotels Studied**

Source: Cartography and Remote Sensing Unit of the Department of Geography and Regional Planning, UCC (2018).

The MN hotels also located in AMA include Marriott, Ibis Styles and Holiday Inn all located in the Accra Airport City (Figure 5). The rest are Kempinski, Mövenpick, Tang Palace, Swiss Spirit, Best Western Premier, Fiesta

Royale and Golden Tulip. There are also uncompleted ones such as Hilton and Radisson Blu which are expected to open to guests by the close of the year 2023. The entry of MN hotel chains has boosted the number of hotels in AMA unlike the past where guests struggled with a restricted supply of upscale accommodation services. This problem has however been rapidly addressed with hotels which meet international standards. These new luxurious hotels being constructed or refurbished are located in AMA and appeal mostly to business travellers. Hotel accommodation which accounts for 34% of guest expenditure, portrays a very healthy sign for the country's economy (GHA, 2013). AMA has the highest concentration of different star-rated licensed accommodation available to all categories of guests (Table 3).

**Table 3: Summary of Licenced Accommodation in the AMA as at December 2018**

Accommodation types	Total number	Number of rooms	Number of beds
<i>Star rated hotels</i>			
5-star	3	559	728
4-star	8	1,208	1,569
3-star	7	641	700
2-star	75	3,012	3,422
1-star	118	2,016	2,940
<i>Other types</i>			
Guest house	47	325	327
Budget	555	6,599	6,831
<i>Total</i>	<i>813</i>	<i>14,360</i>	<i>16,517</i>

Source: GTA licenced accommodation in the AMA as at December 2018



Accra is the largest city in Ghana and the 13<sup>th</sup> largest metropolis in Africa with a population of over 4 million; this population has increased (3.5 times) between 1984 and 2014 owing to urbanisation and rural-urban migration (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017).

Economically, AMA generates 25% of the national GDP and attracts 83% of all foreign direct investments in Ghana (World Bank, 2016). This is due to almost three decades of political stability which has enabled such remarkable economic growth and rapid urbanisation of Accra. AMA's other strength is its connections to the international economy at the corporate and individual levels in high multinational entrepreneurship and business practices, increased productivity and profitability besides remittances from abroad to relations (Pescina, 2013). AMA, the largest industrial centre of the country, boasts of more than 200 major manufacturing establishments, consuming about 46.5% of the total electricity generated for the country.

The upscale hotels in AMA comprises all the three 5-star hotels and most of the 4-star hotels (only two in other parts of Ghana). Also, the cluster of these top-notch hotels in AMA has a lot at stake with respect to competition as it calls for improved service delivery. This expectancy could lead to overzealousness to improve service delivery and profitability especially with the multinational hotels and could cause or lead to service failure.

Also, stressed up FLEs during the interface with guests and tensions between FLEs' inner feelings of dissatisfaction or outward displays do cause service failure. Hence, it behoves on FLEs of these hotels to deliver services to meet guests' expectation. But should such services not meet guests' expectations or fail, guests would expect them to effectively recover them to their satisfaction.

The aforementioned reasons make it relevant for the study of FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery in the AMA upscale hotels.

### **Research Philosophy**

Research philosophy stems from the development of knowledge in a particular field; its nature is on thoughts as to whether to administer questionnaires or conduct interviews (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Positivism and interpretivism are the two dominant ontological and epistemological traditions or ideologies; ontology is the nature of reality whilst epistemology is the relationship between the researcher and the reality (Carson, 2001; Edirisingha, 2012). Positivists support rigorous scientific quantitative methods where they decouple from respondents' emotions and analyse numbers as in the case of the hotel guests. Interpretivists on the other hand prefer humanistic qualitative methods which espouse a more personal and flexible research structures to capture imports in human interface devoid of rigid structured frameworks (Carson, 2001; Edirisingha, 2012; Saunders et al., 2009).

Interpretivism, as in qualitative research with an objective of understanding participants' experience as closely as possible, is directly concerned with the experience as it is 'lived', 'felt' or 'undergone' (Sherman Webb, 1988). In capturing meanings in human interactions in firms such as hotels, it does not only probe the 'what', 'where' and 'when', but examines the 'why' and 'how' of decision-making situations with small focused participants as in the case of FLEs and FLMs of hotels studied (Black, 2006; Sheiky, 2011). It is receptive to capturing meanings in human interaction in firms such as hotels.

Some researchers establish the need to modify the philosophical assumptions sometimes and progress to a new paradigm as most studies are within positivism or interpretivism (Collis & Hussey, 2014). This assists in appreciating firms' practical experiences of employees (Uduma & Sylvia, 2015). This is when pragmatism, a modified philosophical assumption, is adopted by other researchers for a change; this study is no exception, hence the adoption of pragmatism as the research philosophy based on the objectives and to analyse both types of data for this study.

Pragmatism emphasises the research problem in social science as a philosophical foundation for mixed methods studies and liberally uses its pluralistic approaches to derive knowledge about the problem (Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2011). It accommodates multiple modes of data collection, different perspectives and assumptions as well as analysis in positivism and interpretivism studies to clarify the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

Presented in Table 4 is the pragmatism research which integrates more than one research approach and strategy to respond to research questions emanating from this study, determining the research philosophy adopted. This is because each approach responded to a particular question better than the other, building on their strengths for a powerful mix and understanding (Creswell, 2012; Hughes & Sharrock, 2016). Thus, this study was no exception with the assumption that FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery could be viewed and studied from both deductive and inductive, and objective and subjective philosophical spectrums.

**Table 4: Positivism, Interpretivism and Pragmatism**

	Research approach	Ontology	Axiology	Research strategy
Positivism	Deductive	Objective	Value-free	Quantitative
Interpretivism	Inductive	Subjective	Biased	Qualitative
Pragmatism	Deductive/ Inductive	Objective/ Subjective	Value-free/ Biased	Quantitative and Qualitative

Source: Pizam & Mansfeld (2009)

The quantitative (positivism) and qualitative (interpretivism) was mutually used to collect and analyse the data for the study. This corroborates and complements the strengths of either designs, fully enhances the understanding of the research problems, responds to the research questions than either approach alone, and overcomes the limitations or gaps in the service failure recovery literature (Creswell, 2014).

Pragmatism’s knowledge claims arise out of and accept concepts to be relevant only if they support actions, situations and consequences in the form of problems such as those critical in hotel service delivery like service failure and recovery; hence, its usage to clearly understand the problems and solutions in the various situations (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2011). Pragmatism was also conducive to this study as the final database comprised both quantitative data from hotel guests and qualitative data from hotel FLEs, FLMs and the top officials of GTA and GHA to enhance the reliability and validity of the results obtained from this study. The concepts of reliability and validity of the study were very necessary as they bordered on the

quality of the study and how dependable the results are.

Pragmatism, in aiding the freedom of choice of the methods, also enabled the choice of viewpoints, techniques, procedures and approaches which best meet the needs and purposes of the study to collect and analyse the data so far as it offers the best understanding of the research problem. This is because the study occurred in a social context where it incorporated a theoretical lens reflective of social justice in service failure recovery (Cherryholmes, 1992; Morgan, 2007).

Although Bryman (2006) agrees to a combination of two paradigms for maximum output in their capacities and the reduction of the challenges of the data, Hughes (1997) cautions the probability of the individual paradigms' solution being underestimated and/or overshadowed by the association. Morgan (2014) also posits that although pragmatism has provided a promising new direction for understanding the nature of social research, it has disrupted the assumptions of positivism and interpretivism.

Additionally, Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) contend that pragmatism is instinctively appealing mostly because it prevents researchers from engaging in what seems quite futile debates about concepts being truth and reality. They, however, caution researchers of the knower and the known paradigms being interactive at some points, while at others, one detaches self and react objectively to what is being studied. This could be realised by their degree of determined nature, the use of closed-ended as against open-ended enquiries and the emphasis on numeric or nonnumeric data analysis.

## Research Design

Research design, a plan of research to collect, analyse and interpret data for the study, dealt with the procedure of enquiry or the research questions studied, the relevant data for the study, the data collected and how the results were analysed (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 1994). Thus, based on the objectives of the study and the adoption of pragmatism as the research philosophy, the mixed methods approach was selected as the research design of this study. The choice of mixed method was based on its appropriateness for the fundamental views of the study. Also, mixed methods design permitted the usage of both the quantitative and qualitative data of the study to comprehend the research problem (Creswell & Clark, 2011) and enhance the validity and reliability of the results obtained.

The attainment of valid and reliable results was necessary to validate the quality of the study and the dependability of the results. Additionally, mixed methods approach as a logical model of proof allowed extrapolations of causal relations among the variables under study to be drawn. This was realised in the case of FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery, justifying the suitability or validation for mixing methods (Creswell, 2012). The mixed methods approach was also used to expand the breadth and depth for clarity and elaborate on the problems of the study. For instance, while the quantitative data (statistical analysis) provided guests' detailed assessment of FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery, the qualitative data provided a deep understanding of hotel FLEs, FLMs and the top officials of GTA and GHAs' responses to the same, hence the adoption of the mixed methods research approach.

Mixed methods research, an approach to enquiry integrating quantitative and qualitative, is an advanced method and procedure in research; it is currently the third methodological approach and the latest development in research methods (Creswell, 2012). Table 5 exhibits how researchers integrate elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches as in the viewpoints, data collection, analysis and inference techniques for the broad purpose of understanding complex research questions (van Esch & van Esch, 2013).

**Table 5: Comparison of Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods**

**Approaches**

#	Quantitative methods	Mixed methods	Qualitative methods
1	Pre-determined	Both predetermined and emerging methods	Emerging methods
2	Instrument based questions	Both open- and closed-ended questions	Open-ended questions
3	Performance data, attitude data, observational data and census data	Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities	Interview data, observation data, document data and audio-visual data
4	Statistical analysis Statistical interpretation	Statistical and text analysis Across databases interpretation	Text and image analysis Themes, patterns interpretation

Source: van Esch & van Esch (2013).

The qualitative method which started gaining more attention in hospitality and tourism research three decades ago (Mehmetoglu, 2004) is being overshadowed by the mixed methods approach to conduct hospitality, tourism,

and leisure research (Downward & Mearman, 2004; Henderson, 2011).

The study collected quantitative data to answer specific research questions (Hair, Celsi, Oritinau & Bush, 2013) such as guests' perception and their behavioural intentions resulting from FLEs' service failure recovery efforts. The quantitative research was ideal as there was the need to collect data from a large number of respondents (400) and analyse using statistical methods (Malhotra, 2010). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time. The design also made the collection of the second form of data from FLEs, FLMs and top officials of GTA and GHA with different research questions possible. This was to enhance or back the primary data of guests with additional information not in the domain of the latter. Such an approach was appropriate as different stakeholders like guests, FLEs, FLMs and top officials of GTA and GHA were fully covered in the study in order to explain the phenomenon of FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery in upscale hotels in the Ghanaian hotel industry.

Mixed methods design as shown in Figure 6 has been used in mixed method studies for social and behavioural researches. The embedded design, an advanced mixed method, was chosen to guide this study as quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently due to the limited time frame, with the qualitative data supporting the quantitative data.

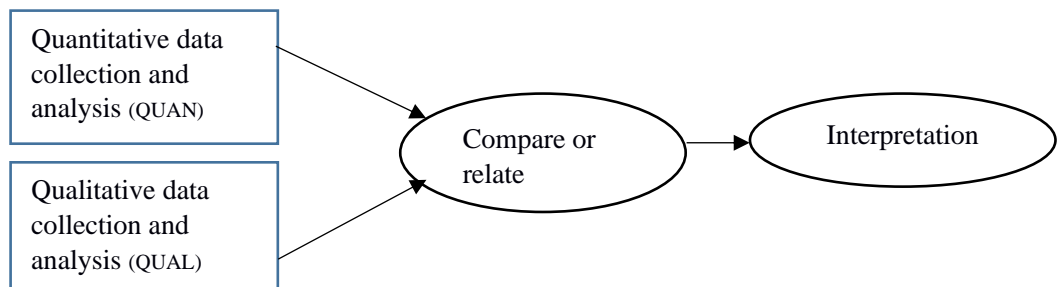
The embedded mixed method design depicts the methods, processes and procedures in data collection and analysis, and the integration procedures as illustrated in Figure 6. Additionally, the design was chosen to guide this study because it offered a practical method which concurrently examined and addressed the research questions and problems in different ways, quantitatively



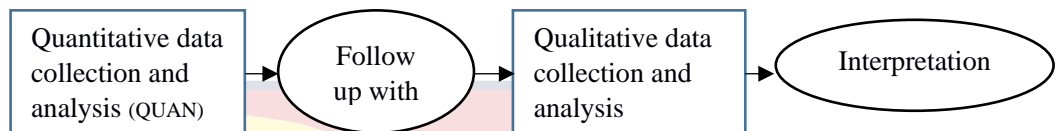
and qualitatively. Its application also augmented the possible results through the integration of the various perspectives of guests, FLEs, FLMs and top officials of GTA and GHA in the context of FLE-guest service failure recovery in hotels.



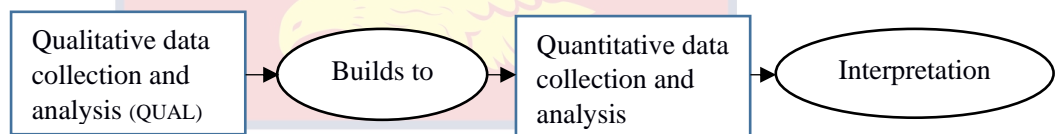
**Convergent Parallel Design**



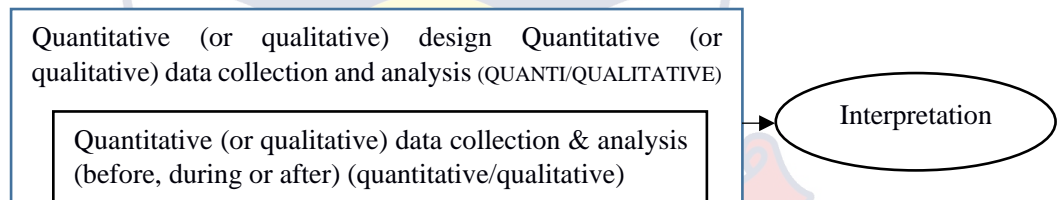
**Explanatory/Sequential Design**



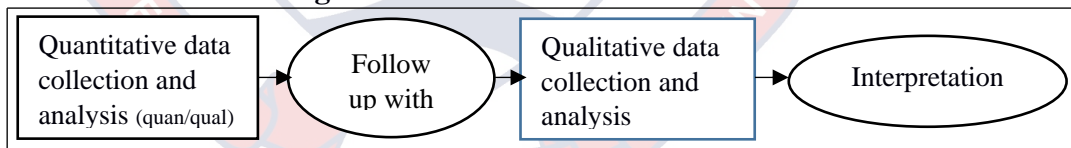
**Exploratory Sequential Design**



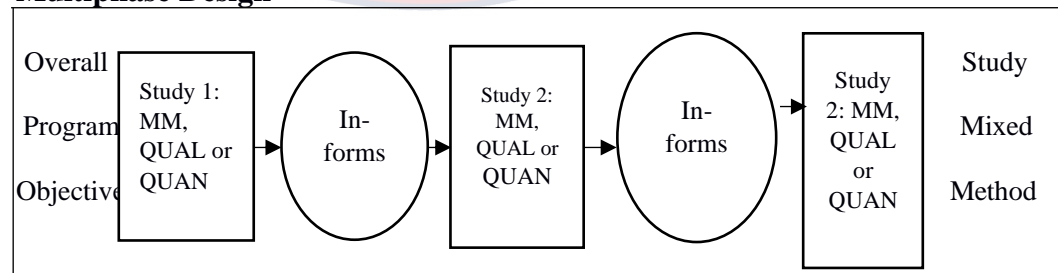
**Embedded Design**



**Transformation Design**



**Multiphase Design**

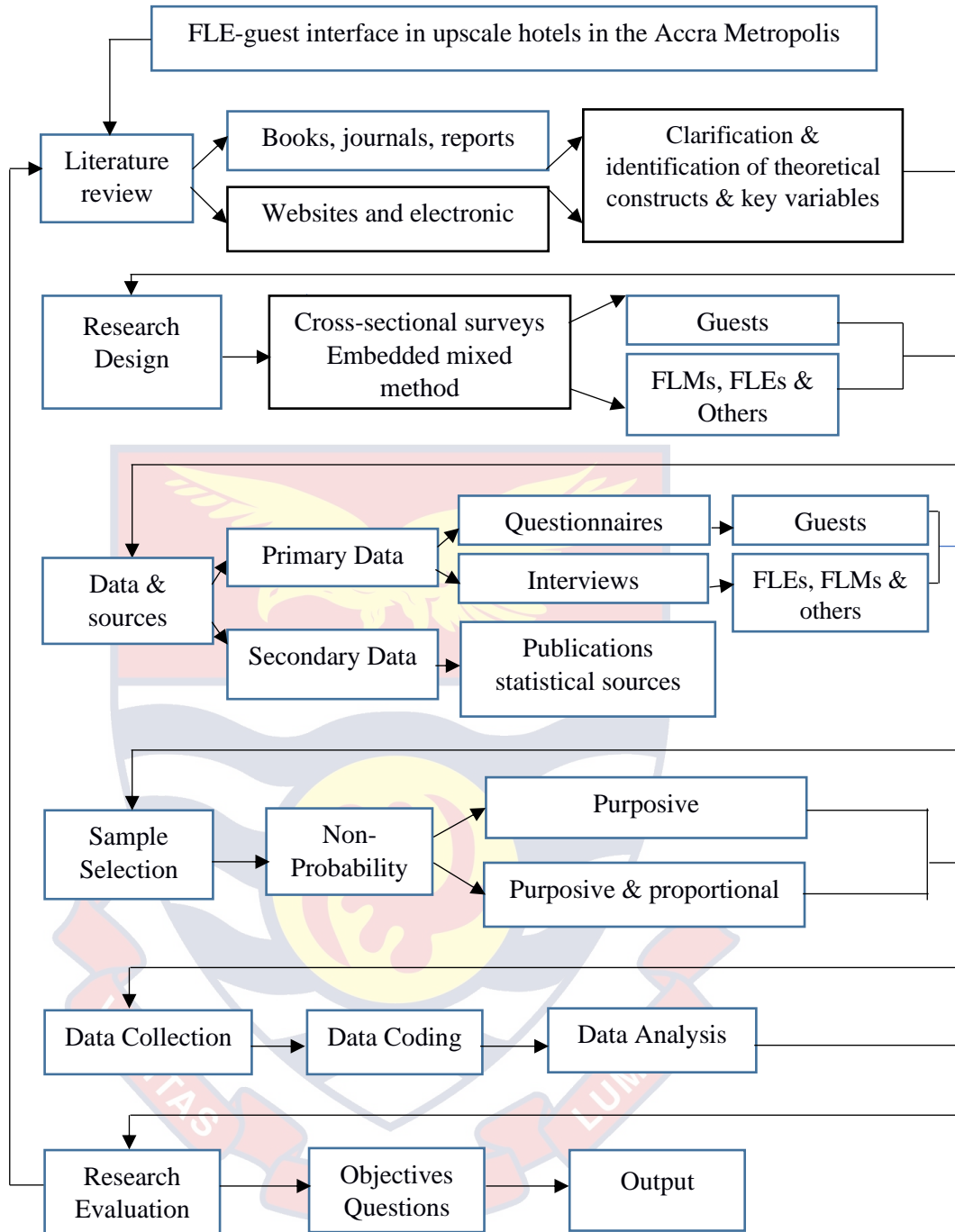


**Figure 6: Types of Mixed Method Designs**

Source: Creswell and Clark (2011)

Figure 7 illustrates the research process followed as per the topic, the review of literature, research design, sources of data, sample selection, data collection up to the evaluation of the research questions and objectives of the study. The cross-sectional research design was also selected to guide this study. It is one of the most renowned and popular designs in which data is collected from either the whole population or a selected subset to assist in responding to research questions of interest (Olsen & George, 2004). It also enriches the study with the large number of people based on the inclusion criteria within a short time to ascertain the causes and occurrence of the phenomenon of service failure (Olsen & George, 2004).

Cross-sectional studies involve the collection of data to measure social science studies concurrently to gather multiple data on attitude, practices or opinions at a specific point in time. Such findings are analysed to create new theories, studies or in-depth research within a short period and at reasonable means (Creswell, 2012). This study sought to concurrently collect multiple data (survey and interview) on an incident (service failure), its correction (recovery) and effect (guest satisfaction) within a short period because of time constraint (Churchill, 1999; Saunders et al., 2009). To this end, the cross-sectional and embedded research designs which were deemed appropriate for this study were utilised to collect data for the FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery in upscale hotels.



**Figure 7: Research Methods Employed for the Study**

Source: Adapted from Mensah (2012)

## Data and Sources

The study employed both primary sources of data and secondary information. In view of the mixed methods approach, the primary data on FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery were sourced from guests, FLEs, FLMs of the selected hotels and top officials of GTA and GHA. The primary data included how FLEs' handle service failure recovery and the challenges they face during service recovery; guests' perceptions of FLEs' service failure recovery and their satisfaction with service failure recovery and the measures put in place by the FLMs and top officials of GTA and GHA to facilitate guests' service failure recovery.

Secondary information was obtained from published and unpublished literature such as books, journals and relevant articles on the internet. These include the list of licensed hotels in the Accra Metropolis, the ratings and the number of rooms and beds were obtained from GTA. The global growth and performance statistics of hotels were obtained from institutions and firms such as the World Factbook of CIA, Eurostat and Jones Lang Lasalle IP, INC. Others were the various occupancy rates of hotels and the population of FLEs and FLMs from the HRMs. The units of analysis were hotel guests, FLEs and FLMs of the selected hotels, and top officials of GTA and GHA.

## Target Population

The target population for the study comprised of guests, FLEs and FLMs of 3 to 5-star hotels in the Accra Metropolis as well as top officials from GTA and GHA. The study population was the accretion of elements from which the sample was actually selected (Babbie, 2007). Upscale hotels (15) classified as 3

to 5-star with more than 100 rooms in the Accra Metropolis were selected. These hotels were selected because they have the highest number of rooms and high occupancy rates for consistent data collection. They were also world-class hotels with the required policies and SOPs, hence expected to provide high-class services.

The criterion for the resident guests of the various hotels was that, they should have stayed for at least one night (24 hours) as at the time the study was undertaken. They should have also experienced a service failure, lodged a complaint, experienced service recovery and interfaced or communicated with FLEs or FLMs because of the service failure and its recovery. Such guest complaints were normally made to FLEs who interacted directly with guests. Hence, these FLEs have the responsibility to see to guests' needs and resolve their problems or complaints. FLMs would normally train FLEs to effectively carry out their responsibilities based on the various hotels' policies and SOPs and assist them to resolve some guests' complaints or completely resolve them when the FLEs are not empowered to do so.

The inclusion of hotel regulators like GTA's quality assurance and GHA which assists and ensures that the hotels conform to international standards was also necessary for effective service delivery, service failure recovery and guest satisfaction.

### **Sample Size Determination**

The sample size of the study was 400 respondents (hotel guests) for the quantitative aspect of the study, while that of the qualitative study comprised of a representative each of the FLEs and FLMs of the 15 hotels in the Accra

Metropolis and two top officials from GTA and GHA totalling 32. Table 6 presents a tabulated total number of upscale hotels for the study with the star ratings, available and occupied rooms, average occupancy percentage and sample size for guests.

In totality, there were 2,393 rooms available, 1815 were occupied, with an average occupancy 75.85% as exhibited in Table 6. The survey of 400 guests who had experienced service failure recovery and slated for the quantitative study was the result of the calculation from the actual occupied rooms of 1815 out of the total of 2393 available rooms of the 15 selected hotels.

**Table 6: Sample Size of Hotels and Guests**

Hotel	Star Rating	Available rooms	Occupied rooms	Average occupancy percentage	Guest sample size
1	5	269	223	82.7	49
2	5	164	135	82	30
3	5	260	237	91	52
4	4	196	133	68	29
5	4	109	85	78	19
6	4	199	177	89	39
7	4	109	74	68	16
8	4	100	74	74	16
9	4	238	186	78	41
10	4	156	112	72	25
11	4	111	80	72	18
12	3	168	132	80	29
13	3	104	68	65	15
14	3	110	35	32	8
15	3	100	62	62	14
<i>Total</i>		<i>2393</i>	<i>1815</i>	<i>75.85</i>	<i>400</i>

Sources: GTA list for licensed hotels, 2018, Human Resource Managers of 3 to

5- star hotels in AMA

For a quantitative study to have a representative and precise sample size of the target population, the assumption is that it should be between 20% to 25% of the total population (Leedy & Ormond, 2001). In effect, sample size of 400 guests for the study was based on the guidelines which state that 20% of a population size of 1,500 should be sampled (Leedy & Ormond, 2001). Hence, with total occupied guestrooms in Table 6 being 1,815 (which is more than 1,500), 20% of 1815 was 363, while 25% was 453.75. To obtain a figure which will be statistically valid, 22% was sampled which resulted in 399.3. This was approximated to 400. It also resulted in a larger sample size with merits of more accurate results of a heterogeneous population with desired confidence level (Leedy & Ormond, 2001).

Additionally, a rule of thumb for structural equation model (SEM) is that the minimum sample size should be equal to the number of parameters to estimate in the model multiplied with five. Accordingly, Kline (2011, pp: 11-12) states that most researchers recommend the usage of sample sizes of at least five or maximum of 10 cases per parameter. Hence, the four parameters with the number of statements for guests were expectation (14 statements), perception (14), satisfaction (16), overall satisfaction (eight) and loyalty (two statements), resulting in 54 parameters. Thus, 54 multiplied by 7 is 378, while 54 multiplied by 8 is 432.

Consequently, based on Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson's (2014) suggestion that sample sizes with respect to the constructs and items measured for the model should be in the range of 100 to 400, 54 was multiplied by 7.4 to arrive at 399.6 for this study. This sample size coincides with the 22% of the target population sampled which resulted in 399.3; therefore, 399.3 was also



rounded off to the nearest whole number to be 400. Hence, sample size per hotel is:

$$N \text{ (sample size)} = \Sigma (n_1 + n_2 + n_3 + \dots + n_i + \dots + n_{15}) = 400$$

$$H \text{ (total rooms occupied)} = \Sigma (h_1 + h_2 + h_3 + \dots + h_i + \dots + h_{15}) = 1815$$

Using proportion:  $\frac{n_i}{N} = \frac{H_i}{H}$

$$\frac{n_i}{400} = \frac{H_i}{1815}$$

Therefore  $n_i = \frac{400}{1815} \times R_i = 0.22 \times R_i$  (Individual hotel's occupancy)

Where  $R_i$  is the number of various occupied rooms per hotel

$$\text{Guest sample size/hotel} = \frac{\text{Total guest sample size (400)}}{\text{Total occupancy (1815)}} \times \text{Individual hotel's occupancy}$$

For example, Hotel 1 =  $\frac{400 \times 223}{1815} = 49 \text{ guests}$

### Sample Size of Hotels' FLEs and FLMs by Position and Division

Table 7 shows the positions of the selected 15 FLEs who interfaced with guests and 15 FLMs who were responsible for FLEs in this study. They were selected from the rooms' division (front office, guest relation office, housekeeping) and food and beverage division (restaurant and groups & events) of the selected hotels. The selection of the FLEs also made it possible to obtain FLEs who had been employed for at least one year in their current positions,

received service failure complaints from guests and undertaken service failure recovery. Regulators of the hotel industry were also sampled. They included one top official each of GTA and GHA. Data was collected from three 5-star hotels, eight 4-star hotels and four 3-star hotels.

**Table 7: Sample Size of Hotels' FLEs and FLMs by Position and Division**

S/ N	Hotel Rating	FLE		FLM	
		Current Position	Hotel Division	Current Position	Hotel Division
1	5	Waiter	Food & Beverage	Groups & Events	Food & Beverage
2	5	Cashier/Receptionist	Rooms	Front Office	Rooms
3	5	Front Desk Executive	Rooms	Guest Relation	Rooms
4	4	Room Attendant	Rooms	Executive Housekeeper	Rooms
5	4	Guest Relation Officer (GRO)	Rooms	Front Office	Rooms
6	4	Front Desk Executive	Rooms	Rooms Division	Rooms
7	4	Reservationist	Rooms	Food & Beverage	Food & Beverage
8	4	Waiter	Food & Beverage	Reservation & Yield	Rooms
9	4	Waitress	Food & Beverage	Food & Beverage	Food & Beverage
10	4	Room Attendant	Rooms	Guest Relation	Rooms
11	4	Reservationist	Rooms	Guest Relation	Rooms
12	3	Guest Relation Officer	Rooms	Rooms Division	Rooms
13	3	Night Auditor	Rooms	Food & Beverage	Food & Beverage
14	3	Room Attendant	Rooms	Front Office	Rooms
15	3	Guest Relation Officer	Rooms	Groups & Events	Food & Beverage

Source: GTA list for licensed hotels, 2017; HRMs of the above hotels

## Sampling Procedure

With respect to the collection of quantitative data, proportional and convenient sampling procedures were used to select the respondents (guests). Proportion and purposive sampling procedures were utilised in the selection of the FLEs while only purposive sampling procedure was used for the FLEs and the policy enforcers of GTA and GHA.

The sampling frame for the hotel guests was based on the number of rooms of the 3 to 5-star hotels in the Accra Metropolis (15); this was obtained from GTA. The FOMs of the 15 hotels provided the number of functional and occupied rooms together with the hotels' daily percentage occupancy for one week. This percentage occupancy was calculated by dividing a week's average number of occupied rooms by the total average number of rooms available multiplied by 100. Hence,

$$\text{Average occupancy \%} = \frac{\text{no. of rooms sold/occupied per week}}{\text{no. of rooms available per week}} \times 100$$

The sample size of 400 was then proportionately divided among the 15 hotels based on the number of occupied rooms.

Furthermore, convenient sampling procedure was utilised as an inclusion selection criterion for individual guests who had experienced service failures and received a form of service recovery after formally complaining to a FLE or a FLM and were willing to respond to the questionnaires. Such guests who were willing to respond to the questionnaires were introduced to the field assistants by the front FLEs and some waiters.

In addition, Table 8 presents the purposively selected FLEs and FLMs from the 15 hotels based on their positions because only one member each was eligible for the in-depth interview. Basically, the FLEs or FLMs who deal directly with guests were from two main divisions, namely rooms division and food and beverage (F&B) division. Notable were the FLEs positions of front desk executives, room attendants and guest relation officers from the rooms' division and waiters and barmen from the food and beverage division.

The criteria employed in selecting the FLEs were, they should have been employed for at least one year in their current positions, contributed to guest service failure, received service failure complaints and contributed to service recovery. Some of the FLEs of the various departments were purposively selected for the study because they were the boundary liners of the hotels who have direct relationship and dealt directly with the guests through the services they offered. They were mostly the first people guests complained to and they helped to resolve them. FLMs were also purposively sampled from the Rooms Division (front office, guest relation office, housekeeping) and food and beverage division (restaurant, groups and events). Regulators of the Ghanaian hotel industry such as the GTA quality assurance manager and GHA president were also purposively sampled for the study.

**Table 8: Unit of Analysis, Instrument, Sample Size and Sampling**

**Technique**

Respondents	Instrument	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
<i>Hotel respondents</i>			
Guests	Questionnaire	400	Proportional and Convenient
FLEs	Interview guide	15	Purposive and random
FLMs	Interview guide	15	Purposive
<i>Other stakeholders</i>			
GHA	Interview guide	1	Purposive
GTA (QA)	Interview guide	1	Purposive
<i>Total</i>		<i>432</i>	

Source: GTA list for licensed hotels, 2017; HRMs of the above stated hotels and organisations.

**Data Collection Instruments**

Questionnaires and semi-structured interview guide were used for data collection. The questionnaires were administered to guests whilst the open-ended interview guides were administered to selected FLEs and FLMs and two top officials of GTA and GHA.

**Questionnaires**

A questionnaire is a standardised measuring instrument with exactly the same worded questions for a larger sample size (Babbie, 2007). Questionnaires offer respondents greater anonymity, thereby encouraging them to readily reveal their real feelings and attitudes (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). Questionnaires are primarily the mode employed by hotels to collect data (feedback) from guests as

the stated scaled responses make it easier for guests to complete with little or no assistance from the researcher.

The questionnaire consisted of four modules with multiple item scales (Appendix A). Each construct was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘Strongly agree’ (5). Other questions were measured on the nominal scale such as ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ and multiple-choice questions with labelled responses like gender, age, marital status, educational level and monthly income. Guests’ narration was also captured in open-ended questions such as the service failure they experienced.

Module A consisted of five dimensions with 14 statements on guests’ expectation of FLEs’ service delivery. The constructs were adopted from van Iwaarden et al. (2003) and Parasuraman et al. (1988). The five dimensions for guests’ expectations were responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy and tangibles. Module B which covered guests’ perception of service or product quality after the delivery was based on their expectations and service failure (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Tax & Brown, 1998). Guests’ perceptions were equally rated on a Likert scale with the same constructs used for guests’ expectations. The service failures were captured in a narrative form from open-ended questions together with the complaints they lodged with the FLEs or FLMs. The narrated service failures were to support the coded forms of service failures indicated as experienced by the guests.

FLEs’ service failure recovery process, guests’ satisfaction and loyalty were covered in Module C. The constructs employed were adapted from Bitner (1990) and Zeithaml et al. (1996). FLEs’ service failure recovery process with six dimensions of communication, empowerment, feedback, atonement,

explanation and tangibles measured fifteen items on a five-point Likert scale. Guests' satisfaction and loyalty scaled with eight and two items respectively were also measured; the questionnaire ended with an open-ended question requesting guests to mention one thing which will make them loyal to the hotels they were residing in. Guests' stating what would make them loyal was to support their reasons for being loyal.

The last Module of the questionnaire elicited the socio-demographic and travel characteristics of the respondents, including age, level of education, occupation and monthly income, while travel characteristics were purpose of visit, how often they visit the hotel and the length of stay in the hotel.

#### Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide was used to elicit responses from FLEs, FLMs and two top officials of GTA and GHA. The in-depth interview guide consisted of four thematic areas for each one of them. With respect to the FLEs, the first part elicited responses about their profile and that of the hotels they were working for (Appendix B). The second area required their responses on measures put in place by management for FLEs to deliver quality service, empowerment and motivation. Additionally, how FLEs handle service failure recovery was also investigated by adopting the questions of Sherman (2012). Responses on FLEs' training and its influence on guests' complaint handling, service failure recovery performance and their job satisfaction which influences their performance of service failure recovery were sought for in the third module. The last module adapted from Boundless Management (2016), Mathies and Viet Ngo (2013) and Waterhouse (2012) elicited responses on the challenges the

FLEs face during service failure recovery.

The FLMs' in-depth interview guide also covered four main thematic areas (Appendix C). The first area elicited for their profiles and those of the hotels. The second area drew responses on aspects of measures put in place by FLMs for service quality delivery, service failure and their perception of FLEs' performance. Measures put in place by the FLMs to facilitate FLEs' service failure recovery such as training, empowerment and rewards were also sought for as the third area. Finally, the fourth area delved into the underlying processes which motivated the FLEs to perform better service failure recoveries and the ensuing results.

The interview guide (Appendix D) for the GTA quality assurance official and (Appendix E) for GHA official had four sections. The first section was on the interviewees' profile and that of their institutions. The second interview guide bordered on GTA and GHA's perspectives on special strategies put in place to ensure QSD in Ghanaian hotels, and their knowledge of unmet guests' expectations (service failures) and complaints. Responses were also sought from a top official of GTA on other components of FLEs' service delivery and guests' complaints apart from hotels' tangibles during the annual or bi-annual inspections. The third section centred on the measures put in place by GTA and GHA to support hotels in guests' service failure recovery, while the last section enquired about their knowledge of FLEs' motivation and condition of service to perform better in guests' service failure recovery.

### **Training of Field Assistants**

Four field assistants who were graduate students, two hospitality technicians and two national service persons, were involved in the main



fieldwork in the Accra Metropolis. The four of them were taken through a three-day training from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 to furnish them with the requisite knowledge of research ethics and the translation of questions or canvassing based on the research questions and objectives. They were taken through all the questions on the instruments and effective methods of data collection.

### **Pre-Testing of Research Instruments**

Pre-tests are minor tests of research instruments in the form of questionnaires and interview schedules to check the efficacy of the instruments (Sarantakos, 2005) Stakeholders such as guests, FLEs and FLMs with the same characteristics as those to be involved in the final survey were sourced in similar settings (4-star hotel) for the pre-test. These units of analysis were selected in similar settings to ascertain the validity, reliability, dimensions and issues they consider as vital to guarantee that the survey instruments do not overlook key areas of service failure recovery and other dimensions (Smith, 2012). Hence the pre-testing of this study's instruments was conducted in a 4-star hotel in Takoradi in the Western Region from 9<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2017. This was because the hotel was an upscale one located in a city with an appreciable occupancy rate similar to those in Accra, the study area.

In order to test the questionnaire to be used for the data collection, 31 respondents comprising 25 guests, four FLEs and two FLMs were used for the pre-test. Initially, most of the guests who should have responded to the questionnaire together with the HRM and the FOM complained about the volume of statements for some of the dimensions and the font size of the printed questionnaire, as they had to strain their eyes to read them. Modifications such

as changing the font size from nine to 11 were made without losing the objectives and focus of the study and redistributed to guests who had complained of service failures and were willing to respond to the questionnaires on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

Exploratory data analysis was undertaken to examine the relationship between the constructs under study, such as guest expectation and perception, service failure, recovery satisfaction, overall satisfaction and guest loyalty to the hotels they visit. Reliability test using the Cronbach Alpha was conducted on the data to determine the reliability of the scale; it had an estimated value of 0.910, indicating a high level of reliability (Field, 2005).

The pre-tests granted the researcher the opportunity to affect the necessary modifications of the shortcomings detected to sharpen the questionnaire for the actual fieldwork (Kvale, 1996; Smith, 2012). The effective pre-test of FLE-guest interface survey which reflected what the respondents and interviewees care about most (Smith, 2012) also assisted in establishing the reliability and content validity of the instruments.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The actual data collection exercise started on 14th June and ended on 16th September 2017. Prior to the collection of the data, contacts were established with the HRMs of the selected hotels and the top officials of GTA and GHA to seek permission and ensure cooperation from them to provide the data for the study. The rationale of the study was explained to them to gain an understanding of the purpose of the study. The HRMs of the selected hotels introduced the researcher and field assistants to the front desk FLEs who were to identify guests who had lodged complaints and the FLMs and FLEs to be

interviewed. The researcher and field assistants had the privilege of being introduced to seven GMs: one GM each from a 5 and 3-star hotels and five GMs from 4-star hotels. The purpose of the study was explained to all of them as and when the field assistants were introduced to them.

On arrival at the various hotels, the HRMs and/or the FLMs introduced the researcher and the field assistants to the selected respondents in the HRM's office or the back office of the front desk of the various hotels. The research assistants then introduced themselves again to the respondents who had had problem(s) with the services offered them and were willing to participate in the data collection, explained the rationale of the study and sought their verbal consent before self-administering the questionnaires to them. Some of the guests completed them there and then and handed them over within 27 – 35 minutes. Other guests who were either tired after a full-day's work, were relaxing or were just reluctant to write requested the field assistants to write their responses to the questions for them based on what they said. In the last instance, most of the respondents requested the field assistants to go over the responses to ensure that what they stated was what had been written. The rest responded to the questionnaires at their convenience and handed them over to the front desk personnel who placed them in an envelope supplied by the research assistants for collection the following day. Appreciation was shown to all the respondents for agreeing to participate in the study before and after the data collection.

