

A Triadic Analysis of Service Quality Between Customers, Employees and Managers of Fine
Dining Restaurants in Dubrovnik

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of this research project was to assess service quality in Dubrovnik fine dining restaurants, more specifically to analyze the importance of specific service quality elements from three perspectives ; restaurant customers', managers' and employees'. Five service quality dimensions were measured; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Modified DINESERV model was used to develop a questionnaire for conducting this research. Results of this questionnaire indicated that there is a significant gap between managers', employees' and customers' perceptions on the importance of service quality elements in Dubrovnik fine dining restaurants. In addition, this research suggested that managers overrate the importance of service quality elements while employees underrate the importance of these elements when compared to customers. Customers and employees ranked reliability as the most important service quality element for restaurant industry while managers ranked responsiveness element of service quality as the most important element, which is a new finding provided by this research.

Keywords: service quality, fine dining, service quality elements, gaps model, service quality perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Restaurant industry is a highly competitive industry that is changing rapidly. In the past, the main focus of the restaurant was to provide food and drinks. However, its role nowadays is more complex than that. Restaurants are places where impressions, experiences and memories of guests are made. In today's day and age, the ability to satisfy guests is extremely important for restaurants because guests are the co-creators of the service itself (Kukanja, Omerzel and Bukovec, 2017). Focusing on guests' needs, wants and expectations is the first step in understanding and satisfying guests, as well as in providing them with quality service (Kukanja, Omerzel and Bukovec, 2017).

Restaurant industry is extremely affected by both increased competition and greater demands and expectations of customers. There are couple of elements which influenced on the development of high expectations among customers when it comes to service quality such as media influence, consumerism, technological developments and marketing influences (Hart and Casserly, 1985). Due to these influences, customers became sophisticated, more involved and impatient because if they are not satisfied with one restaurant, they will easily replace that one with some other (Stevens, Knutson and Patton, 1995). High service quality is thus seen as one of the most powerful weapons responsible for business development, prosperity, profit and ultimately, its survival (Lee and Hing, 1995).

Competing restaurants provide more or less the same type of service, but they do not by all means provide the same quality of service, and people who know this the best are the customers (Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml, 1988). This notion implies that service quality is ultimately determined by customers and it is a highly subjective concept (Kukanja, 2017).

According to the definition given by Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1988), service quality is the concept which focuses on the ability of service provider to meet and go beyond the

expectations of customers. Other definition claims that service quality is the result of the comparison between guests' expected and perceived quality of the service which they receive (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, 1988). The above mentioned definitions are different in sense that they put different actors in charge of service quality; the first one suggests that service provider (employees and managers) are those who are responsible for service quality, whereas the other one suggests that service quality is a highly subjective concept dependent on customers and their evaluations.

For the purpose of this paper and for the evaluation of service quality in Dubrovnik restaurants, both definitions are accepted and service quality is seen as an ultimate result of managers' and employees' efforts to satisfy and go beyond the expectations of customers which is later evaluated by customers in terms of comparison between their expectations and perceptions of delivered service.

Due to distinctive service characteristics such as intangibility, simultaneity and heterogeneity, it is very hard to measure or even test service quality since it is seen as a highly abstract construct (Lee and Hing, 1995). Despite the difficulties, SERVQUAL instrument was developed in 1985 by Parasuraman and it is considered to be one of the best instruments for measuring service quality from the perspective of a customer which can be applicable among various sectors (Lee and Hing, 1995, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). SERVQUAL instrument tries to measure service quality by focusing on the gap which happens as a result of discrepancies between customers' expectations and perceptions of the service itself (Kukanja, 2017). Expectations can be defined as wants or even customer desires or things that they believe some service provider should provide them with (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). In most cases expectations are formed before experiencing the service itself, i.e., prior to going to the restaurant. On the other hand, perceptions are made by looking at the actual performance and service delivery, i.e., during the dinner at the restaurant (Parasuraman,

Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). Revised SERVQUAL instrument focuses on five dimensions which influence on customers' service quality assessment and these dimensions according to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) are:

- (1) Tangibles – physical facilities within the establishment, appearance of the staff and equipment
- (2) Reliability – organization's ability to perform desired service dependably, consistently and accurately.
- (3) Responsiveness - focus is on the willingness of the service provider to help customers and provide prompt service
- (4) Assurance – knowledge and courtesy of the employees and their ability to inspire feelings of trust and confidence
- (5) Empathy – caring and individualized attention for customers.

Babakus and Boller (1992) have insisted on the customization of SERVQUAL instrument depending on the service that is analyzed. On that note different instruments have been developed. Stevens and Knutson created an instrument called LODGSERV, specialized for assessing and measuring service quality in lodging industry (Stevens, Knutson and Patton, 1995). In 1995, Stevens, Knutson and Patton created DINESERV; instrument which assessed perception of service quality in restaurant industry. DINESERV is very similar to SERVQUAL and it uses the same service quality elements (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) to assess the overall service quality. However, these elements are customized to the restaurant industry (i.e. reliability element in the restaurant is connected to freshness of food, accurate billing etc.) (Markovic, Raspor, Segaric, 2010).

DINESERV instrument can be customized further into Institutional DINESERV model which focuses on the institutional factors including price and value, food quality, atmosphere,

convenience and service quality (Kim and Kim 2009). The importance of focusing on DINESERV tool was emphasized in a research done by Kim and Kim (2009), where these authors proved that the above mentioned institutional DINESERV elements have a positive influence on customer satisfaction and their willingness to visit some restaurant again.

According to Stevens, Knutson and Patton (1995), DINESERV is considered to be a valid, useful, cost effective and extremely reliable tool for measuring service quality in restaurants which helps service provider to better understand customers' needs and ultimately deliver a service that will go beyond customers' expectations.

