

SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL BASES OF CONCEPTS OF SERVICE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY IN HOTEL BUSINESS

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Abstract: The quality of service in hotel industry is an important factor of successful business. The existing trend of complete quality management in hotel industry ensures the achievement of competitive advantage of hotel companies and is therefore the subject of contemporary research into service quality in hotel industry. The concept and the conceptual model of service quality is indispensable if we wish to understand the genesis of service quality and potential gaps in quality.

Keywords: Accommodation, guests, tourists, reception, management.

Introduction. The hotel business in the world economy is regarded as a very specific type of entrepreneurial activity, which is the basis for the growth of national tourism forming a certain country brand in the eyes of the international community, carrying a huge potential for a sustainable income to the state budget and contributing to the expansion of foreign economic activity of the state through a system of integration links and specifics of building the hotel management systems. At the same time, the problem of quality management in the hotel business has been relevant at all stages of economy operation, but it acquires special significance during the transition of the post-socialist industrial economy to sustainable development. At present, increasing the level of products (services) quality of the hotel business is the key strategic task of any organization, company and firm. The main reason should be an increasing competition in the domestic and world markets, leading to the need for more and more active application and development of quality management systems based on international standards. The concept of service quality in the hotel business is inextricably linked with a branch of the management system such as managing the quality of products (services), which is understood as the activity carried out when creating and using or consuming products in order to establish, maintain and support the required level of its quality.

The hotel industry has changed beyond recognition over the past few decades in the countries with post-socialist economy. There are great opportunities, both for success and failures, in this field of activity today, as never before. Today's guests expect high service standards from the hotel. This is a new challenge for executives of the hotel enterprises, whose main focus until recently has been on operational management of production. Development of new approaches to the development and maintenance of a competitive hotel infrastructure becomes an urgent need, since it is the primary responsibility for creating an efficient business. The hotel business in the countries with post-socialist economy is one of the most promising and rapidly developing types of services that generates millions in revenues. Hotels are businesses with their own products, markets, technologies, methods of arranging multiple processes and management systems, the study of which allows to reveal the prospects for the growth of the overall impact on society and on the state from their operation.

The hotel business takes an important place in the hospitality industry in the countries with post-

socialist period of development, as its wide and diverse nature encompasses elements of the industry sectors related to it – for instance, food, recreation and entertainment, etc.; therefore, the hotel business demonstrates a broader and more diverse organizational structure than other sectors of the industry. Any enterprise in the hotel business is known to be forced to guarantee certain standards and terms of service that would be initially understandable and attractive to them, if it seeks to attract and retain its customers. These standards are set by classification systems developed by the relevant government bodies or business associations. However, there was no such advertisement in post-socialist countries, which would not say that the offered goods or services were of the highest quality. The service companies have never been so concerned about the quality of goods and services before. This is due to the fact that quality had the greatest impact on the viability of service enterprises. The history of many modern hospitality industry corporations proves that the quality allowed to achieve a leading position in that field. The provided services must meet the requirements that assume additional convenience for consumers, attractiveness and prestige of services. 40 to 70% of the gross national product is currently created in the service sector around the world. The pace of accelerated development and the priority of the service sector in the geoeconomic space have become the most significant economic phenomenon in the second half of XXth and early XXIst centuries. The issues of the services sector development and the specifics of the hotel business operation are largely reflected in the economic literature in the papers of foreign scientists.

The hospitality industry has a reputation for being short-term oriented. Often, in this fast moving industry, there is a large amount of “fire-fighting” that occurs. When problems arise seem to completely surround the hospitality manager, survival is key. Thus, simply handling the problem and moving to next is the pattern of activity. Long-term planning and serious thought seems to be often overlooked. Ancient wisdom continuously reminds the human being that, “if you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there” (said the Cheshire Cat to Alice in *Through the Looking-glass* by Lewis Carroll written in the 1800s). The same can be said for effective planning and implementation by circumspect hospitality leadership. The hospitality industry offers products and services that are often “me-toos” and similar to undifferentiated commodities such as salt or gasoline. Anybody can spend the money to build a beautiful hotel, but not everybody can produce superior service quality. And, meeting customers’ expectations, as we have seen above, translates into service quality. Those hospitality organizations that deliver service quality escape the “commoditization” of the hospitality industry: they “stand-out” from their competitors. This differentiation leads to competitive advantage as well as other benefits. Some major benefits of delivering service quality are:

1. Retaining Customers – This means “repeat business.”
2. Referrals – Satisfied customers are happy to generate positive word-of-mouth.
3. Avoidance of “Price” Competition – If your organization is seen by customers as the same as others, then your product/service is essentially undifferentiated or like a commodity. As mentioned above, Differentiation is a strategy upon which to effectively compete. Price strategy is another way to compete, however this may not always be possible or desirable. Attaining service quality allows competition based on a differentiation strategy.
4. Retention of Good Employees – Employees like to work for a “quality” organization.
5. Reduction of Costs – When quality is achieved, costs of correcting problems (after they have occurred) is reduced. Since a focus on quality stresses preventative maintenance, then these costs are reduced. Of course, many other costs are reduced such as lowering employee turnover and the cost of having to motivate uninspired employees.

Literature review: The concept of service quality has emerged as a major strategic theme in services marketing research (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Harrington and Akehurst, 1996, Antony et al., 2004). Since its inception in the late 1970s the philosophy of service quality has been the subject of many conceptual and empirical studies (Harrington and Akehurst, 1996; Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988).

The hotel industry is experiencing increased competitive pressures as a consequence of the combined effect of the worldwide economic recession, technological advancement and globalisation (Harrington and Akehurst, 2000). The intense competitive hotel environment has modified the service delivery ethos and has promoted the importance of adopting a quality ethic.

This development has triggered a considerable increase in research on the management of quality in recognition that service quality aspects have the greatest strategic differentiation potential for achieving sustainable competitive advantages (Harrington and Akehurst, 1996; 2000; Morgan and Piercy, 1996; Ekinici and Riley, 2001). Service quality has become an important research topic because of its perceived relationship to costs (Crosby, 1984), profitability (Buzzel and Gale, 1987), customer satisfaction (Bolton and Drew, 1991), customer retention and positive word of mouth (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990).

Indeed, quality is believed to have replaced price as the determining factor in consumer choice (Harrington and Akehurst, 2000). In that respect managing the quality dynamic is regarded as a comprehensive approach to improving the way of running a business (Rajagopal et. al, 1995). In support to those views the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (1994) states that customer driven quality is a key strategic business issue that must be an integral part of overall strategic business planning. Thus, linking issues relating to service quality and strategy, this had previously been addressed as separate concerns (Harrington and Akehurst, 2000).

There is a suggestion in the reviewed literature that until in the mid 1990s strategy literature had not been concerned with service quality; and conversely service quality literature lacked a strategic dimension (Powel, 1995). Thus strategic management research and practice remain unclear and under examined while existing empirical studies lack rigour and theoretical support and thus remain a key area for extension of the quality concept (Powell, 1995; Pruett and Thomas, 1996; Harrington and Akehurst, 2000).

Parasuraman et al. (1985) defined service quality as a gap between customers' expectations and the performance they actually receive whilst Asher (1996) suggest that quality is the degree to which a customer's perceived expectations are met based on a subjective judgement of the service transaction.

The review of service quality definitions is important to the study as accurate knowledge of what customers expect is the first and perhaps the most critical step in delivering service quality. Furthermore, the controversies that belie service quality implementation may stem from the difficulties that surround the definition of the quality concept (Robinson, 1999).

Customer segmentation

Customer segmentation is an important part of marketing and pricing as it allows you to define groups of travelers that visit your hotel and address them differently. For example, business travelers have different needs and preferences than backpackers on a budget, so you have to know your customer and be ready with the offers that fit each group.

However, there are more possible categories that you might want to identify and market to than just "*business vs leisure*". Some typical segmentation criteria are

- demographic factors (age, gender, marital status, etc.),
- the trip's purpose (business, sport or entertainment event, family vacation, wedding, etc.),
- stay duration,
- traveler status (new, returning, or regular),
- booking channel (direct, through an OTA, or walk-in), and so on.

Each customer group provides opportunities to gain extra profit -- if you do it right. For example,

you might offer discounts to your loyal customers, create tour packages for families, or negotiate rates with companies that have many business trips.

Further analysis can help you discover important trends in customer behavior. You might find out that some customer groups have a high rate of cancellations or no-shows, so it makes sense to focus your marketing efforts on other segments. Here, the technique that can help predict such disruptions is demand forecasting.

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