The FLM and FLE nominees for the interviews were selected based on the hotels' star ratings for representativeness. Those who were selected were all prepared to respond to the interview guide with the exception of a 4-star hotel FOM who recommended the GRM to be interviewed since most guests' service

failure complaints were made to her. In each instance of the interview sessions, the interviewer introduced herself and briefed each interviewee on the nature and purpose of the interview. Verbal consent of each of the interviewees was sought again prior to the conduct of the interview and this time, none of them declined participation, likewise tape recording and notes taking to capture the interviews. The assurance of confidentiality of identities resulted in relaxed FLEs which led to openness. All the data were collected at ‘natural settings’ where the respondents experienced the subject or problem under study (Creswell, 2014).

The above stated preliminary actions were taken to ensure that the interviewees were relaxed, gain their consent for the second time to conduct the interview and explain how their responses would be recorded. Further probing was made where necessary. Non-verbal expressions of communications through body language such as facial expressions, sighs and prolonged thinking relevant to the interpretation of the data collected were also noted. It was also ensured that biases or opinions did not affect behaviour or data while using in-depth interview as a data collection instrument.

Permission was also sought after the interview to follow-up should the need arise. The duration of the FLEs’ interview ranged between 25 to 45 minutes while that of the FLMs was 45 to 60 minutes. Altogether, 15 each of FLEs and FLMs of various positions in the 15 upscale hotels in the Accra Metropolis and one each of the top officials of GTA and GHA were interviewed, while 400 questionnaires were purposively collected from guests who lodged complaints on service failure and were recovered.

### Challenges Encountered on the Field

Collecting data for studies is not devoid of challenges. A number of challenges were encountered during the course of data collection. Getting the permission of three HRMs to collect data from guests was a bit difficult initially due to policies of their hotels to safeguard the privacy of guests, so they needed the approval of management first. The introductory letter from the department addressed specifically to the various hotels introducing the researcher as a PhD student made the collection of the data possible, especially the quantitative data. It took between three and five weeks after the submission of the letter before the final approval from management of the hotels. In spite of the fact that letters were sent to them about four months in advance; hence, the delay in the collection of data from some of the hotels.

In some instances, managers were interrupted during the interviews due to 'very urgent' issues and the interviews had to be rescheduled to other dates and time. This also resulted in the conduct of interviews of three FLEs on different days from that of the FLMs of the same hotels. Additionally, some of the hotels scheduled the collection of guests' data on Saturdays and Sundays, or between 5pm and midnight during the week because they did not want their guests to be interrupted during the week or during the day.

Finally, several calls and visits had to be made to three of the hotels to conduct fresh interviews because five of the interviews conducted with two FLMs and three FLEs from a 3-star and two 4-star hotels were corrupted. This was because the FLEs to be interviewed had very busy schedules coupled with the need to get someone equally efficient to stand in for them during the interviews. In the long run, permission was granted the second time to conduct

the interviews again.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the quantitative analysis. The completed questionnaires were edited to check for inconsistencies, the open-ended questions coded and analysed. The study's open-ended question on guests' service failure experience yielded four categories and 15 sub-categories in 'natural' groupings from the 831 incidents after repeated careful sorting of the data; this makes the formation of the individual groupings more reliable and eligible (Lockwood & Deng, 2004). Again, researchers are allowed to proceed with the categorisation of 50 guests' service failures; a study with 100 or more service failures provides a more reliable categorisation (Lockwood & Deng, 2004).

Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS) version 22 was used to process the data from the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were calculated for all the variables, and pie and bar charts were employed to describe, present the results and summarise the nominal data and other characteristics of the subject matter. These descriptive statistics were performed to provide an overview of the sample characteristics and distribution of the data.

With respect to the inferential statistics for the quantitative analysis, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) involving the maximum likelihood technique in analysis of moment structure (AMOS) 22 was used to examine how well the measurements fitted the dataset. The CFA was also used to assess the underlying structure and factorial validity of the measurement scaled on guest

expectation, perception, recovery satisfaction, overall satisfaction and loyalty. The normality of the data was assessed by examining the skewness and kurtosis because the study sought to confirm the utility of the scales or measuring instruments in relation to the study context.

As regards the SEM analysis, the maximum likelihood estimation method in AMOS version 22 software was used to perform this analysis to assess the normality of the data. The same software was used to test the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scales. Additionally, the global fitness of the measurement model was assessed based on model fit indices such as the  $\chi^2/df$  ( $< 3$ ), goodness-of-fit index [GFI] ( $\geq 0.90$ ), adjusted goodness-of-fit index [AGFI] ( $> 0.90$ ), comparative fit index [CFI] ( $\geq 0.90$ ), Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] ( $> 0.95$ ), standardised root mean square error residual [SRMR] ( $< 0.08$ ), and root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] ( $< 0.08$ ) (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2017).

The results of the normality test revealed that the data have both univariate and multivariate kurtotic distribution. Kurtosis values of equal to or greater than 7.0 are considered to be indicative of a non-normal univariate distribution in AMOS (Bryne, 2010). The kurtosis values for the observed variables ranged from -0.087 to 1.074 which confirms that the items are normally distributed.

The results for each scale are displayed in Tables 17, 19, 21, 23 and 25. Tables 17 and 19 display the results on two scales which are guests' expectation of service delivery and perception of service failure. Table 20 addresses the scale which measures guest satisfaction with service failure recovery (RECOVSAT), while Table 24 focuses on the scale which measured guests' satisfaction and

loyalty intentions. These are in turn interpreted and discussed in Chapter Nine.

Furthermore, the independent-samples t-test and one-way analysis variance (ANOVA) were used to explore the differences in guest assessment of service failure and satisfaction with recovery across the variables, which served as independent variables. Post-hoc tests were estimated using the Least Significant Difference tests and cross validated using Bonferroni adjustment.

The semi-structured interviews with the FLEs, FLMs and the two top officials recorded with a digital voice recorder were transferred to a computer for verbatim transcription; informants' names were replaced with code numbers. It was then organised under major themes and synthesised. These themes, as patterns across the sets of data associated with a particular research question, were necessary for the description of the phenomena. This was used to combine the quantitative results from the guests to gain a deeper insight on the issues studied and fill gaps ensuing from the analyses of the other responses from the questionnaire to improve and validate the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations in research processes are necessary especially when studying multiple interpretive practices (Creswell, 2012; Mertens, Holmes & Harris, 2009). Hence, ethical issues observed in the mixed method cross-sectional study were informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality in communicating the purposes and collection of the data for the study.

With respect to informed consent, the respondents were generally informed of the purpose and the possible implications of the study through the HRMs of the various hotels and other firms. This was done by seeking for and



obtaining permission from the various firms to undertake the research through personal visits and emails to the HRMs of the selected firms. Official introductory letters from the department to the HRMs seeking permission to conduct the research also introduced the researcher and detailed the topic and purpose of the research. Again, the consent of the individual respondents was sought verbally when the researcher and the field assistants came into direct contact with them and avoided any form of coercion whatsoever. Interviewees' assent was also sought to tape record the interview for transcription.

The HRMs were initially guaranteed of the respondents' anonymity because their personal data, the responses given and any other identifiable information relating to them were also not captured. All the respondents were again assured of their anonymity because names were not associated with the responses, but code numbers.

Similarly, ethical issues relating to confidentiality of sensitive information, identities of respondents and hotels as well as any other information not to be divulged in the public domain were observed. This was because the data was purely for academic purposes. Also, the researcher and field assistants were continually reminded to avoid deceptive practices which could influence the process, methods or data collected.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has explained the methods, processes of data collection and analysis of data. This includes the introduction, description and justification of the study area, description of the philosophy (pragmatism) as well as the research design (embedded mixed method and cross-sectional survey). The sources of

data, target population, sample size, sampling procedure, data collection instruments employed in collecting the data including their reliability and validity have also been discussed.

Lastly, pre-test, ethical considerations, methods of data analysis and the elaboration and explanation of the issues related to research methodology have also been highlighted. For instance, the ANOVA, CFA and SEM were used to analyse the quantitative data while the qualitative data was analysed electronically.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SERVICE FAILURES EXPERIENCED BY GUESTS IN UPSCALE HOTELS

#### **Introduction**

Chapter five presents and discusses the findings related to service failures experienced by guests from the perspectives of guests, frontline employees (FLEs), frontline managers (FLMs) and top officials of Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) and Ghana Hoteliers Association (GHA). Common service failure complaints made by guests were examined based on three categories, namely service delivery system failures, employee attitude and guest related problems and what attributed to them. Furthermore, guests' reporting channel of service failure, persons to whom they made the reports to and the extent of their satisfaction with how their complaints were handled was also discussed. It also looks at the background characteristics of the guests.

#### **Background Characteristics of Respondents**

The profile of the 400 respondents is presented on Table 9. Generally, the background characteristics of the respondents are diverse, which is an indication of a heterogeneous clientele. More males (73.50%) than females (26.50%) participated in the study. More than half of the respondents (70%) were between the ages of 31 and 50 years indicating that most of them were relatively young. Similarly, 66.25% of those respondents were married. In terms of their religious background, about 79.25% of the respondents were Christians, while 11.5% professed Islam. Moreover, more than three-quarters (76.25%) of

the respondents were postgraduate degree holders.

**Table 9: Background Characteristics of Guests (N = 400)**

Characteristic	N	Percent
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	294	73.50
Female	106	26.50
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	265	66.25
Ever married	72	18.00
Single	63	15.75
<i>Age</i>		
41-50	158	39.50
31-40	122	30.50
51 and above	92	23.00
<30	28	7.00
<i>Continent of residence</i>		
Africa	158	39.50
Europe	134	33.50
America	69	17.30
Asia	39	9.80
<i>Education</i>		
Post graduate	305	76.25
Bachelor	61	15.25
Diploma	26	6.50
Others	8	2.00
<i>Religion</i>		
Christian	317	79.25
Moslem	46	11.50
Others	37	9.25
<i>Sector of employment</i>		
Engineering	139	34.75
Banking and Finance	78	19.50
Trading	54	13.50
Education	40	10.00
Health sector	30	7.50
Hospitality and Tourism	26	6.50
Legal	20	5.00
Others	13	3.25
<i>Monthly income (\$)</i>		
3000 and above	222	55.50
2501-3000	101	25.25
2001-2500	42	10.50
1501-2000	21	5.25
Less than 1500	14	3.50

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

More than half (55.50%) earned a monthly income of about \$3,000; this is due to the fact that most of the respondents occupied top positions in multinational companies. The respondents reported working in various sectors ranging from engineering (34.75%), banking and finance (19.50%), trading (13.50%); with only 6.50% working in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry.

### Travel Characteristics of Respondents

The majority of the respondents were sampled in 4-star hotels (74.5%) followed by those in 5-star hotels (Table 10), as there were more of 4-star hotels with more than 100 rooms in the study as compared to the 5 and 3-star hotels. Most of the respondents visited for business purposes (89.25%), confirming the fact that clients of upscale hotels usually visit for business purposes, and are equally targeted by the upscale hotels because of their economic status (Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015). Also, there were more repeat visitors (76.50%) than first timers (23.50%). They mostly travelled in groups (58%) and, on the average, stayed for 16 days in the hotels probably because of their work schedule.

**Table 10: Travel Characteristics of Respondents (N=400)**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
<i>Star rating</i>			
4-Star	249	74.50	
5-star	102	25.50	
3-Star	49	12.25	
<i>Purposive of visit</i>			
Business	357	89.25	
Leisure	37	9.25	
Others	6	1.50	
<i>Visitation status</i>			
Repeat visitor	306	76.50	
First timer	94	23.50	

Table 10 Continued

<i>Frequency of visitation to Ghana</i>		
Sometimes	192	48.00
Hardly	88	22.00
Often	74	18.50
Very often	46	11.50
<i>Travel party</i>		
Group	232	58.00
Individual	168	42.00
<i>Number in a group</i>		<b>4.73</b>
<i>Length of stay in hotel (days)</i>		<b>16.08</b>
<i>Length of stay (weeks)</i>		
Less than a week	200	50.00
One week	80	20.00
Two weeks	59	14.75
A month and above	24	6.00
Three weeks	20	5.00
Four weeks	17	4.25

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

### Service Failures Experienced by Guests

The study found that 831 service failure complaints had been lodged by the 400 respondents, with some of them reporting multiple problems experienced. Thus, service failures were quite prevalent among the facilities studied.

### Categories and Forms of Service Failures Experienced by Guests

Four categories of service failures were identified. These service failures were attributed internally to management with respect to service delivery system failures (63.89%) and employee attitude (33.81%), and externally to guest-related service failures (1.56%) and external noise (0.73%). Further subdivision of the four categories yielded fifteen forms of service failures reported based on their nature (Table 11). Service delivery system failures include all nucleus

service problems where guests do not receive core services, products and/or amenities from the hotels. The dominant service failure emanating from service delivery system failures were unavailable and/or irregular service (15.88%), defective equipment (12.03%), overpriced services or products (9.51%) and unfriendly guest policies (8.66%).

### **Attribution of Service Delivery Problems**

Table 11 below highlights the various attributions related to the service delivery problems encountered by the respondents based on the study's conceptual framework. The factors of service failures were attributed to internal and external factors (Weiner, 1985). The service failures were mainly attributed to internal factors (97.70%). These include the 'non-performance' of some managers (63.89%) and FLEs' attitudes (33.82%). The external factors include disturbance from guests (1.56%) and external noise (0.73%). Thus, in the opinion of guests, most of the service failures were characterised and caused by the hotels and their FLEs.

The results show that most of the service failures which occur in 3 to 5-star hotels in Accra could have been prevented if management and staff had put in the needed efforts to minimise service failures in order to meet guests' expectations. Such performance would in effect satisfy them to gain their trust and loyalty as suggested in the conceptual framework of the study. Although not much could be done about the external causes of service failures since noise from flying aircraft and honking of vehicular horns (0.73%) are out of the hotels' control, some noise from other guests (1.56%) could be prevented or controlled.

**Table 11: Attributions, Categories and Forms of Service Failures (N= 400)**

Attributes/Categories	Specifics	N	Percent
<b>Internal attributes</b>			
<i>Management: Service system failures</i>			
	Unavailable or irregular service	132	15.88
	Defective equipment	100	12.03
	Overpriced service/products	79	9.51
	Unfriendly guest policies	72	8.66
	Insanitary conditions	65	7.82
	Defective products	54	6.50
	Noise on premises	16	1.92
	Reservation associated problems	13	1.56
	<i>Total</i>	<i>531</i>	<i>63.89</i>
<i>Employee attitude</i>			
	Unacceptable staff behaviour	93	11.19
	Slowed or delayed staff services	69	8.30
	Unskilled/unknowledgeable staff	60	7.22
	Guest request not granted	37	4.45
	Over billing	22	2.65
	<i>Total</i>	<i>281</i>	<i>33.82</i>
<b>External attributes</b>			
<i>Guest related</i>	Disturbances	13	1.56
<i>External noise</i>	Noise off premises	06	0.73
	<i>Total</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>2.29</i>
<b>Total</b>		<b>831*</b>	<b>100.00</b>

\*Multiple responses

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Respondents recounted some of the worst service failures they experienced. These include instances of unavailable and or irregular services



(15.88%) such as unavailability of reserved rooms even after guaranteed reservations had been made, unstable internet access and power outages. In the guest-rooms, some guests experienced the absence of ceiling or overhead fans, some suites did not have kitchenettes, and some refrigerators were not stocked with drinks. Other service failures included the absence of coffee machines, lack of privacy and lack of guest-room amenities. Additionally, in some instances, there were no designated smoking areas, and no towels at the swimming poolside. Service failures related to food service included no special dishes for Vegetarians, Nigerians and Muslims, limited variety of buffet dishes, and the absence of fruit baskets. Some of the remarks made by the guests were:

*Power interruptions lasted for hours shutting down the LCD Projector during a conference. Non-smoking rooms smell of smoke, dreadful lunch without dessert. In fact, the standards of this hotel have fallen (American Structural Engineer, Male, 4-star hotel).*

*There was no Halal food for Moslems. Though the restaurant promised twice to prepare some when I requested, it never did (Rwandan Software Engineer, Male, 5-star hotel).*

A Frenchman who is a Hotelier residing in a 3-star hotel also stated that:

*The rooms don't offer any privacy; they aren't insulated, and there's a door between two rooms. The AC wasn't turned on ahead of my checking in, lighting and décor are not enough, the Wi-Fi is unstable and the TV has only local channels.*

In response to the last complainant, the FOM of the 3-star argued that,

the guest-room AC cannot be turned on prior to guests' arrival. This is because the ACs were fully automated and worked only when someone was in the room or the key card was inserted in the 'pouch' before it starts working, cooling the room within five minutes. He continued by saying that:

*We also need to cut down on energy costs and so can't afford to leave electrical gadgets on. What about if the guest doesn't turn up at the expected date or time? Maybe something could be done about that when Front Desk notifies Room Attendants of guests' arrival.*

Contrasting the views of the manager and complaints of the guest, it suggests conflicting expectations on the use of energy by the two parties. While the management of hotels are mindful of costs, guests are mindful of their comfort. This is one example of the generally known gap or discrepancy between management and guests' expectations of service delivery (Bondzie-Simpson, 2013; Amissah 2017), identifying guests' problem with business facilities and limited variety of food. The findings of this study are also in tune with Loo and Leung's (2018) findings where guests were dissatisfied with the facilities of Taipei's luxury hotel industry such as rooms with soundproofing problems, unpleasant smell and uncomfortable beddings.

Service failures relating to defective equipment (12.03%) comprise of core service problems related to products offered by the hotels such as guestroom telephones and key cards which were not working. Others were broken locks and beds, hand bath showers, wash hand basins, WCs, and other room amenities. Respondents also cited clogged bath tubs, breakdown of conference equipment and problem with credit card machines. A German Engineer in a 5-star hotel

lamented about the sliding door to his balcony which was not locking, resulting in mosquitoes disturbing his sleep. There were also complaints about malfunctioning equipment like Jacuzzi, internet and air-conditioners. Some guests had the following complaints:

*My problem was with the Jacuzzi's drainage system which wasn't working. As a result, I had to stand in the dirty water after bathing. I've been moved to another room, yet it's still the same problem. It's so disgusting* (South African Businessman, 3-star hotel).

*The only problem I have with this hotel is the speed of the internet; it's 0.35mbps, 72 times slower than the internet in my office. I think they can do better* (Chinese Businessman, 4-star hotel).

*Leakage from the AC dripped on and damaged my luggage at night. In fact, this hotel is not at par with other 4-star hotels with similar charges* (South African Male Geologist, 4-star hotel).

Most of the problems reported were associated with product problems (44%). Management conducting regular inspections and ensuring preventive maintenance of all facilities at the highest level of standard befitting upscale hotels at all times would have minimised core service problems and complaints.

Guests' dissatisfaction resulting from overpriced hotel services accounted for 9.51% of the service delivery system failures. Guests were dissatisfied with the prices of services, products and facilities such as guest-rooms, food, services and transport because they thought they did not get value for money. For instance, some guests complained of check-in after midnight and late check-out

at 6pm attracting a full night's rate instead of half. A Kenyan Accountant in a 3-star hotel also complained about the exorbitant rate of a room he reserved two months earlier yet ended up in a small dark room due to overbooking. Another guest also reported of being 'ripped off' to pay for a supposedly 'Express' laundry which took two days. Some other guests who complained about overpricing had this to say:

*I was overcharged with respect to my room rate as compared to that of my colleague, for whatever reasons, I don't know. Moreover, it's not worth the \$300 per night (American Psychologist, Female, 4-star hotel).*

*This is a very expensive hotel, yet the speed in delivering service doesn't match up to it. It took 30 minutes to check in with only one person ahead of me (Turkish Aerospace Engineer, Male, 5-star hotel).*

Much is expected of FLEs and hotels to respectively offer services and products to meet guests' expectations for guests to have their money's worth and to minimise guests' complaints. If a South African Male Surgeon could report of a 4-star hotel's throat-cutting charges, which he claims, does not match up to international standards or even that of other African countries, then it is not the best. This is because it would be at the detriment of the hotel should such a statement get onto any of the social media platforms in the current competitive global market.

Unfriendly guest policies (8.66%) include situations where decisions are made by the hotels to the detriment of guests. It is necessary for hotels to clarify

the policies and standard procedures for their guests, though such policies should not be too rigid. These policies which guests complained about include: why guests who arrive at noon could not check in till 2pm though their rooms were ready, a policy of not entertaining prostitutes on the premises as well as policies on over booking, smoking and non-smoking areas.

Some hotels' policies have been found to be unfavourable to some guests, making it difficult for FLEs or FLMs to react should guests complain about them. For instance, a Chinese businessman who was loyal to one of the hotels under study was disappointed when he was asked to pay extra for an early check-in. As a loyal guest, he assumed he would not have to pay for the early check in unless the hotel was full. Also, a Ghanaian Accountant had the following experience in a 3-star hotel:

*I was forced to pay cash during a conference instead of the agreed cheque after the programme; the scene was very embarrassing.*

An aggrieved male French Banker who had to wait for almost two hours to be picked up at the airport also had this to say:

*I had to fully pay for my room's bill before being checked in - how?*

*I'm yet to hear this in my 23 years' business travel (4-star hotel).*

A Sierra Leonean International Footballer also complained about how maintenance works were carried out in a 4-star hotel whilst he was in his room.

*Maintenance work was going on while guests were in their rooms with no excuse or apology, and credit card payment is charged 6% on the rate which is not right.*

Respondents had cause to also complain about the insanitary conditions of the hotels (7.82%). These included dirty guestrooms, dirty bed sheets and torn

bath towels, smelly hallways and guestroom carpets as well as dirty gym and beaches. Other guests complained about dirty swimming pools with flies and mosquitoes everywhere especially in the rooms which caused sleepless nights and stuffy rooms smelling of mould and cigarette. A South African Air Traffic Controller complained about the ear infection he developed for two weeks as a result of swimming in a swimming pool which had not been cleaned regularly.

A male South Korean Graphic Designer also said this about a 4-star hotel:

*There's a foul stench from the bathroom due to poor drainage and the windows are also very dirty.*

Guests of upscale hotels would generally expect the highest standard of cleanliness to deter infestation and unhygienic conditions and would vehemently criticise such situations which do not meet their expectations. Other researchers also found that luxury hotels' guests mostly complain about the cleanliness of the properties (Dangliano, 2016; Loo & Leung, 2018). It is therefore, very necessary that effective sanitary conditions are maintained at all times for guests to continue patronising such hotels.

The second highest category of service failures related to FLEs' attitude (33.82%) included unacceptable behaviour of employees (11.19%), slowed or delayed services (8.30%) and employees' lack of knowledge (7.22%). Unacceptable employee behaviour includes actions taken or not taken intentionally or unintentionally by FLEs. A number of findings such as those of Ogechi and Igbojekwe (2015) highlighted how most of the service failures were attributed to FLEs such as some receptionists, cashiers, waiters, and finally room attendants in eleven 4 and 5-star hotels in Nigeria. A notable contrary finding to this study is that of Johnston and Michel (2008) which found FLEs amongst the

least causes of guests' service failures.

With respect to unacceptable employee behaviour, guests complained that staff were not competent, hospitable and empathic. They also had poor attitudes, were ill-mannered, unfriendly and unhelpful, especially receptionists who look down on blacks. They are always on the computer instead of acknowledging guests or paying attention to their needs. Additionally, guests claimed that some cashiers overbilled them, never had change for payments made, and made them pay cash instead of using their credit cards after opting to use credit card during reservation. Room attendants knocked on guests' doors as late as 11:45pm just to enquire if they needed anything, thereby disturbing their sleep. Some employees also allowed prostitutes in to harass guests. There were other complaints about the attitude and communication skills of FLEs such as the one made by a Kenyan man who was an I.T. Engineer about a 3-star hotel:

*Most of the front desk staff lack basic human interactions. 'Hello', 'Thank you' or 'You're welcomed' are missing in their vocabulary. The traditional front-line staff contagious smile is even missing.*

A male American software engineer lodging in a 5-star hotel had this to say:

*Generally, the staff are insolent, especially the Security Persons. One of them wanted to open my bag without permission—that wasn't courteous. Another one also shouted at me saying, 'Hey, where are you going? What are you doing here? What's your room number? What's your name?' all at the same time! The impudence.*

A Nigerian Petroleum Engineer could not stand most of the waiters dragging their feet as if they were tired, and the glass of drink which he ordered was served without a salver. A couple also complained of Waiters stacking dirty plates on a

table just opposite theirs whilst they were eating, and they had to beckon them to come and clear those dirty plates before they obliged.

Perhaps, a French Hotelier in one of the 5-star hotels sums it all by saying:

*Receptionists also communicate in local dialect among themselves ignoring our need to check in. Our rooms were not made for the second time, and the Receptionist's reaction was, the Room Attendants have closed and so nothing could be done about it; that's unacceptable!*

Unacceptable staff behaviour under the category of employee attitude, especially among FLEs, is unacceptable since they are the boundary spanners of the hotels, standing in as the 'face' of hotels. Guests reported instances of barmen making guests pay for drinks for an event not meant to be paid for by the guests, and cashiers not allowing guests to use credit cards for payments but cash for whatever reason do not augur well for upscale hotels' reputation. Overpricing of service products and overbilling by the FLEs (12.16%) are abnormal ways in which guests are 'ripped off' (Harris, 2012). Some of these FLEs were found out later and made to refund the difference, but this is not good enough. With such behaviour, FLEs cannot be trusted.

These results are consistent with that of Lewis and McCann (2004) in the United Kingdom and China, which further indicated that guests found receptionists to be uncooperative and they also prepared inaccurate bills. Abou Taleb and Abou Kamar (2013) also found that 12% of the respondents, just like this study (11.19%) had problems with FLEs' behaviour. In tune with this study also is that of Chen et al. (2014) and Loo and Leung (2018) whose respondents found FLEs' bad manners as very unfair, and a violation of their self-esteem.



Additionally, Lee (2018) and Loo and Leung (2018) found FLEs being unfriendly, unhelpful and inattentive. Such negative FLE behaviours which are not being exhibited only in our part of the world, resulting in negative guest encounters or experiences could result in psychological loss to guests, threaten the hotel/FLE-guest relationship and evoke liabilities to the hotels (Bock et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2014; Roschk & Gelbrich 2014; Wetzel et al., 2014). In line with the guests' opinion, the Dynamic Interactions Model (Bitran & Lojo, 1993) and the conceptual framework of the study, upscale hotels seriously investing in training their FLEs to portray a positive 'moment of truth' is the most critical segment of the framework of FLE-guest interface. Hence, critically addressing such attitudes through effective training and supervision of FLEs could minimise the adverse effects on guests' satisfaction and loyalty.

Slow or delayed services (8.30%) relate to lack of urgency on the part of employees, slow check-ins, guestrooms not made ready, and slow food and beverage service delivery. Some respondents reported of check-ins taking as long as two hours for only six people because it took a long time for their passports to be photocopied. Room attendants have to be even prompted by receptionists to clean *stayover* guestrooms. An American Diplomat indicated that his request for an exchange of a \$100 bill to Cedis took 30 minutes. A complaint from a male Norwegian Petroleum Engineer in a 5-star hotel was:

*I didn't get it when we had to wait for an hour on arrival to be checked in without any explanation, apology or compensation, only to be told that two of our colleagues had to share a room due to overbooking.*

Two other guests also narrated their ordeals thus:

*We arrived after a long flight, tired, only to realise that our rooms were not ready; we had to wait for 2 hours! No one gave us a feedback on what's happening or apologised - that's poor service delivery (Dutch Mining Consultant, Female, 5-star hotel).*

*The least said about slow services rendered in this hotel the better, especially the restaurant we visited while hungry. We waited for an hour and got so angry that we couldn't eat much of the food served. Are they really in business? (Nigerian Businesswoman, 4-star hotel).*

Most Africans are less intolerant to FLEs' delays in dealing with guests' problems as compared to other nationals who thought staff service delivery need to be revamped through trainings for an enhanced FLE-guest relationship (Bitran & Lojo, 1993; Petrina, 2015). Other researchers have made similar findings. For instance, Lewis and McCann (2004) requested business and leisure guests to indicate which of the 26 typical hotel service failures they had ever experienced. Slow restaurant and room service emerged as the first and slow check-in/check-out were second; guestrooms not ready was another regular problem. The finding is also in support of that of Abou Taleb and Abou Kamar (2013) in a study on upscale hotels and Kanyan et al. (2016) in a restaurant case study, who both identified slow service as the main service failure encountered by guests. Slow service delivery would definitely infuriate tired guests who desire a quick check-in or hungry guests in need of a timely service of food; this affects their satisfaction as depicted in the SPC model when guests' needs are not met on

time (Heskett et al., 2008).

Unskilled staff and/or staff's lack of knowledge which result in FLEs' inappropriate behaviour and action accounted for 7.22% of the service failures experienced by the respondents. There were instances where receptionists were not confident. According to the guests, incompetent waiters had little knowledge of the menu, did not even interact with diners, avoided eye contact with diners for extra orders, served guests wrong dishes and gave them wrong bills. Guestrooms were also not properly cleaned by room attendants. Most guests concluded that, if the FLEs could not offer the requisite level of service, then they need to have more training, especially the receptionists, waiters and barmen. Instances of some FLEs' incompetence as recounted by guests are:

*The Receptionist wasn't confident but timid while checking me in.*

*I ended up in an uncleaned room (Ghanaian H. R Training Consultant, Female, 3-star hotel).*

*Room Attendants don't know how to clean; guestrooms don't smell, look or feel clean, though I see them with all the requisite detergents and equipment used in cleaning; the bathrooms are worse. (African-American Air Hostess, Female, 4-star hotel).*

*A wrong order of food was served us, and a wrong bill presented by a Trainee Waiter who pleaded with me to pay or else she'll lose her job for making mistakes; the staff really need to be trained (British Corporate Lawyer, Male. 5-star hotel).*

Unskilled and/or 'unapprised' FLEs demonstrating unfitting behaviour

and actions of incompetence, being unreliable or unresponsive to guests' needs portray their apathy for guests' satisfaction. Hence, some guests stating the need for FLEs to be effectively trained to deliver quality service is commendable. Findings of this study on the competence of some FLEs tend to support and validate the findings of Abou Taleb and Abou Kamar (2013), Lee et al. (2011), Loo and Leung (2018) and Ogechi and Igbojekwe (2015) on problems related to guestrooms and food and beverage services by FLEs. Examples are missing reservations, food not cooked as ordered, wrong or lost order, and seating problems. Some guests thought it would be prudent for FLEs to be trained and empowered to carry out their duties and take decisions.

Ekis et al. (2012), in ranking 54 themes in service failure, found respondents referring to FLEs as 'clueless' and their failure to respond to guests' needs were the highest. Also, Lewis and McCann (2004) requested business guests to indicate which of the 26 typical hotel service failures they had ever experienced, and inefficient FLEs ranked second.

Guests' request not granted accounted for 4.45% of all service failures. This may be due to FLEs' attitude or behaviour. Typical examples were when guests requested for non-smoking rooms but ended up in smoking rooms, requests for guestroom mini bar to be restocked not granted, or 'wake up' calls not made. An American Physician Specialist also stated that though she reported a faulty AC in her room, it was not repaired. A Tanzanian woman's request to be moved to a new room due to offensive odour and a faulty AC in her room was not granted even after she made three calls to the reception. She had to threaten to check out before she was moved to another room. A dissatisfied Chinese Businessman who was a guest of a 4-star hotel also had this to say:

*Our firm's request to this hotel to host 130 guests in rooms with Wi-Fi a year ago was not honoured; only 80 of us are roomed with inconsistent access to Wi-Fi, which is affecting the programme.*

A Sri Lankan Sales Representative in a 3-star hotel also recounted how his requests were not granted:

*The staff failed to grant my request to be picked from the airport on arrival, failed to honour my request for a wakeup call to catch my flight at 6am, and here I am having to pay for a late check-out for a re-scheduled flight – this isn't fair! It's just unacceptable!*

The findings of this study have provided evidence of guests' negative experiences as a result of some of the hotels' failure to grant guests' requests, carry out services or fulfil promises made to guests as an object of marketing (Grönroos, 2020). This is in violation of the Tourism Regulations L.I. 2238 and L.I. 2239 which require hotels to offer free shuttle service and a complimentary Wi-Fi throughout upscale hotels. In effect, Ekis et al. (2012) and Ogechi and Igbojekwe (2015) found that how FLEs responded to guests' needs and requests were the major causes of service failures; this affirms and provides insights into this study where guests' requests were not granted. This finding is also consistent with that of Mensah-Kufuor et al. (2015).

Most of the guest-related service failures were attributed to disturbances by guests. Some respondents complained about other guests who after soliciting the services of prostitutes engaged in arguments with them regarding payments. Also, some guests disturb others during discussions, especially after seminars, conferences, workshops or during football matches. Others complained about loud music from other guests and others who jumped queues during check-ins.

A male CEO of a South African/Dutch Mining Company who lodged in a 4-star hotel reported:

*It's so disgusting and disturbing to hear or observe the arguments between Night Ladies (prostitutes) and guests on their charges.*

A male Danish Lawyer of another 4-star hotel also stated that:

*Just when I was about to sleep after a long flight, I was woken up by so much noise in the hallway from conference attendees residing in the hotel; that doesn't give them the right to disturb other guests.*

These findings have provided evidence of guests' negative experiences as a result of other guests who smoked in no smoking areas, talked on top of their voices and even jumped queues (Harris & Reynolds, 2003; Huang, 2008). Bitner et al. (1994) and Clacher (2001) also reported of some guests breaking hotel policies and creating problems for other guests and FLEs. Although this did not happen often (1.56%), such activities add up to the service failures experienced by other guests with the potency of the outcome being attributed to the hotel and/or dissatisfying other guest. Finsterwalder and Kuppelwieser (2011) have noted that this is when the FLEs or FLMs would have to monitor and manage the negative experiences attributed to other guests, as they negatively affect their satisfaction.

External noise (1.33%) as a form of service failure refers to all disturbances from the neighbourhood of hotels situated at the airport and/or on some highways of the Accra Metropolis. These disturbances which could not be controlled by the hotels included noise from vehicular traffic, aircraft, beach goers and loud music of entertainers especially during holidays and weekends.

A Malaysian Industrialist residing in a 3-star hotel at the airport reported of being

disturbed by the noise from aircrafts flying over the hotel. A Nigerian/American Home Keeper also remarked:

*There's so much vehicular noise and honking of horns disturbing those of us in the East Wing of the hotel from as early as 3:30 am due to its location on a main road (5-star hotel).*

### **FLEs' Assertion of Common Complaints by Guests**

FLEs revealed 37 common forms of complaints made by guests of defective products and substandard service delivery resulting in service failures and guest dissatisfaction. Diverse guest complaints as reported by the FLEs were categorised into three, namely service delivery system failures attributed to management, employee attitude and guest related service failures. In all, the FLEs reported 18 service delivery system failures, 12 employee attitude failures and seven guest-related service failures. Service delivery system failures comprised of unavailable or irregular services, insanitary conditions, defective facilities and equipment and unfriendly guest policies. Service failures relating to employee attitudes included unacceptable staff behaviour, slow or delayed staff services, unskilled/unknowledgeable staff and guest request not granted. Guest-related service failures included disruptions, disturbances and smoking by other guests.

The interviewees reported some of the unavailable or irregular services as slow internet, power fluctuations, limited variety of food, unavailability of hot water, discoloured bedlinen or limited TV channels. Defective structures or equipment, problems with ACs and telephones, and faulty key cards were mentioned. Insanitary conditions as a result of bad odour emanating from leaking

and choked toilets, mosquitoes in guestrooms and unclean beach fronts of some of the hotels were also mentioned. Additionally, unfriendly guest policies which were reported included early check-in and late check-out charges and not allowing guests to have their breakfast in guestrooms were also reported:

*It's mainly maintenance problems with water heaters in rooms, faulty ACs, guests' inability to get to the call centre as the phone is out of order. We have plumbing problems and choked toilets because the structures are quite old— nine years, plus power fluctuations. There are internet issues too from the service providers so, the challenges are beyond our control (30-year-old female GRO of a 4-star hotel).*

*Some guests don't like the rooms they've been checked in, as some of them have odour which might either be from a previous guest, a wet carpet or the washroom. The other common one is the early check-in and late check-out guestroom charges. Complaints were also made of charges for room service (30-year-old female room attendant of a 4-star hotel).*

According to the FLEs, other common service failure complaints made by guests relate to their negative attitudes and body language, poor behaviour such as being unfriendly, chatting instead of welcoming guests, speaking in vernacular and poor dissemination of guest information. The rest were unfair treatment of guests, not granting guests' requests, slow guest check-in or check-out and delay in serving food and beverage, food such as Beef Steak not cooked as ordered and poor services by unskilled or unknowledgeable staff:



*We've had guest complaints of delayed room service and delayed check-ins caused by check-out guests who opted for last minute late check-out due to delayed flights. They accuse front office and restaurant staff of being unfriendly because we didn't smile, while regular guests complain of new ones getting better treatment. Those supposed to check-out also use abusive words for their assumption of we being unfriendly when we insist they check out at the stipulated time. There have been odd occasions when we weren't able to control our emotions due to such abusive words resulting in some form of negative attitudinal behaviour; this also spirals into complaints. (43-year-old waitress of a 4-star hotel).*

*We've had guests' complaints because they weren't happy with issues such as staff not responding to their calls because of five or six calls coming in at the same time. We've had guest feedback due to some miscommunication or poor dissemination of info from guests who made requests yet no one knew about it because someone 'kept' the info. Some of us speak vernacular which infuriate our foreign guests or display some form of body language which displeases them (32-year-old female front desk executive of a 3-star hotel).*

Guest-related problems involved some guests disrupting FLEs from checking other guests in, sitting at places reserved for other people such as restaurant tables, and verbally abusing staff. Others were disturbances by guests from loud TV or music from adjoining rooms, noise making in the hallways and

interactions with prostitutes as well as smoking in non-smoking rooms.

*.... especially during check-ins when guests in the queue interfere with the interaction between a front desk executive and guests in front, thereby making the guests angry. Other guests also complain of loud music and TV at night and so much noise from visitors and prostitutes in other guestrooms (28-year-old night auditor of a 3-star hotel).*

*Some guests also ignore and sit at reserved tables in restaurants resulting in those who made the reservation complaining (24-year-old male waiter of a 5-star hotel).*

As stated by two GROs of 4-star hotels, they cannot achieve 100% excellence in the delivery of services, since they are human. Thus, service failures are inevitable (Lewis & McCann, 2004) due to human and non-human errors. The GROs were of the opinion that if guests do not complain, complacency will set in and they would not be challenged to render better services. Guests' complaints, as necessary feedbacks, should not end with the service recovery but examined and analysed to establish the root causes of the complaints from the various areas and worked on for minimisation.

### **FLMs' Assertion of Common Complaints by Guests**

According to the upscale hotels' FLMs, common complaints made by guests were mainly mechanical (maintenance) problems, service lapses, unfavourable management policies, unsanitary conditions and unsavoury staff attitudes as summarised below based on the various levels of hotels. Based on

the statements of the three FLMs of the 5-star hotels, the most common complaints categorised into three from the highest to the least were service delivery system failures, employee attitude and guest-related service failures.