Markovic, Raspor and Segaric (2010) used modified DINESERV model and applied it to 32 Croatian restaurants. They were measuring customers' expectations and perceptions of service and found out that there is a negative gap, meaning that expectations of guests are higher than their perceptions which ultimately indicated low service quality. In addition, the research showed that customers value tangibles and reliability aspect of service quality the most. In addition to the above mentioned research, Stevens, Knutson and Patton (1995) did a similar research in the USA and found out that in restaurant industry customers value reliability element of service quality the most followed by tangibles, assurance, responsiveness and empathy.

For the purposes of this study the author will use the modified version of DINESERV to assess the expectations of customers and introduce the gaps model of service quality assessment.

Gaps Model was developed in 1985 by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry. According to Lovelock and Wirtz (2007), gap analysis or gaps model is an excellent tool which helps to identify and ultimately correct any problems related to service quality. Gaps model was the foundation for the SERVQUAL instrument development. The gaps model focuses on five

gaps likely to arise in service industry. The gaps model shown in Fig.1 identifies these gaps. Gap one is called “The Knowledge gap” and it arises due to the difference between what the customer expects and what managers perceive the customer expect from particular service. One of the widely used advice when it comes to closing the gap number one is to learn what the customer wants, needs and expects.

Gap two happens due to the difference between service quality specifications and managers’ perceptions of the expectations of the customers. One of the easiest ways to close this gap is to develop service quality standards which reflect customers’ expectations (Lovelock, Wirtz, 2007). In addition to gaps one and two, gap three arises as the result of discrepancies between service which is actually delivered and service quality specifications. This gap can be easily closed by making sure that performance is in accordance with the established standards (Lovelock, Wirtz, 2007).

Gap four happens due to difference between external communication and actual service delivery. Making sure that the external communication is true and that it really reflects what a service provider can deliver is an essential tool for closing this gap. In addition, gap five happens due to the difference between customers’ expectations and perceptions of the service delivered (Lovelock, Wirtz, 2007). Thus, it is evident that gap five corresponds to the SERVQUAL instrument which also addresses the differences between expectations and perceptions and tries to identify in which aspects of service quality major discrepancies happen.

The gaps model is considered to be very useful and thus was used for many researches in the arena of service quality. According to the research done by Lee et.al (2016), the knowledge gap was considered to be the biggest issue which affects perception of service quality in service industry, more specifically, in hotels.

Gap analysis is useful and relevant tool because it helps to evaluate service problems and give an insight or advice to managers and employees on how to correct these problems and improve service quality (Lee et.al, 2016). Gap analysis will be used for the research at hand.

Customers are vital for every service business because ultimately they have control in their hands and a simple customer's word of mouth can make or break a business. This is especially true in restaurant industry of today (Oubre, Brown, 2009). According to Dedeoglu and Demirer (2015) customers who have a high and positive perception of service quality are extremely useful and important for promotion of the business and for enhancing the business image. Moreover, according to Oubre and Brown (2009), if customers are satisfied with the service provided, they bring a lot of benefits to the service provider such as repeat business, customer loyalty and free advertising. All of these benefits which service provider gets, makes him able to differentiate his business from the competition and secure his market share in this relatively unstable industry.

Managers are extremely important in every service encounter. According to Fallon and Schofield (2000), managers communicate with guests of the restaurant; they welcome them, assign them with a table and are present during the service delivery to make sure that guests are satisfied. Thus, some researchers such as Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1988) argued that managers must be knowledgeable about customers' needs, wants, desires and expectations and once understanding those, managers must share their knowledge with employees who will be ultimately serving these customers.

Dedeoglu and Demirer (2015) argued in their research about the importance of the employees in specific service setting and they claimed that employees have power in their hands because they represent a connection between customers and the business itself. It can be argued that employees must be knowledgeable enough to meet the needs of customers. Since they have

the power during the service delivery, they can go a step further and exceed the expectations of the customers and provide them with an exceptional service.

The important role of customers, employees and managers has been discussed in various research papers. However, some researchers used a triadic perspective when analyzing service encounter or delivery while others used a dyadic approach. According to Oubre and Brown (2009), when incorporating managers, employees and customers in one research on service quality, this gives more clear and complete view of the service encounter and thus gives more valid results regarding service quality itself. It can be argued that triadic perspective is more valid than dyadic which takes into account only customers and employees.

In their research, Oubre and Brown (2009) used a triadic perspective when analyzing service quality in three restaurants in Mississippi area (USA). After analyzing managers', employees' and customers' perceptions of service quality, they found a great difference or gap between perceptions of these three stakeholders; the results showed that managers overrate quality of service offered while employees underrate the quality of service when compared to customers and their results. The idea behind this research was to prove that triadic approach should be used when assessing service quality in restaurants because this approach gives more complete view than the dyadic approach. In addition, the results of this study do not confirm with the results of another research done by Fallon and Schofield (2000) who suggested that both managers and employees overrate the quality of service in fine dining restaurants when compared to customers.

According to a research done by Wong, Dean and White (1999), employees, tangibles and reliability elements of service quality have a great influence on highly satisfied guests or in other words, these elements help to predict the overall service quality. Since employees are considered to be one of the most important elements, they should be included in the research

on service quality in restaurant industry. In addition, Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1988) have argued that if there is a difference between customers' expectations and manager's understanding of those expectations, the result is devastating- perceived service quality will be damaged. This claim works well with the gaps model of service quality previously mentioned and it would be interesting to see how this works in practice and whether the biggest gap in Dubrovnik restaurants is gap number one- not knowing what the customer expects, needs or wants.

Dubrovnik is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Croatia and it is visited every year by millions of guests. One of the most important offers of Dubrovnik is its F&B offer which brings a lot of revenue and helps to create a favorable image of the destination itself.

According to Dubrovnik Tourist Board website, there are 196 restaurants in Dubrovnik and its surroundings. However, based on Trip Advisor, there are 267 restaurants in Dubrovnik.