Service delivery system failures reported included malfunctioning air conditions (AC), guests not getting through to call centres, pressure at the front desk during check-ins and check-outs, mosquitoes in the guestrooms and public areas, dirty beaches and guests being required to present identity documents for verification.

Guests' complaints about FLEs' attitude which offended some of them were in relation to slow service delivery and the attitudes of some FLEs'. Other complaints related to food and beverage such as over/undercooked dishes and spicy dishes.

Guest-related service failure complaints included guests reporting other guests occupying their reserved areas in restaurants, other guests disturbing with loud music, loud conversations or smoking. The complaints of a FLM sums up all the above:

*From where our guests are coming from, they can't stand the heat so they easily pick up the AC when it breaks down. It could be guests not getting through to a call centre due to a faulty telephone, slow food service or mosquitoes around. Non-residents who use the beach also complain of the beach being dirty due to all kinds of debris deposited after rains. Sometimes guests find the stance FLEs assume when talking to them based on policies as offensive or 'giving them attitude'. Some guests equally disregard reserved restaurant tables sign and sit there*

*resulting in guests exchanging words. Some guests also disturb others when drunk, by playing loud music, with loud TV or while entertaining visitors in their rooms; some even smoke in no smoking areas resulting in other guests complaining (31-year-old female FOM of a 5-star hotel).*

The 4-star hotels' eight FLMs revealed that they had issues with the internet, interruption of ACs, mechanical problems with respect to maintenance, service lapses, unfriendly FLEs and unsavoury staff attitudes, with some guests being responsible for other guests' reason to complain once in a while.

*Guests' mechanical complaints are leaking ACs, spoilt safes, hot water not flowing and squeaking beds. Unsavoury staff attitudinal nature is arguing with guests, being rude to and laughing at them for various reasons. Instances of service lapses are slow check in procedure, guest waiting too long to be served in the restaurant or too long to be attended to when a specific request is made. A guest may also find sanitary fittings or bed linen dirty after the day's cleaning (54-year-old female EHK of a 4-star hotel).*

According to the responses given by FLMs of four 3-star hotels on common complaints made by guests, they equally received a range of them just like the 4- and 5-star hotels. The complaints cited were on technology with respect to the *down-time* for the internet when the link is down probably from the service provider or the weather which also affects TV channels, problems with the ACs and toilets not flushing. Guests' complaints which related to the FLEs were slow room service delivery, exhibiting unacceptable body language, negative behaviour and attitudes and speaking vernacular, while some guests

also contributed to other guests' complaints.

*The most common complaints from guests are related to problems with the guestroom ACs, problems with the TV when the weather changes, toilets not flushing especially when there is a shortage of water, and once in a while negative behaviour and attitudes of the FLEs. We do get instances of a guest next door disturbing with loud music, the TV a bit louder or children running and disturbing on the corridor. Guests may pass by a no-smoking floor and smell the scent of smoke (29-year-old female F&BM of a 3-star hotel).*

The response given by a 55-year-old male quality assurance official of GTA as to whether they were aware of services which may not meet guests' expectations was:

*Yes, we are aware of guests' diverse complaints of hotels' services and products which do not meet their expectations. Some guests even report such problems not solved by the hotels to us.*

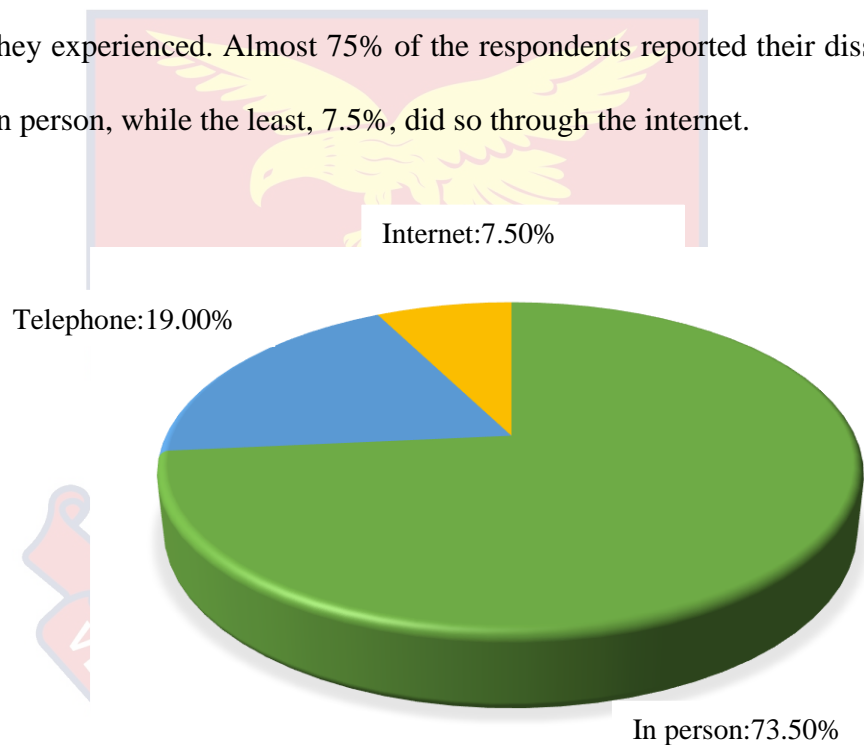
Once again, some hotels, in violation of the Tourism Regulation L.I. 2239 which requires upscale hotels to muffle the sound from guestroom AC systems, do not even maintain them to be in working conditions. Although some of the FLMs who received guests' complaints on malfunctioning ACs revealed that some guests preferred the natural ventilation, the buildings were without proper cross ventilation hence, nothing could be done about such situations because of the plan of the buildings. Equipment like the AC which are supposed to be working should be.

Such dissatisfying encounters should be mentioned to guests prior to their experience to ease the adverse effect and recovered as soon as possible to

create some form of memorable positive experiences even after the service failures (Guchait, 2019). This is when it behoves the FLMs and their FLEs to critically identify the causes of service failures to be properly equipped to anticipate the service or product failures.

### Guests' Reporting Channel of Service Failure

Figure 8 illustrates the channels guests used in reporting service failures they experienced. Almost 75% of the respondents reported their dissatisfaction in person, while the least, 7.5%, did so through the internet.



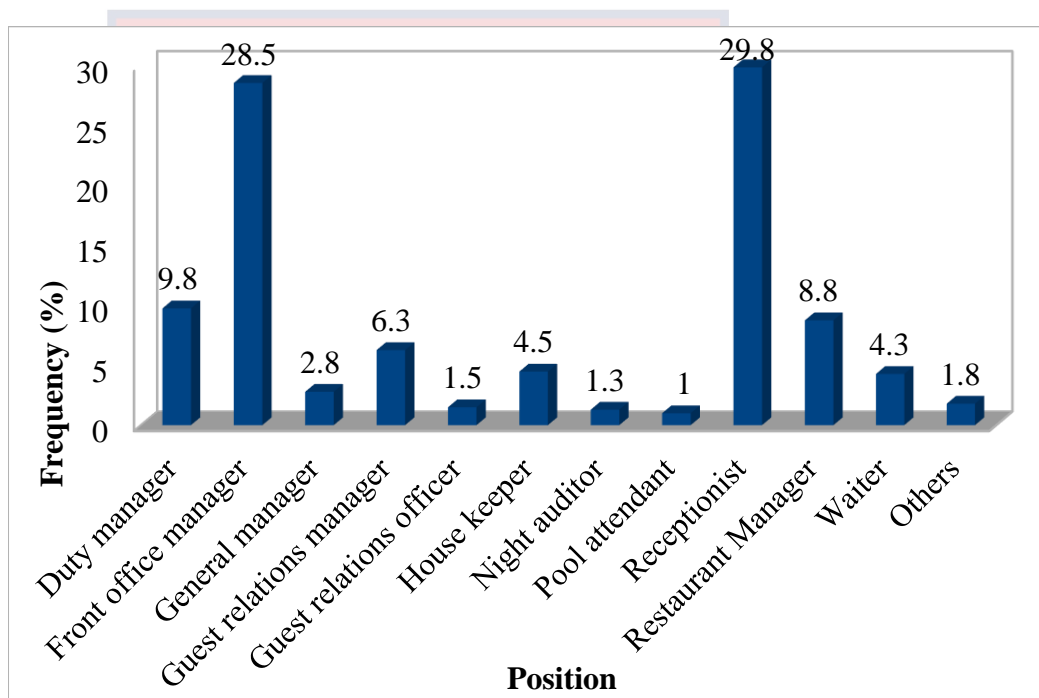
**Figure 8: Reporting Channel of Service Failure**

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Conversely, Chen et al. (2014) found out that the culture of Chinese guests made them indifferent in expressing their views or preferences when even entreated by a hotel's policy to complain.

### Persons to Whom Guests Reported Service Failure

The majority of respondents reported cases of service failure to Receptionists (29.8%) and FOMs (28.5%). Others did so to the Duty Managers (9.8%). Only 1% reported to the Pool Attendant. In effect, 60.70% of the respondents reported their problems to FLMs including general managers (2.80%) whereas 39.70% reported to the FLEs, as exhibited in Figure 9.



**Figure 9: Persons to Whom Guests Reported Service Failure**

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Guests reporting to the FLMs might be because they trusted and had more confidence in the FLMs to handle their complaints devoid of any cumbersome procedure, as compared to the FLEs. Yet, it would be realised that most guests with problems would still have to relate to some FLEs with the intent to see a FLM before they are directed to the FLM. FLEs still play a major role in SFR since they are boundary-spanners of hotels. Therefore, not having the

chance to receive and solve guests' problems might not augur well for the FLE-guest relationship as the FLEs would be frustrated. Some of them might even lose their confidence in solving guests' problems; this would probably affect their commitment and job satisfaction.

In all, 831 complaints were made by the 400 respondents with the minimum being one, maximum five, and averagely two complaints per respondent. Perhaps, the cumbersome and time-consuming procedures involved in handling guest complaints do put some guests off. Thus, some FLMs realising the need for, and carrying out FLEs' training programmes with emphasis on the understanding, the need and promptness in effectively handling guest complaints and SFR was commendable. This supported the study's conceptual framework presumptions of FLMs' commitment to FLEs' service quality/recovery. Such training was observed by the researcher in seven hotels where the FLMs used audio-visual, videos, scenarios and on-the-job modes of training.

According to the FLEs, some of the avenues open to guests to lodge their complaints are directly to FLEs and GROs, in person or by phone, or indirectly through guest complaint forms or by email. They also stated that some dissatisfied guests do not bother to complain. For instance, a 30-year-old female room attendant of a 4-star hotel had this to say on avenues for complaints:

*There are complaint cards in every guestroom which we replace when used. We inform guests upon check-in that they can talk to us directly, email us or just dial '0' when they have problems for us to resolve. We believe guests' problems are better solved when still inhouse for them to feel and appreciate the remedial action as some of them may never come back after checking-out. Their*



*impression of avenues for handling complaints are also vital at this time and age when social media is so powerful; they can even take pictures or videos and upload the negative aspects of reported complaints.*

It is normal for some dissatisfied guests not to complain about negative experiences. This is because among the four types of guests are the passives who do not complain to anyone; the rest are the voicers, irates, and activists (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). Additionally, few dissatisfied guests may complain as the majority do not have confidence in the effectiveness of the complaint or its outcome, hence it does not merit the time and effort spent on it (Becker, 2000).

Effective complaint avenues and strategies to equip empowered FLEs to quickly and confidently listen to and resolve guests' complaints (Andreassen, 1999) would create strong positive feelings of delight and a stronger impact on guest loyalty. Conversely, unsuccessful resolution of guests' complaints would create strong negative feelings of anger; both results would influence guests' satisfaction and loyalty (Hansen et al., 2011).

According to most of the FLMS, the avenues for guests to lodge their complaints in person or on phone were the front desk, the MOD and the Guest Relations Department all available for 24, 18 and eight hours respectively. Additionally, six FLMS mentioned guest complaints or feedback forms, interactions on tablets or emails and guest satisfaction tracking system (GSTS) for the complaints to be addressed or gain feedback on services rendered. A 35-year-old female GRM of a 4-star hotel in affirming that they have avenues for guests' complaints also stated that they do courtesy calls on in-house guests to find out how they are doing and if they have any complaints while in residence.

They even call or send emails to check out guests' inbox asking about their stay, 'fill in' if they had any problem and still deal with the problem through emails or phone calls. She concluded by saying that they have been 80% successful in bringing back unhappy guests. Again, some of the FLMs of the international hotels also stated that as soon as guests check out, a form is sent to their email to assess the hotel which is sent to the international management company and the hotels in Ghana. Two FLMs indicated the avenues for guests' complaints as follows:

*Guest comment cards, guest relation officers and the MOD engaging guests verbally through daily interactions during breakfast or at other opportune times such as at recreational centres. Some front desk staff have also been trained to handle guests' complaints (54-year-old female EHK of a 4-star hotel).*

*There are Guest Comment Cards on which they state their complaints and helplines in the directories all in guestrooms. It's part of our spoor to request guests not to hesitate to call a number given out to them should they have any complaint and they always get through to us as the system is multifunctional - it's able to handle about 10 calls by our staff who've been trained to handle multiple calls. Hence, should a guest call any of these 3 lines, there is someone at the desk to pick it up and attend to them, or tell them 'We will get back to you in a short while', and we do (42-year-old male GEM of a 3-star hotel).*

On the other hand, a 29-year-old female G&E manager of a 5-star hotel stated that their GM prohibits them from creating a platform for guests to complain.

*My GM reminds us every morning not to create the platform for guests to complain in case they have to; that's when we, as managers, are to be on the floor interacting with guests, making sure they are okay, not to only sit in our offices working. This is when a FLM would know if a guest has a problem with the AC in his room; the GM would expect the FOM, the MOD, the engineering manager and the EHK to apologise to the guest in such a situation and ensure that everything is okay. So, at the end of the day the guest would be satisfied that his concerns were really thought of and taken care of by all the managers involved.*

The responses of the GHA and GTA officials when they were asked whether they were aware of some of the avenues opened to guests to lodge their complaints were respectively:

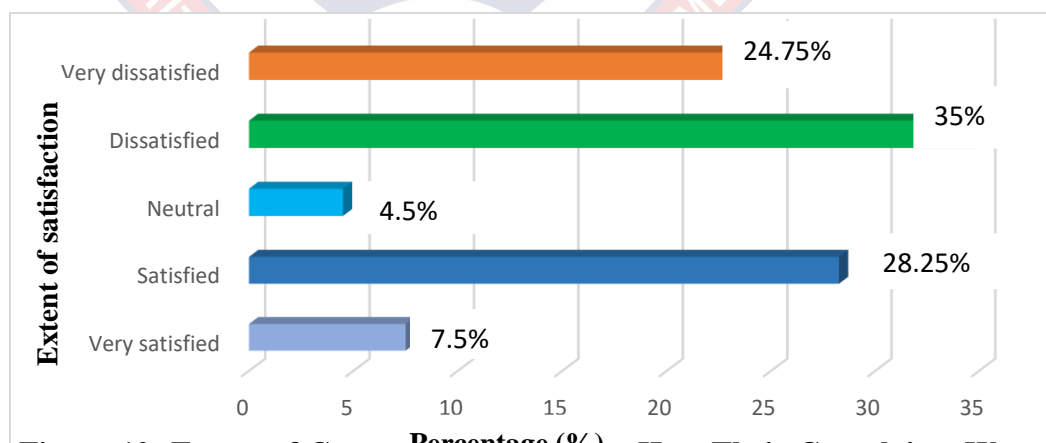
*Yes, I know of their telephone calls and guest feedback forms. I also know that some of the receptionists have been trained to ask from guests their experiences such as 'How was your night?' 'Do you have any challenges?' These trained staff resolve complaints should guests come out with them. Guests who book online also have the opportunity to lodge complaints online via the emails. So these are some of the ways members get feedback (52-year-old male GHA Top Official).*

*The hotels have these avenues. We, as Quality Assurance Dept. of GTA occasionally receive guests' complaints not resolved to their satisfaction by the hotels and based on the Tourism Act 817, LI 239, guests are eligible to make such complaints to us within 30 days of the problem for us to see to its successful resolution (55-year-old male GTA Top Official).*

Some of the hotels waiting for the guests to check out before sending a form to their emails to assess the hotel and forwarding to the international management company and the hotels in Ghana is not the best. Ideally, such assessments should be done while guests are in residence so that if there is any service or product to be recovered, it is effected before guests' check-out.

### **The Extent of Guest Satisfaction with How Their Complaints Were Handled**

Overall, more than half (60%) of the respondents were dissatisfied with how their complaints were handled as shown in Figure 10.



**Figure 10: Extent of Guest Satisfaction with How Their Complaints Were Handled**

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Specifically, 35% were dissatisfied while 24.75% were very dissatisfied. Conversely, 28.25% of the guests were satisfied, while only 7.5% were very satisfied. Dissatisfied guests anticipating service failures to be addressed using some form of justice is not out of place. These forms of justices could include a combination of interactional, distributive and procedural which involve FLEs' good conduct and empathy while interacting with guests, fairness of compensation in relation to the magnitude of service failure, and control of the service recovery process and timeliness respectively (Lee, 2018; Migacz et al., 2017; Miller et al., 1999; Mostert et al., 2009). Effecting any form of these justices to satisfy guests would ensure re-visits and PWOM.

Distributive justice through compensation is an attribute valued by all guests, as it could be related to service failure experienced (Chen et al., 2014; Lee, 2018; Miller et al., 1999; Wamuyi, 2016) yet, Roschk and Gelbrich (2014) argue that it cannot compensate guests' emotional loss.

### **Chapter Summary**

Results of this study have revealed that most service failures experienced by guests were attributed internally to managers' inertia, some FLEs' attitudes, and externally to other guests' and external noise. Four main categories of service failures were identified, namely service delivery system failures, employee attitude, guest-related service failures and external noise. The categorisation of the service failures based on the reported ones were the same as those of the FLEs and FLMs, and similar service failures were experienced by the 3, 4 and 5-star rated hotels. It was established that most of the respondents

reported their dissatisfaction in person to FLMs instead of FLEs, while the least did so through the internet. Overall, more than half (60%) of the respondents were dissatisfied with how their complaints were handled. Secondly, findings from this chapter supported the study's conceptual framework presumptions that FLEs' training has positive effects on their service delivery and SFR.



## CHAPTER SIX

### SERVICE FAILURE RECOVERY BY FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES

#### Introduction

Chapter six discusses how frontline employees' (FLE) handle guests' service failure recovery in 3- to 5-star hotels in the Accra Metropolis. This chapter is sub-divided into four sections, namely measures or strategies put in place for FLEs' quality service delivery (QSD) and service failure recovery (SFR) in the hotels, the influence of training on how FLEs handle guests' complaints and the effect of their job satisfaction and retention on how they handle guests' SFR in relation to the conceptual framework guiding the study.

#### Socio-Demographics of FLE Interviewees

Table 12 shows the socio demographic profile of the 15 FLEs interviewed for this study. Their positions ranged from front desk executives, cashier/front desk representative, reservationists, night auditor, guest relations officers (GRO), room attendants to waiters. While the interviewees had worked between 1 and 21 years at their current positions, 10 of them had had two to 24 years of previous working experience within the hotel industry. Their level of education ranged from SSCE to MBA. Seven of them had pursued specific Hospitality programmes while another seven had other qualifications in other disciplines. All of them had had some form of on-the-job training (OJT). Twelves of the FLEs interviewed were female while three (3) were male and their ages ranged from 25 to 50 years. Eight of them were single, while seven were married. All the FLEs were Ghanaians.

**Table 12: Socio-Demographics of FLE Interviewees (N = 15)**

#	Sex	Age	Marital status	Education		Current position	Hotel star rating	Number of years in:		
				Highest	Other forms of training			Current position	This hotel	Hotel industry
1	M	24	S	SSCE	Online Bar Prog; OJT	Waiter	5	1½	1	3
2	F	31	S	Und Grad S&M	OND F/D C&G Trg	Cashier/ Front Desk Exec	5	6	6	8
3	F	30	S	OND Hospitality	Internship OJT	Guest Relation Officer	5	6	6	8
4	F	30	M	SSCE	On the Job Trg (OJT)	Room Attendant	4	5	5	5
5	F	30	S	MBA Marketing	OJT	Guest Relation Officer	4	5	5	5
6	F	25	S	Adv Dip H Mgt	OJT	Front Desk Exec.	4	1½	1½	3
7	F	30	S	Und Grad Fr/Ling	OJT	Reservationist	4	1	1½	4
8	M	50	M	GCE O/L	OJT	Waiter	4	21	21	24
9	F	43	M	OND H&T Mgt	Training in hotels; OJT	Waitress	4	18	18	22
10	F	25	S	Int Travel & Trsm	OJT	Room Attendant	4	2	2	2
11	F	29	M	Und Grad English	OJT	Reservationist	4	2	2	2
12	F	34	M	HND H&T Mgt	H. Mgt	Guest Relation Officer	3	7	7	15
13	M	28	S	BSc Accounting	OJT	Night Auditor	3	4	4	7
14	F	35	M	HND H&T Mgt	OJT	Waitress	3	7	7	10
15	F	32	M	HND HCIM	OJT	Front Desk Exec.	3	1	2	2

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

OJT: On-the-job training



## FLEs' Quality Service Delivery and Service Failure Recovery Procedures

According to the majority of FLEs interviewed, quality guest service delivery (QGSD) and its failure recovery in the upscale hotels were guided by standard operating procedures (SOP). Hence, the frontline managers (FLM) monitor them to ensure that they abide by the SOPs in order to offer the best services to satisfy guests. This is because the FLE-guest interface is assumed to be very critical during service delivery or service failure recovery. Other measures put in place include FLEs' putting up behaviours to ensure good guest relations, guests memorable first impressions, anticipating, knowing and assessing guests' needs to ensure their requests were met as well as effectively handling guests' complaints. The following statement by a 31-year-old female front cashier/desk executive of a 5-star hotel elucidates the need for QSD:

*We have SOPs which will always enable us to deliver quality service to guests' satisfaction, or handle guests' complaints, if only we abide by them. SOPs are basically listed in points- 1. 2. 3. ... guiding us on what to do at work. Though we naturally perform the duties every day, the SOPs keep us in check as to 'Am I really going through the right path to prevent or take care of guest complaints'? We also have training from time to time and refresher courses too.*

A 43-year-old waitress of a 4-star hotel indicated what she does in anticipating guests' needs:

*In anticipating a guest's need three days ago, I asked her whether she cared for any beverage. I mentioned those available and she selected Hot Chocolate. I prepared it for her making her*

*very happy. She ended up giving us a tip in appreciation of anticipating her need.*

Teamwork among FLEs was also mentioned as being necessary for QSD and service failure recovery. A typical example given was reservationists assisting the front desk to check-in guests due to mass arrival of guests resulting from flight cancellations. Some FLEs also ensured effective employee training, availability of logistics and tools such as credit card readers and scanners and stepping in whenever necessary to assist the FLEs. One of the interviewees for instance stated categorically that:

*Delivering quality service or seeing to guests' complaints depend on the availability of logistics, cleaning equipment, the supply of clean guestroom linen and branded amenities to prevent or solve guests' complaints. Other anticipated guests' needs are to make the room look, smell and feel clean, and my experience on the job to deliver quality service or correct complained mistakes to satisfy them (30-year-old female room attendant of a 4-star hotel).*

The GRO of a 5-star hotel whose previous experience made her appreciate the need to provide the right equipment and tools to operate smoothly stated that:

*Unlike my former workplace where we had to run to the back office to photocopy guests' documents during check-ins resulting in guests' complaints due to delays, a scanner attached to the computer scans passports while a credit card machine handles guests' deposits on the cards. This enables guests to incur charges at other outlets without paying with a credit card, as all transactions are made on the card through an interface with the*

*front desk; this cuts down guests' credit card charges – all due to the quality service we deliver.*

The need for FLEs to anticipate guests' needs, deliver quality guest service or go the extra mile to creditably recover service failure to solve guests' complaints should the service fail is very necessary in the FLE-guest interface. Bock et al. (2016) are of the view that such positive behaviours emanating from FLEs' during the service delivery evoke guests' satisfaction and gratitude, while negative behaviours could result in guests' dissatisfaction and induce liabilities like negative word of mouth (NWOM) to the hotels (Wetzel et al., 2014).

With regard to what the FLEs focused on when offering quality service, majority of them said they focused on guests' expectations, needs and preferences to make them comfortable and minimise their dissatisfaction with the service. They also want guests to feel they are ever ready to attend to their needs and complaints. Others focused on sets of procedures to maintain the set standards and ensure whatever they need to know was at their fingertips. While a 31-year-old female cashier/front desk executive of a 5-star hotel revealed that they made sure guests checked-in with less complaints in order to create a lasting impression on them, a 30-year-old female GRO, also of a 5-star hotel, said they make sure all the hotel's procedures and standards are followed to ensure that guests are satisfied. Should there be a problem after following the procedure, they then think of other ways of handling situations to exceed guests' expectations. A 30-year-old female reservationist of a 4-star hotel remarked:

*Our main focus is guests so, we do whatever we can to achieve the goal of satisfying them with the services we provide. We give approaching guests the recognition or attention by smiling or looking into their faces for them to know that their presence is being acknowledged. We also take note of their complaints, empathise with them and let them know we're ever-ready to assist in finding solutions to them to bring back a smile on their faces.*

A similar view was shared by a 30-year-old female guest relations officer (GRO) of a 4-star hotel when she said:

*Our focus on QSD starts from the scratch during reservation or guests' check-in process: to acknowledge them, know and keep their names, give them personalised service though we have 1000s of people walking in and out of the hotel. Basically, they're the reason why we're here. They make us earn money, so we try as much as possible not to make mistakes to spoil their experience and our brand's name. We find out from them, 'Is everything okay with you?' 'Are you satisfied with how the problem was solved?' 'Is there anything else I could do for you?' As they give us feedbacks, we also do our best and 'work' with them to improve upon our services.*

A 25-year-old female room attendant of a 4-star hotel also stated that:

*I normally focus on guests by putting myself in their shoes that: 'It's my room, I'm sleeping here'. So, I do my best to provide everything they need in their rooms so that they don't have cause*

*to complain.*

Committed FLEs willing to focus on guests to meet or exceed their expectations by delivering quality service, seeing to their needs and giving their best to solve guests' complaints would enhance FLE-guest relationship, guests' satisfaction, revisit intentions and PWOM. Studies by Bock et al. (2016), Wetzel et al. (2014) and Xia and Kukar-Kinney (2013) have shown that FLEs' positive behaviours during service delivery evoke guests' gratitude and promotes benefits to both guests and hotels. However, overstressed FLEs' outward display during guest encounters might not be genuine because they have to shelve their true emotions, resulting in some form of service failures (Brown & Lam, 2008; Chiang et al., 2014).

### **Service Failure Recovery Strategies Used in the Upscale Hotels**

Further interviews with the FLEs of the upscale hotels provided insight into the recovery strategies used to recover guests' service failures. The strategies employed included apology, explanation, acknowledgement and correction of the service failure, exceptional treatment or compensation when empowered, and a follow up till the problem was resolved to guests' satisfaction.

Eight of them mentioned apologies with instances of even the GM coming out personally to apologise to guests, six cited discounts as a service recovery strategy, while three more mentioned upgrades to calm dissatisfied guests' nerves. Other strategies mentioned included offering complementary food and beverage, writing off guests' food bill, or offering complimentary rooms on the hotels' charges as a form of compensation, depending on the

gravity of the problem. Guests were made to understand that upgrades were compensations to the problems they had with services or products delivered so that they would not come next time expecting the same type of room for that rate, which could also generate another problem.

According to the FLEs, the FLMs also avail themselves when guests sometimes request to speak to them; this enables managers to listen to them or be involved in the recovery of a service failure. In some instances, all that a dissatisfied guest needs is a manager's attention after a service failure. This enables them to exchange pleasantries with them and establish relationships with them. A GRO of a 3-star hotel remarked that when they empathise with complaining guests while addressing their concerns, even difficult guests become satisfied with the recovery. The reservationist of a 4-star hotel also stated that they follow up to find out if the guests were satisfied with whatever services they have rendered to them in resolving the complaints. The following statements support the above stated strategies:

*We strategically apologise first which calms the guest. Should we know his nature, then we'll know what to tell or do for him. One doesn't say this about a guest to a colleague 'Oh, don't mind him/her, you know how he/she is'. The book says 'Guests first'. They're always right even when wrong. The recovery could strategically be in a form of a discount; if they've finished eating, we could accord no charge to the water, or let them pay for two instead of three to satisfy them so that they'll come back next time (43-year-old waitress of a 4-star hotel).*

*I have the history or data of 1000s of loyal guests, with one of them residing here 566 times. I just have to see my CEO about such guests who've been here a number of times with serious complaints or state the amount of money they've spent and strategically suggest we give him a room night free, and it's approved (30-year-old female GRO of a 4-star hotel).*

Further probing into the offer of complimentary rooms to a corporate guest or an individual yielded the following response from the GRO of a 4-star hotel:

*We don't give complimentary rooms to corporate guests who aren't responsible for their bills; we only upgrade them. We strategically offer free rooms to guests who are supposed to pay their bills over weekends when the occupancy's quite low or offer free meals to recover complaints, and they are usually delighted.*

The results on guests' service recovery strategies reinforce that of Fu et al. (2015), Hoffman and Chung (1999), Lee (2018), Ogbeida, Böser, Harrinton and Ottenbacher (2017) and Ogechi and Igbojekwe (2015) with instances of apologies, discounts and offers of food and drinks. Others are complimentary nights or upgrading guests to suites based on the magnitude of the complaints. Suprpto and Hashym (2010) and Wamuyu (2016), looking at guests' recovery strategies and satisfaction in Yogyakarta-Indonesian hotels and service recovery on guest loyalty in Kenyan hotels respectively, found all the three justices, namely interactional, procedural and distributive coming into play. Yet, guests' psychological losses due to FLEs' negative attitude which affected their self-image could not be compensated by distributive justice or 'monetary' offers (Roschk & Gelbrich, 2014). It then becomes necessary for FLEs to use all

strategies available to them to recover guests' service failures. This is when it becomes necessary for the FLMs and/or even GMs to assist FLEs to strategically resolve difficult guests' problems in order to retain them.

### **FLEs' Handling of Service Failure Recovery**

FLEs in responding to how they handle SFR specified that one of their main role was to resolve guests' complaints after a service failure to the satisfaction of the guests. Hence, the FLEs who were empowered to recover service failures stressed the need for them to uniquely treat each case, go the extra mile as a team to ensure guests get the best recovery so that the problem does not reoccur. This, the FLEs hoped, would influence guests' loyalty positively. A 30-year-old female GRO of a 5-star hotel's response in dealing with guests' complaints was:

*I handle each guests' case uniquely which helps a lot. First of all, I need to know the person I'm dealing with. They're all unique in their own way, so I can't handle them the same way or else I'll have issues.*

A 43-year-old waitress of a 4-star hotel also revealed that some of their first approaches to solving guests' complaints were to quickly go to the guests, talk to them and try to understand their problem. When they come out with the details of the problem, they apologise, empathise with them, acknowledge the problem and solve them unless they are not empowered to do so. Sometimes they find out how they could be of help, go back to the source of the problem to find out what caused it and how best it could be solved. Meanwhile if they envisage that the recovery is going to take a while, guests are given an estimated



time and served a drink while they wait for the solution. A follow-up is made thereafter. Another waiter (50-year-old) of a 4-star hotel also stated that some of the FLEs who were also good at solving guests' problems were normally approached by colleagues to help. If they are incapable of solving the problem, they forward it to the appropriate department; they only involve FLMs when the situation gets out of hand. Such a scenario was given by two FLEs:

*We don't underestimate the havoc dissatisfied guests can create to even upset other guests. Though guests aren't always right, it is to avoid arguing with them as retaining them is our ultimate goal. So, we thank them for the complaint, listen to them without interrupting, empathise and discuss with them how best the problem could be resolved. No blame game here. You would be surprised that no matter the intensity of their anger, they end up being relieved and appreciating our input as they now feel we care. This is because they just want the problem to be resolved and/or fairly compensated (30-year-old female GRO of a 4-star hotel).*

FLEs remaining calm and avoiding heated arguments with guests to defend the hotel or themselves during encounters is in the right direction so as not to infuriate the guests more and also to retain them. As stated above, retaining guests is every hotel's goal.

*Most of today's guests are sophisticated and widely travelled so we sometimes forgo the SOP, break the rules and solve their complaints differently because they're all unique. We also don't want to spread NWOM or lose them so whatever the situation, we*

*correct the problem as quickly as possible and follow-up to ensure they are satisfied and will come back (34-year-old female GRO, 3-star hotel).*

A 24-year-old waiter in a 5-star hotel recalled that his role after a service failure was to ensure that his guests experience the best service recovery so that when they go back or are online, they will positively recommend the hotel. A typical example cited by a 30-year-old female GRO in a 4-star hotel was:

*People don't book for Sunday's brunch yet expect to be seated as soon as they arrive. They get upset if they aren't, complain, and decide to leave. I can only calm them down, seat them at a vacated table and offer them a drink. I then liaise with a waiter to clear it. Waiters are supposed to clear tables before seating guests, but nothing could be done in such cases. At least they are assured of a table. I later go around during and after the service to find out if they're enjoying their meals or if there's anything else we could do for them. Initially upset guests end up satisfied and tipping staff.*

Another finding which emerged from the interview was the possibility of some FLEs performing other duties to help solve cases of complaining guests because of their flexible schedules. Ten out of 15 interviewees were very flexible in the performance of their duties, making it possible for them to perform other duties. Only five of these FLEs had specifically gone through CFT. For instance, a 34-year-old GRO of a 3-star hotel mentioned how they all move to assist the front desk when guests complain of slow check-ins after a

heavy arrival.

Similarly, a 30-year-old reservationist of a 4-star hotel specifically stated that she just closes the communication lines for them to be directed to the front desk, come out to find out what the problem is and help out. She can also go to the housekeeping department when guests complain of delayed check-ins to assist in cleaning guestrooms when there are heavy arrivals because they work as a team.

A 30-year-old female GRO of a 4-star hotel disclosed her flexible schedule due to CFT to perform other duties to help out:

*It's very flexible. With guests' complaints due to heavy guest arrivals without rooms on the system to check them in, I'd have to speak to them as a GRO. But it doesn't make sense to do so to complaining guests when the rooms aren't ready. So, I offer them drinks to relax them, then go and help out in the rooms, even if I just strip the beds for room attendants to do other things to move faster. I can also call to update front desk on cleaned rooms to check-in guests rather than just talking to the guests.*

A 31-year-old front desk cashier/executive of a 5-star hotel and a 29-year-old female reservationist of a 4-star hotel further revealed that their schedules are flexible as they are all trained to do everything to handle guests' complaints at the various sections of the front office. Such duties include reception, reservation, check-in/out, cashiering, receiving calls through the desk when the lines of the call centre are busy with external or in-house calls. Another front desk staff also said it was possible to perform other duties to resolve arrival guests' complaints of the absence of porters by assisting in

carrying guests' luggage to guestrooms. The night auditor of a 3-star hotel also said there are no routinely laid down procedures to attend to guests' complaints so they were at liberty to try as much as possible to resolve them to ensure they are satisfied. Even if it is not within one's scope of work, one apologises and forwards it to the appropriate department for correction. A reservationist of a 4-star hotel had this to say:

*Yes, it's very flexible. I perform reception duties in their absence, and while at post there's the tendency of guests coming in to complain which I'll have to resolve just for them to feel we all care, especially as I communicate and create relationships with most guests before their arrival. For instance, I had to quickly pick a towel from housekeeping for a guest who complained of not having one after its staff had closed. I also perform the duties of sales persons by allocating conference facilities with rates to clients. Likewise, when I'm off or on break other colleagues respond to some guest complaints online, check my emails and see to reservations.*

FLEs strategically utilising some non-monetary strategies to recover service failures was commendable, but some of them should be utilised effectively. Apology, for instance, should be rendered personally, sincerely and non-mechanically to convey a sense of regret for the inconvenience caused guests to emotionally 'connect' or empathise with the guest during the service recovery interface. None of them mentioned explaining (another non-monetary strategy) to guests how the service delivery failed or how it will be corrected. This is contrary to studies by Lee et al. (2011) and Fu et al. (2015) which

revealed how FLEs' tactically utilised interactional justice by explaining to guests how the service failures occurred, and thereby helped guests to understand the incident. Such explanations would result in guests' appreciation of FLEs' conscious efforts in recovering service failures, hence their satisfaction after the service recovery.

### **FLEs' Handling of Guests' SFR within the Context of Hotel Policies**

With regard to whether FLEs who could resolve guests' complaints ever did so within the hotels' policies or call of duty to satisfy guests, only five of them consented to it as a strategy to satisfy guests for repeat business. They accordingly stated that there are some guests who would not appreciate whatever is done to recover a service failure, and that compels them to go beyond the policies to satisfy them. As a 32-year-old front desk executive of a 3-star hotel puts it:

*We could do everything beyond our control, our manager may even come in, yet they will still not be satisfied and decide to put it on TripAdvisor so we end up doing more to satisfy them.*

A 29-year-old female reservationist of a 4-star hotel buttressed the interview by saying that the reason for doing so is to sustain the relationship they have with guests and to also make them revisit the hotel. She could even go out of her way to send apology emails to departed guests who had problems when she learns of what happened to them during their stay, and hopes it would not happen again, ending with the hope to see them again.

*Yes, I remember a couple who complained bitterly of the delay in*

*the service delivery when they came here for a buffet lunch with their two children. The children didn't eat much, hence I felt we shouldn't charge them to make up for the delay. This I explained to them when I presented the bill for only two instead of four. They really appreciated that, and even came back for a meal last week on Fathers' Day (43-year-old waitress of a 4-star hotel).*

A 28-year-old male night auditor recounted an encounter with an enraged guest who had to be dropped at the airport by a driver who could not be found thus:

*My options were to either drive the guest to the airport in my car, the hotel's vehicle or hire a taxi for him at my expense. I was still at work so I couldn't have dropped him; more so when I hadn't been authorised to drive the hotel's vehicle. So, I hired a taxi for him at my own expense, took some security measures and followed up with the driver and guest later to ascertain his safe arrival at the airport.*

A 30-year-old room attendant of a 4-star hotel also had this to say when a guest complained of not being given water the previous day:

*When a guest reported that I didn't place water in his room, I added four more bottles to the two bottles to make up for the what he claimed were not served him just to pacify him and to sustain the relationship we have with him and guarantee his re-patronage.*

Three FLEs admitted that they could have done more to satisfy guests when they complained. One of the reasons given was by a 28-year-old male night auditor of a 3-star hotel:

*A guest who complained about the air-condition in her room not cooling enough was still adamant to move out when she was given the option to move into another room. This was because she thought it was too late and wasn't comfortable moving into another room without her luggage. Though she was uncomfortable, she slept in that room till morning, and I felt I could have done more by convincing her to.*

The interviewees further disclosed other outcomes in relation to policies on service failure recovery. For instance, a 43-year-old waitress of a 4-star hotel remarked that the solutions to guests' problems are always prescribed by the SOPs: one does not go beyond or below it. Conversely, a 30-year-old female GRO of a 4-star hotel stated that:

*I don't think there's a day that I'd look back and say 'I should or could have done this or that to solve a guest's complaint'. I'm always ready to do anything (with a giggle) to put a smile on their faces.*

The study revealed that most FLEs who made conscious efforts to perform service recoveries and competently solve guests' complaints were effectively trained, experienced and committed than those who had not been trained for a while (Boudreau et al., 2001; Masoud & Abu Hmeidan, 2013). These qualities were geared towards getting the service delivery right the second time for guest satisfaction, revisit intentions and PWOM. This supports the findings of Gassoli et al. (2013) that experienced and confident FLEs delight in offering the necessary guest services such as recovery service for guests' satisfaction. Devoid of effective service failure recovery, dissatisfied guests

with the touch of a keyboard could vent their anger on welcoming online platforms thereby discrediting the hotel. Though the FLEs exhibited their capabilities in doing so, Cambra-Fierro et al. (2014) found that FLMs would have to manage FLEs' attitude in addition to their performance as guests' service failure recoveries.