This research will try to assess service quality in three fine dining Dubrovnik restaurants in order to compare and contrast the results. Fine dining, for the purpose of this research is defined as a place where food quality is considered a norm and where bigger emphasis is on the dining experience. Dining in these restaurants is all about the experience and making memories. Triadic approach will be used to assess service quality. Little or no research (to author's knowledge) has been done to evaluate service quality of restaurants in Dubrovnik from a triadic perspective. This research will try to determine how much is particular service element important to customers, employees and managers in their definition of quality dining experience and it will try to determine different gaps between manager's, employees' and customers' responses.

By following this approach, useful, valuable and relevant data will be obtained and the results can be useful to Dubrovnik restaurant managers in order to improve service encounters in

their restaurants and understand which trends in dining industry are visible from customers' responses. Managers should then be able to adapt their service to meet customers' needs by first starting to educate themselves and their employees about what truly matters to a customer who is visiting their restaurant.

In this context, the aim of this study is to explore whether there is a gap between customers', managers' and employees' perceptions on the importance of different service quality elements in Dubrovnik restaurants. This research will be based on the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 – there is a significant gap between managers', employees' and customers' perceptions on the importance of service quality elements in Dubrovnik restaurants.

Significant (later) has to be quantified as $p \leq .05$.

Hypothesis 2 –managers and employees in Dubrovnik restaurants do not know what customers expect.

METHODS

After a thorough literature review, a modified DINESERV model was used to develop a questionnaire and analyze perceptions of managers, customers and employees on service quality in three Dubrovnik fine dining restaurants. Minor wording changes were made to adapt the questions to Croatian language. Three restaurants were purposely chosen because of the fact that this research was taking place in March, 2018 – period when not a lot of restaurants are open in Dubrovnik. The restaurants used for this project are the ones which are open mostly for the entire year and the researcher argued that the most valid results about the topic at hand will be obtained from analyzing these restaurants. Managers, customers and employees from these restaurants were invited to participate and the author left pen and paper questionnaires in these restaurants to be delivered to restaurant customers while the author administered the questionnaires for restaurant managers and employees.

The main goal of this descriptive research was to compare perceptions on the importance of specific service quality elements between three groups; restaurant managers, employees and customers.

Three survey questionnaires were developed, one for each group of participants. First part of the questionnaire was developed based on the DINESERV model and it contained 24 statements about service quality grouped into five categories (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy). All the participants were asked to rate on a 5 point Likert scale of importance (with “1” indicating *Least important* and “5” indicating *Most important*) value that they give to each statement about restaurant service quality from the customer’s standpoint. Customers in the restaurant needed to rate how important these statement are for them, while managers and employees needed to rate how important they believe specific service quality elements (translated into sentences) are for the restaurant

customers. The second part of the questionnaire was asking participants to divide 100 points to five service quality dimensions (again translated into sentences) based on the importance from the customer's standpoint. This particular question was taken from the SERVQUAL instrument for assessing service quality. The final part contained demographic questions (age and gender) while for the managers and employees a question regarding the level of education was added.

Pilot study was conducted on March 8, 2018 which included five people (college professor and four senior students) who were checking the questions and making suggestions for improvement. After the pilot testing, minor wording changes were made to questions #5 and #12. The final version of questionnaire in Croatian language was developed on March 9, 2018. The complete sets of questionnaires can be found at the end of the appendix section (Questionnaire 1 and 2).

The research was taking place from March 13th, 2018 to March 24th, 2018. Researcher administered the questionnaires for manager and employees which were collected in the first two days of survey. Total of three manager questionnaire responses and 30 employee questionnaire responses were obtained in all three restaurants. On the third day of the survey process the researcher explained to managers and employees how to administer the survey for customers. Total of 70 surveys were given to local customers (people from Dubrovnik or Croatian speaking customers) in all three restaurants. Customers were chosen randomly. If the customer refused to fill out the questionnaire, the survey was given to other customer and the refusals were not tracked. All the customers were assured with privacy and confidentiality of their responses. Total of 63 valid customer questionnaires was obtained at the end of the survey process.

Data was analyzed by using the IBM SPSS Statistic. Data was analyzed for reliability, means, standard deviations, correlations and frequencies. In addition, ANOVA test (analysis of variance) was used to determine whether there are some significant differences between the responses of three participant groups and to compare mean scores (averages) of each participant groups. T-test was used to determine significant differences between two groups (customers and employees).

Significant level was determined at $p \leq .05$.

RESULTS

The total sample for this research was comprised of 96 usable questionnaire responses (N = 96), indicating response rate of 96%. Out of 96 responses, 63 respondents were restaurant customers (65.6%), three were managers (3.1%) and ultimately 30 respondents were restaurant employees (31.3%). The total number of employees' responses was highest from restaurant "A" compared to other two restaurant involved in this research. Customers' and managers' responses were equality distributed among all three restaurants (A, B and C). In terms of the gender, 56.3% of respondents were female while 43.8% accounts for male respondents (Table 1). Majority of the restaurant guests were aged between 26 - 35 years (19.8%) (Table 2) and majority of them visits restaurants (A, B or C) once a month (31.3%) (Table 3). In terms of qualifications, most of restaurant employees have high school degree (24 %) while all three managers have bachelor's degree (Table 4).

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of six item scale concerning tangibles as the element of service quality ($\alpha = 0.65$), five item scale concerning the reliability element of service quality ($\alpha = 0.8$), four item scale testing the responsiveness element of service quality ($\alpha = 0.48$), five item scale testing the assurance element ($\alpha = 0.73$) and finally four point scale testing the empathy element ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Pearson correlation test was used to reveal correlations between variables of service quality elements (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy). This test showed that all variables were correlated. However, the strongest correlation was found between reliability and responsiveness variables ($r = 0.47$, $p = 0.00$, $p < 0.01$), as well as between the reliability and assurance variables ($r = 0.66$, $p = 0.00$, $p < 0.01$). Additional correlation data is available in Table 5.