### **FLEs' Training for Effective Service Failure Recovery Performance**

All the FLEs interviewed disclosed that they were capable of handling guests' service failure recoveries though nine out of 15 of them were fully or partially empowered to do so, and not all of them had been trained to do so by their current hotels. Most of them have had the privilege of being taken through various trainings; three out of the fifteen disclosed that they had not had a formal training for the past three years. While all of them had had on-the-job training (OJT), 10 had gone through CFT to enable them carry out other duties apart from their specialised areas in order to assist guests when they complain. While a 30-year-old female GRO of a 5-star hotel affirmed the need for FLEs to be trained in order for them to offer acceptable services to guests, she thought training relates more to one's attitude than just learning or reading.

The FLEs interviewed declared that the forms of training during daily briefings on the job using SOPs remind them of what they have to/or not to do to be on top of their duties, especially in handling guests' service failure recovery. Also, the FOM and HRM periodically train them on customer service, how to handle guests' complaints as it is impossible to eliminate all forms of complaints. A 25-year-old front desk executive of a 4-star hotel had this to say:

*For instance, a team from the UK train us quarterly, highlighting*



*on what is expected of FLEs in offering quality guest service and resolving guests' complaints (observed by the interviewer). Such trainings educate us on the techniques of handling guests' complaints and influence our output positively.*

According to the FLEs, they were required to go through some vital trainings to enable them change their attitude, deliver exceptional service and recover service failures to meet guests' expectations. These training needs were guest relations and management, customer service delivery, effective communication, and handling guests' complaints. Others were handling difficult guests, product knowledge, guestroom cleaning, hygienic practices and good grooming, and ICT, especially the management of guest data.

A 50-year-old waiter of a 4-star hotel, for instance, stated that although all the training they had undergone were necessary, the most important one was effective communication with guests. His reason was that if one does not listen to the guest attentively and fully understand what is being said, one would make mistakes resulting in guests' dissatisfaction and complaints. Yet he went on to say that they have had all the training they need to deliver top-notch services to satisfy guests. One would expect continuous training in an upscale hotel to avoid complacency on the part of employees. The question on the most vital training for FLEs yielded the ensuing response from a 34-year-old female GRO of a 3-star hotel:

*We need to be trained on how to handle the complaints and outbursts of 'Irate' guests who are very difficult and the 'Analytical' who want to know everything. We should also be trained not to be defensive and how to control our emotions or*

*else if we match ours to theirs, we might be at fault, though the guest might be wrong.*

Further questioning by the interviewer as to whether they were provided with such training resulted in a positive response from majority of them. They conceded that it is up to them to apply the knowledge and skills they had acquired through training, though it is not easy: this is because they come from different backgrounds with different attitudes. This was supported by a 30-year-old female GRO of a 4-star hotel who thought it was more of the individual's attitude in addition to the training: one could be trained a thousand times but if he/she does not have the right attitude towards a complaining guest, he/she would not be able to perform to the guest's satisfaction. Thus, there is the need for FLEs to be trained in both soft and technical skills in order to offer excellent guest service (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). A 31-year-old female cashier/front desk executive of a 5-star hotel stated that:

*We, as FLEs, are trained to know all that we need to know to deliver service and use the system we're working with to boost our confidence and assist guests with complaints to the core. But when it comes to attitude and being versatile, I wonder what training could be given; we should have the right attitude towards guests to really deliver exceptional service failure recovery to their satisfaction.*

CFT was mentioned when the interviewer probed further whether there were any other forms of training necessary for guests' service failure recovery. Only a third of the interviewees (5) had been cross trained. The rest thought it was a necessary form of training for them to enable them to offer other services

or see to guests' complaints not directly related to their specialised fields. The 24-year-old waiter of a 5-star hotel also disclosed that:

*We're cross-trained at the front office, marketing, human resource, finance or the security departments based on our interests and backgrounds, and still have the choice of going back to our original department. Such trainings are made possible because the hotel makes available online courses known as Lobster Ink which we assess periodically. We're also provided with information about the hotel on WhatsApp platform. My colleagues believe that such training fully equip us to work in most positions in the industry.*

The 30-year-old GRO of a 5-star hotel, for instance, stated that they periodically undergo sectional CFT in order to deliver quality services and handle guests' complaints. A typical example cited was a FLE who is assigned to the hotel's highly rated executive floor. Should guests complain about their rooms not being cleaned, in the absence of a room attendant, the FLE would have to do the cleaning herself. A 50-year-old waiter of a 4-star hotel also stated that:

*Yes, we're cross-trained to assist in solving guests' complaints.*

*We as waiters go to the kitchen to assist in preparing breakfast when guests complain of delayed service. They also come to the restaurant to assist in dishing and serving buffet meals. We could also go to the front office for guests' check-in/out. If one is a waiter, that doesn't mean he'll be one forever; some of my colleagues who were once waiters are now front desk executives*

*and cashiers.*

The five FLEs who had undergone CFT mentioned some of the merits as being versatile and indispensable with the ability to change positions due to advancement in knowledge and skills. Other benefits were promotion and job satisfaction. They also indicated that it enabled them to perform better in guest service recovery as they are challenged or motivated in their new positions to match up and even do better than those occupying the positions.

One of the ten FLEs who thought CFT was a necessary form of training to enable them see to guests' needs or complaints not directly related to their specialised fields had this to say:

*I don't have any idea of how to clean a guestroom. So, when walk-in guests arrive at night when room attendants have closed, I'm not able to attend to them though there might be check-out rooms. This results in the loss of guests and revenue (28-year-old night auditor of a 3-star hotel).*

Two-thirds of the interviewees (10) were provided with handouts or modules after every training including handouts on guest complaints and service failure recovery. All the FLEs who had been cross-functionally trained also had designed modules from those departments to assist them execute their duties. On the other hand, the reservationist of a 4-star hotel who had not had CFT said she thought they would need such training to enhance their competence in handling guests' complaints not related to their field of specialisation.

The findings on CFT are in consonance with that of Chapman and Lovell (2006) who found the need for hotel employees to exhibit diverse skills. It is laudable for FLEs to display the different skills needed to carry out routine

guest services, in addition to their knowledge, proficiency and other forms of training. CFT also assists FLEs to develop their skills through innovation and flexible schedules to provide consistent relevant quality service and successfully recover guests' service failures. FLEs with their newly acquired and flexible schedules are able to assist in other duties when their colleagues are on break or absent. No wonder the cross-functionally trained FLEs have higher job satisfaction as they feel they are better equipped and are more committed to handle and ensure guests' service failures are dealt with.

Consistent with the results of this study is that of Chen and Tseng (2012) which indicate that upscale hotels' multi-skilled employees could enjoy promotion with greater prospects for career advancement. Such prospects could strengthen the FLEs. However, some of those promoted could be frustrated in speedily climbing the management ladder after the promotion to higher positions (Chen & Tseng, 2012). On the other hand, the three FLEs who had not gone through formal training and had not been adequately supported by their managers for the past three years may not be able to effectively execute their duties satisfactorily to guests' satisfaction.

### **The Influence of Training on How FLEs Handle Guests' Complaints**

Twelve of the interviewees who had been trained on how to handle guests' complaints explained how it had influenced their ability to manage guests' problems. Prior to their training on how to deal with guests' complaints or difficult guests, they used to run back to their managers for solutions when confronted with such problems. However, after the training, they have been resolving most of the problems themselves. They only involve their managers

when the problem gets out of hand or guests insist on seeing their managers as confirmed by a 43-year-old waitress of a 4-star hotel:

*I don't usually go to my manager when guests complain to me. For instance, when a guest rejects food, I just go to the kitchen and inform the cook that 'Please let's change this food, the guest is complaining about it'. They quickly do so without the restaurant manager or chef's knowledge. They come in only when guests insist on seeing them or the situation is beyond my authority.*

According to a reservationist of a 4-star hotel, training on guests' complaint handling has equipped them with new ideas and techniques to handle them professionally. It has also influenced them to follow the steps in dealing with complaints by first listening to guests, and repeating what guests say to ensure that is what they meant. They now have patience with guests who interrupt them when analysing the service failure with them. They then apologise for the service failure and solve the problem. A 24-year-old waiter of a 5-star hotel also revealed how the training he had acquired had influenced his handling of difficult guests during service delivery; he need not let them know he is also angry with them but rather, just solve the problem to satisfy them. Similarly, a 31-year-old female cashier/front desk executive of a 5-star hotel stated that:

*Such trainings help us to know who we're dealing with first, and how to make irate complainants relax; otherwise there'll be chaos. A man walked straight to me at the desk and said 'Mr. .... is in room #... and I want to see him'. When I told him that the room was vacant, he flared up talking harshly on top of his voice to me.*

*Involuntarily, my colleague talked back in a similar tone insisting there was no one in the room (I realised she was absent the day we had that training). I blinked at her to stop, then asked him to call the friend which he did, only to find out that he had checked out.*

The results of FLEs' training as revealed in this study was the exhibition of professionalism which influenced the performance of their duties by listening to guests more, effectively handling guests' complaints or channelling the complaints to the appropriate quarters. Training as a guiding tool advanced the knowledge and experience of the FLEs, equipped them with new ideas and the understanding of the different types of guests and how to deal with their complaints to their satisfaction in order to achieve positive results. Other benefits include: such positive results improve FLE-guest relationship (Jaworski et al., 2018; Kanyan, 2016); it also helps them gather information about guests and evaluate them based on feedback from them.

These findings are also consistent with those made by Brown (2000) about the tried and tested forms of training for FLEs' development strategies as in CFT and the Lobster Ink utilised by franchised hotels or international chains hotels because of their positive results in guests' complaint management (Kattara & El-Said, 2014; Nickson, 2009; Sami & Mohamed, 2014).

### **FLEs' Motivations and Service Failure Recovery**

Motivation in the form of recognition and rewards also influenced the FLEs' SFR as established by literature and reviewed in the theoretical and conceptual issues underlying the study (Bitran & Lojo, 1993; Heskett et al., 2008; Mensah & Dei Mensah, 2013). With regard to how FLEs knew how well

each one of the FLEs performed in order to be recognised, seven of them mentioned performance appraisals, while three cited feedbacks from guests on problems solved to their satisfaction. The others mentioned guests' recommendations of FLEs who solved their complaints as well as colleagues, managers, especially supervisors who are always with them observing how they work. The 50-year-old waiter of a 4-star hotel fervently explained that:

*My manager does not only sit in the office but works with us so he knows how each one of us performs to recover guests' service failures.*

The 30-year-old female room attendant of a 4-star hotel also reiterated that her manager knows what goes on even in her absence, whether one behaves well and works hard especially in seeing to complaining guests' needs.

Most of the interviewees (12 out of the 15) affirmed their regular appraisals and the periodical recognition and/or reward of hardworking employees for good service failure recovery performance. The criteria for appraising the FLEs were one's availability, credibility, ability to assist at all times when the need arises especially in handling guests' complaints, and extra duties performed. The 30-year-old female GRO of a 5-star hotel in explaining how performance appraisals are conducted said employees are allowed to grade themselves. They then discuss it with their managers, enabling them to know how their managers view their job performance. They also get to know where they fall short in the execution of their duties, the areas they need to improve and to continue with those that they are doing well.

According to a 24-year-old waiter who works in a 5-star hotel, FLEs' commendations from guests are derived from questionnaires that they are asked



to fill out after receiving the services. Additionally, when checking out, guests could recommend to the front office an employee who took very good care of them when they encountered problems. Such commendations are then relayed to the various managers. A 34-year-old female GRO of a 4-star hotel in affirmation responded that:

*Managers from different departments do say, 'Tina is very good' as most guests inform them about how you see to their complaints, commend you, while some just look at your name badge and write about you on TripAdvisor. I have seven positive comments on TripAdvisor so far; some specifically mentioned my name, while others mentioned the GRO.*

Employees were recognised and/or rewarded after their appraisals based on their knowledge, customer service, and solution to guests' problems, relationship with guests and communication with guests as well as good grooming, punctuality, hard work, teamwork and relationship with colleagues. In addition to the enumerated criteria above is guests' feedback on FLEs service failure recovery performance. Recognition of 'Best Staff of the Month' is based on FLEs' performance which is discussed by all the managers before they are selected. The awards were of different categories and types such as Employee of the Month or Employee of the Year, Front of the House or Back of House Employee of the Year. Two FLEs stated that:

*We've had two appraisals so far based on punctuality, appearance, how well we know our job especially our performance in handling guests' complaints, fluency in talking to*

*guests and how we relate to our colleagues. We're also commended for recovery services rendered to guests at staff meetings. Appraisals could raise our salaries or be nominated for the best month or year employee award just to give us bonuses and promotions (30-year-old female GRO of a 4-star hotel).*

*Hardworking staff who are able to solve guests' problems are rewarded departmentally. Assuming a front office staff is awarded the best worker in June, an F&B staff will be awarded in July. Then the best worker among the 12 is selected as the Best Worker of the Year at the end of the year. I've won such an award once (50-year-old waiter of a 4-star hotel).*

However, not all the hotels undertake staff appraisal; while one of the FLEs revealed that the last time an employee of her hotel was appraised, rewarded or promoted was four years ago (confirmed by other FLEs in the hotel), two of them did not know when staff were appraised, promoted or rewarded.

Commending FLEs' for their contribution to successful guests' service failure recovery is a step in the right direction as it signifies management's appreciation of their exceptional performance. Such recognition and support energise and encourage them to put in more effort towards guests' service failure recovery performance and satisfaction (Abou Taleb & Abou Kamar, 2013; Fay & Thompson, 2001; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004).

## Effects of FLEs' Job Satisfaction and Retention on Service Failure

### Recovery

The data from the interviews provided further context as to whether FLEs were satisfied with their jobs and how that influenced their performance on service failure recovery. Nine out of the 15 FLEs were satisfied with their jobs and so desired to stay on while three were satisfied to an extent. However, the remaining two were dissatisfied and wanted to move on. Three of them expressed their dissatisfaction with their jobs with one indicating that she will vacate her position.

Reasons given for the satisfaction with their jobs were because they were able to meet guests' needs, some of them were empowered to do a lot of things on their own and they had all the equipment and tools to work with. The opportunity to be trained on the job and learn academically online (Lobster Ink) had also enabled them to learn a lot of things, enabling them to quickly recover service failures to guests' satisfaction. Additionally, they had an outstanding relationship with guests, managers and colleagues who supported and guided them to gain more experience in recovering guests' service failures, develop and grow professionally. Though some of them were dissatisfied with their salaries, they were hopeful that it would be better with time. Two of the FLEs expressed satisfaction with their jobs as follows:

*I just love my job. It's my first time working. The knowledge and experience I'm gaining in dealing with guests' problems are great and the condition of service in this chain hotel is one of the best (25-year-old Room attendant of a 4-star hotel).*

*I'm very satisfied because this brand has really taught me a lot of things I never knew through the online portal I talked about – the Lobster Ink - used in top-notch hotels. My relationship with guests after solving their complaints that of my colleagues and managers is the best part of my job as I've learnt a lot from them. My team also supports and guides each other to develop and grow professionally (24-year-old waiter of a 5-star hotel).*

Among the 15 interviewees were three who were satisfied with their jobs to an appreciable level, yet one wanted to move on for greener pastures. Though the other two were dissatisfied with some policies, only one had plans of quitting to set up her own business. These two FLEs were dissatisfied because of how guests and FLMs treated them when guests complain of service failures. They claimed guests disrespected them, and their FLMs sided with such guests. According to them, they are reprimanded by the FLMs due to the ideology that the *guest is always right*, though they might not.

A 31-year-old female cashier/front desk executive in a 5-star hotel was of the view that FLEs have been made to believe that guests are always right for whatever they say or do when they encounter service failures, though it might not be so. Their bosses who were mindful of the fact that FLEs might also be right sometimes while the guest may be wrong, will never support them. The FLMs will handle a case as if the guest is speaking the truth because they cannot tell the guest that he/she is lying. The reaction of a 30-year-old female reservationist of a 4-star hotel in expressing her dissatisfaction was:

*Our managers normally side with guests when there are issues between guests and us. Guests who might be wrong are rather*

*said to be right. Is it because they bring in the revenue? We'll be reprimanded as scapegoats and receive whatever penalty they deem fit. We feel betrayed as they're not being loyal to us; this discourages us.*

A 32-year-old Front Desk Executive of a 3-star hotel had this to say to the interviewer who probed further:

*That's what they make us believe, but we, or I personally think otherwise. A guest would abuse front desk executives for service failures we didn't cause, but the FOM won't say anything. There are notices in some hotels that 'You don't verbally or physically abuse our Frontline Executives'. But it isn't the case here. Even after the guest has abused you and left, the manager wouldn't say anything to console you. Sometimes it hurts.*

The 30-year-old female reservationist of a 4-star hotel who, though satisfied with the job of handling guests' complaints, wanted to move on for better opportunities asserted:

*I'm really satisfied with this job especially taking care of guests' complaints, but there's room for upgrading myself, with more opportunities out there. So, I'll go for another job which I'd love, though here's home, working like a family in a relaxed mood, as the owner's an African, unlike working with Europeans under so much pressure especially when a guest complains of our service delivery. But I can work under pressure too, so wherever I find myself, I'll fit in there.*

The last three dissatisfied FLEs who had intentions of vacating their

posts all sighed and hesitated for a while before responding to the questions. While one of them thought she had had enough of the job, particularly guests' problems after 20 years, the other two claimed most junior staff together with their supervisors were just holding on till they get a better offer. This was because they were not satisfied with the conditions of service and how the managers give a wrong picture of service failure situations. The 43-year-old waitress with the 20-year experience hesitantly said she was not satisfied with the job and so wanted to resign, start her own business and employ others to also work for her. Further probing for more clarification and re-assuring her of anonymity resulted in this response:

*Hmmm (a sigh) I'm not satisfied as I've realised that, I should have been working for myself by now. I'm not getting any younger. In fact, it's tiring waking up early each morning, going to work, and not being appreciated by some guests and managers for solving guests' complaints.*

The results of this study relating to FLEs' job satisfaction and retention relates to that of Gazzoli et al. (2013) and Van Vaerenbergh et al. (2014) who found FLE job satisfaction to positively influence FLE-guest relationship. This positive influence invariably affects their commitment to the job. Nonetheless, the few dissatisfied FLEs in this study found it difficult shelving their emotions when delivering services to guests who do not appreciate their services or do not present the true picture of a situation when recounting problems.

Several factors were attributed to the FLEs' job satisfaction such as good working conditions, training in delivering the best services to guests, support from their FLMs, some empowerment to take care of guests'

complaints, promotion and an innovative climate. The dissatisfied FLEs who intended to vacate their posts had reasons such as dissatisfaction with some of the policies, emotional stress, ingratitude shown by FLMS and guests should there be a service failure and having had enough with the job (Borralha, Jesus, Pinto & Viseu, 2016).

### **FLEs' Level of Success in Service Failure Recovery**

Extracts from the FLEs' interviews revealed that they were usually successful in dealing with guests' complaints, as they made conscious efforts to resolve them. While seven of them disclosed their ability to deal with guests' problems successfully without involving their FLMS, three of them mentioned their level of success as above average. According to a 25-year-old female Front Desk Executive of a 4-star hotel, a FLE's level of success in dealing with guests' complaints is based on the individual guest who lodged the complaint and the magnitude of the service failure.

FLEs can move a guest to another room should he complain of an air-conditioner or hot water heater not working in his room. They are usually successful in dealing with such complaints but would not dare to tackle the very serious ones; instead, they refer such complaints to the FOM; and if it is too much for her, she also refers it to the General Manager. Another female Front Desk Executive (31 years) of a 5-star hotel in response to her level of success in dealing with guests' complaints had this to say:

*I wouldn't want to say 10/10 (smiles), but it's 10/10 because I handle each guests' case uniquely which helps a lot.*

Another successful 50-year-old waiter of a 4-star hotel said that:

*I'm very successful in dealing with guests' complaints because I'm mindful of the best efforts I put in, and so far, I've been able to solve all guests' complaints without involving any manager.*

When the interviewer asked him to cite an instance, he stated that:

*There was a very furious guest who rejected the food I served him because it delayed. He decided not to eat or pay for it, but after talking to him in a nice way, I was able to convince him to eat his food and pay for it because of how I approached the situation.*

Some FLEs making the necessary efforts to successfully meet guests' expectations during service failure recovery is commendable and an attribute to their various hotels in this competitive global market. Such efforts might be attributed to empowered hardworking FLEs who make all their skills and the three justices (interactional, procedural and distributive) come into play during and after guests' complaints. FLEs' constant training and their conformance to HRM practices, policies, SOPs in addition to their experiences, positive attitudes and job satisfaction might also contribute to successful service failure recovery by FLEs.

### **Chapter Summary**

According to the majority of FLEs, QGSD and its failure recovery in the upscale hotels were guided by SOPs and putting up behaviours to ensure good guest relations. They focused on guests' expectations, needs and preferences to make them comfortable, minimise their dissatisfaction with the services delivered and make guests feel they are ever ready to attend to their needs and complaints. The FLEs specified that one of their main roles when



empowered was to resolve guests' complaints after a service failure to guests' satisfaction and ensure that it does not reoccur. Majority of the FLEs were able to perform other duties to help solve cases of complaining guests because of their flexible schedules.

Strategically, the FLEs utilised some non-monetary strategies (apology) to recover service failures, yet none of them mentioned explaining to guests how the service delivery failed or how it will be corrected. Only five FLEs consented to resolving guests' complaints within the hotels' policies to satisfy guests as there are some guests who would not appreciate whatever is done to recover a service failure, compelling them to go beyond the policies to satisfy them. The study also revealed that most FLEs who made conscious efforts to competently recover guests' service failures were effectively trained (effective communication during service recovery; OJT; CFT), experienced and committed than those who had not been trained. Majority of the interviewees affirmed their regular appraisals and periodical recognition and/or reward of hardworking FLEs for good service recovery performance. They were satisfied with their jobs and so desired to stay on.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES IN SERVICE FAILURE RECOVERY

#### **Introduction**

The preceding chapter investigated how FLEs handled guests' service failure recovery in upscale hotels. In accordance with the conceptual framework guiding the study, this chapter examines the challenges frontline employees' (FLE) face during guests' service failure recovery in Accra Metropolis' upscale hotels. It is sub-divided into two sections, namely FLEs' challenges during service failure recovery and FLEs' assistance to FLEs challenges during service failure recovery.

#### **FLEs' Challenges during Service Failure Recovery**

Regarding the challenges FLEs face during service failure recovery, results of the study show that only three interviewees out of the 15 specified that they do not face any challenge during service failure recovery. Two of the interviewees did not have anything to do with complaining guests because it was the duty of the departmental FLEs or the manager on duty (MOD) to resolve them. For instance, should a guest experience a problem and complain to them, they have little explanation to give so they just apologise, try as much as possible to make the guest comfortable and hand him/her over to the FLEs. Twelve of them mentioned 10 main challenges which were categorised into three, namely organisational structures and procedures, guest-related challenges and employee-related challenges.

Most of the challenges FLEs faced during service failure recovery were related to the structure of their organisations and procedures of the hotels such as the levels of empowerment and the degree of bureaucracy associated with the approval of guests' compensation. Others were inadequate resources and logistics, dealing with issues like guests' overbooking and FLMs' magnification of guests' complaints which slowed down the recovery process and portrayed them as incompetent in the presence of guests. They also lacked specific knowledge, training or information to address some guests' complaints or explain some facility problems to guests.

Empowerment emerged as the most mentioned challenge which hindered the ability of the FLEs to promptly and speedily resolve guests' service failure complaints. Based on their pronouncements, empowerment of the FLEs surfaced in three forms, namely unempowered, partial and fully empowerment. Unempowered FLEs were not allowed to handle guests' complaints, but were directly handled by the FLM; the partially empowered ones were authorised to solve some guests' complaints excluding those related to financial transactions which were dealt with by the FLMs; while the fully empowered FLEs solved all guests' complaints without limitations.

The FLEs who were not empowered were six, another six were partially empowered, while only three were absolutely empowered. According to the FLEs who were not empowered, they were usually the first point of call by some guests who expect them to or believe they are capable of resolving their complaints; however, two FLEs responded by stating that:

*I don't know what we're doing here as frontline executives if we don't have the required info, the mandate and our manager's*

*support to solve guests' simple complaints. I for instance, was well trained in my previous hotel so I have the required knowledge and skills to promptly and speedily take care of guests' needs including taking care of their complaints about services delivered which didn't meet their expectations; I also follow up verbally. My inability to use my current skills and even build on it is really demoralising me – that's my greatest challenge (25-year-old front desk exec. of a 4-star hotel).*

*We've not been empowered to make decisions to solve guests' service complaints though we deal with them directly and we are the first people they complain to. When they have problems with their meal and they report to us, unfortunately we're not able to replace them or give them a discount on the bill. This results in guests becoming angry and insulting us of our incapability to solve simple problems like just changing a distasteful dish, though we're more than capable of solving such problems (35-year-old waitress of a 3-star hotel).*

Majority of the interviewees who were not empowered to solve guests' complaints normally call on departmental heads for resolution; they only extend the needed assistance when necessary. This is when the upscale hotels should envisage the benefits of empowering their capable FLEs to promptly make decisions to deal with guests' problems for their satisfaction, revisits and PWOM as found in a study of Amenumey and Lockwood (2008), Ogbeida et al. (2017), Schumacher and Komppula (2016) and Yavas et al. (2010). Instead,

the FLMs who do not empower their FLEs end up frustrating them when they are unable to resolve guests' problems when the need arises and this ends up infuriating guests more due to delays and bureaucratic processes of dealing with their complaints. Such a case was narrated by a 32-year-old Front Desk Executive of a 4-star hotel who lowered her voice and said:

*We face so many challenges, but the most serious one is, we're not empowered to see to guests' problems which infuriates some of the guests. There was an instance when a group of American engineers (35) who should have resided in our hotel for 21 nights checked out en masse after three nights because a problem they faced was not promptly resolved. This was all because we, as FLEs who received the complaint were not empowered to solve it, and the managers supposed to do so were all locked up in an emergency meeting in the GM's office. Also, they felt they were not fairly compensated so the whole group checked out, making us loose so much revenue as the hotel had to refund the rest of their deposit.*

Another FLE also mentioned similar challenges she faced in her performance of guests' service failure recovery:

*We're not empowered. I blame our managers first, then the guests for that. Our managers have created a negative impression to our GM and guests that we're not competent enough to make sound decisions on guests' service failure complaints, only they can; while dissatisfied guests too want to lodge their complaints directly to managers because they think they can give them favourable*

*compensations. We as front-liners aren't recognised at all in both cases (30-year-old reservationist of a 4-star hotel).*

This study replicates that of Ngwenya (2017) who found in a study of ten 2- to 5-star hotels in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe that only 5% of front desk employees were empowered to make decisions towards guests' service failure recovery; 80% were not. Supervisors in the study were even supposed to consult management on such decisions, all because of the fear that they may take wrong decisions. In fact, Ghanaians to be specific and Africans in general are still struggling with the understanding and enactment of FLE empowerment concept whereas Westerners and Europeans are in the lead of reaping its benefits. In spite of the established knowledge that FLEs were empowered to make decisions in order to quickly recover service failures of dissatisfied guests (Abou Taleb & Abou Kamar, 2013; Bowen & Lawler, 1995; Ogbeida et al., 2017), its implementation and effectiveness are yet to be captured by most African countries (Ngwenga, 2017).

The six interviewees who were partially empowered to solve guests' service failure complaints had limitations with respect to distributive justice like monetary compensations and upgrading. Decisions on these forms of recovery and responses to guests' negative reports on service failure recovery on online hotel review sites were made by the FLMs or General Managers (GM). Some of the FLEs who had been partially empowered stated that it was not all guests' complaints that got to their FLMs because with their experience on the job, they were able to solve them. Yet they were sometimes reprimanded by their FLMs especially, when their attempt to recover the service failure did not satisfy the guests. The response of a 30-year-old GRO of a 5-star hotel who had a problem

with such attempts was further asked if the FLEs were really empowered; her initial response was:

*Yes, we are empowered.*

Further probing by the interviewee on how she would describe FLEs' empowerment in her hotel yielded the following hesitant response:

*Well, we all have limits - it's not absolute, and that's where our challenge is. If it's a guest complaint that I'm legible to handle, I go ahead and handle it. But if I'm not supposed to, I report it to my manager; if he's not around, then I inform the duty manager, and it goes on and on ...but the guest can't wait for such transfers. This is when he becomes angry because the solution to his problem isn't forth-coming. When those of us who are experienced in handling guests' service failure complaints decide to solve it because of the delay, we're sometimes queried especially when an opportunistic guest wants to take advantage of the situation and our manager gets to know that we shouldn't have handled the case. But when problems we're not supposed to handle are successfully resolved, we're not even acknowledged.*

Yet a 30-year-old female room attendant of a 4-star hotel also had this to say:

*We've been promoted and empowered, yet we're limited with approvals and decisions on guests' compensations such as discounts or upgrades. Our managers escalate some guest complaints which could have been solved by us; this makes us feel odd in the presence of guests sometimes. I think I've had enough of all these things.*

A 31-year-old cashier/front desk executive of a 5-star hotel whose empowerment was also limited responded that they are empowered to a point.

Further probing resulted in her stating that:

*I'll describe it in a way that we're not really limited - it's when it comes to very top decisions - that's when we have to involve a manager, but there are some basic things we can do. Sometimes a guest who is checking out with an outstanding bill of Gh¢45 for just Soda or a glass of wine might say 'This was wrongly posted' or even say that 'This isn't my signature and so I'm not paying'. The guest might have spent so much, so there's no point arguing; I just let go. I don't really need the permission of a manager to handle these little things. If I handled the check-in so well, the exit should be equally good to satisfy the guest otherwise I lose him to a competitor. Though I think the extent of our empowerment is okay, I wished I could do something to help or do more in other cases.*

Although it sometimes becomes necessary for the FLM to overlook guests' refusal to honour the rejected bills, it is necessary that they randomly investigate such occurrences especially when the level of incidence is high resulting in the loss of revenue. This is because there is the need to ascertain whether such 'write-offs' were genuine, and not some FLEs taking undue advantage to gain from such situations. Again, the total amount of revenue lost per guests' 'write-offs' could be so much. In addition to the non-monetary strategies used by some empowered FLEs is the monetary strategies for them to promptly resolve guests' complaints (Igbojekwe, 2015; Wamuyu, 2016).



While the prompt resolution of guests' problems with compensations greatly influenced guests' overall service recovery satisfaction (Lee, 2018; Masdek et al., 2011; Ogbeida et al., 2017), the costs involved made them un-attractive for some hotels to adopt because of some loss of revenue.

In effect, only three of the FLEs (a waiter, a GRO and a night auditor) were fully empowered which does not augur well for the upscale hotels. The night auditor was empowered by virtue of his position and responsibilities in the hotel while on duty; his other colleagues on the same level were not empowered. These three FLEs who had absolute empowerment were a waiter, a GRO and a Night Auditor of a 5-star, 4-star and 3-star hotels respectively. The 28-year-old night auditor of a 3-star hotel disclosed that he is fully empowered because of his position to attend to guests' complaints in the night and ensure they are comfortable and satisfied during the night. There is no limit to the extent he goes to effectively resolve guests' problems. Other studies, though with different target population, have equally revealed that some FLEs were at liberty to offer guests free upgrades and discount coupons for future exchanges because of their positions (Hoffman & Chung, 1999; Suprpto & Hashym, 2010).

A similar view was shared by a 30-year-old GRO of a 4-star hotel:

*I, or we're empowered to solve guests' complaints. For instance, when guestrooms aren't ready, I can offer them drinks, sit and talk to them while my colleagues work on how to get them better rooms. When guests have problems with their rooms, I can upgrade them based on what I feel would make my guests happy, and nobody would ask me anything. I can even give out a*

*complimentary room night based on the guest's number of nights and visits.*

The empowered 30-year-old female GRO of a 4-star hotel who professed that empowerment was very helpful and necessary for all FLEs gave a scenario of a guest who checked in on a particular day and was expected to check out in two days' time. He came in requesting to see the manager, as he wanted to check out the same day instead. She first tried finding out what the problem was, but he was adamant, insisting on seeing the manager. So, she introduced herself and confided in him that she could help out with whatever problem it was. She continued by disclosing that:

*I always empathise with them, trying to be in their shoes. They then realise they're in safe hands and so relax to let you know what the problem is, for you to instantly solve it for them.*

These empowered FLEs exhibited the ability to deal effectively with and control a problem at hand (Ashill et al., 2001; Ogechi & Igbojekwe, 2015; Schumacher & Komppula, 2016). This is possible when they are responsibly empowered to diffuse guests' service failure complaints before they get to the FLMs or posted online.

On the contrary, that was not the case with the other 12 FLEs because making all service failure complaint decisions and effectively implementing them on time as FLEs was not vested in them, especially when it involved monetary implications or online guest reviews. The 25-year-old room attendant of a 4-star hotel who confided in the interviewer that they had nothing to do with guests' complaints saw the need for FLEs to be empowered to salvage distasteful situations. All the interviewees affirmed the effectiveness of FLEs'

empowerment for guests' service failure recovery because when they are promptly resolved, they become satisfied, and also feel good as they had their money's worth. This was accordingly confirmed:

*It's very effective because once we've been empowered to handle service delivery mistakes, it prepares us for the next guest so that we don't commit the same 'offence' as we did. This sharpens our skills for our next service. It also takes us off the pain of talking to a guest due to a service failure as we're able to resolve the problem caused and adequately compensate him to his satisfaction (24-year-old waiter of a 5-star hotel).*

This is a good illustration of minimising the problem and guests' discontent. In addition, FLEs compensating guests for the inconvenience caused them equally reduces guests' infuriation and dissatisfaction. Yet the Front Desk Executive of a 4-star hotel thought otherwise; she opined that empowerment level of those who were even fully empowered was about 70% effective, as it is not all the time that FLEs are able to successfully handle guests' problems. Even if the 70% effectiveness of FLEs' empowerment invariably results in a sense of belongingness, job satisfaction and FLEs' retention, one could imagine the feeling of 'belongingness and job satisfaction' as a result of all responsible FLEs being empowered to resolve guests' service failure complaints.

### **Other Challenges Confronting Upscale Hotels' FLEs**

According to the findings of Bowen and Lawler (1995), FLEs' real empowerment can be manifested only when firms implement practices which apportion power, knowledge, information and rewards throughout the body

otherwise ‘empowerment will be zero’. This reflects negatively on other organisational structures and procedures’ challenges encountered by the FLEs (afore-mentioned) with respect to FLEs’ lack of specific knowledge, training or information to address some guests’ complaints. Others are the degree of bureaucracy related to compensations, inadequate resources and logistics, dealing with issues like guests’ overbooking and FLMs’ magnification of guests’ complaints which slowed down the recovery process and portrayed them as incompetent. A 30-year-old female room attendant of a 4-star hotel revealed that:

*Some of the resources we need to work with are unavailable or scarce. Our managers use bureaucracy in approving logistics, especially cleaning chemicals and guests’ amenities. All these slow down guests’ recovery and inhibits the required freshness in guestrooms and public areas. This make us feel incompetent.*

Such complaints by hotels’ internal guests (FLEs) were as a result of some FLMs failing to avail the FLEs the necessary support and not being empowered to carry out specific responsibilities as boundary liners of the hotels who directly interfaced with guests to take care of their needs. Although there is the possibility of FLEs not being trained as in the case of the three FLEs in this study who had had no formal training and proper support for the past three years, it does not augur well for the effective execution of their duties.

A typical example of the challenges and repercussions of overbooking was provided by a 34-year-old female GRO of a 3-star hotel:

*When guests with guaranteed reservations have no rooms on arrival because the house is full, it’s we, the FLEs who bear*

*guests' grudges. Then comes the crux of the case when a decision is made to 'walk' them to another hotel; this really infuriates them, worsening the situation.*

A 28-year-old night auditor of a 3-star hotel also had a challenge in attending to guests' complaints from other departments such as the kitchen, restaurant or housekeeping after 10:30 pm when all the staff had closed and left. An instance was when a guest complained about his room not being cleaned; he did not know how to attend to him because he had not been trained to clean guestrooms. Such concerns would significantly influence his competency as the 'night manager'; but it is an obvious situation in an upscale hotel which requires a skeletal staff of one personnel each in housekeeping and kitchen to promptly resolve guest complaints and satisfy their needs.

These findings support those of Boshoff and Allen (2000) and Liao and Chuang (2004) which found that the FLEs lacked the necessary personal and technical skills to effectively recover guests' service failures. In these instances, one wonders the levels of empowerment, types of training and skills some of the FLMs had imparted to their FLEs for them to make such statements. This is when the FLMs are expected to equip and support the FLEs with all the necessary resources to effectively perform their duties to guests' satisfaction (Heathfield, 2014).

Overbooking as a challenge, for instance, is 'necessary' because it prevents hotels from losing guestroom revenue. It also minimises hotels' losses due to cancellations, unnecessary refusals which could send prospective guests to competitors and helps manage reservations for a better yield. On the other hand, front desk FLEs informing guests of the unavailability of guaranteed

rooms due to overbooking is a big challenge and should preferably never happen because guests associate hotels' main business with the sale of guestrooms. Therefore, should a potential guest book and make the necessary deposit or arrangement, due to the hotel's contract with his firm, to be told on arrival that there is no room for him will be very disappointing.

Furthermore, the degree of bureaucracy involved in approving guests' compensation is necessary to ensure that FLEs do not abuse or take advantage of such privileges such as guest's discounts, refunds or upgrades in recovering service failures. It was also necessary for FLMs to monitor such monetary rewards, curb overcompensation or opportunistic guests' claims and just be reasonably fair in an upfront offer since the hotels are in business to make profits.