First 24 questions of the questionnaire were tested for mean and standard deviation which included all three respondent groups ($N = 96$). Frequency test revealed that the reliability variable is considered the most important ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.53$), while the least important variable was the tangibles variable ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.69$). Additional frequency data on the overall importance of service quality elements can be found in Table 6.

Moreover, the frequencies test was done to determine whether all three respondent groups rated service quality elements the same. The test revealed that restaurant customers and employees rated these elements the same (most important for them is the reliability element followed by responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles as the least important variable). Managers differ from other two groups in their ratings (most important for them is the responsiveness element followed by reliability, assurance, empathy and tangibles as the least important element). Means and standard deviations for each group on this matter can be found in Table 7.

In addition, first 24 questions of the questionnaire were tested for significant difference by using ANOVA test. This test showed that there are no significant differences between respondent groups. Since the category of managers was much smaller than the other two, T-test was run to compare two dominant groups; restaurant customers and the employees. T-test revealed that there is significant difference between customers ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.54$)

and employees ($M= 4.10$, $SD=0.76$), $t(91) = 2.09$, $p(0.039)$ for the assurance element of service quality. In addition, difference was detected between customers and employees regarding the empathy element of service quality with customers rating it as more important ($M= 4.14$, $SD=0.79$) than employees ($M=3.79$, $SD=0.86$), $t(91) = 2.04$, $p(0.044)$.

Significant differences between variables were not based on differences on the basis of respondents' gender or age group, as revealed by ANOVA test.

Each question from each category of service quality elements was tested by using the ANOVA test to determine in which question there is a significant difference in terms of the level of importance that respondent groups assign to that particular question. For the tangibles element, the significant difference ($sig. = 0,010$) was detected for the question number one ("Restaurant has available parking"). Customers rated that question high on importance ($M= 4.05$, $SD. = 1.11$), followed by employees who rated it slightly neutral on the level of importance ($M= 3.27$, $SD. = 1.41$) and ultimately managers who rated the question as neutral ($M = 3.00$, $SD. = 1.00$). In addition, ANOVA test detected significant difference ($sig. = 0.001$) for the question number five from tangibles category ("Restaurant has neat and clean toilets with the availability of all toilet amenities"). Managers rated that question high on the level of importance ($M = 5.00$, $SD. = 0.00$), followed by customers ($M = 4.87$, $SD. = 0.38$) and ultimately employees rated that question lower than other two categories ($M = 4.27$, $SD. = 1.11$). From the assurance category, the question number 17 ("The staff will make sure that the guests feel comfortable and satisfied") revealed significant difference among groups ($sig. = 0.022$). This question was rated the highest in the group of managers ($M= 4.67$, $SD. = 0.58$), followed by customers ($M= 4.56$, $SD. = 0.69$) and ultimately employees rated this question lower than other two groups ($M= 4.00$, $SD. = 1.26$).

ANOVA test found another significant difference (sig. 0.26) for question number 21 coming from empathy element of service quality (“Staff can predict individual needs and wants of the customers”). Customers rated this question as slightly important (M= 3.84, SD. = 1.05), managers rated is slightly lower than customers (M= 3.67, SD. = 0.577) and ultimately employees rated it the lowest (M= 3.13, SD. = 1.38). In addition, the last question again from the empathy section revealed significant difference (sig. = 0.010) (“Staff with their actions make guests feel special during their stay”). This question is very important to managers (M= 5.00, SD. = 0.00), to customers (M= 4.37, SD. = 0.747) and ultimately, employees rated this question lower than other two groups (M= 3.77, SD. = 1.382). Other questions revealed differences among groups, but no other significant differences were detected.

The second part of the questionnaire asked from participants to allocate 100 point to five sentences each representing one element of service quality. Frequencies test revealed that three groups assigned higher number of points to the question representing tangibles variable of service quality (M= 24.28, SD. = 11.65), followed by assurance variable (M= 21.04, SD. = 9.65), then reliability variable (M= 19.36, SD. = 7.75) followed by responsiveness variable (M= 17.78, SD. = 6.64) and ultimately empathy variable (M= 17.43, SD. = 7.66).

In addition, ANOVA test was again used to determine which restaurant (A, B or C) had the lowest gap between managers’, customers’ and employees’ responses. Restaurant A was detected with 0.05 significant difference connected with the assurance element of service quality (Table 8).

For the restaurant B, no significant differences were observed among responses from three groups (Table 9). In addition for the restaurant C, significant difference of 0.019 was detected for the responsiveness element of service quality (Table 10).

DISCUSSION

Similar research done by Oubre and Brown (2009) suggested that managers overrate the quality of service offered in fine dining restaurants in the USA, while employees underrate the importance of specific service quality dimensions when compared to responses from customers. Findings of the current study are consistent with those of Oubre and Brown (2009) because majority of statements in the questionnaire (13 out of 24) were ranked the highest on the level of importance by managers, followed by customers and ultimately by employees who had the lowest mean score for these particular questions.

However, the findings of this research do not support the previous research done by Markovic, Raspor and Segaric (2010) who claim that customers value tangibles and reliability elements of service quality the most. In addition, the results of this research contrast the results of a research done by Stevens, Knutson and Patton (1995) who did the similar research in the USA and found out that in restaurant industry customers value reliability element of service quality the most, followed by tangibles, assurance, responsiveness and empathy elements. The results of this study indicate that customers value reliability element the most followed by responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles element being classified as least important. The same response was found for employees while managers were different in their responses by rating responsiveness element of service quality the highest on the level of importance.

Other part of questionnaire developed for this research was dealing with the allocation of 100 points to statements representing service quality elements, which was taken from the SERVQUAL instrument for assessing service quality. What is surprising is that the results of this particular question do not confirm the previously mentioned results regarding the importance of service quality elements. On this particular question the study found that the most important service quality element for respondents was the tangibles element followed by

the assurance, reliability, responsiveness and ultimately empathy. The author claims that this particular question should not be considered as valid and correct because SERVQUAL instrument is often criticized because of its inability to reflect in depth on the importance of specific service quality elements. In addition, since the original questionnaire was translated from English language into Croatian, it seems possible that these results are due to some issues connected with the translation process which might have contributed to the misleading results given by this particular question.

The results of this research proved the hypothesis that there is a significant gap between managers', employees' and customers' perceptions on the importance of service quality elements in Dubrovnik fine dining restaurants. Thus, the second hypothesis claiming that managers and employees in Dubrovnik restaurants do not know what customers expect was proven as well. In addition, the results from this study confirm the benefits of triadic approach of assessing service quality in restaurant industry when compared to dyadic approach.

One surprising finding of this research was that managers overrate the importance of service quality elements when compared to customers. The author connects this result with their level of education. All three managers have bachelor's degree and are aware of some trends happening in the restaurant industry. These trends have proven that nowadays the food quality is considered a norm while service, experience and even personalized approach to customers is something that will truly differentiate one restaurant from the extensive competition around and which is considered the greatest competitive advantage that restaurants can have. Rating specific service quality elements higher than customers is not a concern because this, according to the author, means that managers are on the good way of providing service and experience which will go above the needs and expectations of customers while creating the "wow" effect. However, the challenge remains in transferring the knowledge that managers have to their employees.

Customers, on the other hand, in the majority of questions placed lower importance on specific service quality elements when compared to managers' responses. The author claims that this result was not a huge surprise because the target population for this research were local people (coming from Dubrovnik) who might not be competitive in evaluating restaurants as places where food quality is a norm and where experience and personal touch are in the focus. This, on the other hand, can be a result of restaurants mostly focusing on tourists and customizing their offer or even their entire operations to the needs of tourists. Restaurants, analyzed in this project, are quite successful in that because when looking at Trip Advisor ratings (done mostly by tourists), all three restaurants were rated with the average grade of 4.5. However, significant gaps found when analyzing these restaurants from local people standpoint, do not by all means give them the same grade; Restaurant B should be rated the highest because in this particular restaurant, no significant gaps were found while restaurant C should be rated the lowest since the biggest gap was found there. The author claims that Dubrovnik restaurants do not focus enough on local people, their needs and wants which can be perceived as huge miss opportunity especially during the low season when local people could contribute positively to the increase in profits of these particular restaurants.

The low mean results of employees in most of the questions are a huge concern. Again, the author connects this result with the level of education since most of the employees have high school degree as their highest degree achieved. Employee turnover can be an issue as well because in these particular restaurants (to the author's knowledge), there are couple of permanent employees while other employees change quite often. Employees represent the strongest link between the service provider and its customers. Employees have the power in their hands to determine what customer really needs and wants and employee in this way can make sure that all individual needs and wants are fulfilled which will definitely benefit the reputation of that particular restaurant and in this way contribute to the repeat business.

Restaurant managers and owners could benefit from the results of this research the most. Results imply the existence of the “Knowledge gap” (not knowing what customer expects) in Dubrovnik fine dining restaurants. After the analysis of the results, managers should place importance on educating and training their staff in order to fully meet the expectations of their local customers. Restaurant owners and managers can use the instrument developed for this research, to periodically assess service quality from three different perspectives and to determine the existence of some similarities or differences in rankings which could again be used for training the employees to improve the overall service encounter.

On the other hand, the results of this research indicated that there are seven statements which were rated the highest by customers which indicate that both manager and employees have room for improvement in understanding what customer perceives as important in one restaurant.

Difference in the overall importance of service quality elements should concern the managers, because they place the responsiveness element higher on level of importance while employees and customers place the reliability element of service quality on the first place. Author claims that managers are concerned too much with providing prompt service while that is not what customers value the most. They value consistent and accurate service more than prompt service. Managers must understand that rushing during service delivery will not benefit their business because the perceived service quality, from the customers’ standpoint, might be in danger and many mistakes can happen by following this approach. More focus should be placed on consistency and delivery of accurate service. That will benefit the image of the restaurant the most. On this particular example it is visible how managers have to listen to their employees because, based on results of this research, employees know that customers value reliability element the most. Only the combined efforts to change and improve service will work out. Managers should strive to break down the hierarchy in their restaurant and,

with the help of the owners, allow the restaurant to become a “Learning Organization” where everyone can learn from everyone for the benefit of the organization itself. This is the future of every business and the sooner this becomes incorporated in restaurant business, the more chance that business will have to survive in this highly unstable and competitive environment. This “shared knowledge” approach will be beneficial to restaurants to finally understand and learn what customer really needs, wants and expects and only in this way will the “Knowledge gap” be finally closed.

The findings in this report are subject to at least three limitations. First, this research deals only with one city in Croatia. Second, only three fine dining restaurants have been analyzed providing the researcher with relatively small sample size of managers and employees to draw some big conclusions from. Third, only one type of restaurant has been analyzed and only local Dubrovnik customers were invited to participate.

This research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation. Further research might investigate service quality in other Dubrovnik restaurant types to compare and contrast the results. In addition, as mentioned several times in this paper, Dubrovnik restaurants mostly focus on tourist, so another suggestion would be for restaurant owners and managers to conduct the same research including tourist as customer respondent group to see whether some gaps exist there and compare the results with the results obtained from this research.