Extracts from the interviews revealed some guest-related challenges as the second highest challenge which the FLE interviewees faced in the execution of their duties. These guest-related challenges included difficult guests who harassed and abused them by using derogatory words during service failure recovery. They also encountered those who virtually complained about everything yet were dissatisfied with any form of recovery and those who made excessive demands for compensation which were beyond what they or the hotels could offer. Some FLEs sometimes elicit the help of more skilful colleagues to attend to such guests yet some were never satisfied with whatever solution offered. Others do not request for airport pickup but become angry upon arrival when they are not picked by the hotel as narrated by a FLE:

*I have challenges; some guests are not satisfied with whatever solution you offer them when they have problems and may*

*demand for something that you can't give. Also, some wouldn't request for airport pickup and upon arrival at the airport, call the hotel complaining that there's no one to pick them up. They then request for compensation on arrival at the hotel for delaying in picking them up which isn't the case (29-year-old female reservationist of a 4-star hotel).*

Although some of the FLEs accepted the saying that 'guests are always right', they admitted that some guests could be very 'naughty', yet they do not have to get back at them. A waiter for instance had misgivings about guests who, because of a problem, become so angry that they end up using abusive words on FLEs. From the waiter's statement, it is obvious that even though some of the FLEs do not face challenges when dealing with complaining guests, they were not happy or satisfied with some guests' behaviour or derogative statements:

*A guest whose problem was being solved by a front desk executive got angry in the process and said to her 'You're a useless woman'. All of a sudden, the front desk executive's countenance changed - she's human and it wasn't that she's done something wrong. That is why some of our colleagues would avoid some guests with problems (32-year-old female GRO of a 3-star hotel).*

*They think they know the director, so everything should go well for them. For instance, if they go to their room and the water heater isn't working they keep on harassing you. If you don't try very hard to satisfy them, then you know where the problem is*

*getting to so when guests complain, we take it in good faith and try to resolve them (28-year-old male night auditor).*

The fact that FLEs must take complaints in good faith and resolve them was reinforced by a 24-year-old and 50-year-old waiters of a 5-star and 4-star hotels respectively. According to them, their hotel brands are in existence because of the guests. Hence, once any guest had a problem, FLEs are to ensure that they rectify it because they are the reason why they are working and their remuneration is derived from guests' payments for the services and products offered.

The available literature reveals guest-related challenges which include intoxicated guests who verbally and physically abuse FLEs (Bitner et al., 1994; Lewis & Clacher, 2001). The latest evidence being a customer who physically attacked a McDonald's FLE due to the absence of a drinking straw at the condiment section of the establishment (CNN, 2019). Such behaviours from guests should be discouraged as guests are not always right.

Another employee-related challenge results from colleagues like cooks, room attendants and maintenance team members who do not carry out their duties effectively. Specifically, these include poor dissemination or lack of information, lack of transparency with respect to what led to guests' problems coupled with colleagues covering up guests' problems which they caused; these challenges delay the resolution of those issues. With respect to the challenges in accessing information to resolve guests' complaints, a 32-year-old front desk executive of a 3-star hotel narrated hers as follows:

*Information, because we need to know the actual details of what transpired in guests' complaints from other departments. It's not*



*all the time that one gets the information quickly. A colleague may even cover up a problem which delay issues. That's why one needs to be investigative in addition to the CCTV cameras.*

A 30-year-old room attendant of a 4-star hotel who had problems with unavailable guestrooms had this to say:

*We're always stressed up with guestroom problems. It's either bathroom leakages which can be so bad, or there is no linen to lay arrived guests' beds due to a faulty laundry machine. In both cases, it's the maintenance team which have to see to the problems, but front desk and guests would be on our heels.*

According to the interviewees, all the above challenges result in emotional stress as they impede their ability to render the best services or swiftly and skilfully recover service failures to guests' satisfaction (Yavas et al., 2010). In line with this study, Chiang et al. (2014) found FLEs working in three 5-star hotels in Hong Kong to be stressed up as they were not empowered to solve guests' problems but had to depend on their FLMs to do that. FLEs trying to do otherwise were considered to be undermining the authority of the FLMs, which could cost them their jobs. Such challenges which had adverse effects on the FLEs' performance do not augur well for FLE-guest interactions and speedy resolution of guests' complaints thereby compelling some guests and FLEs to move to other hotels.

These organisational structures and procedures, guest and employee-related challenges and their outcomes do not augur well for effective service failure recovery and FLE-guest relationship. The challenge of FLEs' not having access to information on their hotels and other resources to address guests'

problems culminates in FLEs not being fully empowered, hence their dependence on FLMs to resolve guests' problems. Also, some FLMs not availing FLEs the proper support and logistics and other resources does not augur well for the independence of FLEs to effectively execute their duties. This study is also in line with Brown and Lam's (2008) report on FLEs emotional labour with negative effects because guests failed to reciprocate FLEs' friendly smiles to welcome guests. On the other hand, the study contradicts those of Konzes and Posner (2003), Ogbeida et al. (2017), Schumacher and Komppula (2016) and Zainol and Lockwood (2014) who found that when FLEs gain access to their firm's resources, they promptly recover service failures.

### **FLMs' Assistance to FLEs when Faced with Challenges during Service**

#### **Failure Recovery**

The interviewees revealed that they turned to their FLMs for assistance in resolving some of the complaints by guests when they were unable to resolve such problems, especially when guests were being difficult. Also, FLMs sometimes come in trying to assist when the FLEs are on the verge of solving guests' problems, without them formally requesting for their assistance. They sometimes solve the service failures together with their FLMs, or the FLMs talk to the guests privately in their offices to avoid some guests creating scenes. They then listen to their complaints and solve them by following up from where the FLEs left off to satisfy the guests.

Instances of guests' complaints dealt at FLMs' level is the unavailability of a guestroom due to overbooking or serving of wrong dishes. A 25-year-old room attendant of a 4-star hotel reiterated that she knows when to bring in her

managers to assist in resolving difficult situations to calm guests down. A 30-year-old GRO of a 4-star hotel also revealed that they do not take decisions on their own when guests post problems online like on TripAdvisor; it is discussed at the level of management before she replies online and personally to the guests. A 28-year-old night auditor of a 3-star hotel had this to say when guests complain:

*I try as much as possible to solve them or explain situations to them as a night auditor responsible for the hotel at night. But if the solution does not meet guests' expected needs or wants and still prove defiant, I call on the FOM or DM to help out – even at night. They'll then direct me as to what to do, or they'll even opt to speak to the guest and try as much as possible to calm them.*

The F&B manager who is informed about the second situation reports to or alerts the chef, who also authorises the alteration or change of the dish to satisfy guests. Two FLEs cited the following cases which were beyond them:

*When guests complain of being hassled to make payments because they've got to the 'limit' and so wouldn't pay, our manager comes in to talk to them, and he's able to convince them to pay. When guests abscond, the front desk executive or cashier will have to settle the bill which we can't afford (A GRO, 4-star hotel).*

*I made it clear to a couple that their breakfast per the rate starts from tomorrow when checking them in at 7:00 am and stressed on they paying for it should they decide to have one. They went*

*for breakfast, but refused to sign, complaining that I gave them the wrong information. There was no way I could defend myself so, I reported the case to my manager who, fortunately, decide to take care of the bill (Front desk executive, 3-star hotel).*

FLMs assisting FLEs to resolve guests' complaints is commendable as it is an opportunity for the FLEs to learn from the FLMs who are knowledgeable and have more experience on guests' complaints and their recovery than the FLEs. Such supports, especially when the need arises for the recovery of guests' service failure complaints, ensure positive FLM-FLE relationship. These demonstrations show how concerned some FLMs are about their FLEs' exhibiting their commitment on the job through creditable performance to satisfy guests (Prentice et al., 2018). FLMs' show of concern and support of FLEs help to provide a healthy working atmosphere devoid of emotional stress which could hinder their desire to deliver top-notch services or competently recover service failures to guests' satisfaction. Thus, FLEs experiencing such immense support from their FLMs are expected to perform impressively.

On the other hand, if most of the FLEs stated that their FLMs were always ready to assist them in solving guests' complaints, yet they encountered all the above stated challenges, then most probably FLMs and FLEs' briefings were not detailed enough to discuss FLEs' problems with guest service failure recovery. In such a situation, the study could be related to the findings of Lahap et al. (2016) that in most of the Malaysian hotels', FLMs hardly discuss with FLEs the problems encountered in solving guests' complaints for guest satisfaction or organisational success.

## Chapter Summary

The results of Chapter seven show that only three FLEs out of the 15 did not face any challenge during service failure recovery. Twelve of them mentioned 10 main challenges which were categorised into three, namely organisational structures and procedures, guest-related and employee-related challenges with organisational structures and procedures, the highest, attributable to non-empowerment of FLEs.

Lack of FLE empowerment hindered the FLEs' ability to promptly and speedily resolve guests' service failures: six were not empowered, six were partially empowered and only three were fully empowered. Although they were most guests' first point of call, majority of them did not have the absolute autonomy to promptly resolve them to guests' satisfaction. Even the six FLEs who were partially empowered had limitations with distributive justice like monetary compensations and upgrading; they were referred to the FLMs.

Other challenges encountered by the FLEs were the lack of specific knowledge, information, training or inadequate resources and logistics to address some guests' complaints, guests' overbooking and FLMs' magnifying guests' complaints also slowed down the recovery process and portrayed them as incompetent. Guest-related challenges included difficult guests who harassed and abused FLEs, complained about everything yet were dissatisfied with any form of recovery and made excessive demands for compensation.

Lastly, the FLEs faced challenges from colleagues who do not carry out their duties effectively, poor dissemination of information and lack of transparency with guests' problems. All the above-stated challenges do not augur well for effective service failure recovery and FLE-guest relationship.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### FLMs' STRATEGIES FOR FLEs' SERVICE FAILURE RECOVERY

#### Introduction

This Chapter discusses the findings related to strategies employed mainly by hotel frontline managers (FLMs) and top officials of Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) and Ghana Hoteliers Association (GHA) to facilitate FLEs' service recovery in upscale hotels. To appreciate these strategies, there was the need to look at the varied socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The chapter centres on what they envisaged as service quality, the strategies employed which include training, employee appraisal, empowerment and motivation for FLEs' job satisfaction in the study's conceptual framework. FLMs' perceptions of FLEs' service recovery performance was also explored.

#### Socio-Demographics of FLM Interviewees

Seventeen interviewees comprising 15 FLMs of the 15 selected upscale hotels and one top official each of Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) and Ghana Hoteliers Association (GHA) were interviewed in this study (Table 11). The FLMs held various positions including Front Office Managers (FOM), Rooms Division Managers (RDM) and Food and Beverage Managers (F&BM). The rest of the FLMs were Guest Relations Managers (GRM), Group and Events Managers (GEM), an Executive Housekeeper (EHK) and a Yield and Reservation Manager (YRM). The ages of the nine males and eight female participants ranged between 31 and 55 years. The married ones were thirteen, three were single and one was divorced.

**Table 13: Socio-Demographics of FLM Interviewees (N = 17)**

#	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Nationality	Education		Current position as a manager (M)	Hotel star rating	Number of years in:		
					Highest	Hospitality related			Current position	This hotel	Hotel industry
<b>Hotel managers</b>											
1	F	29	M	Ghanaian	Bachelor's deg. (Business Admin)	HND (HCIM); OJT; Software applications	Groups & Events (GEM)	5	1	6	6
2	F	31	S	Ghanaian	Exec MBA (Marketing)	Bachelor's degree (Hosp Mgt.); AITA	Front Office (FOM)	5	1	6	8
3	M	42	M	Ghanaian	Executive MBA (Hospitality Mgt)	Hospitality Mgt (UK) Guest Relations; OJT	Guest Relation (GRM)	5	2	5	14
4	F	54	M	Ghanaian	BSc Human Resource	IM; Accommodation Operation Mgt.	Executive House-keeper (EHK)	4	5	5	31
5	M	32	M	Ghanaian	Bachelor's degree (Marketing)	OJT (Hospitality)	Front Office (FOM)	4	3	3	10
6	F	33	M	Ghanaian	Bachelor's degree (Accounting)	OJT; Hospitality-short courses	Rooms Division (RDM)	4	1	6	6
7	M	35	M	Ivorian	MBA Food & Beverage Mgt.	OJT; Other courses	Food & Beverage (F&BM)	4	1	2	10
8	F	53	S	Ghanaian	MSc (Hotel Mgt.)	HND (HCIM) OJT	Reservation & Yield (RYM)	4	4	6	28
9	M	54	D	Malaysian	Bachelor's degree (Hospitality Mgt)	Several Hospitality related; OJT	Food & Beverage (F&BM)	4	4½	5	25

**Table 13 Continued**

10	M	38	M	Ghanaian	Bachelor's degree (B Admin. Acct)	Guest Relations; OJT	Guest Relation (GRM)	4	1	5	7
11	F	35	S	Ghanaian	Bachelor's degree Hosp Management.	NVQ 1&2 City & Guilds (HR) OJT	Guest Relation (GRM)	4	1	2	3
12	F	44	M	Ghanaian	Bachelor's degree Hospitality Mgt.	Guest Relations; IUT Business; OJT	Rooms Division (RDM)	3	3	9	20
13	M	44	M	Ghanaian	MBA Marketing	CRM; OJT	Food & Beverage (F&BM)	3	3½	8	17
14	F	34	M	Ghanaian	HND (HCIM)	Several Hospitality related courses; OJT	Front Office (FOM)	3	1	6	6
15	M	42	M	Ghanaian	B.Admin- Tourism; Travel Agency Management	HND Hotel Mgt. (UK); Facility Management.	Groups & Events (GEM)	3	3	3	12
Other stakeholders (One top official each of GTA and GHA)											
16	M	52	M	Ghanaian	Ph.D. Intl & Rural Development	OJT (Hospitality)	Exec. Member GHA	-	1	-	5
17	M	55	M	Ghanaian	Executive Masters (Governance & Leadership)	OJT/Privatey (Hosp; QA)	GTA (Quality Ass.)	-	3	-	22

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

D: Divorced, IM: Institutional Management, IUT: Institut Universitaire de Technologie (University Institute of Technology), OJT: On-the-job-training



In terms of nationality, fifteen of them were Ghanaians, one was an Ivorian and the other, a Malaysian. Their highest level of education ranged from Higher National Diploma (HND) to a terminal degree (PhD), while 13 of them had had an education relating to the hotel industry. Other qualifications and trainings they had acquired during their working period were business administration, information technology (IT), and hospitality management. They had worked between one and eight years in their current positions and spent between three and 31 years in the hotel industry.

The hotel FLMs' responsibilities included managing and training their subordinates, dealing with guest issues such as queries and complaints, handling events including banquets, budgeting and writing reports. The main responsibility of the GTA top official was to ensure that quality standards in the hospitality industry are maintained, while that of the GHA top official was to serve as the mouthpiece of the members of the association. As such, the GHA top official assisted in formulating and implementing policies as well as addressing challenges which affect members of the association.

### **Strategies for Quality Guest Service Delivery (QGSD)**

The strategies put in place by the FLMs for FLEs' service quality delivery were mainly from management with input from FLEs' contributions and guest's feedback. Training was the main strategy used by the hotels for QGSD by 14 out of the 17 FLMs; six of them additionally mentioned SOPs. Based on the pronouncements of the FLMs, most of the strategies emanated from management in the form of knowledge and skills training to enable FLEs to handle guests and their concerns, develop SOPs and focus on scheduled

maintenance of facilities. The FLMs also monitored, encouraged and alerted FLEs while performing their duties as stated by an Executive Housekeeper:

*I set SOPs with stakeholders and conduct skills and product knowledge training for my staff to influence their attitudes in order to offer exceptional services to guests. I train them on guest care, guest service, guests' complaints corrective actions and follow-ups. I monitor service processes and constantly follow up all trainings. Sustaining all these service quality strategies for guest satisfaction is realised in training (54-year-old female EHK of a 4-star hotel).*

A 54-year-old male F&B Manager of a 4-star hotel also specified that:

*I constantly interacted with guests for feedback. This is one thing I've learnt which has helped me to get some guests to lodge their complaints and commend FLEs with the exception of the 'frustrated' ones who would just leave without complaining. This has enabled me to identify their needs and train my FLEs on QSD and how to address guests' complaints.*

Other strategies include FLMs-FLEs shift 'briefings' and training them to be more responsive to guests' complaints. For example, guests' calls are automatically routed to the front desk which is manned 24/7 for someone to receive it and assist him/her:

*Our friendly front office staff normally check-in guests within 5 minutes without delay as most of them have arrived tired from hours of long-distant flights. Spending more than five minutes at the lobby is questionable - are they having issues with payment?*

*The FOM steps in to resolve such guest-related issues and challenges if the staff aren't able to do so (33-year-old female RDM of a 4-star hotel).*

The FLMs were also concerned about FLEs' welfare because they believed that when the FLEs are treated well, they would transfer it to guests by delivering quality service. Some of the FLMs had systems in place where they appreciated FLEs who delivered services which exceeded guests' expectations. In this respect, a 44-year-old female Rooms Division Manager of a 3-star hotel indicated that her outfit uses a document known as Guest Satisfaction Tracking System (GSTS) and Employee Satisfaction Tracking System (ESTS) to track their satisfaction. This is because if the FLEs (internal guests) are happy, it reflects on the 'external guests' through their service delivery so they do not discern between the two as the FLEs are as important as the guests.

Additional strategies mentioned were related to the deliberate involvement of the FLE's and guests with the intention of augmenting managements' effort in QSD:

*FLEs' play an important role; they offer inputs and implement the strategies adopted by management to guarantee QSD by putting in more effort to effectively deliver services to guests. We also create avenues through forms placed in guestrooms, platform or the front desk to encourage guests to provide verbal or written suggestions or feedbacks on QSD.*

The findings from this section lend support to earlier studies' assertion that guest satisfaction with QGSD is indubitably one of the strong factors which guarantees guest loyalty intentions and retention (Dastane & Fazlin, 2017). This

behoves FLMs to effectively equip FLEs with the knowledge and skills necessary, in addition to seeking their welfare and job satisfaction to transfer it to deeds of QGSD for guest satisfaction. Such hotels would also distinguish themselves from the others to consistently be in business due to guest loyalty.

### **GTA and GHA's Contribution to QGSD**

The two main strategies used by the Quality Assurance Department of GTA to ensure QSD in the hotels were inspections and monitoring their performance. GHA had also published a book on QSD to guide hotels to deliver services which meet guests' expectations titled 'Operational and Service Standards for Tourist Accommodation Enterprises in Ghana'. In addition, both GTA and GHA periodically facilitated training programmes to improve and maintain QSD standards formally in the hotels in Accra and Kumasi, and systematically and informally in the other regions through OJT. These training programmes were funded by the Tourism Development Fund (TDF). As separate bodies, they also assessed and awarded hotels throughout the country annually to inspire them to do better such as the Ghana Tourism Awards. A 55-year-old male top official of GTA also stated that:

*We conduct service assessment of the up-market hotels (3- to 5-star hotels) unannounced through mystery guest visits to assess the facilities, the quality and speed of service delivery. New hotels which do not meet the required standards are not licenced to operate and the older ones have their license revoked.*

Furthermore, a 52-year-old male GHA top official also added that:

*We create an environment which allows hotels to flourish by*

*assisting them to address guests' challenges related to QSD and the resolution of guests' major complaints. This is because most of the factors affecting the industry are government- or guest-related. We disseminate such info to our members during our meetings.*

### **Quality Service Delivery Assessment**

Some of the FLMs assessed FLE's QSD through questionnaires which were placed in guestrooms or online as well as through mystery guests.

This was specifically mentioned by a 31-year-old female FOM of a 5-star hotel:

*We usually contract mystery guests to give us feedback on QSD.*

*We also record mystery calls to call centres, play and discuss them during briefings to identify what's laudable or wrong with them to ensure that the right things are done at the right time and location.*

Further questioning of what is required of the mystery guest during the service quality feedback resulted in the following response also by the FOM:

*The mystery guest could be picked from the airport and checked-in for two or three nights. So, the assessment with a checklist based on our policies and SOPs starts from the airport, whether the driver did what's expected of him; this is ticked and remarked. On arrival at the hotel, he experiences everything from check-in to guestroom through to F&B and all other outlets. He then prepares a report for management who assesses the report and*

*use the feedback to enhance our service delivery (31-year-old female FOM of a 5-star hotel).*

With respect to QSD being assessed through feedback from guests, a 42-year-old male Groups and Events Manager of a 3-star hotel stated that:

*Guests' feedback gives us a lot of input to assess QSD. Questions are designed as benchmarks and set against the standards to solicit for relevant responses on FLEs' service delivery; these are collated as data for GR Office to analyse. FLEs' actual performance is then deduced as against the standard, whether it's below, within or above and of course, we take the appropriate strategy as set in each case.*

On their overall impression of the QSD in upscale hotels, 12 out of the 15 FLMs comprising one 5-star, seven 4-star and all the four 3-star hotels stated that their performance was from average to very good; yet they opined that they could do better. Conversely, the rest were of the view that they offered the best services. A 42-year-old male GEM of a 3-star hotel, making TripAdvisor a yardstick for measuring the impression of their hotel's QSD, specified that they were doing 8 on a scale of 1-10 and ranged between 10 and 12 out of 92 hotels within their category on Trip Advisor; he still believed there was room for improvement. A 54-year-old male F&BM of a 4-star hotel also commented that:

*I would be lying if I said it was good but looking at our ratings on Trip Advisor, we moved from 29<sup>th</sup> position to 15<sup>th</sup>. We can say there is improvement and would like to move into the top 10 hotels but we know it would take a lot of hard work to get us there.*

These are typical honest opinions being shared by the FLMs using guests' reviews on TripAdvisor as means for measuring QSD; the desire to do their best to improve their online ratings indicate how they are striving to meet guests' expectations.

### **GTA and GHA Officials' Impressions of Hotels' QSD**

The two GTA and GHA officials generally shared the opinions of the FLMs on the hotels' QSD. A 55-year-old male GTA Quality Assurance official affirmed that service delivery levels would be rated as good; however, there was more room for improvement. He was of the view that the industry developers and operators spend huge amounts of money in developing the hotels but refuse to invest in the recruitment of qualified persons and training staff to deliver quality service. A 52-year-old male GHA top official also said that:

*Well, it's quite okay though we still hear of cases of guests who'd had bad experiences; they offer the best opinion of our services through reviews. That's not to say that all hotels aren't doing well; some are, but when it's related to the complaints, then we realise that it's not a perfect situation. It relates to different grades too; the higher you go, the better the system appears because the big hotels invest directly into training their staff apart from what the government tries to do. Hardly would a budget or a 1-star hotel organise training for its staff.*

Responses of the FLMs confirmed managers' commitment to FLEs' QSD as reinforcing the conceptual framework guiding the study with respect to

supportive FLMs, FLEs' training, empowerment, performance appraisal, motivation and rewards for FLEs' job satisfaction and QGSD in the upscale hotels. Similarly, the statements made by the two officials sum up the state of the QSD in Ghanaian hotels. Thus, QSD requires these hotels to look into recruiting the right calibre of personnel for all positions and consistently train them to offer quality services to meet guests' expectations.

Previous studies, including those of Heskett et al. (2008) and Muller (2009), have shown that service quality training for FLEs in upscale hotels should start with the recruitment process where the required knowledge and skills to carry out the duties are clearly spelt out. This is because a flaw in the service delivery system negatively impacts on services rendered to guests; hence the need for strategies to ease FLEs' service recovery efforts (Mensah-Kufuor et. al., 2015; Ogechi & Igbojekwe, 2015).

### **Strategies Employed by FLMs to Facilitate FLEs' Service Recovery**

#### **Efforts**

Regarding the strategies put in place to facilitate FLEs' SFR, information was sought on both managerial commitments and practices critical for improving how they handle them. The FLMs employed policies governing guests' complaint handling procedures, performance appraisals and training to improve FLEs' professionalism. The FLMs also empowered them to promptly resolve guests' complaints, utilised SOPs and scheduled maintenance of facilities and motivation which led to FLEs' job satisfaction to reflect on how they handle SFR.



According to the FLMs, the critical managerial practices which impacted on FLEs' service recovery were planning, participative leadership, communication skills and showing appreciation. They personally believed in leadership by example as they did not expect dissimilar acts from them, conferred with them individually and collectively on how service recovery issues were dealt with, and encouraged them to give feedback. Other FLMs also advised the FLEs to have the presence of mind and be alert to contain any situation which may arise during service recovery. A 35-year-old female Guest Relation Manager of a 4-star hotel narrated that:

*For a smooth operation, I train and work hand-in-hand with them to replicate the right things I do, be abreast with what needs to be done and to confidently perform them to satisfy guests. They also know that I'm at the background checking what they are doing and to support them to do things right in order to curtail guest problems which may have to be solved later. These reinforce their confidence and capabilities and motivate them to solve some guest complaints.*

In sum, the transcripts revealed the FLMs' commitments which could affect FLEs' service recovery performance and result in job satisfaction to reflect on their job turnover. These leadership commitments as found in the SPC model (Heskett et al., 2008) and the study's conceptual framework were internal service quality, FLEs' satisfaction, retention and productivity which extends to guest satisfaction, loyalty and profitability. These strategies were made possible because of the policies these hotels had put in place to influence FLEs service delivery or service recovery, guests' satisfaction, PWOM and revisit intentions.

### Hotel Policies Governing Guests' Complaint Handling Procedures (FLM)

Although majority of the 15 hotels (11) had policies governing guests' complaint handling procedures, only six of the FLMs from a 5-star, three 4-star and two 3-star hotels rigidly adhered to them. The rest of the 11 which were two 5-star and three 4-star hotels flexibly used the policies as a guide for service failure recovery. However, the rest did not have policies for handling guests' complaints. The ensuing account was given by a 35-year-old female GRM of a 4-star hotel:

*Yes, there are policies to ensure guests' complaints are responded to within 10 mins even before guests' arrival, during check-in and occupancy, or after they've checked-out as a follow-up.*

However, a 44-year-old male GRM of a 5-star hotel cited flexibility as the reason for his hotel not having a particular policy. This is to accommodate guests who were unique and had differing complaints which needed different solutions. So, although policies should be set as guidelines for the FLEs, ideally, they should not be too rigid as to restrict them. This augments guest care, FLE-guest relationship and trust which boosts a constructive effect on guests' satisfaction and loyalty intentions (Bitran & Lojo, 1993; Gremler & Brown, 1998). In effect, there was not much difference among the hotels which had policies and rigidly adhered to them and those who did not as the three scenarios affected almost all the grades of the hotels. The study also revealed that though all the three 5-star hotels had policies which governed how guests' complaints were handled, two of them were flexible in their implementation. Ideally, all hotels should have policies on strategies and procedures to guide them in

handling guest complaints with the choice of being flexible in order to facilitate FLEs' service recovery efforts.

### **FLEs' Empowerment in Service Failure Recovery**

Empowerment effectively makes FLEs more committed to handling guests' complaints. It also enhances their output, morale and job satisfaction (Lytle & Timmerman, 2006), yet management fully empowering FLEs to handle guests' service complaints was to a limited extent. This was based on the policies which guided some of the hotels. Hotels which fully empowered the FLEs comprised one each of 5, 4 and 3-star hotels; those partially empowered were made up of one 5-star, five 4-star and one 3-star hotels; while the unempowered ones were one 5-star and two each of 4 and 3-star hotels. Though most of the hotels had SOPs for handling guests' complaints, each complaint was considered on its own merit and FLEs' inability to recover them within a time frame irritated most guests.

A 42-year-old male GEM of a 3-star hotel whose FLEs were empowered to handle guests' complaints used an SOP based on 'LEAST', an acronym for listen, empathise, apologise, solve the complaint and thank the guest. He explained that:

*A FLE could contact engineering for immediate action to be taken if water's not flowing in a guestroom, move or upgrade the guest for a timely intervention without involving any FLM as the guest can't wait for us to come and resolve the problem. The upgrading's based on benchmarks like the number of nights spent, if he's a loyal guest and not the complaining type. I can*

*verify later from a CCTV that indeed, there was the need to move or upgrade the guest.*

Reasons given by the FLMs for FLEs being partially empowered were because of the degree of some of the complaints which they might not be able to recover satisfactorily within the stipulated time to guests' satisfaction; a possibility of some FLEs taking advantage of the empowerment was also not ruled out. So, they could report technical complaints to maintenance staff while they handle the service-related ones. Complaints involving refund of payments or other cases like upgrades which tend to affect hotel revenue were handled by only FLMs. For instance, a 42-year-old male GRM of a 5-star hotel clarified that, should a guest report of his missing money, FLEs cannot intervene due to security reasons; a FLM and the IT boss usually check the lock and CCTV cameras and report on them.

A 31-year-old female FOM of a 5-star hotel whose FLEs were not empowered clarified the fact that there was the need to observe how upset guests were before settling on the recovery decision and procedure which FLEs were not capable of undertaking. So, FLEs who were not empowered to resolve guests' complaints quickly called a GRM or the departmental head involved to ensure its resolution. The findings also revealed that some guests with problems refused to talk to anyone - not even to GRMs or FOMs, but the GM or the owner; such guests were sometimes allowed to talk to the GM as he is the final person to solve guests' complaints.

Conclusively, the findings revealed two main issues emanating from FLEs' empowerment. Empowered FLEs who take prompt decisions on problems during guest-encounters could enhance guests' satisfaction and

influence their perceptions of the hotels. This naturally augments FLEs' knowledge and skills on the job. Again, their successful recovery of guests' complaints could result in an inner satisfaction which would motivate them to do more.

On the other hand, some guest complaints may demand in-depth experience and knowledge outside the normal SOPs and beyond some FLEs' comprehension, capabilities or trustworthiness which result in some guests or FLMs' preference to handle such service recoveries (Lee, 2018). Yet, there could be situations where FLEs who are not empowered are guided to recover service failures. Such FLEs are expected to apologise first to upset guests for their poor experience upon hearing their complaints in the Ghanaian setting. These FLEs could utilise this strategy to quickly turn angry guests who, under normal circumstances, would not have permitted them to handle their problems, into satisfied ones.

### **FLEs' Right to Handle Service Failures They Caused**

Majority of the FLMs encouraged FLEs to *do it right the second time* when they make mistakes during service delivery. This is because they believed the FLEs cannot always get everything right the first time in a human-centred industry like hotels. But the FLMs equally argued that mistakes which dissatisfied guests should not be taken for granted hence, FLEs' fair service recovery performance was time-bound, after which FLMs were consulted to intervene to offer the needed support. Some FLEs were also not allowed to correct grave financial mistakes they caused; the FLMs rather interrupted and solved them as stated in the ensuing narrative:

*FLEs do whatever needs to be done to resolve guests' complaints caused by their action or inaction. But a Cashier who inadvertently or intentionally overcharges a guest's bill is a serious disservice so he can't correct it himself; I'd have to. The guest who's upset would not want to meet him (35-year-old female GRM of a 4-star hotel).*

Although the 15 hotels had varied policy frameworks on the right of FLEs who cause service failures to recover them, all the FLMs said it was based on the degree of service failure and the countenance of the guest. Notably, three scenarios emanated from their responses; firstly, whether the FLE is empowered to recover the service failure. Secondly, whether the guest is prepared to meet the FLE who caused the service failure and thirdly, whether the FLE can affect the recovery with justice to the satisfaction of the guest. Even with some fully empowered FLEs, someone else recovers the service failure they caused if the guest does not want to meet them. One of the scenarios was a case of a resident lawyer who had everything on his pen-drive mistakenly deleted by a FLE in-charge of a business centre when he had to print something for him. The problem was how to get the 16G (1,000) documents of cases back. The 32-year-old male FOM of a 4-star hotel continued:

*The man was so upset so I calmed him down and said, 'She's my staff, please allow me to do my best to help'. He then said, 'All I want is my cases back; I'll be at the poolside'. I got my FLE out of the situation, called the IT manager who got a data recovery software, recovered everything on the pen-drive and gave it back to the guest.*

This is when service recovery training programmes become very necessary for FLMs to implant an attitude in the FLEs to pursue incessant service recovery training since all service-related mistakes cannot be eradicated. FLEs' advancement would promote the FLE-guest relationship and that of the hotel (Kanyan, 2016).

### **FLEs' Training on Service Failure Recovery**

High quality training is increasingly becoming relevant to enhance hotel and/or FLEs' performance, especially service recovery in MN hotels (Sami & Mohamed, 2014) as compared to the independent ones. In this study, the FLEs were specifically trained on guests' complaints, service recovery, in addition to other areas like customer care based on their case studies from management groups and Trip Advisor. The FLMs trained newly-employed FLEs themselves as they wanted to inculcate in them their core values, their main responsibilities towards guests and the need for them to know how to professionally relate to them during service delivery/recovery. Especially so when those recruited from other hotels may have traits which they have to unlearn; they thought it was not the best to leave them with supervisors who may have traits which could be imparted unto the new ones.

Most of the FLMs and their HRMs strategically and consistently training FLEs to implement hotel policies for development in order to successfully recover guests' service failure cannot be overemphasised (Nickson, 2009). These FLMs were from the three 5-star hotels, seven 4-star and two 3-star hotels. Eight of these hotels had external trainers who assisted in training the FLEs in service delivery or recovery when the need arises. A FLMs' positive

response to such training was:

*About 70% of our training is centred on service delivery/recovery as the former could fail. We had a recent one on FLEs' application of emotional intelligence during service failure/recovery. It prepares them especially to emotionally deal with difficult guests and those from different cultures (33-year-old female RDM of a 4-star hotel).*

However, a 31-year-old female Reservation and Yield Manager of a 4-star hotel revealed a shortcoming in their current training which was limited to only service delivery without service recovery as they used to have; so, the FLEs are handicapped when guests complain.

FLEs being trained on emotional intelligence, a primary behaviour which forms the basis for resolving most guest complaints, is commendable, as they would be equipped to be emotionally connected to perform authentic service recovery. These FLEs would also offer a personal touch, distinctive of service which is inseparable during the process (Kruger, 2015) for a lasting impression and good value. Such MN chain hotels which incorporate innovative forms of training FLEs like emotional intelligence in service delivery/recovery performances in addition to other tried and tested systems of training and SOPs would sustain the FLE-guest rapport and guests' revisits than most independent ones (Kattara & El-Said, 2014).

Logically, FLEs who lack the necessary job and interpersonal skills training to emotionally deal with guests' complaints would not be up to the task to deliver high level service recovery (Ashill et al., 2005; Gassoli et al. (2013).



## The Methods and Frequency of FLE Training

Generally, the training methods used by majority (11) of the FLMs were OJT with SOPs, short lecture sessions and tutorials, ‘*participative channels*’ and power point (PPT) presentations; eight of them organised CFT in addition. They also utilised mentoring, coaching, role play, behaviour modelling guided by guests’ reviews and other case studies. The OJT normally took the form of the trainer (FLM) manually or electronically demonstrating the procedure for the trainees (FLEs) to learn, observe and replicate until they got it right. Though the FLEs were left on their own to gain confidence, the FLMs were often at the background supervising, guiding, directing, observing and prompting them when the need arises to ensure that the SOPs were followed to the letter. A 32-year-old male FOM of a 4-star hotel asserted that:

*OJT is the best method to train FLEs and for them to help each other, as each one of them has different levels of knowledge and experience on service recovery. We discuss and share ideas for solution; it does not auger well for me to always lead because I don’t know it all; they may know something through experience which I, a FOM, may not.*

The participative channel or round table training also used by a 31-year-old female FOM of a 5-star hotel equally explained how her team members researched for sub-topics of guests’ service failure cases, prepared power-point slides and presented them. In doing so, they brought out their ideas on board for solutions and discussed them to ensure they suit the cases before adapting them.

Some of the FLMs focused on coaching or mentoring some selected

FLEs to enhance their performance so as to be more productive and competent to progress professionally. Reasons given to that effect were because some of them had the potential to climb up the career ladder, while those who had difficulties in dealing with some guests' issues were encouraged to build their confidence. A 35-year-old male F&BM of a 4-star hotel indicated in the interview that:

*When a FLE is self-motivated to be better and wants to be helped, has the potential to excel or I'm interested in how he works, I get closer to that person and assist or inspire the one to excel.*

Basically, CFT is organised among divisions (F&B and Rooms) or departments (front office) for FLE's multiple skills (functional flexibility). For instance, a 54-year-old male F&B Manager of a 4-star hotel clarified that some waiters assist in the preparation of breakfast or lunch when a cook is late or due to peak season. Cooks also assist in buffet service due to the CFT they had undergone. A 33-year-old female RDM of a 4-star hotel also added that:

*When rooms aren't ready to check-in guests owing to understaffing, front office staff have been trained enough to quickly make up rooms to check in guests to avoid complaints. A guest with a DND sign on his door could come in complaining 'My room wasn't made' at 11pm when housekeeping had closed. The front office person can't tell him housekeeping's closed, but to go and make the room.*

While one of the FLMs whose hotel does not practice CFT said he does not mind his FLEs taking the initiative to do that, a 38-year-old male GRM of a 4-star hotel said he is yet to witness CFT, as his previous places of work did not

practice it.

Majority of the FLMs implementing OJT, an affirmed most effective means of facilitating learning, and insisting on training new FLEs themselves is laudable. This is because apart from its provision of knowledge and hands-on skills at normal working settings, it would also enhance the FLM-FLE relationship especially with the new FLEs during and after the training (Kanyan, 2016). Outsourcing FLMs and HRMs' training functions to external trainers of the best hotel practices by virtue of the various hotels serviced would enhance FLEs' service performance to meet guests' expectations (Abbey, 2014). However, the healthy team spirit which usually develops between FLEs and FLMs during OJT will be missing or absent in addition to increased training costs (Abbey, 2014).

Furthermore, the use of audio-visual materials, PPT presentations and CFT to showcase or demonstrate real life situations FLEs meet during the performance of their duties would assist them to know and understand the reality and practicality of the various service recovery procedures applied. Such expertise may not be acquired from the various hotels' general training by the HRM, but the specific departmental ones which help reshape how they relate to and recover guests' complaints. At this point, one realises the need for FLEs to display varied skills from CFT necessary for specific guest services in various hotel divisions designed to accelerate prompt guest service recovery experience across common functions (Chapman & Lovell, 2006) to guests' satisfaction.

Hence, it was not surprising to note that some FLMs were flexible in their approach to training and mentoring the FLEs to reflect the underlying effect of the functional flexibility model and the study's conceptual framework.

In so doing, the FLM Trainers brought the best out of their FLE Trainees by encouraging them to think outside the box in solving guest issues. All these modes of training and adherence to them would consequently enhance FLEs' service delivery and service failure recovery to resolve the injustice guests might have encountered (Maher & Sobh, 2014; Mensah-Kufuor et al., 2015).

Regarding the frequency of the training, most of the training were held between fortnightly and quarterly by the 12 FLMs in collaboration with the HRMs; these were in addition to the OJT which were held weekly by 10 of them. The OJTs were held during handing over periods for the various frontline departments (the interviewer witnessed five of them). The SOPs were revisited daily during briefings to remind FLEs of what is expected of them when dissatisfied guests complain.

*Our training by HR and external trainers are conducted quarterly while OJT and complaint handling are regular or when the need arises. Guests often complain of services not meeting their expectations, hence the need for frequent training to address them professionally (37-year-old male GRM of a 5-star hotel).*

Majority of the FLM Trainers provided modules and/or materials for the FLE Trainees for reference when necessary. Modules from management groups or Franchisors which did not apply to them were tailored to suit the Ghanaian situation.

*Yes, they're given handouts and note pads in folders plus IT system activity sheets like 'Kahoot' to fill or respond to questions on whatever they've been trained on using their smartphones (29-year-old female GEM of a 5-star hotel).*

Modules from management groups or Franchisors being tailored to suit desired situations in Ghana was not out of place; this is because it should be adaptable to the specifics and dire needs or expectations of guests.

### **The Effects of Training on FLEs' Handling of Guest Complaints**

Considering the effects of training on FLEs handling of guest complaints, all the FLMs, including those who had not trained their FLEs for a while, opined that such training influenced them positively. It enabled the FLEs to understand and empathise with guests, boosted their confidence levels and enhanced their performance as they went the extra mile thinking outside the box in the recovery of service failures. Also, a 54-year-old female Executive Housekeeper of a 4-star hotel stressed the tangible or obvious positive impact of training as less complaints being made over a period as 'learning' had taken place. Another FLM who believed in and often trained his FLEs on 'handling guests' complaints' stated further that:

*Such training seeks to establish the service recovery goal – highlight the strategies and procedure to be used to recover the failure to meet guests' expectation. The impact is seen in their confidence and skills in communicating with guests during the recovery using 'ARFFD' which is apologise, go over problem with guest, fix the problem, follow up, then document the problem and solution in detail (42-year-old male GEM of a 3-star hotel).*

The findings in this section revealed that FLEs' regular training on handling guest complaints impacts positively on their performance. Therefore, it should be constantly monitored until it becomes their second nature. However, it

sometimes rests on the individual FLE's initiative and personal drive for success in satisfying guests while handling their complaints. This could equally encourage and enable the 21<sup>st</sup> Century purposeful or focused FLE to consistently provide exceptional and personalised service recovery, increase productivity and uplift the image of the hotel. Such a package to improve one's performance after being trained on how to handle guest complaints will certainly increase profitability (Kruger (2015), yet most hotels do not put in much effort to achieve effective training (Jaworski et al., 2018).

#### **Efforts of Training FLEs to Recovery Service Failure by GTA and GHA**

The GTA and GHA in their commitment to enhanced service recovery to guests' satisfaction conduct refresher training programmes for hotel staff. Such training on work ethics, customer service and care, and guests' complaints were organised for Front Office, F&B and Housekeeping FLEs. The GTA participant further explained that:

*We investigate guests' complaints, then organise the appropriate training based on the relevant area to enhance FLEs' service delivery/recovery (55-year-old male GTA top official).*

The GHA occasionally provided technical assistance to FLEs of members in the form of seminars to enable them recover guests' service failure in addition to the standardised procedures they had provided in a manual. According to the 52-year-old male GHA top official, big hotels train their staff unlike some of the low-rated ones who do not, but hire FLEs who just smile without attending to most guests' needs. He added that:

*Such hotels' fear's that the FLEs would move on forgetting that*

*if they train them to do better, it would rather enhance the services they render and their revenue. Obviously the higher you go, the better the services appear to be because of their emphasis on training.*

### **FLEs' Performance Appraisals**

Regarding the conduct and frequency of FLEs' performance appraisals as a basis for their promotion and reward, majority of the hotels (11) appraised them based on their job description and output. These hotels were made up of all the sampled 5-star, most 4-star and 3-star hotels. Seven of the hotels appraised the FLEs bi-annually, quarterly by three hotels and tri-annually by one hotel, while four of them had annual reviews in addition.

Primarily, the criteria for performance appraisal of the various hotels were based on FLEs' conduct (punctuality and time management, social skills, guest relations, team effort) and capacity (ability to learn new things, initiative, leadership qualities/skills, judgement). The rest were attitude (interest, responsibility, inter-department co-operation, personal grooming); job knowledge (objectives, unit systems, procedures, policies, standards, best practices, facilities/products on sale); job performance (planning, accuracy, development output, quality and/or quantity of work). All the above components portray FLEs' professionalism in dealing with guest issues such as QSD, complaint handling and service recovery decisions which could result in guest satisfaction and PWOM. Appraisal could be informal interactions with FLEs on where they are, where they want to be, whether they were able to achieve what they planned a year ago and the kind of training they need. A 35-

year-old male F&BM of a 4-star hotel specified that:

*FLEs' daily performance is recorded in a performance dairy based on a criterion and marks awarded for the number of guest complaints solved. These are collated at the end of the week, month and year as a guide for their promotion and salary increment. FLEs commended for exceptional service recovery are also awarded during appraisal.*

Performance appraisal which evaluates FLEs' technical, conceptual and human skills in dealing with guest issues, their attainments and progress within a period is necessary for feedback on their performance. This enables the FLMs to take decisions on their reliability, promotion and rewards. So, the four hotels which do not conduct appraisals are missing out a major procedure for assessing the FLEs' performance.

### **FLEs' Motivation**

Generally, hotels depend on FLEs motivations to positively relate to guests in order to influence their performance (Rothfelder et al., 2013). Hence, during briefings and service recovery, the FLMs encouraged the FLEs to come out with their best and rewarded them mostly based on guest service recovery performance. While the management team of a 4-star hotel had instituted a scholarship scheme for employees' wards up to the tertiary level since its inception, another one had a monthly 'Appreciation Day' where management served items like cakes and ice cream to all staff. FLMs also showed appreciation as in the case of a FLM who booked dinner for a FLE for turning an enraged guest into a loyal one. All these incentives were to motivate them to



competently take care of guests' needs.

*FLEs' are motivated for good performance such as turning an angry guest around and achieving set targets in the form of constructive feedback. I take some of their ideas when making guest service decisions, recognise their output, reward their efforts and promote them to enrich their jobs (42-year-old male G&EM of a 3-star hotel).*

A 33-year-old female RDM of a 4-star hotel also added that they have a 10% automatic annual salary increment for all staff and they can also boast of certificates for the training organised for them. Another FLM stated that:

*FLEs are motivated for turning rooms around during peak periods to check in complaining guests. Days off are given, fewer rooms are serviced with low occupancy, I pat their shoulders signifying 'Well done', they're refreshed, or they close early before the stipulated time (54-year-old female EHK of a 4-star hotel).*

Motivation had often been mentioned in the literature as one of the factors which shapes FLE's service failure recovery efforts (Masoud & Abu Hmeidan, 2013). Motivation had also been identified as a key determinant of FLEs' job performance in this study. According to the FLMs, most satisfied guests highly commended FLEs verbally or sent emails after checking out for successfully solving their problems while in residence and such appreciation really motivated them.

## FLEs' Recognition and Rewards

Motivation in the form of recognition and rewards also influenced the FLEs' service failure recovery as there is a relationship between FLE rewards and service delivery/recovery performance to guests' satisfaction. Hence, majority of the hotels conducted 'Employee of the Month/Year Awards'. FLEs were also rewarded through salary increment after promotion, mostly based on their exemplary service recovery efforts to guests' satisfaction. A FLM further explained that:

*FLEs awards are based on guests' commendations of those who go the extra mile to offer outstanding services to them. The best FLE of the year is selected from the 12 monthly winners. This inspires them to work harder (35-year-old male F&BM of a 4-star hotel).*

A FLM of an independent hotel explained that:

*Though we've never had the Best Employee before, the owner, who's not involved in the hotel's operations gives them money on the spot when he finds them to be hardworking. He even motivated a staff with a car for the same reason (38-year-old male GRM of a 4-star hotel).*

In addition, a 44-year-old female RDM of a 3-star hotel which had not recognised its employees for the past three years tried to explain that they used to do that but revoked it when they realised that they were doing it on a rotational basis. This validates what some FLEs said of their performance not being appraised or rewarded for the past three years in Chapter Six. Unappreciated FLEs would be demotivated which would invariably affect the fortunes of the

hotels. Yet, FLEs who perceive the rewards systems as sincere commitments of management are more likely to exhibit high level commitment for guests' service recovery.

Most of the FLMs opined that motivation is not only about rewards but sometimes encouraging FLEs who were practically and academically good with a potential to climb the managerial ladder to go back to school. Having leaders who thought of their welfare, output and future is one thing the FLEs would appreciate.

### **Underlying Factors Which Motivated FLEs to Perform Better Service Recovery**

Given guests' unpredictable reaction to FLEs' service recovery and FLEs job satisfaction, the FLMs revealed some underlying factors which motivated FLEs to perform better service recovery. These were their level of empowerment, FLMs upholding decisions made after successful service recovery and verifying guests' allegations to safeguard their job. They were also concerned about how their outputs were addressed in relation to appraisal and motivation through tangible rewards such as monetary packages and recognition; training and product knowledge; how FLMs related to them (positive, openness) and not to promise what is not feasible. They also wanted FLMs to be on call to help solve 'difficult' guests' complaints. Additional factors which motivated them to perform better service recovery were:

*Commitment of management to QGSD and recovery, job satisfaction and merit system based on a healthy competition.*

*Also, guests' positive feedback on them to management which is*

*factored during their appraisal for promotion and recognition, and my special rapport with them which makes them want to give off their best (42-year-old male G&EM of a 3-star hotel).*

The overall view of the FLMs shows that, if the systems in place were right incentives for motivation and transparent, inspiring and implemented regularly, then with effective supervision, the FLEs would inevitably be motivated to excel in the process of service recovery after service failure.

The two officials of GHA and GTA on the assessment and motivation of FLEs mentioned that both institutions had instituted the Ghana Hotels Awards and the Ghana Tourism Awards to respectively encourage their members and the hotels to do much better. According to a 55-year-old male GTA top official:

*Regional and National Tourism Assessments are conducted by GTA prior to the awards on a yearly basis. Selected juries assess and select the award winners of hospitality and tourism enterprises regionally and nationally. These awards are based on the quality of service delivery and recovery, and facilities of the nominated firms.*

The 52-year-old male GHA top official in responding to whether he was aware of FLEs' motivation to perform better in guest service recovery replied thus:

*It always stands to reason that with the right incentives for motivation, staff would do what's expected of them. One thing I've also observed with the industry is that it appears staff don't do what they're told to or trained to do on their own but are likely to get things done if the system in place is right and the supervision's*

*effective.*

GTA was not really conversant with the hotels' condition of service for the FLEs. Conversely, the GHA top official who had seen that of some hotels hence, had a general idea responded that most Ghanaians in the working class were not satisfied with their condition of service and the hotels were not an exception. He further stated that some FLEs in some hotels appear more satisfied than others, but all is not well when occasionally, one hears of strike actions or impending ones.

*Once in a while GHA is able to manage them to reach a contented compromise. I'm sure you've heard of the issues of two 4-star hotels; one of them pays the fees of staff's wards up to the tertiary level, yet the strike action went on. The challenge is whether their conditions are comparative to their managers'. Some are yet to come to terms with what it means to be a 'manager' or a 'FLE' and until they do, they would never be satisfied (52-year-old male GHA top official).*

### **FLEs' Motivation and Job Satisfaction**

Notwithstanding the diverse ways FLMs motivated their FLEs' to enhance their performance in guests' service recovery, majority of them could not come out clearly with the FLEs' satisfaction with their jobs. Only four of them (two each of 5-star and 4-star hotels) confidently said that their FLEs were really satisfied with their conditions of service. Six of them thought or 'believed' they were satisfied, though two of these added that more could be done to improve the FLEs' condition of service to ensure job satisfaction. The

four FLMs who mentioned that their FLEs were satisfied gave reasons that they were adequately catered for in terms of a good salary, their ward's tuition fees were taken care of, they had nice uniforms, good time schedules, good physical conditions, 'good' food and were transported back home after work. One of them further indicated that:

*Yes, they are because of the kind of impression they give out there.*

*The kind of service they give is superb. FLEs who cancel their off days when we're short of staff or during peak seasons wouldn't do that if they weren't satisfied. They'd inform us or our strong Union if they weren't (42-year-old male GRM of a 5-star hotel).*

Five of the FLMs who felt their FLEs were not satisfied with their jobs gave reasons as management not showing much concern about their welfare. Also, their performance had not been appraised or they had not been promoted for the previous three years. This had affected their output and how they relate to guests. Thus, the study found that FLEs often compared their conditions of service with those of their colleagues in other hotels which resulted in discontent. To this effect, some FLM believed more could be done to enhance their job satisfaction as stated below:

*I'll be sarcastic and say that no matter how much you pay someone, he'd never be satisfied with it. But at a point in time, there's still the belief that something better could be done; we do not shy away from that fact because we are working with human beings. Our business is more of human interface and so how FLEs feel affects how they relate to guests. They need to be happy to translate it into their output (33-year-old female RDM of a 4-star*

hotel).

Surprisingly, a 38-year-old male GRM of a 4-star hotel said that his FLEs were considerate and empathised with management, though they were not satisfied, with the reasons that the owner listened to them and helped out a lot. He added that this was the only hotel he had observed FLEs were not affected by the situation.

Most FLEs would keep on comparing their conditions of service with others for the same work in the same rated hotels and if they are not getting similar conditions especially when they think their hotel is doing better than the others. This is when one wonders why employees of a hotel would decide to go on strike even when the hotel is responsible for their wards' fees up to the tertiary level in addition to other benefits which others do not enjoy. On the other hand, a caring management or hotel owner could influence FLEs' decisions to be committed and creditably give off their best to ensure guests' satisfaction though they may not be satisfied contrary to the findings of Gazzoli et al. (2013) and Van Vaerenbergh et al. (2014). FLEs', in receiving such support as management's commitment, would feel mandated to reciprocate by enhancing their performance; such a commitment increases their job satisfaction and reduces turnover intentions (Ashill et al., 2008; Singh, 2000).

### **FLE Job Turnover**

Closely related to FLEs' job satisfaction is the rate of FLEs' job turnover; although nine of the FLMs said that it was moderately low, the rest said it was a bit high. Out of the 15 FLMs, only four of them could give figures on FLE turnover which ranged between 15% and 40%. Generally, non-

managerial hotel employees' turnover up to 15% was accepted by upscale hotels as low whereas a figure of 50% and above was considered high (Wells, 2018). The nine FLMs whose hotels experienced low FLE job turnover attributed it to FLEs' positions at the front office and F&B departments, and some permanent staff positions as explained by a FLM:

*FLEs do not quit so easily because of the tips, especially foreign currencies. It's also relatively easy for them to be promoted to supervisory positions as their duties are interchangeable in several respects such as Guest Relations. Also, they're able to build solid network for career development and avenues for foreign travels (35-year-old female GRM of a 4-star hotel).*

On the other hand, high FLE turnover was attributed to poaching from other hotels, FLEs aspiring to move up the ladder in other hotels, cases of resignation to join spouses outside Accra, termination of appointments and retirement. A 42-year-old male GEM of a 3-star hotel, for instance, cited FLE job turnover at the F&B department to be 40% which was lower as compared to the others like housekeeping which were higher. On top of the list were those moving to other hotels due to offers of better conditions of service, few of them left for personal reasons like going back to school, while trained casuals left for no apparent reason.

Two observations could be made from the FLMs' findings on issues relating to FLEs moving on to higher positions in other hotels. In the first place, there is the need to hold FLE turnover in check to curtail hotels always having new hands to train which does not augur well for their reputation, guests' trust and finances. Secondly, a divergent view is some of the FLMs who inspire their



FLEs to move higher wish them well when they get good offers in other hotels. Such movements portrayed how well these FLEs were doing prior to their poaching and would give the FLMs an inner satisfaction because a subordinate they trained had been employed elsewhere to hold a better position.

Trained casuals may also leave for apparent reasons of job insecurity due to the feeling and fear of the possibility of not being confirmed as permanent workers with the ‘perpetual’ renewal of their contracts. A permanent Room Attendant performing laborious duties who might have gone through CFT at the front office may equally leave without hesitation to take up an offer at the front office in another hotel not necessarily because of job insecurity, but the position.

Subsequent enquiry from the 52-year-old male GHA top official on FLEs’ turnover revealed that it was a big issue which came up at their last meeting due to the extensive poaching in the industry, just like the football industry. He added that:

*They’re looking for opportunities and better conditions of service all the time. I was recently at a new beach resort and I wasn’t surprised when I saw at least four FLEs I personally knew from two top hotels.*

### **FLMs’ Perception of FLEs’ Service Failure Recovery Performance**

The FLMs evaluated and rated their perception of FLEs’ service failure recovery performance based on their views, assessments and policies relating to a number of factors and procedures. Among them, some used observation and/or listening to how FLEs handled guests’ complaints and guests’ feedback. Some FLMs utilised assessment guide or checklist, appraisals, frequency of

successful service recoveries with the use of strategies like assistance and compensation, and the confidence and attitude exhibited during the performance. A FLM opined that:

*Generally, FLEs handled guests' complaints and its rectification well based on the policies and SOPs which guide them; but I sometimes have to come in to remedy a situation as they may not handle the complaint tactfully (42-year-old male G&EM of a 3-star hotel).*

Another FLM in an explanation on how he evaluated his perception added that:

*When I'm around and they're handling guests' problems, I take note of how they're relating to guests because their body language and flow of speech count. Guests are looking for confidence, competence, remedial actions, speed and honesty like me. I may intervene when I realise a staff is not doing well as I can't go back to guests asking if FLEs attended to them well (32-year-old male FOM of a 4-star hotel).*

The FLMs also rated their perception of FLEs' performance of service failure recovery in percentages. The highest rating was 90% by four out of the 15 FLMs, while two each rated their performance as 80% and 70% with the lowest rating being 30% by a 35-year-old female GRM of a 4-star hotel due to complacency which had set in resulting in the FLEs not doing their best. A FLM's response was:

*On the whole, front desk would be graded 90% efficient while other FLEs are 80% (42-year-old male GRM of a 5-star hotel).*

Probing further into the response of another FLM's perception of FLEs' service

recovery performance as ‘*Averagely*’ yielded the following reasons:

*Some FLEs’ fear of taking full responsibility of monetary matters in the absence of a FLM, fear of being reprimanded by management for unsuccessful resolution of guests’ complaints, inadequate training in service recovery and the exhibition of lackadaisical attitudes towards guest complaints are some of the reasons why some FLEs perform averagely (54-year-old female EHK of a 4-star hotel).*

The FLMs’ perception of their FLEs’ service recovery performance with the aid of strategies would enable them know how well their FLEs are doing (Kennedy, 2018; Lewis & McCann, 2004; Love, 2018). Under normal circumstances, the ratings of eight out of the 11 FLMs whose FLEs were empowered as between 90% and 70% was commendable though one may wonder whether such scores were realistic, as compared to the two who presented lower scores which might be seen as not doing so well.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter focused on the strategies used by the management and FLMs of the upscale hotels in the Accra Metropolis, GTA and GHA to facilitate FLEs’ service recovery performance of guests’ service failure. It first defined the three QSD strategies which were FLMs’ training, SOPs and scheduled maintenance of facilities, FLEs’ effort in offering effective services and guests’ feedback on services rendered. GTA and GHA also trained FLEs, assessed and monitored QSD.

Secondly, FLMs’ strategized managerial commitments and practices

which facilitated FLEs' service recovery efforts were explored. These revealed policies governing guests' complaint handling procedure, FLE training, empowerment, performance appraisals and motivation which led to FLEs' job satisfaction to reflect on service recovery performance. Most FLMs trained the empowered FLEs through OJT, role play and CFT to promptly solve guests' complaints, and evaluated and rated their perception of FLEs' service recovery performance based on guests' feedback and appraisals and rated their performance between 90% and 50%.

Motivation as the third strategy sought to appraise FLEs' general output based on their professionalism in dealing with guest issues such as complaints handling, guests' commendations and leadership qualities for them to be promoted and awarded. Finally, most of the FLMs believed the FLEs were satisfied when their job satisfaction and job turnover were examined. FLEs' turnover was low in the 5-star hotels but progressed to a higher level in the 3-star hotels, mainly due to poaching from other hotels. The findings confirmed the study's conceptual framework's management commitment to FLEs' service quality/failure recovery and its affective outcomes of FLEs' satisfaction and retention. The next chapter examines guests' perception of FLEs' service failure recovery performance and the effect of their satisfaction on loyalty intentions.

**CHAPTER NINE**  
**GUESTS' PERCEPTION OF FLEs' SERVICE FAILURE RECOVERY**  
**PERFORMANCE AND ITS EFFECT ON THEIR SATISFACTION**  
**AND LOYALTY INTENTIONS**

**Introduction**

This chapter analyses and discusses the results of guests' perceptions of FLEs' service failure recovery performance. It also focusses on the effect of guests' satisfaction with FLEs' performance of service failure recovery on their loyalty intentions in upscale hotels in the Accra Metropolis. The chapter is subdivided into three sections to conform to respondents' expectations of services offered by FLEs, their perceptions of how the service failures were recovered, their satisfaction with the recovery and its effect on their loyalty intentions.

**Guests' Expectation of Service Delivery**

Results of the study suggest that guests had higher expectations of the services prior to their experience (Table 14). Among the dimensions of service quality, empathy (M = 4.75) was the most prominent, followed by responsiveness (M = 4.66).

As regards empathy, the guests strongly agreed that the staff (FLEs) should be empathic to their needs (M = 4.75). The respondents also expected FLEs to provide them with individualised attention and show them genuine concern when they had problems. The next dimension which attracted high expectation from the guests was responsiveness (M = 4.66). Here, guests expected staff to deal with their problems promptly should they occur (M =

4.74) and that the hotel should also provide them with adequate information on their needs (M = 4.73).

**Table 14: Guests' Expectation of Service/Product Delivery**

Statements	Mean	SD
<i>Tangibles</i>	4.62	1.21
The hotel's physical facilities must be consistent with its image and price range.	4.49	1.16
Staff of the hotel should be neat and well groomed	4.70	1.34
Technology and electronic facilities must be up-to-date.	4.66	1.18
<i>Assurance</i>	4.63	1.55
Hotel must provide quality food and beverage	4.66	1.18
Guests should be offered varied choices of facilities.	4.57	1.94
Hotel staff should be professionals.	4.66	1.04
<i>Reliability</i>	4.64	1.56
Hotel should provide all services as promised.	4.52	1.36
The hotel should provide adequate security.	4.75	1.16
Services offered by staff must be consistently high in quality with updated guest records.	4.66	1.21
<i>Responsiveness</i>	4.66	1.58
Hotel provides adequate information.	4.73	1.59
Staff must promptly deal with my problem/s.	4.74	1.15
Hotel's staff are required to promptly respond to my request/s.	4.51	1.22
<i>Empathy</i>	4.75	1.54
Staff should show me genuine concern when I have problem/s.	4.74	1.57
Staff must give me individualised attention as they attentively listen to my complaint.	4.75	1.32

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Scale: 1.0-1.49 = strongly disagreed, 1.50–2.49 = disagreed, 2.50-3.49 = neutral, 3.50-4.49 = agreed, 4.50-5.0 = strongly agreed.

It is worth noting that business guests who do not usually have limited time, would want their needs or problems addressed promptly or resolved by

FLEs. Thus, promptly addressing the needs of these guests and providing individualised attention would most probably uphold their image and dignity, thereby avert guests' dissatisfaction. This is in line with the studies made by Eshetie et al. (2016), Roschk and Gelbrich (2014) and Wamuyu (2016). Guests also expected hotels to provide adequate security ( $M = 4.75$ ).

The least expectation was in relation to tangibles. Guests expected hotel staff to be neat and well groomed ( $M = 4.70$ ). They also expected technology and electronic facilities to be up-to-date ( $M = 4.66$ ).

### **CFA Results on Guests' Expectation of Service/Product Delivery**

The available literature is clear that prior to consumption of products and services, guests usually have their own expectations and would accordingly evaluate the services rendered as to whether the service failed or not. Therefore, this section intended to analyse the extent to which the data fitted the scales which measured each of these using CFA. The initial assessment of the measurement models for these two scales both indicated that the scales fitted the sample data very well as shown by the model fit indicators. The guest expectation scale yielded fitness results of AGFI= 0.92; CFI = 0.980; IFI = 0.955 and RMSEA = 0.033. Each of the measurement items loaded greater than the 0.50 recommended threshold. Internal consistency is also achieved for each of the measurement dimensions as the composite reliability scores each is approximately 0.70 and above. Altogether, it is deduced that the guest expectation measurement scale is valid for its intended measurement. Thus, its dimensions included tangibles, assurance, reliability, responsiveness and empathy. The same scale and its underlying dimensions were also used to

gauge guest perception of service failure in the surveyed hotels (Table 15).

**Table 15: CFA Results on Guests' Expectation of Service/Product**

**Delivery**

Dimensions	SFL	AVE	CR
<i>Tangibles</i>		0.75	0.70
The hotel's physical facilities must be/are consistent with its image and price range.	0.54		
Staff of the hotel should be neat and well groomed.	0.75		
Technology and electronic facilities must be up-to-date.	0.74		
<i>Assurance</i>		0.67	0.84
Hotel must provide quality food and beverage.	0.67		
Guests should be offered varied choices of facilities.	0.68		
Hotel staff should be professionals.	0.74		
<i>Reliability</i>		0.74	0.80
Hotel should provide all services as promised.	0.75		
The hotel should provide adequate security.	0.81		
Services offered by staff must be/were consistently high in quality with updated guest records.	0.74		
<i>Responsiveness</i>		0.76	0.67
Hotel should provide adequate information.	0.83		
Staff must promptly deal with my problem/s.	0.84		
Hotel's staff are required to promptly respond to my request/s.	0.74		
<i>Empathy</i>		0.68	0.71
Staff should show me genuine concern when I have problem/s.	0.80		
Staff must give me individualised attention as they attentively listened to my complaint.	0.81		

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Note: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; SFL: Standardised Factor Loadings

Model fit indices: AGFI= 0.92; CFI = 0.980; IFI = 0.955 & RMSEA = 0.033

**Guests' Perception of Service/Product Delivered**

Overall, the descriptive statistics show that guests were neutral on the perception of service delivered as shown in Table 16.



**Table 16: Guests' Perception of Service/Product Delivered**

Statements	Mean	SD
<i>Tangibles</i>	3.67	
The hotel's physical facilities are consistent with its image and price range.	3.91	1.11
Staff of the hotel are neat and well groomed.	4.01	1.06
Technology and electronic facilities are up-to-date.	3.10	1.34
<i>Reliability</i>	3.39	
The hotel provides all services as promised.	2.42	1.18
The hotel provides adequate security.	4.20	.94
Services offered by staff were consistently high in quality with updated guest records.	3.56	1.04
<i>Assurance</i>	3.32	
Hotel provides quality food and beverages.	3.76	1.16
Guests are offered varied choices of facilities.	3.23	1.21
Staff of hotel are professionals.	2.87	1.58
<i>Responsive</i>	3.02	
Hotel provides adequate information.	3.12	1.23
Staff promptly deal with guests' problems.	2.96	1.53
Hotel's staff promptly respond to guests' requests.	2.99	1.58
<i>Empathy</i>	3.11	
Staff genuinely show concern when I have problem/s.	3.12	1.57
Staff gave me individualised attention as they attentively listened to my complaint.	3.10	1.57

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Scale: 1.0-1.49 = strongly disagreed, 1.50-2.49 = disagreed, 2.50-3.49 = neutral, 3.50-4.49 = agreed, 4.50-5.0 = strongly agreed.

For instance, on responsiveness, they were ambivalent that staff promptly responded to their requests ( $M = 2.99$ ) and dealt with their problems ( $M = 2.96$ ). They agreed however to being satisfied with the tangible aspects of the services ( $M = 3.67$ ). They particularly agreed that employees of the hotel

were neat and well groomed ( $M = 4.01$ ), likewise the facilities were elegant ( $M = 3.90$ ).

Similarly, on reliability, the guests agreed to being satisfied with the provision of adequate security in the facilities ( $M = 4.20$ ) but disagreed that the hotels provided services as promised ( $M = 2.42$ ). The finding on hotel staff being neat and well-groomed is commendable for guests' lasting impression, though it should commensurate QGSD for guest satisfaction. Also, hotels or FLEs not providing services as promised to guests evoke guests' ingratitude instead of gratitude; this view was equally shared by Bock et al. (2016). Guests' gratitude and satisfaction in service delivery is indispensable in promoting a healthy FLE-guest relationship which could result in guests' PWOM and loyalty.

#### **CFA Results on Guests' Perception of Service/Product Delivered**

The same scale used for guests' expectations and its underlying dimensions, namely tangibles, assurance, reliability, responsiveness and empathy, were also used to gauge guest perception of service failure in the surveyed hotels. Similarly, the model fit for indices ( $CFI = 0.984$ ;  $IFI = 0.955$  &  $RMSEA = 0.060$ ) showed that perception of service failure data also fitted the data well, which establishes its overall structural validity (Table 17).

**Table 17: CFA Results on Guests' Perception of Service/Product**

**Delivered**

Dimensions	SFL	AVE	CR
<i>Tangibles</i>		0.76	0.80
The hotel's physical facilities are consistent with its image and price range.	0.67		
Staff of the hotel are neat and well groomed.	0.58		
Technology and electronic facilities are up-to-date.	0.72		
<i>Assurance</i>		0.77	0.76
Hotel provides quality food and beverage.	0.53		
Guests are offered varied choices of facilities.	0.52		
Hotel staff are professionals.	0.40		
<i>Reliability</i>		0.63	0.82
Hotel provides all services as promised.	0.40		
The hotel provides adequate security.	0.50		
Services offered by staff were consistently high in quality with updated guest records.	0.80		
<i>Responsiveness</i>		0.67	0.78
Hotel provides adequate information.	0.74		
Staff promptly dealt with my problem/s.	0.88		
Hotel's staff promptly respond to my request/s.	0.90		
<i>Empathy</i>		0.57	
Staff showed me genuine concern when I had problem/s.	0.88		
Staff gave me individualised attention as they attentively listened to my complaint.	0.88		

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Note: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; SFL: Standardised Factor Loadings

Model fit indices: AGFI= 0.95; CFI = 0.984; IFI = 0.955 & RMSEA = 0.060

### Gap Analysis of Respondents' Expectations versus Perceptions

Table 18 presents the mean scores on the expectations and perception scale for the attributes and the mean gap scores, which is the difference between their expectations-perceptions. The analysis was carried out using a paired sampled t-test. Overall, the respondents' rated expectations exceeded their rated perceptions (mean = -1.36;  $p < 0.01$ ).

A similar observation was also made at the level of the dimensions where expectations exceeded perceptions such that each perception score for tangibles, assurance, reliability, responsiveness and empathy were significantly lower than their expectations. The dimensions which received the highest dissatisfaction score were the responsiveness and empathy with a mean difference value of -1.64. What the respondents were particularly dissatisfied with was that the hotels did not provide all services as promised (mean = -2.10;  $p < 0.01$ ). They were also disgruntled about the professionalism of the staff (mean = -1.79), promptness with which staff dealt with their problems (mean = -1.78;  $p < 0.01$ ) and staff inability to give them individualised attention as they listened to their complaints (mean = -1.65;  $p < 0.01$ ).

The SERVQUAL model suggests that when expectations exceed perceptions, it means that the guests were not satisfied with the services they received. The significant difference observed between guest expectations and their perceptions of the services received confirm most service quality studies (Bondzie-Simpson, 2013) conducted in the hospitality sector in Ghana.

**Table 18: Gap Analysis of Expectations and Perceptions**

Attributes	Expectation (E)	Perception (P)	Gap (E-P)	t-value
Statements	Mean	Mean	Mean	
<i>Tangibles</i>	4.62	3.67	-0.95	5.23*
The hotel’s physical facilities must be consistent with its image and price range.	4.49	3.91	-0.58	3.21*
Staff of the hotel should be neat and well groomed	4.70	4.01	-0.69	4.33*
Technology and electronic facilities must be up-to-date.	4.66	3.10	-1.56	7.67*
<i>Assurance</i>	4.63	3.32	-1.31	5.66*
Hotel must provide quality food and beverage	4.66	3.76	-0.90	
Guests should be offered varied choices of facilities.	4.57	3.23	-1.34	6.12*
Hotel staff should be professionals.	4.66	2.87	-1.79	9.23*
<i>Reliability</i>	4.64	3.39	-1.25	5.99*
Hotel should provide all services as promised.	4.52	2.42	-2.10	10.12*
The hotel should provide adequate security.	4.75	4.20	-0.55	
Services offered by staff must be consistently high in quality with updated guest records.	4.66	3.56	-1.10	5.22*
<i>Responsiveness</i>	4.66	3.02	-1.64	8.13*
Hotel provides adequate information.	4.73	3.12	-1.61	7.88*
Staff must promptly deal with my problem/s.	4.74	2.96	-1.78	9.21*
Hotel’s staff are required to promptly respond to my request/s.	4.51	2.99	-1.52	7.11*
<i>Empathy</i>	4.75	3.11	-1.64	8.13*
Staff should show me genuine concern when I have problem/s.	4.74	3.12	-1.62	8.11*
Staff must give me individualised attention as they attentively listen to my complaint.	4.75	3.10	-1.65	8.14*
Overall satisfaction	4.66	3.30	-1.36	6.34*

Source: Field survey, Mensah-Kufour(2017) \*p<0.01

### Respondents' Satisfaction with Service Failure Recovery (RECOVSAT)

Results presented in Table 19 indicate that guests neither agreed nor disagreed to being satisfied ( $M = 3.05$ ) with service failure recovery by the hotels. But some variations are noted across the specific dimensions upon which service failure recovery was evaluated.

**Table 19: Guests' Satisfaction with Service Failure Recovery**

Statements	Mean	S/D
<i>Communication</i>	3.27	
Staff communicated clearly when providing information about my complaint.	3.28	1.17
Hotel staff asked questions to clarify the situation.	3.52	1.11
Hotel staff were honest and fair in dealing with the problem.	2.99	1.23
Hotel staff were very concerned and understanding.	3.30	1.27
<i>Empowerment</i>	2.79	
Hotel staff put in all the appropriate efforts to solve the problem.	3.02	1.29
Hotel staff proved able to solve the problem.	3.00	1.25
Solution provided by hotel staff met my expectation.	2.57	1.31
Staff's effort to solve my problem was satisfactory.	2.55	1.34
<i>Feedback</i>	2.82	
I was informed about the progress made to solve the problem.	2.95	1.24
I was provided with an accurate and reliable feedback.	2.69	1.23
<i>Atonement</i>	3.09	
A formal apology was rendered to me due to the problem.	3.78	1.31
I think the hotel fairly compensated me for the problem.	2.40	1.40
<i>Explanation</i>	2.56	
I was provided with an explanation why the problem occurred.	2.87	1.28
Satisfactory explanation(s) was/were given by the staff.	2.32	1.96
<i>Tangibles</i>	3.78	
The furnishing of the room is of good quality	3.77	1.16
The beddings are very comfortable	3.78	1.16

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Scale: 1.0-1.49 = strongly disagreed, 1.50-2.49 = disagreed, 2.50-3.49 = neutral, 3.50-4.49 = agreed, 4.50-5.0 = strongly agreed

Consistent with the previous assessments in Table 18 on tangibles, respondents were more satisfied with the service failure recovery in relation to tangibles ( $M = 3.78$ ). The beddings, for instance, were considered very comfortable ( $M = 3.78$ ). On communication, they also acknowledged that hotel staff asked questions to clarify situations when there was a service failure ( $M = 3.52$ ). Nevertheless, they were dissatisfied with the explanations given by the staff ( $M = 2.24$ ). FLEs not utilising explanation, a non-monetary recovery strategy, in addition to apology and correction is farfetched. This revelation conflicts with the findings of Fu et al. (2015) and Lee et al. (2011). Guests disagreeing that FLEs provided acceptable explanations might probably be due to miscommunication; lack of clarity, or the wording of their explanation to guests. This might be the reason why most of the respondents (60.70%) reported service failures to the FLMs as compared to 39.70% who reported to FLEs. This also explains the reason why guests sometimes expect FLMs to be involved in the recovery of service failure (Cong & Fu, 2008). Most guests not reporting their service failures to FLEs might not get them resolved promptly; this might also aggravate FLEs' job dissatisfaction as boundary spanners representing the hotel.

Although the findings of Loo and Leung (2018) revealed that guests complained of uncomfortable beddings, that of this study indicated that the beddings were very comfortable ( $M = 3.78$ ). This finding is important, with implication for guests' resting at night after a hard day's work or even on vacation; If the beddings were very comfortable, then guests were assured of a good rest.

**CFA Results on Guests’ Satisfaction with Service Failure Recovery (RECOVSAT)**

The scale for guest satisfaction is made up of 6 dimensions: communication, empowerment, feedback, atonement, explanation and tangibles. All the observed variables loaded significantly between 0.50 and 0.84 which means that the interrelationships between items and associated dimensions were high hence uni-dimensionality was achieved.

**Table 20: CFA Results on Guests’ Satisfaction with Service Failure**

**Recovery**

Statements	SFL	AVE	CR
<i>Communication</i>		0.79	0.75
Staff communicated clearly when providing information about my complaint.	0.72		
Hotel staff asked questions to clarify the situation.	0.84		
Hotel staff were honest and fair in dealing with the problem.	0.67		
Hotel staff were very concerned and understanding.	0.74		
<i>Empowerment</i>		0.76	0.67
Hotel staff put in all the appropriate efforts to solve the problem.	0.61		
Hotel staff proved able to solve the problem.	0.80		
Solution provided by hotel staff met my expectation.	0.82		
Staff’s effort to solve my problem was satisfactory.	0.78		
<i>Feedback</i>		0.62	0.56
I was informed about the progress made to solve the problem.	0.65		
I was provided with an accurate and reliable feedback.	0.68		
<i>Atonement</i>		0.62	0.57



**Table 20 Continued**

A formal apology was rendered to me due to the problem.	0.60		
I think the hotel fairly compensated me for the problem.	0.70		
<i>Explanation</i>		0.53	0.54
I was provided with an explanation why the problem occurred.	0.50		
Satisfactory explanation(s) was/were given by the staff.	0.50		
<i>Tangibles</i>			
The furnishing of the room is of good quality	0.55		
The beddings are very comfortable			

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Note: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; SFL: Standardised Factor Loadings; Model fit indices: AGFI= 0.90; CFI = 0.964; IFI = 0.965 & RMSEA = 0.031

In addition, for the purposes of ensuring internal consistency of the measurements, the composite reliabilities (Table 20) were checked against the lower limit of 0.50 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The results showed that the values were above 0.50 suggesting that latent variables exhibit adequate internal consistency. All the dimensions also had average variances greater than 0.50 with the highest being ‘communication’. Altogether the guest satisfaction scale fitted with the data at following thresholds: AGFI= 0.90; CFI = 0.964; IFI = 0.965 & RMSEA = 0.031.

**Guests’ Overall Satisfaction and Loyalty Intentions**

Table 21 examines the overall satisfaction and loyalty intentions of the respondents as indicated in the results of the study. For instance, the guests were not satisfied with the compensation like discount or refund offered by the hotel

(M = 2.41). However, they portrayed positive loyal intentions (M = 3.52).

**Table 21: Guests’ Overall Satisfaction and Loyalty Intentions**

	Mean	S/D
<i>Satisfaction</i>		
I'm satisfied with how staff dealt with and resolved my problem	2.78	1.25
I am happy with how my problem was solved.	2.62	1.25
I am satisfied with the action taken by the staff involved in resolving the problem.	3.11	1.30
I am satisfied with the process and resources used to solve the problem.	3.09	1.30
In my opinion the staff provided an acceptable solution to this particular problem.	2.54	1.31
I am satisfied with the compensation offered by the hotel (restored service, money refund or upgraded room).	2.41	1.36
I am satisfied with my overall experience with the hotel staff.	3.18	1.38
Based on my experience with this hotel, I am very satisfied with the services it provides.	3.10	1.39
<i>Loyalty intentions</i>		
I will not change to any other hotel with my experience in this hotel.	3.53	1.27
I will always recommend this hotel to friends and relatives	3.52	1.33

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Scale: 1.0-1.49 = strongly disagreed, 1.50–2.49 = disagreed, 2.50–3.49 = neutral, 3.50–4.49 = agreed, 4.50–5.0 = strongly agreed.

Generally, the guests indicated that they will not change to another hotel despite their experience in their current hotel (M = 3.53) and will also recommend the hotels to friends and relatives (M = 3.51). This is probably due to the fact that the various service failures which resulted in guests’ dissatisfaction did not cover all the facets of guests’ experiences in the hotels; there might be some which made it worth revisiting.