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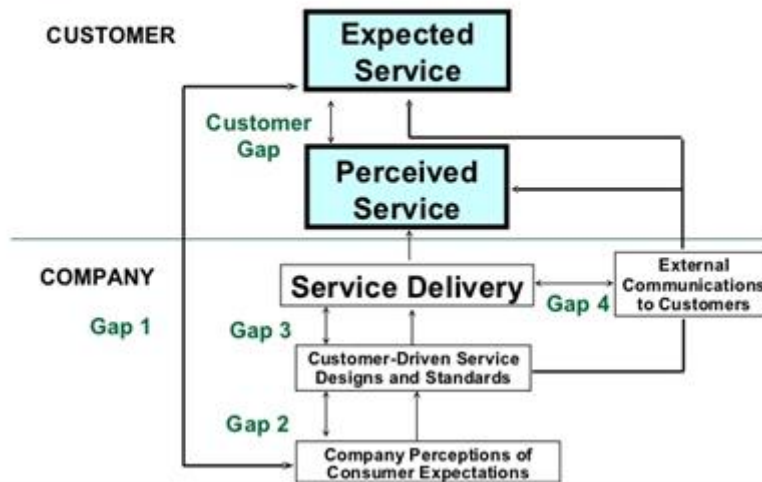
[Dubrovnik_Dubrovnik_Neretva_County_Dalmatia.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurants-g295371-Dubrovnik_Dubrovnik_Neretva_County_Dalmatia.html)

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APPENDIX

Figure 1. Gaps model of Service Quality

Gaps Model of Service Quality



Retrieved from <https://www.slideshare.net/richakeswani/gap-model>

Table 1. Gender

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	42	43,8	43,8	43,8
	Female	54	56,3	56,3	100,0
	Total	96	100,0	100,0	

Table 2. Age

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	33	34,4	34,4	34,4
	16-25	7	7,3	7,3	41,7
	26-35	19	19,8	19,8	61,5
	36-45	15	15,6	15,6	77,1
	46-55	12	12,5	12,5	89,6
	56-65	7	7,3	7,3	96,9
	66+	3	3,1	3,1	100,0
	Total	96	100,0	100,0	

Table 3. Frequency of arrival

		Frequency of arrival			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	33	34,4	34,4	34,4
	every day	6	6,3	6,3	40,6
	every week	18	18,8	18,8	59,4
	once a month	30	31,3	31,3	90,6
	not a regular customer	9	9,4	9,4	100,0
	Total	96	100,0	100,0	

Table 4. Qualifications of employees and managers

		Qualifications			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	63	65,6	65,6	65,6
	high school	23	24,0	24,0	89,6
	associate degree	3	3,1	3,1	92,7
	Bachelor's degree	6	6,3	6,3	99,0
	Doctorate	1	1,0	1,0	100,0
	Total	96	100,0	100,0	

Table 5. Correlations of service quality elements

		Correlations				
		Tangibles_scale	Reliability_scale	Responsiveness_scale	Assurance_scale	Empathy_scale
Tangibles_scale	Pearson Correlation	1	,365**	,261*	,377**	,310**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,010	,000	,002
	N	96	96	96	96	96
Reliability_scale	Pearson Correlation	,365**	1	,472**	,658**	,410**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000	,000	,000
	N	96	96	96	96	96
Responsiveness_scale	Pearson Correlation	,261*	,472**	1	,515**	,446**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,010	,000		,000	,000
	N	96	96	96	96	96
Assurance_scale	Pearson Correlation	,377**	,658**	,515**	1	,641**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000		,000
	N	96	96	96	96	96
Empathy_scale	Pearson Correlation	,310**	,410**	,446**	,641**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,002	,000	,000	,000	
	N	96	96	96	96	96

Table 6. Overall importance of service quality elements

		Statistics				
		Tangibles_scale	Reliability_scale	Responsiveness_scale	Assurance_scale	Empathy_scale
N	Valid	96	96	96	96	96
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3,8663	4,6021	4,5208	4,2979	4,0365
Std. Deviation		,68766	,53390	,59395	,62509	,76947

Table 7. Groups' preferences for service quality elements**Category = customers**

		Statistics^a				
		Tangibles_scale	Reliability_scale	Responsiveness_scale	Assurance_scale	Empathy_scale
N	Valid	63	63	63	63	63
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3,9127	4,6540	4,5344	4,3873	4,1389
Std. Deviation		,68251	,45039	,51688	,53986	,71530

Category = managers

		Statistics^a				
		Tangibles_scale	Reliability_scale	Responsiveness_scale	Assurance_scale	Empathy_scale
N	Valid	3	3	3	3	3
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3,8333	4,8667	4,8889	4,4000	4,3333
Std. Deviation		,72648	,23094	,19245	,52915	,14434

Category = employees

		Tangibles_scale	Reliability_scale	Responsiveness_scale	Assurance_scale	Empathy_scale
N	Valid	30	30	30	30	30
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3,7722	4,4667	4,4556	4,1000	3,7917
Std. Deviation		,70911	,68145	,75039	,76067	,86623

Table 8. Restaurant A – Significant Differences Detected

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tangibles_scale	Between Groups	,303	2	,152	,256	,775
	Within Groups	21,913	37	,592		
	Total	22,216	39			
Reliability_scale	Between Groups	1,699	2	,849	2,590	,089
	Within Groups	12,132	37	,328		
	Total	13,831	39			
Responsiveness_scale	Between Groups	,229	2	,115	,420	,660
	Within Groups	10,101	37	,273		
	Total	10,331	39			
Assurance_scale	Between Groups	2,667	2	1,334	3,246	,050
	Within Groups	15,204	37	,411		
	Total	17,871	39			
Empathy_scale	Between Groups	2,391	2	1,196	1,753	,187
	Within Groups	25,234	37	,682		
	Total	27,625	39			

Table 9. Restaurant B – Significant Differences Detected

		ANOVA ^a				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tangibles_scale	Between Groups	,832	2	,416	,971	,392
	Within Groups	11,576	27	,429		
	Total	12,408	29			
Reliability_scale	Between Groups	,132	2	,066	,383	,685
	Within Groups	4,643	27	,172		
	Total	4,775	29			
Responsiveness_scale	Between Groups	,854	2	,427	1,819	,182
	Within Groups	6,335	27	,235		
	Total	7,189	29			
Assurance_scale	Between Groups	,681	2	,340	1,364	,273
	Within Groups	6,738	27	,250		
	Total	7,419	29			
Empathy_scale	Between Groups	,526	2	,263	,518	,602
	Within Groups	13,715	27	,508		
	Total	14,242	29			