Additionally, majority of the respondents who were in Accra for

business purposes, though dissatisfied with the service recovery, did not have much choice in the selection of hotels as they were being sponsored by their various firms. Such sponsorship could be based on favourable contractual negotiations with the hotel which were not easy to revoke as some individuals may have some interest.

The available literature confirms that high levels of service recovery such as compensations influenced guest satisfaction and positively impacted their PWOM, re-patronage and loyalty (Komunda & Osarenkhoe, 2012; Lee, 2018; Mensah & Dei Mensah, 2018). Yet, the findings of this study portrayed guests' positive loyal intentions and decision to also recommend the hotels to others though they were dissatisfied with the compensations offered by the hotels.

#### **CFA Results on Guests' Overall Satisfaction and Loyalty**

The last scale used in the analysis was guest satisfaction and intention scale, which is made up of two broad constructs: satisfaction and loyalty intentions (Table 22). The results showed that both dimensions were valid and well fitted. The factor loadings ranged from 0.55 to 0.86 and the composite reliabilities were 0.67 and 0.83 respectively.

**Table 22: CFA Results on Guests’ Overall Satisfaction and Loyalty**

	SFL	AVE	CR
<i>Satisfaction</i>		0.87	0.83
I’m satisfied with how staff dealt with and resolved my problem	0.84		
I am happy with how my problem was solved.	0.86		
I am satisfied with the action taken by the staff involved in resolving the problem.	0.85		
I am satisfied with the process and resources used to solve the problem.	0.55		
In my opinion, the staff provided an acceptable solution to this particular problem.	0.56		
I am satisfied with the compensation offered by the hotel (restored service, money refund or upgraded room).	0.75		
I am satisfied with my overall experience with the hotel staff.	0.79		
Based on my experience with this hotel, I am very satisfied with the services it provides.	0.81		
<i>Loyalty intentions</i>		0.74	0.67
I will not change to any other hotel with my experience in this hotel.	0.68		
I will always recommend this hotel to friends and relatives	0.70		

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Note: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; SFL: Standardised Factor Loadings; Model Fit indices: CFI = 0.974; IFI = 0.975 & RMSEA = 0.042

### Reasons for Respondents’ Loyalty

Although the respondents were dissatisfied with some of the products and services rendered by the FLEs, they expressed their intentions of being loyal to their respective hotels. Two main reasons accounted for such intention to remain loyal to the hotels as shown in Table 23. These included some staff being helpful and friendly (29.70%) and location of the hotel (29.70%). Other reasons were

that the facilities or amenities were of high standard (10.00%). The friendliness of the staff (29.70%) was one of the main reasons why some respondents indicated that they would remain loyal. They specifically mentioned the hospitable, professional and responsive behaviours of some FLEs.

**Table 23: Reasons for Respondents' Loyalty**

Specific reasons	N	Percent
Friendly and helpful staff	98	29.70
Location	98	29.70
High standard of facilities and amenities	33	10.00
Outstanding service delivery	25	7.57
Clean rooms and quality furnishing	23	6.97
Quality and varied food & beverage	23	6.97
Safety and security	16	4.85
Loyalty rewards	14	4.24
<i>Total</i>	<i>330</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

A guest, for instance, commended some for the housekeeping staff for being professional and for offering value for money. A Ghanaian businessman in a 5-star hotel also commended some employees for being incredibly pleasant, showing much concern towards clients, and always ready to help guests.

The pleasantness of some of the staff made a British banking training facilitator residing in a 4-star hotel to remark that he will definitely come back because of the infectious smile of some employees, while a Dutch Mining Consultant in a 5-star hotel also attributed her revisit intention to:

*The actions of a staff who offered us beverages, sandwiches, plus where I could take a nap whilst the room is being cleaned.*

Guests' commendations of such FLEs are to be expected as FLEs' positive behaviours during the service delivery/recovery arouse guests' gratitude (Bock et al., 2016) which is beneficial to the hotel. The hotel stands to benefit from repurchase intentions, loyalty, recommendations and PWOM.

Guests' motivation for being loyal to hotels due to the performance of the FLEs seemed not to be stratified by gender and country of origin as both male and female respondents had something positive to say about the service delivery of some FLEs. The underlying reason cited by the dissatisfied guests for their positive loyalty intention was a locational factor (29.70%), such as the serene and safe vicinity of some hotels, and the fact that they are located between the airport and the centre of the city of Accra. Other reasons were the proximity of the hotel to the workplace, recreational, shopping or transport centres. An Imam from Abu Dhabi who was lodging in a 4-star hotel, for instance, stated the reason for which he will be loyal to a hotel as its location near the Nima Mosque in Accra. Another guest also stated that:

*I'll be loyal to this hotel because of its proximity to the airport*  
(Liberian Economist, Male, 3-star hotel).

These reasons cited by the guests are indications of the convenient locations of the facilities patronised. It is therefore not surprising that location is a major factor considered by hoteliers when siting facilities (Adam & Amuquandoh, 2014). By this frame of reference, it suggests that the location of a hotel offers not only economic advantage to hoteliers but also convenience to the guests.

Quality of the facilities and amenities (10%) in the hotels was mentioned as the third factor that motivated some of the guests to be loyal. The respondents acknowledged the fact that some of the hotels had well maintained, attractive and spacious facilities with exceptional African touch in relation to the ambience and aesthetic appeal. Such appealing features would make them loyal to the various hotels. A respondent indicated that:

*What'd make me loyal is the captivating scenery of a spacious hotel overlooking the sea* (Egyptian Architect, Male, 4-star hotel).

A smart digital amenity known as a *Hand Phone* supplied by some of the hotels for guests' use were also mentioned. These phones while with guests make it possible for the hotels to locate them wherever they are should anything happen to them especially while they were off the hotel's premises.

Other remarks made by some respondents had undertones of a sense of belongingness and loyalty to some international chain hotels, of which their current loyalty intention is believed to be a spill over. Such loyalty is due to the fact that the hotels met their expectations and desires. This in turn informed their commitment to re-patronise the hotels in the future and recommend it to others in addition to PWOM to the whole world through an electronic media. A typical case was the comment made by an American Sales Consultant residing in a 5-star hotel who blatantly mentioned his loyalty to a hotel worldwide. Similarly, a 65-year-old British also stated that:

*I'll be loyal to this hotel because it's our own, and originally British managed* (Corporate Lawyer, Male, 5-star).

Commitment to brand loyalty sometimes overrides a guest's sense of feeling due to the exclusive offers such as free room nights and retail gift cards

offered by the hotels. The tendency of some respondents having loyalty intentions are those who were upgraded, and so thought the charges were reasonable, worthy of the amounts paid, and so would be loyal to the hotel. A German Diplomat intimated that:

*The rates are good and I'm really enjoying my stay. I'll definitely be loyal to this hotel (Male, 4-star hotel).*

Conversely, some loyal respondents decided to stay away from some hotels due to the overpriced services and products. Additionally, some regular guests who might be seen to be *loyal* would not have revisited some of the hotels had it not been the contractual agreement between their firms and the hotels. Such is the story of an American Air Hostess in a 4-star hotel who was dissatisfied with a hotel's services and lamented:

*I have no choice but to always reside in this hotel on trips to Ghana until the contract between my airline and the hotel is abrogated.*

### **Reasons for Respondents' Disloyalty**

In spite of the reasons cited by some respondents for being loyal, others provided reasons why they were not going to be loyal to the hotels patronised. Almost 14.50% of the respondents who were disappointed with the various hotels' services stated that nothing would make them loyal to or recommend the hotels because of their terrible experiences; such hotels do not merit their loyalty. Some respondents also indicated that the facilities and services being carried out in some of the independent hotels were deteriorating; they thought the owners and/or management cared less about the maintenance of the hotels.



The rest (6.70%) asserted that until the services offered were improved, ill-mannered, incompetent and unfriendly staff trained, cheating on room rates is stopped and prostitutes are turned away, they would not be loyal to such hotels. To this, a male American Petroleum Engineer residing in a 5-star hotel also declared that:

*Nothing will make me come back; I've had enough of unfriendly and inhuman staff rendering horrible services in such an expensive hotel*

An American business analyst also in another 5-star hotel who felt embarrassed in the presence of his invited guests for being asked to pay bills he had already settled with an advance payment, with more than \$300 to his credit, also stated:

*I'm out of here; never again would I set foot here.*

Some dissatisfied guests who had decided to defect to other hotels would come back only if managers of the various hotels put things right to ensure guests' satisfaction.

## **Model Testing and Hypotheses Results on Guests' Service Failure**

### **Recovery Satisfaction and Loyalty**

This section of the study sought to analyse the antecedents and outcomes of service failure recovery satisfaction using a structural equation modelling approach. The antecedents considered were guest expectations of service delivery and perception of service failure, while the outcome of service recovery satisfaction was loyalty intentions. The measures were drawn from the SERVQUAL and RECOVSAT scales. However, prior to model testing, the various scales used were first confirmed for their fitness with data in terms of convergence and divergence validity as shown in the previous sections.

Table 25 shows that adequate convergent validity is observed based on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) at > 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results, as indicated in Table 24, clearly demonstrated that the measurements' scales had tolerable global fitness based on the GFI, AGFI, CFI and RMSEA. For example, the scale of guests' satisfaction with service failure recovery (Table 20) recorded the following model fit indices: IFI (0.96), AGFI (0.90), CFI (0.96), TLI (0.95), SRMR (0.06) and RMSEA (0.03). It is also evident that all measurement items loaded significantly between 0.50 and 0.88 – confirming uni-dimensionality across all constructs. Indicators of the convergent validity of the constructs are also within widely accepted thresholds, which suggests optimal internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability scores were mostly above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

**Table 24: Inter-construct Correlations and Square Root of the Average Variance Extract**

Expectation	0.73				
Perception	-0.09	0.68			
Recovery satisfaction	-0.14	0.60	0.64		
Overall satisfaction	-0.10	0.65	0.87	0.87	
Loyalty intentions	-0.08	0.48	0.47	0.54	0.67

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Note: Diagonals represent square roots of AVE whereas off-diagonal represents correlation

Similarly, adequate convergent validity is observed for all measurements based on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) at  $> 0.5$  (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The CFA results also confirmed discriminant validity (through the Fornell-Larcker criterion) in the scales, as none of the constructs, as shown in Table 25, correlated higher than the square root of its Average Variance Extracted (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

### **Effects of Guests' Service Failure Recovery on Satisfaction and Loyalty**

This section presents the results on the hypotheses with their associated remarks (Table 25). These hypotheses were based on the antecedents and outcomes of service recovery satisfaction.

The results show that the proposed model accounts for more than half of the variance (59.34%) in loyalty intentions of hotel guests, and it is well fitted (AGFI= 0.90; CFI = 0.964; IFI = 0.965 & RMSEA = 0.020). While guests' service expectation did not directly and significantly impact their recovery satisfaction, their perception of the service failure did. A significant direct positive relationship is observed between perception of service failure and service recovery ( $\beta = 0.73$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

Similarly, apart from the four main hypotheses which guided this, worth commenting also is that no direct significant relationship is observed between expectation of the service delivery and overall satisfaction of services received. However, perception of the service failure ( $\beta = 0.23$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) and service recovery ( $0.73$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) exert direct significant positive effects on overall satisfaction. The path coefficients show that service recovery holds a more statistical marked direct effect on overall satisfaction relative to perception of

service failure.

**Table 25: Model Results and Associated Remarks**

Antecedent	Moderator	Outcome	SRW	SE	P-value	Remark
Expectation	→	Perception	-0.09	0.12	0.065	Not supported
Expectation	→	ServRecovery	0.01	0.10	0.848	Not supported
Perception	→	ServRecovery	0.73	0.04	0.001*	Supported
Expectation	→ Perception →	RECOVSAT	-0.25	0.01	0.001*	Supported
Expectation	→	OVERALSAT	-0.02	0.08	0.411	Not supported
Perception	→	OVERALSAT	0.23	0.05	0.001*	Supported
RECOVSAT	→	OVERALSAT	0.73	0.04	0.001*	Supported
Expectation	→ Servrecovery →	OVERALSAT	0.11	0.01	0.001*	Supported
Perception	→ RECOVSAT →	OVERALSAT	-0.12	0.01	0.001*	Supported
Perception	→	Loyalty intent	0.21	0.10	0.001*	Supported
OVERALSAT	→	Loyalty intent	0.68	0.10	0.001*	Supported
RECOVSAT	→	Loyalty intent	-0.10	0.11	0.039*	Supported
Perception	→ OVERALSAT →	Loyalty intent	-0.48	0.01	0.001*	Supported
Servrecovery	→ OVERALSAT →	Loyalty intent	-0.10	0.10	0.001*	Supported
RECOVSAT	→ Perception →	Loyalty intent	0.22	0.01	0.001*	Supported

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

SRW = Standardised regression weight; SE= Standard error

AGFI= 0.90; CFI = 0.964; IFI = 0.965 & RMSEA = 0.020

This is consistent with the findings of Hassan et al. (2014) and Rashid et al. (2014) which indicated that guest satisfaction positively influenced service recovery through the moderation of FLE empowerment (Hassan et al., 2014) and all the three dimensions of justice, namely procedural, interactional and distributive justices (Rashid et al., 2014). Additionally, Abou Taleb and Abou Kamar (2013) found that although service recovery influenced guest satisfaction in 15 Egyptian 5-star hotels, compensation (distributive justice) greatly

influenced guest satisfaction.

A direct significant positive relationship was observed between RECOVSAT and loyalty likewise overall satisfaction and loyalty ( $\beta = 0.680$ ). RECOVSAT significantly moderates the relationship between overall dissatisfaction and loyalty. This suggests that RECOVSAT dampens the negative effect of dissatisfaction on loyalty. Unfortunately, RECOVSAT dissatisfaction negatively moderates the significant positive relationship between perception of service failure and overall satisfaction. This implies that in attempt to recover a failed service, if not properly carried out, it could worsen the intended outcome. Expectation negatively moderates the relationship between perception of service failure and RECOVSAT. The indication is that when guests take into consideration expectation while evaluating satisfaction with recovery of service failure, chances are that they would not be satisfied with the service recovery. This is certainly the case when perception of service failure is greater than service expectation.

Figure 11 presents the conceptual pathways hypothesised in a model based on the hypotheses. With reference to Table 26, Figure 11 shows the significance of the structural paths and the confirmation of 12 and rejection of three hypotheses proposed in the general model. This section highlights and concludes with four vital hypotheses out of 15 from respondents' expectation through their experience and perception of service delivery (service failure), recovery and satisfaction, to loyalty intentions.

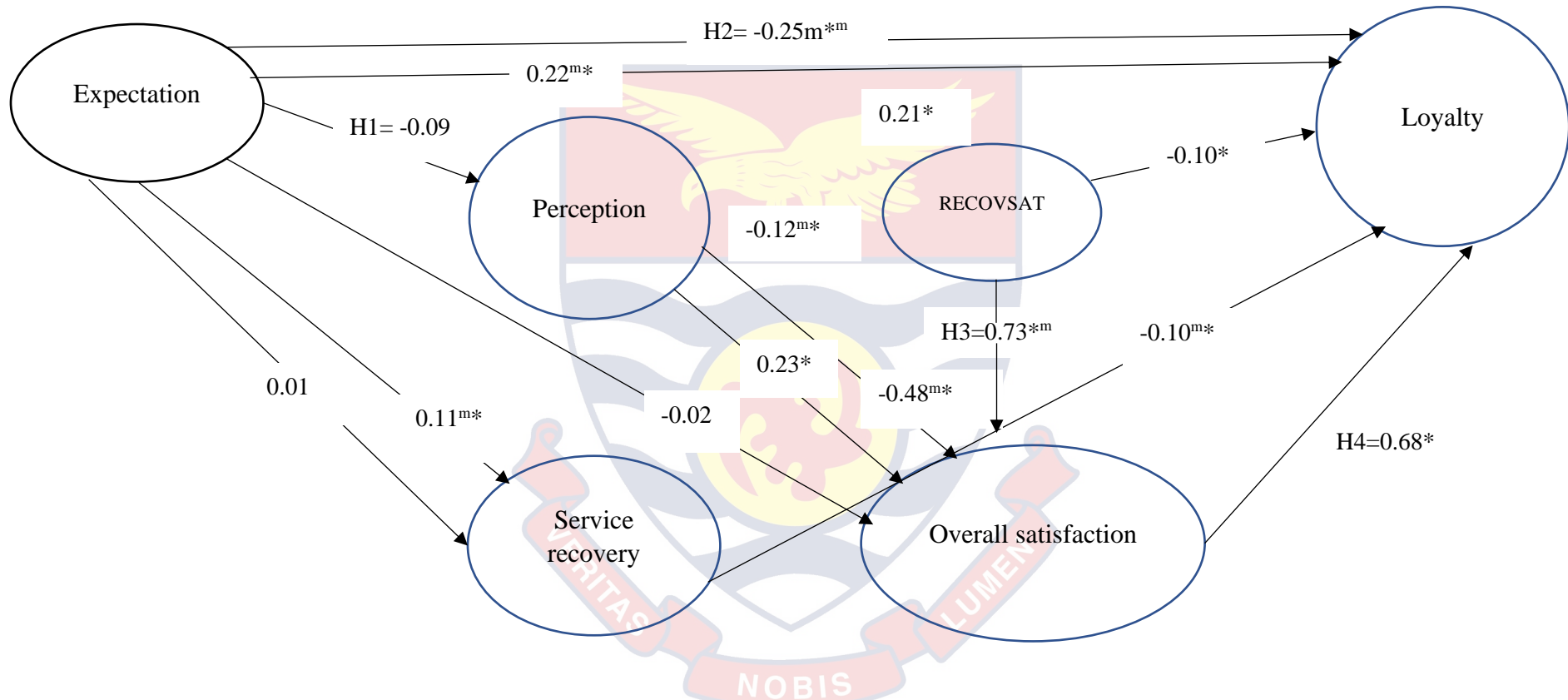
The first hypothesised conceptual path of the model postulates a relationship between respondents' expectation of FLE' service delivery and

their perception of service failure and recovery. As indicated in Figure 11, there is no positive relationship between guests' expectations of service delivery and perception of service failure recovery ( $H1: \beta = -0.09; P > 0.065$ ). This finding can be attributed to the effect of guests' perception of service failures experienced.

This finding could be attributed to the fact that guests in this situation were yet to actually experience the service delivery and its failure and so may not be able to perceive whether the failure recovery will meet their expectation or not.

The second hypothesis or conceptual path suggests that there is a significant relationship between guests' expectation of service delivery and recovery satisfaction ( $H2: \beta = -0.25; P < 0.001$ ). This finding augments how the six dimensions of RECOVSAT (communication, empowerment, feedback, atonement, explanation and tangibles) interplay through the mediation of perception to influence guests' expectation of FLEs' service delivery and service recovery satisfaction. This demonstrated an excellent construct validity empirically tested in luxury hotel (Boshoff, 2005) and in banking (Riscinto-Kozub, 2008; Sabharwal & Soch, 2011).

The third hypothesis stipulates that there is a relationship between service recovery satisfaction and guests' overall satisfaction. As revealed in the model, there is a significant positive relationship between service recovery and guests' overall satisfaction ( $H3: \beta = 0.73; P < 0.001$ ). This is probably due to the fact that the respondents were not only satisfied with the service failure recovery but also, other services delivered by FLEs. This finding confirms the assertions made by Lee (2018) that the respondents were satisfied with the compensations.



**Figure 11: Service Failure/Recovery and Guest Satisfaction Structural Equation Model (SEM)**

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

\* Significant at  $P < 0.010^{*m}$ , = mediating variable

The fourth hypothesis that there is a relationship between guests' overall satisfaction and loyalty to hotels (H4:  $\beta = 0.68$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ) was supported. This hypothesis' results as contained in Figure 11 show that there is a significant relationship between guests' overall satisfaction and loyalty to hotels. This implies that loyalty is informed by certain aspects of the various hotels experienced by guests which satisfied them while in residence. These include seemingly low-rated service failures, the hotels' location, some staff being helpful and friendly and the high standard of some facilities and amenities.

Relative to this study is the findings of Lewis and McCann (2004) which revealed that the relationship between guests' satisfaction after recovery and loyalty was strongly supported, unlike that of Lockwood and Deng (2004). This is because guests who experienced seemingly low-rated service failures and were more satisfied with the recovery were more likely to return.

### **Chapter Summary**

Results of this study have provided evidence on guests' perception of FLEs' service failure recovery performance and the effect of their satisfaction with FLEs' performance of service failure recovery on loyalty in upscale hotels. The CFA results on guests' expectation of service delivery suggest that guests had higher expectations prior to their experience, such as FLEs being empathetic, responsive and exhibiting genuine concern when they had problems. The descriptive statistics on guests' perception of the service failure showed that they were not sure of FLE's promptness in responding to their request and dealing with their problems. The guests agreed to being satisfied with the tangible aspects of the hotels but disagreed to the hotels' provision of services as promised. Conclusively, although about 60 percent of the



respondents were dissatisfied with the service recovery, they indicated positive loyal intentions due to the location of the hotels and some staff being helpful and friendly.



## CHAPTER TEN

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the concluding part of the study which summarises the whole thesis. It commences with the summary of the methodology employed to assess frontline employee-guest interface in service failure recovery episodes in upscale hotels in Accra Metropolis. The chapter further presents a summary of the main findings, conclusions, recommendations of the study and the contributions to knowledge.

#### Summary of the Study

There is a dearth of research which clarifies the interface between FLEs and guests during service failure recovery with responses from guests, service providers, the vital role of managers and other stakeholders in the industry's point of view. Consequently, the study sought to examine these linkages to address the gaps in literature by assessing FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery in 3 to 5-star hotels in the Accra Metropolis.

To achieve the objectives, the study specifically:

1. examined the forms of service failures experienced by guests;
2. investigated how FLEs handled guests' service failure recovery in upscale hotels;
3. examined the challenges which FLEs faced during service failure recovery;
4. ascertained guests' perceptions of FLEs' performance in service failure

- recovery in upscale hotels in Accra Metropolis;
5. ascertained the strategies put in place by FLMs to facilitate service failure recovery by FLEs; and
  6. evaluated the effect of guests' satisfaction with FLEs' performance of service failure recovery on their loyalty intentions.

The pragmatism research philosophy and the mixed method approach, with an embedded design, were employed to achieve the objectives of the study. Hence, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used for the study. Data was collected in the Accra Metropolis from 14<sup>th</sup> June to 16<sup>th</sup> September 2017. Quantitative data was collected from 400 guests who had experienced service failure recovery and interfaced with FLEs or FLMs. Thirty key informants (15 FLEs and 15 FLMs) were purposively selected from the rooms and food and beverage divisions of the 15 sampled hotels with more than 100 rooms. Semi-structured interview guides were used for the selected FLEs and FLMs of the hotels and two top officials of GTA and GHA.

The quantitative data was analysed using analytical techniques: Independent-Samples T-Test, ANOVA and CFA. The analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22; AMOS version 22 software was also used to perform the SEM analysis to assess the normality of the data and to test the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scales.

The interviews were transcribed in verbatim, organised under major themes and synthesised. The findings were presented using direct quotations from the interviewees to support the findings and discussions. This was used to support the quantitative results in order to gain a deeper insight on the issues studied.

The conceptual framework which provided a valuable guide to assess FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery in upscale hotels was a fusion of Service Profit Chain, Justice and Attribution theories. The rest were Dynamic Interactions Framework, Functional Flexibility, the Gap, SERVQUAL and RECOVSAT models. The components of these theories and models from previous studies provided the domains and variables for assessing the study.

### **Major Findings of the Study**

The following are the summary of the major findings of the study:

The first objective revealed that most of the service failures experienced by guests fall into four main categories: service delivery, system failures, employee attitude, guest-related service failures and external noise. The categorisation of the service failures as reported by the guests was either the same or very similar to those stated by the FLEs and FLMs. Furthermore, the service failure experiences among the guests across the 3 to 5-star hotels were the same.

It was also established in the study that most of the guests personally reported their dissatisfaction with the services and products to the FLMs instead of the FLEs with the least doing so indirectly through the internet. Overall, more than half of them were dissatisfied with how their complaints were handled.

With respect to the second objective, the study revealed that the FLEs focused on guests' expectations, needs and preferences to make them comfortable, minimise their dissatisfaction and put up behaviours which were suggestive of their readiness to attend to guests' complaints. Though their recovery actions were expected to be guided by the SOPs, only five FLEs consented that they resolved guests' complaints strictly within the hotels'

policies. The rest indicated that in a bid to satisfy guests, particularly those who never appreciated whatever was done to recover a service failure, they were compelled to sometimes go beyond the policies at their own expense. The FLEs specified that one of their main roles when empowered was to promptly resolve guests' complaints. The FLEs who had undergone CFT usually performed other duties to help solve guests' complaints when the situation demanded.

The study further showed that 12 of the FLEs who faced challenges during service recovery mentioned 10 major ones which were categorised into three, namely organisational structures and procedures, guest-related, and employee-related challenges. Foremost, six of the FLEs were partially empowered while another six were not empowered, hence distributive justice like monetary compensations and upgrading were referred to the FLMs for the necessary recovery actions to be taken. Other challenges were FLEs lack of specific knowledge, information, training or inadequate resources and logistics to address some guests' complaints and the challenge of FLMs' magnifying guests' complaints.

The second category, guest-related challenges, included difficult guests who harassed and abused FLEs, complained about everything, made excessive demands for compensation yet were dissatisfied with any form of recovery made. Lastly, the FLEs faced challenges from colleagues who do not effectively carry out their duties, poor dissemination of information and lack of transparency with guests' problems. All the above-stated challenges do not augur well for effective service failure recovery and FLE-guest relationship.

Further findings from the study indicated that guests had higher expectations prior to their experience. They expected the FLEs to be empathetic

to their needs, responsive in dealing with their requests or problems promptly and exhibit genuine concern when they encountered problems with the hotel services and facilities. Evidence from the study points to the fact that guests' perception of the service failure bordered on the hotels' inability to deliver on their promises. They were also dissatisfied with the unprofessional conduct of the FLEs, their tardiness in dealing with their problems and inability to give them individualised attention while listening to their complaints. Nevertheless, they were satisfied with the tangible aspects of the services such as appearance and good personal presentation.

The fifth objective focused on the strategies used by the FLMs, GTA and GHA to facilitate FLEs' service recovery performance. Firstly, it emerged that most of the strategies adopted by the FLMs emanated from management in the form of knowledge and skills training to enable FLEs to handle guests and their concerns, develop SOPs and focus on scheduled maintenance of facilities. In addition, it was revealed that the FLM's garnered FLEs' support in offering effective services and solicited guests' feedback on services rendered.

The two main strategies used by GTA to ensure QSD and quality products in the hotels were to conduct yearly inspections and monitoring of their performance. GHA had also published a book on QSD to guide the hotels. Additionally, both GTA and GHA periodically facilitate training programmes to improve and maintain QSD standards. As separate bodies, they also assess and award hotels throughout the country annually by recognising the effort of hotels in the promotion of QGSD as reflected in the maintenance of consistent high standards in hotels.

Secondly, the FLMs' strategies, commitments and practices which facilitated FLEs to facilitate their service recovery efforts revealed the findings which reinforced the conceptual underpinning of the study. They were in the form of policies governing guests' complaint handling procedure, FLE training, empowerment, performance appraisals and motivation; these led to FLEs' job satisfaction to reflect on guests' service recovery performance.

Finally, on the effect of guests' satisfaction with FLEs' performance of service failure recovery on their loyalty intentions, variations were noted across the specific dimensions (communication, empowerment, feedback, atonement, explanation, tangibles). It emerged from the study that the guests were satisfied with the tangible aspects of the hotels but were dissatisfied with the hotels not providing services as promised. On communication, for instance, the guests acknowledged that the FLEs asked questions to clarify service failure situations yet, disagreed that the FLEs' explanations were satisfactory. About 60% of the guests were also dissatisfied with the compensation aspect of the service recovery. However, some guests indicated positive loyalty intentions because of the location of the hotels and some FLEs being helpful and friendly. Additionally, the findings indicated that 12 of the conceptual pathways (hypotheses) of the proposed SEM were significant, with a rejection of three of them in the general model. This section highlights and concludes with four vital hypotheses out of 15 from respondents' expectation through the perception of their experience which they perceived to be a service failure, its recovery and their satisfaction on loyalty intentions.

## Conclusions

Foremost, it can be concluded that the service failures experienced by guests could be attributed to internal and external factors. This supports attribution theory adapted for the conceptual framework of the study. Specifically, while some of the failures such as service delivery system failures and employee attitude could have easily been controlled by the hotel, others such as guest-related service failures and external noise were outside the control of management. Further, it could be concluded that irrespective of the grade of the hotel, most service failures were experienced by guests in one form or the other. Again, the study concludes that most of the guests preferred the FLMs to resolve service failure incidents instead of seeking such resolutions from the FLEs who were readily available and accessible. Overall, more than half of the guests were dissatisfied with how their complaints were handled even though most of them sought resolutions directly from the FLMs.

Evidence from the study suggests that the FLE's were mindful of the guests' expectations, needs and preference when handling service failure recovery. Ordinarily, the recovery actions taken by the FLE's were guided by SOPs, while exhibiting some level of emotional intelligence. On the other hand, others were sometimes compelled to go beyond the policies at their own expense to satisfy some guests. It can further be concluded that when empowered, the FLEs made conscious efforts to competently recover guests' service failures. Strategically, the FLEs utilised some non-monetary approaches such as apology to recover service failures.

Again, the study concludes that the challenges encountered by the FLE's in the discharge of their duties contributed to poor service failure recovery and



poor FLE-guest relationship. These challenges were mainly structural and procedural as well as guest-related and employee-related challenges. At the core of the challenges was the inability of the FLM's to fully empower their FLEs to promptly and confidently carry out service failure recoveries. From the study, it was revealed that only three of the FLEs were fully empowered to handle guests' complaints without seeking help from the FLMs. This challenge hindered their ability to promptly and speedily resolve guests' service failures which inevitably slowed down the recovery process and portrayed them as incompetent. It is worthy of note that the FLEs also faced some guest-related challenges in the form of harassment and abuse which had the potential of demoralising the FLEs. In a similar vein, some colleagues of the FLEs equally contributed to their challenges by ineffectively carrying out their duties, poorly disseminating guest information and lack of transparency in dealing with guests' problems.

The study further concludes that there is a disconnect between the expectations of the guests' and the services delivered by the upscale hotels. As a result, guests' prior expectations were not met, hence their dissatisfaction. Evidence suggests that guests perceived that the hotels did not provide all services as promised, some of the FLEs were unprofessional, they reluctantly dealt with guests' problems and they could not attend to guests individually while listening to their complaints. Nonetheless, they were satisfied with the tangible aspects of the services such as the physical appearance of the FLEs.

Further, evidence from this study gives credence to the involvement of all stakeholders in the service failure recovery process. FLMs relied heavily on FLEs' effort to offer quality service and give guests' feedback on services

rendered to effect better recovery strategies to satisfy guest. The other major stakeholders in the hotel industry, GTA and GHA, also supplemented the efforts of the hotels through the periodic inspections, training programmes, assessment and the award of best performing hotels, to improve and maintain QSD standards. Additionally, FLMs' managerial commitments and practice strategies in the form of policies governing guests' complaint handling procedure, FLEs' training, empowerment, performance appraisals and motivation also led to FLEs' job satisfaction or dissatisfaction and the respective outcomes on guests' service recovery performance and FLE's job turnover.

The study finally concludes that the guests were more satisfied with the tangible aspects of the hotels such as the good quality furnishing of the room and the comfortable beddings, but were dissatisfied with the hotels' services because the services offered them were not what was promised them. This suggests that the hotels do not show equal commitment towards all aspects of service delivery which negatively impacts the overall satisfaction.

Although the findings of the study revealed that difficult guests made excessive demands for compensation from FLEs, yet were dissatisfied with any form of recovery made, most hotels did not necessarily have to incur considerable costs for service failures. This is because most guests were satisfied with FLEs prompt response to their complaints. Even unempowered FLEs can, with their service recovery efforts, quickly explain the reason for the service failure, offer an apology, and follow-up. In addition to these, FLEs should be empathetic, responsive and attentive when dealing with guests' requests or problems, exhibit genuine concern when they lodge complaints and provide all promised services professionally. Most guests would be satisfied

with such services and not make excessive demands. Should it become necessary for guest compensations, it could be standardised with few exceptions to curtail or discourage guests' excessive demands.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

Based on the main findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following policy and practical recommendations are made to ensure a healthy FLE-guest relationship, QSD, reduced service failures and effective service failure recovery to satisfy guests and to enhance their loyalty intentions:

First of all, the FLMs' by their commitments and practices should formulate strategies to train FLEs to render quality services to minimise service failures and facilitate FLEs' SFR efforts. They also need to turn into advocates for the enactment and implementation of enabling policies to support FLEs' service recovery. FLMs should empower the FLEs to receive and handle complaints which would gradually encourage guests to complain more to the FLEs. This is because as boundary spanners, FLEs' are the first point of contact with the responsibility of responding to guests' needs and effect the recovery of their complaints. Subsequently, this would deepen the trust between guests and FLEs and cause the latter to work assiduously to achieve guest satisfaction. Drawing from FLEs' challenge of limited empowerment, at least partial empowerment would enable them to confidently use their experience, judgement, empathy and common sense to promptly make decisions to recover service failures professionally without FLMs' prior approval. FLEs with these attributes in addition to empowerment would see to guests' specific needs including refunds and upgrading. Various levels of service recovery

responsibilities carried out by FLEs would enhance their experience and commitment to the establishment, and their job satisfaction.

The Guest Relations and ICT departments should liaise with the Rooms and F&B divisions to keep records on guests' complaints and resolutions. This will help achieve two main results: first, the database would serve as a reference point to enhance FLEs' understanding of their clients' behaviour and expectations which would guide their future resolutions of similar guests' complaints. Secondly, information from the guests' data would help managers to update the SOPs/policy on complaint resolutions which would safeguard FLEs in their attempt to go beyond the policies in handling guests' complaints. Additionally, the information from the data would be used by the FLEs as a reference for resolving guests' complaints.

Given that the first two forms of service failures (service delivery system failures and employee attitude) attributed to internal factors largely are within the control of FLMs and FLEs, some tactical recoveries could be adopted to drastically minimise the occurrence of such service failure episodes. The best strategy is for all the departments of hotels to anticipate, identify and address possible service failures prior to guests' encounters, especially in the housekeeping department where most service system failures occur. This is because, under normal circumstances, 'things will go wrong in any given situation, when given the chance, and usually at the worst time' (Murphy's law). To carry out effective and regular preventive maintenance of equipment, fittings and structures, management should equip the maintenance departments with the requisite materials and tools. Other departments should equally carry out preventive and scheduled maintenance and cleaning of their facilities to curtail

guests' dissatisfaction.

With respect to FLEs attitude, management, in recruiting potential passionate FLEs, could look out for those with good interpersonal skills through a scenario presented during the interview and initial training. Such FLEs should be continuously trained to avoid service failures related to FLEs' attitude, and to equip them with the understanding and knowledge of technical, social/human and conceptual skills. These are necessary for FLEs' best attitude and output in relating to guests (during service delivery/recovery) who are the reasons for hotels being in business, and to achieve their goals in today's competitive environment.

Considering the findings of this study, FLEs who had been trained, especially those who had also undergone CFT, performed better in solving guests' complaints than those who had not. This behoves the other FLMs to effectively train their FLEs in QGSD and service failure recovery to equip them with specific knowledge, information, resources and logistics related to their various sections to competently and confidently respond to guests' complaints and carry out other responsibilities.

With respect to the FLEs' challenges which contributed to poor service failure recovery and poor FLE-guest relationship, namely organisational structures and procedural, guest-related and employee-related, it is recommended that policies should be formulated by the FLMs and/or enforced to curtail service failure incidents. Additionally, management should design and display persuasive normative messages at vantage points to prompt and discourage guests from harassing or abusing FLEs.

FLEs should, as much as possible, empathise with guests and utilise the three justice dimensions (interactional, distributive and procedural) during service failure or recovery; this is when guests complain of or are dissatisfied with services rendered to them. This is because most studies and guests deem services which do not meet guests' expectations (service failure) as issues of injustice meted out on them. In the absence of FLEs' being fully empowered, the interactional and procedural justices could be tactically employed to explain to guests how the service failures occurred to help guests to understand the incident and the ensuing service failure recovery. Guests would appreciate such explanations and FLEs' conscious efforts in recovering service failures, resulting in a healthy FLE-guest relationship and guests' satisfaction after service recovery.

Additionally, the solution to FLEs' rendering service below guests' expectations calls for continuous and effective FLE training, training, training and their change of attitude. Recorded service failures especially those captured on CCTVs should be used as teaching or training points for other FLEs to either minimise them or so that they are not repeated. All the FLMs should endeavour to conduct performance appraisals on their FLEs and motivate them to ensure job satisfaction, enhanced productivity and curb needless employee turnover and reflect positively on guests' service recovery performance.

The GTA Quality Assurance Department should step-up its strategies by going beyond the routine inspection and license renewal to the development of a blueprint to enforce the LIs, assess and monitor QGSD and guests' SFR in hotels. GTA and GHA should also be involved in intensive employee training to ensure that quality standards in the hospitality industry are maintained to

minimise service failures in order to protect the interests of guests. The GHA should also assist its members to effectively implement their formulated policies on QGSD by providing training and technical assistance to strengthen the sector and foster FLE-guest relationship. This will ensure GHA's members have qualified and trained employees to merit international standards in service delivery/recovery for the success of the hotel industry.

Finally, hotel managers should conduct regular surveys of guests' expectations of their service and products, their perception of FLEs' service delivery/recovery, their satisfaction levels, recommendations, revisit and loyalty intentions.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

This study has espoused a broader perspective in assessing FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery in Ghanaian upscale hotels. It reveals the merits and problems associated with FLE-guest interface, guests' complaints, service failure recovery, guests' satisfaction and loyalty intentions. These revelations prompt more empirical research to be conducted to examine or assess all the key elements of service failure recovery by researchers and other hospitality and tourism stakeholders. The inclusion of FLE motivation, job satisfaction, productivity and loyalty would enhance the study because these variables have effect on FLEs' service failure recovery.

Secondly, the recommendations explicated above would be eligible for further empirical studies in other segments of the hospitality and tourism industry because of the composite nature of the tourist products. Such studies would determine whether the concepts and causal models are applicable to them

using longitudinal data. Additionally, such causal relationships could be examined by integrating other moderating variables like guests' perception of FLEs' behaviour, trust, emotional responses and other service recovery strategies by the FLMs. These moderating variables would further expound guests' perception of service failure recovery, revisit and loyalty intentions, and referrals which are not static, hence could change over time.

Thirdly, this study has shed more light on various aspects of FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery and guest satisfaction on loyalty intentions as experienced by guests and the input by FLEs and FLMs. However, further research is needed to investigate similar studies conducted in the lower grades of hotels. This is because the findings of this study which were drawn from upscale hotels in Accra cannot be used to extrapolate FLE-guest interface, service failures and recoveries in the hotel industry in Ghana as a whole. Such results or comparative studies would guide these hotels in their weak areas in FLE-guest interface, service failure recovery and their resultant benefits.

Lastly, in relation to future research, the findings of this study do not assert prompt solution to guests' service failure recovery and positive guests' revisit and loyalty intentions. The findings reveal guests' experience which do not meet their expectations (service failures), guests' perception of how their complaints were handled (service recovery) and their level of satisfaction on loyalty intentions. The study also reveals the challenges FLEs' face during service recovery and FLM's strategic input; this necessitates all stakeholders to be committed in the conduct of further inquiries on possible indicators. Culmination of such studies would enhance FLEs' development and QGSD, its recovery should it fail, and appreciate the beauty of satisfying guests' service



failure recovery.

### **Contributions to Knowledge**

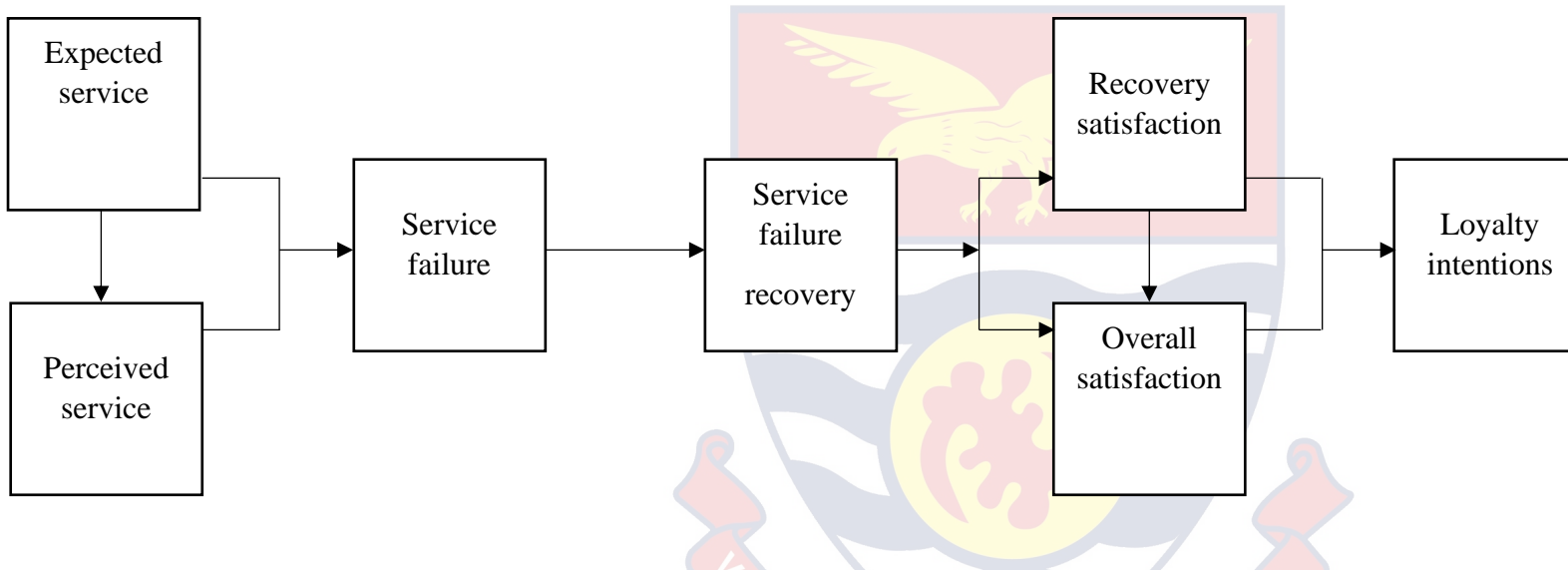
Methodological contribution made by this study relates to the evaluation of luxury hotel guests' satisfaction using the mixed method which provides a richer understanding of the experiences of other stakeholders instead of only one design (Lu et al., 2015). Additionally, the study employed multiple population comprising guests, FLEs, FLMs and other stakeholders to respond to the limitations in the literature which normally employ only one to ascertain guests' perceived performance relationship with FLEs. Hence, this study has gone further to examine these linkages (Hancer & Kim, 2013; Zablah, Franke et al., 2012).

The results of a SEM with 15 pathways showed significant relationships between service failure recovery satisfaction, its antecedents and outcomes. The findings indicated that 12 of the conceptual pathways of the proposed SEM were significant. Three of them were rejected in the general model from guests' expectation through their experience and perception of services delivered, recovery and their satisfaction on loyalty intentions. The study has also proved that the three rejected hypotheses with an antecedent of expectation did not find enough statistical evidence to support the outcome of guests' perception, service recovery and overall satisfaction; hence expectation does not influence these three variables directly.

Empirically, this study has assessed the FLE-guests interface during service failure/recovery and its vital role from FLEs' point of view. It has also revealed the factors influencing FLEs' efforts to respond to or perform service

failures/recovery and the challenges they face in the course of recovering service failures.

There are a number of studies which have examined aspects of service failure/recovery but from only guests or FLEs' perspective; this created the need to study the totality of guests, service providers (FLMs) and other hotel stakeholders, which this study has done. The findings of this study have also revealed responses which have contributed better understanding of the guest coping process in service failure/recovery (Tsarenko & Strizhakova, 2013; Zablah et al., 2012). These gaps were filled by developing and testing a conceptual framework based on the SPC, dynamic interactions framework and justice theory to appreciate the determinants of FLE-guest interface in service recovery performance. The findings have proved that there is a broader illustration of a causal relationship among the concepts or variables which influence guests' perception of experiences which did not meet their expectations; service recovery which influences their satisfaction and affect their loyalty intentions. In this respect, the study proposes 'service failure recovery and guest satisfaction on loyalty intentions' model as presented in Figure 12.



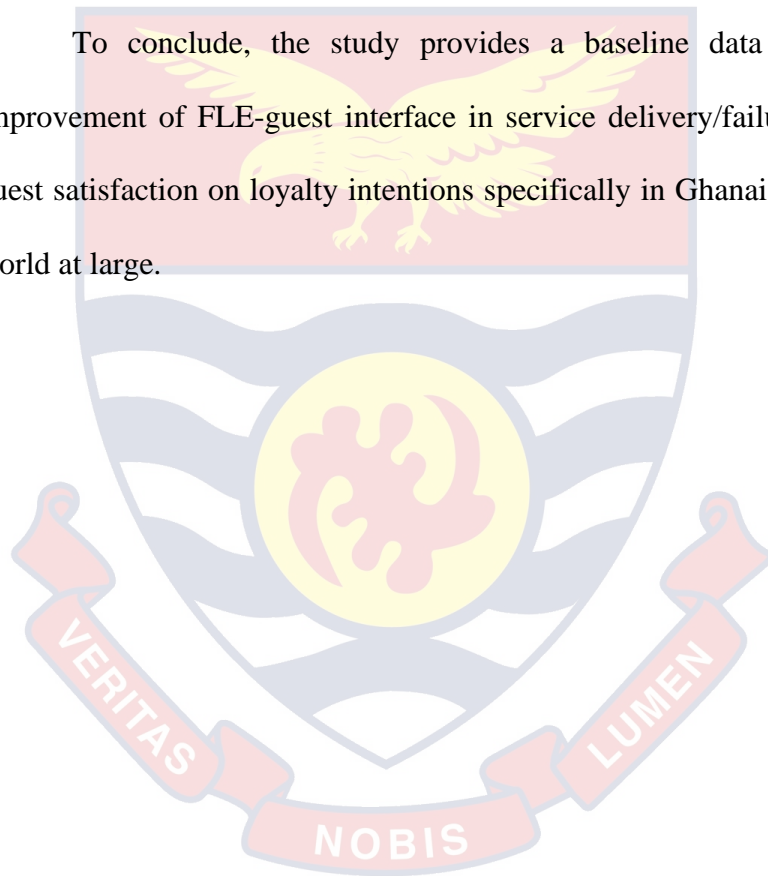
**Figure 12: Proposed Service Failure Recovery and Guest Satisfaction on Loyalty Intentions Model**

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Finally, this study, in putting forward a model for assessing FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery, adapted it to clarify FLE-guest interface in service failure recovery and guest satisfaction on their loyalty intentions.

Subsequently, the Service Failure/Recovery and Guest Satisfaction on Loyalty Intentions Model is proposed as a framework for measuring guests' expectations through their experience and perception of the service delivery (service failure), its recovery, satisfaction and its effect on loyalty intentions.

To conclude, the study provides a baseline data to monitor the improvement of FLE-guest interface in service delivery/failure recovery and guest satisfaction on loyalty intentions specifically in Ghanaian hotels and the world at large.



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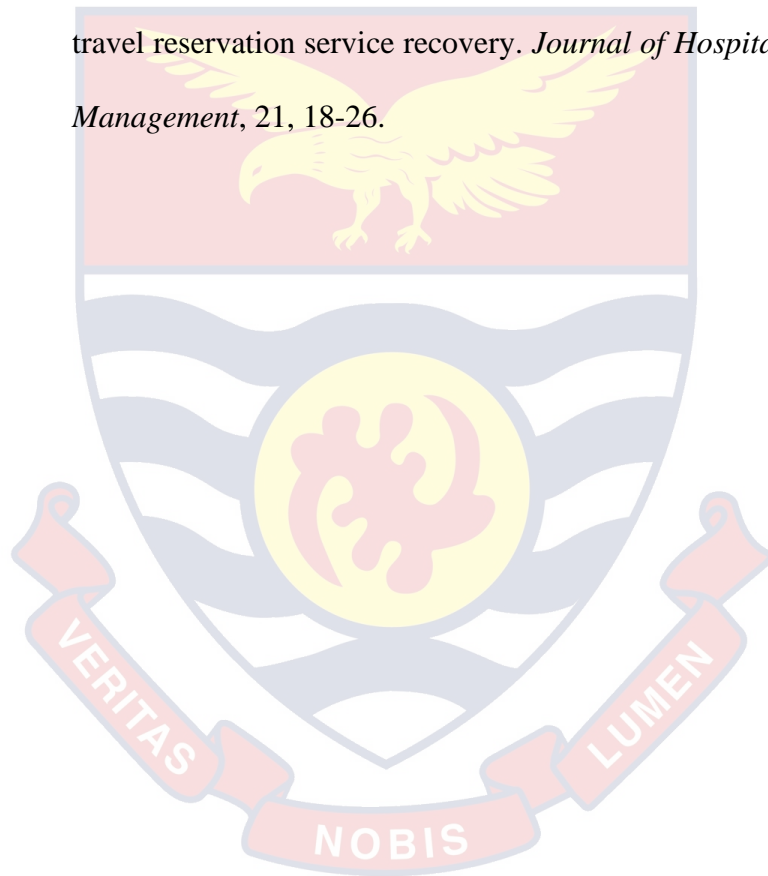
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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR GUESTS

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

#### Introduction and consent

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey which forms part of a research towards the award of PhD in Hospitality Management on ‘Staff-Guest interface in service failure recovery in 3 to 5-star hotels in the Accra Metropolis’.

You are assured of strict confidentiality of all information provided as it would be used for only academic purposes. Your anonymity is also guaranteed.

For further enquiries, please contact the researcher on 0504223626.

#### Module A: Guests’ expectation of service/product delivery

1. Kindly rate your expectations of the quality of service delivered to you in this hotel on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5, Strongly Disagree (SD); Disagree (D); Neither Agree nor Disagree (NAD); Agree (A), to Strongly Agree (SA).

Statements	SD	D	NAD	A	SA
<i>Tangibles</i>					
The hotel's physical facilities must be consistent with its image and price range.					
Staff of the hotel should be neat and well groomed.					
Technology and electronic facilities must be up-to-date.					
<i>Assurance</i>					
Hotel must provide quality food and beverage.					
Guests should be offered varied choices of facilities.					
Hotel staff should be professionals.					
<i>Reliability</i>					
Hotel should provide all services as promised.					
The hotel should provide adequate security.					
Services offered by staff must be consistently high in quality with updated guest records.					
<i>Responsiveness</i>					
Hotel should provide adequate information.					
Staff must promptly deal with my problem/s.					
Hotel's staff are required to promptly respond to my request/s.					
<i>Empathy</i>					
Staff should show me genuine concern when I have problem/s.					
Staff must give me individualised attention as they attentively listened to my complaint.					

2. Has there been an occasion whereby service delivered did not meet your expectations?      a) Yes [ ]      b) No [ ]

**Service failure**

3. Have you had any problem(s) with the service/products offered to you in this hotel?      a) Yes      b) No

4. If yes to Question '3', what was/were the problem(s)? (Please specify)

.....  
 .....  
 .....

.....,

.....

.....

**Module B: Guests’ perception of service/product quality**

1. Kindly rate your perceptions of the quality of service delivered to you in this hotel on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5, Strongly Disagree (SD); Disagree (D); Neither Agree or Disagree (NAD); Agree (A), to Strongly Agree (SA).

Statements	SD	D	NAD	A	SA
<i>Tangibles</i>					
The hotel’s physical facilities must be consistent with its image and price range.					
<i>Tangibles</i>					
The hotel’s physical facilities are consistent with its image and price range.					
Staff of the hotel are neat and well groomed.					
Technology and electronic facilities are up-to-date.					
<i>Reliability</i>					
The hotel provides all services as promised.					
The hotel provides adequate security.					
Services offered by staff were consistently high in quality with updated guest records.					
<i>Assurance</i>					
Hotel provides quality food and beverages.					
Guests are offered varied choices of facilities.					
Staff of hotel are professionals.					
<i>Responsive</i>					
Hotel provides adequate information.					
Staff promptly deal with guests’ problems.					
Hotel’s staff promptly respond to guests’ requests.					
<i>Empathy</i>					
Staff genuinely show concern when I have problem/s.					
Staff gave me individualised attention as they attentively listened to my complaint.					

5. Did you complain about this/these problem(s)? a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]
6. What mode was used to lodge the complaint?
- a) In person [ ] b) Telephone [ ] c) Internet [ ]
- d) Any other (Please specify) .....
7. Whom did you lodge the complaint with? .....

**Module C: Service failure recovery process, guest satisfaction and loyalty**

With reference to your complaint about the problem with service/product of this hotel, please indicate the extent to your agreement to the following statements on the recovery process on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5, Strongly Disagree (SD); Disagree (D); Neither Agree or Disagree (NAD); Agree (A), to Strongly Agree (SA).

Statements	SD	D	NAD	A	SA
<i>Communication</i>					
Staff communicated clearly when providing information about my complaint.					
Hotel staff asked questions to clarify the situation.					
Hotel staff were honest and fair in dealing with the problem.					
Hotel staff were very concerned and understanding.					
<i>Empowerment</i>					
Hotel staff put in all the appropriate efforts to solve the problem.					
Hotel staff proved able to solve the problem.					
Solution provided by hotel staff met my expectation.					
Staff's effort to solve my problem was satisfactory.					
<i>Feedback</i>					
I was informed about the progress made to solve the problem.					
I was provided with an accurate and reliable feedback.					
<i>Atonement</i>					
A formal apology was rendered to me due to the problem.					

I think the hotel fairly compensated me for the problem.					
<i>Explanation</i>					
I was provided with an explanation why the problem occurred.					
Satisfactory explanation(s) was/were given by the staff.					
<i>Tangibles</i>					
The furnishing of the room is of good quality					
The beddings are very comfortable					

Please rate your overall satisfaction with the service failure recovery.

- a) Very Satisfied [ ]      b) Satisfied [ ]      c) Neither Satisfied nor  
 Dissatisfied [ ]      d) Dissatisfied [ ]      e) Very Dissatisfied [ ]

#### 8. Guests' Overall satisfaction and Loyalty Intentions

With reference to your service failure recovery process, please indicate the extent to your agreement to the following statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5, Strongly Disagree (SD); Disagree (D); Neither Agree nor Disagree (NAD); Agree (A), to Strongly Agree (SA).

Statements	SD	D	NAD	A	SA
<i>Satisfaction</i>					
I'm satisfied with how staff dealt with and resolved my problem					
I am happy with how my problem was solved.					
I am satisfied with the action taken by the staff involved in resolving the problem.					
I am satisfied with the process and resources used to solve the problem.					
In my opinion the staff provided an acceptable solution to this particular problem.					
I am satisfied with the compensation offered by the hotel (restored service, money refund or upgraded room).					
I am satisfied with my overall experience with the hotel staff.					
Based on my experience with this hotel, I am very satisfied with the services it provides.					

<i>Loyalty intentions</i>					
I will not change to any other hotel with my experience in this hotel.					
I will always recommend this hotel to friends and relatives					

1. How satisfied were you with the solution?
  - a) Very satisfied [ ]
  - b) Satisfied [ ]
  - c) Indifferent [ ]
  - d) Dissatisfied [ ]
  - e) Very dissatisfied [ ]
2. Please mention one thing that will make you loyal to this hotel.

.....

**Module D: Socio-demographic and Travel characteristics of respondents**

- a. Nationality.....
- b. Country of residence.....
- c. Gender (Please tick)
  - i) Male [ ]
  - ii) Female [ ]
- d. Age in years:
  - i) Below 30 [ ]
  - ii) 31–40 [ ]
  - iii) 41-50 [ ]
  - iv) Above 50 [ ]
- e. Religious affiliation
  - i) Christian [ ]
  - ii) Moslem [ ]
  - iii) Any other .....
- f. Marital status (Please tick)
  - i) Single [ ]
  - ii) Married [ ]
  - iii) Separated [ ]
  - iv) Divorced [ ]
  - v) Widowed [ ]
- g. Highest level of education:
  - i) ‘A/O’ Level/SHS [ ]
  - ii) Diploma [ ]
  - iii) Under Graduate [ ]
  - iv) Post Graduate [ ]
  - Any other .....
- h. Occupation .....
- i. Monthly income:
  - i) Less than \$1,500 [ ]
  - ii) \$1,501 - \$2,000 [ ]
  - iii) \$2,001- \$2,500 [ ]
  - iv) \$2,501-\$3,000 [ ]
  - v) More than \$3,000 [ ]

**Travel characteristics of respondent**

- a. Purpose of visit (Please tick)
  - i) Business [ ]
  - ii) Leisure [ ]
  - iii) Any other .....
- b. How often do you visit this hotel?
  - i) Hardly [ ]
  - ii) Sometimes [ ]



iii) Often [ ]      iv) Very often [ ]

c. Is this your first time of visit to this hotel? i) Yes [ ]      ii) No [ ]

d. Are you travelling in a group?      i) Yes [ ]      ii) No [ ]

e. If 'YES', how many people are with you? .....

f. How long are you staying in this hotel? .....

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND SUPPORT.**



## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey which forms part of a research towards the award of PhD in Hospitality Management on 'Frontline employee-guest interface in service failure recovery in 3-5 star hotels in the Accra Metropolis'.

You are assured of strict confidentiality of all information provided as it would be used for academic purposes only. Your anonymity is also guaranteed. For further enquiries, please contact the researcher on 0249223626/0504223626.

#### **Module A: Profile of respondent and hotel**

##### **1. Profile of respondent**

- a. What position do you hold in the hotel?
- b. How long have you been working in this position?
- c. Do you have any previous work experience within the hotel industry?

- d. How long have you been working in the hotel industry?
- e. For how long did you work in this position before joining this hotel?
- f. How long have you been working in this hotel?
- g. What are your responsibilities in this current position?
- h. What was your motivation of choosing this hotel as your employer?

**Level of education.**

- a. What is your highest level of education?
- b. Have you had any education relating to the hospitality industry?
- c. Do you have other qualification(s) or training?
- d. What is your age/the range?
- e. What is your marital status?
- f. What is your nationality?

**2. Profile of the hotel**

- a. What is the organisational structure of this hotel? Could you please provide a copy?
- b. Which of the departments do you collaborate with to provide guest service?
- c. What services or products do these departments offer to guests?

**Module B: How frontline employees handle service failure recovery**

3. What are the measures put in place for quality service delivery and service failure recovery?
4. What is your overall impression of the quality-of-service delivery in the hotel?
5. What do FLEs focus on during quality guest service delivery?

6. Are you empowered to solve guests' problems? How would you describe FLEs' empowerment in this hotel? What is your current level of empowerment, and how does this affect the effectiveness of the recovery process after guests' complaints?
7. How successful are you in dealing with guests who complain?
8. Does your manager come in to help when you face difficulties during service failure recovery? How does he/she do that?

### **Module C: FLEs' training and its influence on guest complaint handling**

9. What type of training would you describe as the most important for a FLE in order to recover service failure to guests' satisfaction?
10. Have you been provided with such type of training in this hotel? If not, what do you feel/think is missing?
11. Does your hotel have specific modules to educate you on how to handle guest complaints and service recovery processes?
12. How does your training influence your handling of guests' complaints?
13. What are the common complaints by guests? Are there avenues open for guests to lodge them?

### **Service failure recovery performance**

14. How would you describe your role in the hotels' effort to satisfy guests after a service failure?
15. How flexible are the performance of your duties? Is it possible to perform other duties to help resolve cases of complaining guests?
16. What are some of the service recovery strategies used in this hotel?

17. Please describe your capabilities in handling guest service failure recovery.
18. Have you ever felt that you went beyond the policies or call of duty to satisfy a guest? Do you have reason(s) for doing that?
19. Have you ever felt that you could have done more to satisfy a guest? What prevented or stopped you from doing so?
20. How do FLMs support you in resolving guest complaints and recovering service failures?

**Module D: The challenges FLEs face in service failure recovery**

21. Do you have concerns or problems in dealing with complaining guests?
22. What are some of the challenges that you face in the performance of service failure recovery?
23. What do you think are some of the benefits of service recovery to your hotel?
24. How satisfied are you with your job?
25. How do you or your manager know how well you are doing in the midst of your colleagues?
26. Are hardworking workers recognised or rewarded? What is the criteria if it is done?

**Thank you very much for your time and assistance.**

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FRONTLINE MANAGER

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **FRONTLINE MANAGER INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey which forms part of a research towards the award of PhD in Hospitality Management on 'Frontline employee -guest interface in service failure recovery in 3 to 5-star hotels in the Accra Metropolis'.

You are assured of strict confidentiality of all information provided as it would be used for only academic purposes. Your anonymity is also guaranteed. For further enquiries, please contact the researcher on 0249223626 /0504223626.

#### **Module A**

##### **1. Profile of respondent**

- a. What position do you hold in the hotel?
- b. How long have you been working in this position?
- c. How long have you been working in the hotel industry?
- d. For how long did you work in this position before joining this hotel?

- e. How long have you been working in this hotel?
- f. What are your responsibilities in this current position?
- g. Level of education.
- h. What is your highest level of education?
- i. Have you had any education relating to the hospitality industry?
- j. Do you have other qualification(s) or training?
- k. What is your age/the range?

l. What is your marital status?

m. What is your nationality?

2. **Profile of the hotel**

- a. Briefly give the history of this hotel.
- b. What is the ownership or affiliation of this hotel?
- c. What is the management structure?
- d. What is the organisational structure of this hotel? Could you please provide a copy?
- e. What are the various servicing and supporting departments?
- f. What services or products do these departments offer to guests?

**Module B**

3. **Service quality**

- a. May I know the strategies put in place for quality service delivery? How is it assessed?
- b. What is your overall impression of the quality of service delivery or product in the hotel?

**4. Service failure**

- a. What are the common complaints by guests?
- b. Are there avenues open for guests to lodge complaints?
- c. Are frontline employees (FLE) empowered to handle complaints?
- d. Are there any policies on the complaint handlers' process in the hotel?

**5. Perception of FLEs' performance**

- a. How successfully well do FLEs handle service failures?
- b. How do you evaluate FLEs' performance of service recovery?

**Module C**

**6. Strategies put in place to facilitate FLEs' service recovery**

- a. What managerial practices are critical for improving FLEs' service recovery efforts?
- b. What sort of managerial support do you give/offer your FLEs to enhance their service failure recovery?
- c. When FLEs (i) encounter or (ii) make mistakes whilst delivering service, or (iii) guests make complaints to them, do they have the right to make decisions and handle the service failure?
- d. May I know if you motivate your FLEs.

If you do, how do you motivate them, and on what grounds?

- e. How often do you appraise the performance of your staff? What does it entail?

Can I have a look at a copy of the appraisal form?

**Frontline employees' training**

Do you train your frontline employees on service failure recovery?

- a. How often do you organise such training programmes? Please



provide specific instances.

- b. What training methods do you use? What about supervision and motivation after training? Are there modules to guide them?
- c. How do FLEs' training influence their handling of guest complaints?
- d. Could you please explain further how the service training inform frontline employees about service recovery procedures?

#### **Module D**

#### **7. Frontline employee satisfaction**

- a. Are frontline employees really satisfied with the conditions of service of this hotel?
- b. What is the underlying process which motivates frontline employees to perform better service recovery in case of service failure?
- c. To what extent do you recognise and reward frontline employees on the following:
  - The quality and number of service recovery output;
  - Guest satisfaction verified by guest recommendation or loyalty.
- d. What is the rate of frontline employee turnover?

#### **8. Benefits of service failure recovery**

- a. Could you please enumerate the benefits of service failure recovery to the hotel? Briefly explain how they benefit the hotel.

#### **9. What is your opinion of this study being carried out?**

**Thank you very much for your time and assistance.**

**APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR GTA'S QUALITY  
ASSURANCE MANAGER**

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

**QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGER'S (GTA) INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Dear Sir,

I am Adelaide Grace Mensah-Kufuor, a student of University of Cape Coast pursuing a PhD programme in Hospitality Management. It is required of me to conduct a research towards the award of the certificate, and the topic is: **'Frontline employee-guest interface in service failure recovery in upscale hotels in the Accra Metropolis'**

This is to humbly and formally request you, the Quality Assurance Manager of Ghana Tourism Authority, to participate in the survey.

You are assured of strict confidentiality of all information provided as it would be used for only academic purposes. Your anonymity is also guaranteed. For further enquiries, please contact the researcher on 0249223626/0504223626.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey.

### 1. Profile of respondent

- a) What position do you hold in Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA)?
- b) How long have you been working in this position?
- c) How long have you been working with GTA?
- d) Did you work in either the hospitality or tourism industry before joining the GTA?
- e) If you did, for how long did you work in the industry before joining the GTA?
- f) What are your responsibilities in this current position?
- g) Level of education.
- h) What is your highest level of education?
- i) Have you had any education relating to the hospitality or tourism industry?
- j) What is your age/the range?
- k) What is your marital status?
- l) What is your nationality?

### 2 Profile of the GTA

- a) May I know the responsibilities of GTA towards hotels?
- b) What are the responsibilities of the Quality Assurance (QA) Department of GTA?

### 3 Service quality

- a) May I know if the QA Dept. of GTA has put measures in place to ensure quality service delivery in Ghanaian hotels? If it has, how is it assessed?  
Can I have a look at a copy?
- b) Does GTA support hotels to enhance their service delivery to guests

such as training?

- c) Is GTA aware of services which may not meet guests' expectations?
- d) Do your office's annual or bi-annual inspections take cognisance of other components of FLEs' service delivery which could cause service failures (services not meeting guests' expectations) apart from hotels' structures and some products?
- e) Does GTA support hotels to enhance their service delivery?
- f) What about the support of hotels' frontline employees to recover or correct guests' services which fail?
- g) What is your overall impression of the quality of service delivery or products in hotels based on your inspections?

**4 Measures put in place to facilitate hotels' guest service/product delivery**

- a) How often do you conduct inspections in hotels? What does it entail?  
Can I have a look at a copy of the inspection schedule?
- b) What benefits do GTA derive from hotels' quality service delivery?

**Thank you very much for your time and assistance.**

**APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GHANA HOTELS ASSOCIATION  
PRESIDENT**

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

**GHANA HOTELS ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT'S INTERVIEW  
GUIDE**

Dear Sir,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey which forms part of a research towards the award of PhD in Hospitality Management on 'Frontline employee -guest interface in service failure recovery in upscale hotels in the Accra Metropolis'.

You are assured of strict confidentiality of all information provided as it would be used for only academic purposes. Your anonymity is also guaranteed. For further enquiries, please contact the researcher on 0249223626/0504223626.

**1. Profile of respondent**

- a. What position do you hold in Ghana Hotels Association (GHA)?

- b. How long have you been working in this position?
- c. How long have you been an executive member of GHA?
- d. What are your responsibilities in this current position?
- e. Level of education.
  - i. What is your highest level of education?
  - ii. Have you had any education relating to the hospitality or tourism industry?
- f. What is your age/the range?
- g. What is your marital status?
- h. What is your nationality?

## 2. Profile of the GHA

- a. Briefly give the history of the GHA.
- b. What is the organisational structure of GHA? Could you please provide a copy?
- c. What are the responsibilities of GHA towards hotels and the government?
- d. What are the benefits a hotel/ier derive in joining the GHA?

## 3. Service quality

- a. May I know if GHA has put measures in place to ensure quality service delivery in Ghanaian hotels? If it has, what are the specific measures?
- b. Does GHA support hotels to enhance their service delivery to guests?
- c. If GHA has not put in measures to ensure quality service delivery in Ghanaian hotels, what do you think could be done to effect such a

move?

- d. What is your overall impression of the quality of service delivery or products in hotels?

**4. Service failure**

- a. May I know if your office is conversant with guests' complaints? If yes, what are the common complaints by guests?
- b. Are you aware of some of the avenues opened for guests to lodge such complaints in hotels?
- c. Do you know if frontline employees (FLE) are empowered to handle guest complaints?

**5. Measures put in place to support hotels' guest service recovery**

- a. Does GHA support hotels to enhance guests' service failure recovery? If yes, what sort of support does GHA offer?
- b. How often do you carry out such support? What does it entail?

**6. Frontline employees' training**

- a. Do you provide training and technical assistance to employees of members to offer quality service delivery?
- b. How often do you organise such training programmes? Please provide specific instances.
- c. What training methods do you use? Are there modules to guide them?
- d. How do FLEs' training influence their handling of guest complaints?
- e. Could you please explain further how the service training inform FLEs about service recovery procedures?

**7. Frontline employee satisfaction**

- a) Are you conversant with FLEs' conditions of service in hotels? If you

do, do you know if they are really satisfied with them?

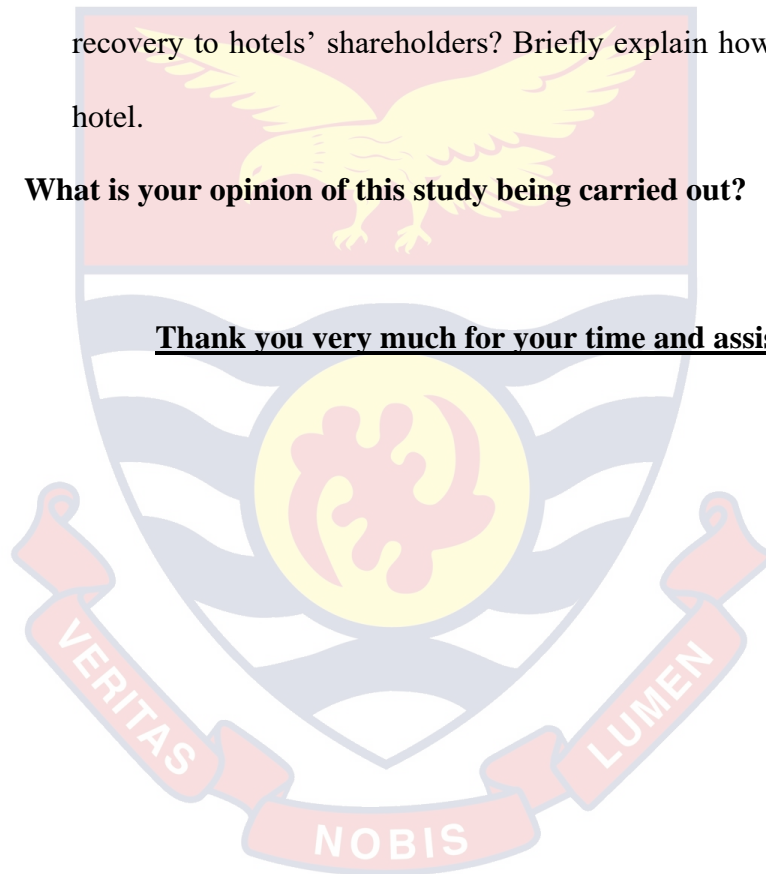
- b) Do you also know whether FLEs are motivated to perform better in guest service delivery and recovery in case of service failure? If you do how are they motivated?
- c) What do you think is the rate of FLEs' turnover in hotels?

8. **Benefits of service failure recovery**

- a) Could you please enumerate the benefits of FLEs' service failure recovery to hotels' shareholders? Briefly explain how they benefit the hotel.

9. **What is your opinion of this study being carried out?**

**Thank you very much for your time and assistance.**





**APPENDIX F: INTER-CONSTRUCT CORRELATIONS AND SQUARE ROOT OF THE AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED (AVE)**

**Table 26: Inter-Construct Correlations and Square Root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**

Assurance expectation	<b>0.79</b>																		
Reliability expectation	0.50	<b>0.86</b>																	
Responsiveness expectation	0.34	0.60	<b>0.81</b>																
Empathy expectation	0.35	0.44	0.73	<b>0.81</b>															
Tangibles expectation	-0.27	0.45	0.62	0.50	<b>0.87</b>														
Reliability perception	-0.07	-0.17	-0.12	-0.13	-0.03	<b>0.88</b>													
Assurance perception	-0.22	-0.07	-0.08	-0.12	0.10	0.46	<b>0.79</b>												
Responsiveness perception	-0.15	-0.12	-0.11	-0.10	0.10	0.53	0.62	<b>0.82</b>											
Empathy perception	-0.15	-0.05	-0.07	-0.05	0.13	0.47	0.55	0.86	<b>0.75</b>										
Tangibles perception	-0.12	-0.05	-0.11	-0.10	-0.01	0.47	0.37	0.39	0.34	<b>0.87</b>									
Communication	-0.09	-0.13	-0.07	-0.06	0.01	0.37	0.32	0.56	0.57	0.22	<b>0.95</b>								
Empowerment	-0.14	-0.09	-0.10	-0.08	0.03	0.43	0.37	0.51	0.49	0.46	0.20	<b>0.87</b>							
Feedback	-0.07	-0.15	-0.16	-0.13	-0.07	0.38	0.33	0.49	0.46	0.20	0.72	0.75	<b>0.79</b>						
Atonement	-0.11	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08	-0.01	0.37	0.32	0.44	0.41	0.19	0.70	0.70	0.66	<b>0.79</b>					
Explanation	-0.04	-0.10	-0.11	-0.15	-0.06	0.38	0.29	0.42	0.40	0.58	0.53	0.53	0.24	0.55	<b>0.73</b>				
Tangibles	-0.11	-0.04	-0.10	-0.07	-0.08	0.15	0.20	0.14	0.08	0.38	0.17	0.26	0.24	0.24	0.16	<b>0.74</b>			
Satisfaction	-0.09	-0.11	-0.12	-0.10	0.00	0.49	0.45	0.62	0.59	0.30	0.75	0.85	0.75	0.77	0.59	0.26	<b>0.93</b>		
Loyalty	0.04	-0.09	-0.08	-0.04	-0.06	0.37	0.36	0.44	0.39	0.27	0.40	0.42	0.40	0.44	0.32	0.16	0.54	<b>0.86</b>	

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

Note: Diagonals represent square roots of AVE whereas off-diagonal represent correlation coefficients

**Table 27: Nomological Network on Second Order Latent Constructs**

Path		SRW	SE	P-value
Reliability expectation	→ RESPER	-0.12	0.17	0.043
Reliability expectation	→ EMPPER	-0.05	0.13	0.348
Reliability expectation	→ TANPER	0.01	0.11	0.890
Assurance expectation	→ RESPER	-0.12	0.11	0.023
Assurance expectation	→ EMPPER	-0.05	0.06	0.341
Assurance expectation	→ TANPER	0.01	0.10	0.891
Expectation responsiveness	→ RELPER	-0.01	0.15	0.901
Expectation responsiveness	→ ASSUPER	-0.08	0.06	0.318
Expectation responsiveness	→ RESPER	-0.16	0.01	0.045
Expectation responsiveness	→ EMPPER	-0.20	0.22	.018
Expectation responsiveness	→ TANPER	-0.12	0.19	0.135
Empathy expectation	→ RELPER	-0.10	0.11	0.138
Empathy expectation	→ ASSUPER	-0.15	0.09	0.028
Empathy expectation	→ RESPER	-0.06	0.01	0.364
Empathy expectation	→ EMPPER	-0.02	0.06	0.771
Empathy expectation	→ TANPER	-0.05	0.14	0.419
Tangible expectation	→ RELPER	0.10	0.11	0.102
Tangible expectation	→ ASSUPER	0.25	0.19	0.001***
Tangible expectation	→ RESPER	0.28	0.00	0.001***
Tangible expectation	→ EMPPER	0.28	0.06	0.001***
Tangible expectation	→ TANPER	0.09	0.14	0.139
REALPER	→ Communication	0.13	0.05	0.002
REALPER	→ Empowerment	0.18	0.07	0.001***
REALPER	→ Feedback	0.19	0.07	0.001***
REALPER	→ Atonement	0.20	0.06	0.001***
REALPER	→ Explanation	0.22	0.08	0.001***
REALPER	→ TANREC	-0.03	0.07	0.399
ASSUPER	→ Communication	-0.08	0.03	0.058
ASSUPER	→ Empowerment	0.02	0.04	0.546
ASSUPER	→ Feedback	0.01	0.04	0.811
ASSUPER	→ Atonement	0.04	0.04	0.386
TANPER	→ TANREC	0.38	0.06	0.001***
TANPER	→ Explanation	0.00	0.06	0.937
TANPER	→ Atonement	-0.04	0.05	0.374
TANPER	→ Feedback	-0.04	0.05	0.324
TANPER	→ Empowerment	0.09	0.05	0.036
TANPER	→ Communication	-0.02	0.04	0.535
EMPPER	→ Explanation	0.14	0.05	.002
EMPPER	→ TANREC	-0.15	0.05	0.001***
EMPPER	→ Feedback	0.11	0.04	0.009
EMPPER	→ Empowerment	0.17	0.04	0.001***

**Table 27 Continued**

Path		SRW	SE	P-value
EMPPER	→ Communication	0.39	0.03	0.001***
RESPER	→ Feedback	0.32	0.03	0.001***
RESPER	→ Atonement	0.33	0.03	0.001***
RESPER	→ Explanation	0.19	0.04	0.001***
RESPER	→ TANREC	0.14	0.04	0.002
RESPER	→ Communication	0.24	0.03	0.001***
RESPER	→ Empowerment	0.26	0.03	0.001***
Empowerment	→ OVERALLSAT	0.56	0.02	0.001***
Feedback	→ OVERALLSAT	0.06	0.02	0.001***
Communication	→ OVERALLSAT	0.24	0.02	0.001***
Atonement	→ OVERALLSAT	0.32	0.02	0.001***
Explanation	→ OVERALLSAT	0.09	0.02	0.001
TANREC	→ OVERALLSAT	0.03	0.02	0.219
OVERALLSAT	→ RELPER	0.46	0.11	0.001***
Communication	→ ASSUPER	-0.01	0.06	0.823
Empowerment	→ RESPER	-0.14	0.07	0.020
Atonement	→ EMPPER	0.08	0.05	0.107
Explanation	→ TANPER	-0.00	0.04	0.912
TANREC	→ RELPER	0.02	0.04	0.589
Feedback	→ ASSUPER	0.03	0.05	0.453

Source: Fieldwork survey, Mensah-Kufuor (2017)

SRW = Standardised regression weight; SE= Standard error