Table 10. Restaurant C – Significant Differences Detected

		ANOVA ^a				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tangibles_scale	Between Groups	1,838	2	,919	2,538	,101
	Within Groups	8,329	23	,362		
	Total	10,168	25			
Reliability_scale	Between Groups	,425	2	,213	,710	,502
	Within Groups	6,881	23	,299		
	Total	7,306	25			
Responsiveness_scale	Between Groups	3,260	2	1,630	4,744	,019
	Within Groups	7,903	23	,344		
	Total	11,162	25			
Assurance_scale	Between Groups	1,462	2	,731	2,025	,155
	Within Groups	8,304	23	,361		
	Total	9,766	25			
Empathy_scale	Between Groups	1,680	2	,840	2,052	,151
	Within Groups	9,416	23	,409		
	Total	11,096	25			

Questionnaire 1 – Customer feedback**UPITNIK**

Istraživanje očekivane restoranske usluge na području grada Dubrovnika

U svrhu prikupljanja podataka ljubazno Vas molim da zaokružite za svaku tvrdnju na skali od 1 do 5 (gdje je 1 nevažno, a 5 vrlo važno) koliko je Vama kao gostu restorana važno da :

Restoran ima dostupan parking.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran ima prostor za čekanje (ukoliko Vaš stol nije spreman).	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran nudi jelovnik sa fotografijama jela.	1	2	3	4	5
Raspored sjedenja u restoranu osigurava privatnost.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran nudi uredan i čist toalet sa dostupnošću svih potrepština (wc papir, sapun i papirnati ručnici).	1	2	3	4	5
U restoranu Vas poslužuje uredno, čisto i prikladno odjeveno osoblje.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran poštuje prethodno dogovoreno (zakazano) vrijeme.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran brzo otkloni probleme vezane uz kvalitetu usluge (ukoliko dođe do grešaka ili propusta).	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran pruža pouzdanu, dosljednu i cjelovitu uslugu.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran izdaje ispravan račun.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran poslužuje hranu točno po narudžbi gosta (uključujući posebne zahtjeve).	1	2	3	4	5
Kvaliteta usluge u restoranu biva optimalna i na visokom nivou čak i za vrijeme povećanog obujma posla (vrijeme ručka ili večere).	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran pruža odgovarajuću uslugu na vrijeme.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje obraća dodatnu pozornost na posebne zahtjeve gostiju (alergije, intolerantnost na hranu, individualne preferencije).	1	2	3	4	5
Učestali gosti restorana uživaju poseban tretman.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje izdvoji dovoljno vremena za detaljno pojašnjavanje i odgovaranje na sva Vaša pitanja.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje se vidno potruđi da se osjećate ugodno i zadovoljno.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje je voljno, kompetentno i kvalificirano dati točne informacije o jelima, sastojcima, načinu i potrebnom vremenu pripreme jela.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje se brine za Vašu osobnu sigurnost.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže dobro osposobljenim, obrazovanim i iskusnim osobljem.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje može predvidjeti Vaše individualne želje i potrebe.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje je suosjećajno i brižno.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje zastupa najbolji interes gosta.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje svojim postupcima čini da se Vi osjećate posebno tijekom Vašeg boravka.	1	2	3	4	5

Navedeno je pet značajki koje se odnose na restorane i usluge koje nude. Željela bih znati koliko je svaka od tih značajki važna za gosta restorana. Podijelite ukupno 100 bodova među pet značajki prema tome koliko Vam je svaka značajka važna iz perspektive gosta restorana. Provjerite da li zbroj Vaših bodova čini ukupan zbroj od 100 bodova.

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1. Izgled restorana, opreme, osoblja i ponude. | _____ bodova |
| 2. Sposobnost osoblja da obavlja tražene usluge pouzdano i precizno. | _____ bodova |
| 3. Spremnost osoblja da pomogne gostima i pruži brzu uslugu. | _____ bodova |
| 4. Znanje i uljudnost osoblja te njihova sposobnost da zadobiju povjerenje gosta. | _____ bodova |
| 5. Brižna i individualna pažnja koju restoran pruža svojim klijentima. | _____ bodova |

UKUPNO : 100 bodova

U sljedećim pitanjima molim Vas zaokružite odgovor koji Vas najbolje opisuje:

Spol

- Muško
- Žensko

Da li ste čest gost ovog restorana?

- a) Da, dolazim skoro svaki dan
- b) Da, dolazim skoro svaki tjedan
- c) Povremeno, jedanput mjesečno
- d) Ne, ne posjećujem često ovaj restoranu

Dob

- 16 - 25 god.
- 26 - 35 god.
- 36 - 45 god.
- 46 - 55 god.
- 56 - 65 god.
- 66 + god.

Preporučio/la bih ovaj restoran zbog

- a) Izvrsne usluge
- b) Lokacije
- c) Vrijednosti za novac
- d) Sveukupnog ugođaja
- e) Kvalitete hrane

Hvala na sudjelovanju!

Questionnaire 2 – Manager feedback

UPITNIK

Istraživanje očekivane restoranske usluge na području grada Dubrovnika

U svrhu prikupljanja podataka ljubazno Vas molim da zaokružite za svaku tvrdnju na skali od 1 do 5 (gdje je 1 nevažno, a 5 vrlo važno) koliko Vi kao manager restorana mislite da je gostu važno da:

Restoran ima dostupan parking.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran ima prostor za čekanje (ukoliko stol za gosta nije spreman).	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran nudi jelovnik sa fotografijama jela.	1	2	3	4	5
Raspored sjedenja u restoranu osigurava privatnost.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran nudi uredan i čist toalet sa dostupnošću svih potrepština (wc papir, sapun i papirnati ručnici).	1	2	3	4	5
U restoranu goste poslužuje uredno, čisto i prikladno odjeveno osoblje.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran poštuje prethodno dogovoreno (zakazano) vrijeme.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran brzo ukloni probleme vezane uz kvalitetu usluge (ukoliko dođe do grešaka ili propusta).	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran pruža pouzdanu, dosljednu i cjelovitu uslugu.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran izdaje ispravan račun.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran poslužuje hranu točno po narudžbi gosta (uključujući posebne zahtjeve).	1	2	3	4	5
Kvaliteta usluge u restoranu biva optimalna i na visokom nivou čak i za vrijeme povećanog obujma posla (vrijeme ručka ili večere).	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran pruža odgovarajuću uslugu na vrijeme.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje obraća dodatnu pozornost na posebne zahtjeve gostiju (alergije, intolerantnost na hranu, individualne preferencije).	1	2	3	4	5
Učestali gosti restorana uživaju poseban tretman.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje izdvoji dovoljno vremena za detaljno pojašnjavanje i odgovaranje na sva pitanja gostiju.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje se vidno potrudi da se gosti osjećaju ugodno i zadovoljno.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje je voljno, kompetentno i kvalificirano dati točne informacije o jelima, sastojcima, načinu i potrebnom vremenu pripreme jela.	1	2	3	4	5
Osoblje se brine za osobnu sigurnost gosta.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže dobro osposobljenim, obrazovanim i iskusnim osobljem.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje može predvidjeti individualne želje i potrebe gosta.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje je suosjećajno i brižno.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje zastupa najbolji interes gosta.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje svojim postupcima čini da	1	2	3	4	5

se gosti osjećaju posebno tijekom njihovog boravka.					
---	--	--	--	--	--

Navedeno je pet značajki koje se odnose na restorane i usluge koje nude. Željela bih znati koliko je svaka od tih značajki važna za gosta restorana. Podijelite ukupno 100 bodova među pet značajki prema tome koliko Vam je svaka značajka važna iz perspektive gosta restorana. Provjerite da li zbroj Vaših bodova čini ukupan zbroj od 100 bodova.

1. Izgled restorana, opreme, osoblja i ponude. _____ bodova
2. Sposobnost osoblja da obavlja tražene usluge pouzdano i precizno. _____ bodova
3. Spremnost osoblja da pomogne gostima i pruži brzu uslugu. _____ bodova
4. Znanje i uljudnost osoblja te njihova sposobnost da zadobiju povjerenje gosta. _____ bodova
5. Brižna i individualna pažnja koju restoran pruža svojim klijentima. _____ bodova

UKUPNO : 100 bodova

U sljedećim pitanjima molim Vas zaokružite odgovor koji Vas najbolje opisuje:

Spol

- Muško
- Žensko

Stupanj stručne sprema

- Srednja stručna sprema
- Viša stručna sprema
- Visoka stručna sprema
- Magistar znanosti
- Doktor znanosti

Poredajte sljedeće značajke po stupnju važnosti koju gosti pridaju ovome restoranu (gdje je 1 najvažnija, a 5 najmanje važna značajka):

- Izvrsna usluga _____
- Lokacija _____
- Vrijedost za novac _____
- Sveukupni ugođaj _____
- Kvaliteta hrane _____

Hvala na sudjelovanju !

Questionnaire 3 –Employee feedback

UPITNIK

Istraživanje očekivane restoranske usluge na području grada Dubrovnika

U svrhu prikupljanja podataka ljubazno Vas molim da zaokružite za svaku tvrdnju na skali od 1 do 5 (gdje je 1 nevažno, a 5 vrlo važno) koliko Vi kao osoblje restorana mislite da je gostu važno da:

Restoran ima dostupan parking.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran ima prostor za čekanje (ukoliko stol za gosta nije spreman).	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran nudi jelovnik sa fotografijama jela.	1	2	3	4	5
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U restoranu goste poslužuje uredno, čisto i prikladno odjeveno osoblje.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran poštuje prethodno dogovoreno (zakazano) vrijeme.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran brzo ukloni probleme vezane uz kvalitetu usluge (ukoliko dođe do grešaka ili propusta).	1	2	3	4	5
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Restoran izdaje ispravan račun.	1	2	3	4	5
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Osoblje je voljno, kompetentno i kvalificirano dati točne informacije o jelima, sastojcima, načinu i potrebnom vremenu pripreme jela.	1	2	3	4	5
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Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje može predvidjeti individualne želje i potrebe gosta.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje je suosjećajno i brižno.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje zastupa najbolji interes gosta.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoran raspolaže osobljem koje svojim postupcima čini da	1	2	3	4	5

se gosti osjećaju posebno tijekom njihovog boravka.					
---	--	--	--	--	--

Navedeno je pet značajki koje se odnose na restorane i usluge koje nude. Željela bih znati koliko je svaka od tih značajki važna za gosta restorana. Podijelite ukupno 100 bodova među pet značajki prema tome koliko Vam je svaka značajka važna iz perspektive gosta restorana. Provjerite da li zbroj Vaših bodova čini ukupan zbroj od 100 bodova.

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2. Sposobnost osoblja da obavlja tražene usluge pouzdano i precizno. _____ bodova
3. Spremnost osoblja da pomogne gostima i pruži brzu uslugu. _____ bodova
4. Znanje i uljudnost osoblja te njihova sposobnost da zadobiju povjerenje gosta. _____ bodova
5. Brižna i individualna pažnja koju restoran pruža svojim klijentima. _____ bodova

UKUPNO : 100 bodova

U sljedećim pitanjima molim Vas zaokružite odgovor koji Vas najbolje opisuje:

Spol

- Muško
- Žensko

Stupanj stručne sprema

- Srednja stručna sprema
- Viša stručna sprema
- Visoka stručna sprema
- Magistar znanosti
- Doktor znanosti

Poredajte sljedeće značajke po stupnju važnosti koju gosti pridaju ovome restoranu (gdje je 1 najvažnija, a 5 najmanje važna značajka):

- Izvrsna usluga _____
- Lokacija _____
- Vrijedost za novac _____
- Sveukupni ugođaj _____
- Kvaliteta hrane _____

Hvala na sudjelovanju !