

The importance of quality in tourism and hospitality

Dr. Soultana Tania Kapiki

Definition of quality in hospitality

Quality in the hospitality industry is defined as “the consistent delivery of products and guest services according to expected standards”. Increasingly, guests are willing to pay more when they visit hospitality properties offering service that meets or exceeds their service expectations.

By creating value for the guest, the hospitality business can manage successfully to retain its guests. Managers must recognise the importance of client retention, since the attraction of a new customer is regarded to be more expensive and time consuming.

Components of quality

The components of quality in the hospitality industry that can be used to develop and implement a quality service system are the following*:

1. Consider the guests being served
2. Determine what the guests desire
3. Develop procedures to deliver what guests want
4. Train and empower staff
5. Implement revised systems
6. Evaluate and modify service delivery systems.

*From the book "Foundations of Lodging Management" by Hayes D. et al.

Consider the guests being served

- It is important for managers to know as much as possible about all of the guests being served (e.g. business executives, senior citizens, young couples, etc. having dinner at the hotel restaurant). They do this by using marketing tactics and by recognizing that basic service expectations are integral to the guests' experiences.

Determine what the guests desire

- Questioning process by managers as they “manage by walking around” during check-in, check-out, at the restaurant, etc.
- On-line questionnaires or comment cards
- By asking the hotel’s employees.

Develop procedures to deliver what guests want

- Two of the best ways to make procedures more guest-friendly are to benchmark and to utilize cross-functional teams of employees.
- *Benchmarking* is the process of understanding exactly how your property does something and determining how it is done by your competitors.
- *Cross-functional teams* are made up of staff members from each area in the hotel who meet and consider ways to improve work methods.

Train and empower staff

- When new procedures are implemented to better meet the guests' service expectations, employees must learn (*be trained on*) new work methods.
- *Empowerment* is the act of granting authority to employees to make key decisions. For example employees have a responsibility to please guests. Empowered staff members are allowed to make decisions about how this is to be done.

Implement revised systems

- Assume a hotel has received numerous guest complaints about room cleanliness.
- In the traditional housekeeping model a guest room is cleaned by a single housekeeper. After the room is cleaned it may be checked by a supervisor to make sure it has been properly prepared for the next guest.
- What if instead, a cross-functional team determined that two housekeepers could clean the room together and do an effective self-inspection at the end of the cleaning process?

Evaluate & modify service delivery systems

- Managers cannot solve problems unless they are aware of them. While this seems obvious, some managers do not take advantage of a simple customer feedback system (questionnaires, comment cards, etc.). It is much easier to retain existing guests than to continually find new ones.
- The solution to the problems will involve a new policy, training, purchase of tools or equipment and/or changes to the operating procedures.

Other tools for improvement

Apart from the Surveys of Satisfaction (questionnaires) and the Benchmarking process, there are some other tools to monitor quality of products or services and achieve continuous improvement in the tourism industry:

- ❖ Mystery Guest/ Mystery Shopper (a technique of secretly visiting companies / organisations in question, to check the quality of services provided and to prepare and submit feedback reports to management).
- ❖ Market Evaluations (market reports analysing critical issues, such as competition and pricing policy, useful for defining the company's strategic policies and marketing).
- ❖ Audit Reports (inspection, correction and verification of business accounts audits, conducted by independent auditors).

Mechanisms for quality recognition in the tourism and hospitality services

There are various mechanisms aimed at delivering quality in tourism services.

The two main reasons for establishing quality labels for accommodation via some form of classification scheme are to: inform consumers, enabling an informed choice to be made that is based on some measure of quality; encourage investment and quality improvement by setting a standard that owners seek to reach and maintain.

Two forms of measurement are commonly used: physical measures (e.g. size of rooms) and quality of service.

Quality standards and labels

The existing quality standards and labels include:

- ❖ The star classification system (hotels are rated from one to five stars). Another hotel rating process is that of the American Automobile Association-the AAA Diamond program (hotels and restaurants are rated from 1 to 5 diamonds).
- ❖ The tripadvisor.com, a travel website with accommodation ratings that are based on consumer opinions as submitted to the site.
- ❖ The International Standards Organisation (ISO). There are several series of standards and some of them can be applied to the tourism sector.
- ❖ Eco-labels have increasingly been established. The first labels to be developed were originally “green labels”, aimed at improving the environmental management of hotel establishments but have since extended to other sectors of the tourism and travel industry.

The European foundation for quality management (EFQM) - <http://www.efqm.org/>

- The European foundation for quality management was created to promote a standard approach to management for all organisations operating in Europe to contribute to ensuring sustainable, quality practices.
- The main characteristics of EFQM are that it expresses a facilitator and advisor role, it does not deliver certification to companies and organisations, but it awards prizes to best companies.

The European foundation for quality management (EFQM)- Mission, Vision, Values

Mission: As a European Foundation, it inspires organisations to achieve sustainable excellence by engaging leaders to learn, share and innovate using the EFQM Excellence Model.

Vision: A world striving for sustainable excellence.

Values:

- **Passionate about excellence**
 - They relentlessly promote excellence and everything they do inspires excellence in others
- **Building trust**
 - They generate trust through their reliable, open and transparent behaviour
- **Working in partnership**
 - They develop partnerships that generate mutual benefits for the community
- **Engaging people**
 - They embrace diversity and respect people's beliefs and opinions.

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award

- It is the highest level of national recognition for quality that a U.S. company can receive. It is administered by the federal government (National Institute of Standards and Technology, Commerce Department). The award promotes an understanding of quality excellence, greater awareness of quality as a critical competitive element and the sharing of quality information and strategies.
- The Baldrige Criteria apply equally to all business sectors, including service organizations, and are compatible with other performance improvement initiatives, such as ISO 9000. These organizations serve such diverse groups as luxury hotel patrons, the health care community, restaurant goers, financial customers, the oil industry, etc.

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in hospitality

- The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company has received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, from the United States Department of Commerce - the first and only hotel company to win the award; the first and only service company to win the award two times: 1999 and 1992.

The Leading Hotels of the World

(www.lhw.com/)

- The Leading Hotels of the World (LHW), is considered to be one of the most significant quality awards.
- The LHW is a prestigious luxury hospitality organization representing the world's finest hotels and resorts. Headquartered in New York City, the company has more than 450* members in 80 countries and offers the largest collection of luxury hotels, resorts and spas.
- Leading Quality Assurance is an affiliate quality inspection company providing assessment programs to improve the levels of operating performance of organizations in various industries. Incognito inspections are conducted to assess the performance of the different departments within an organization.

*Currently there are 12 Leading Hotels of the World in Greece.

The Leading Hotels of the World

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- A comprehensive report that details the client's fulfilment of over 1.200 standard points has proven to be an invaluable management tool for improving overall performance of an organization, as well as measuring individual employee performance and the need for capital improvements. The report also benchmarks the individual clients' performance against a database of 1.500 other organizations throughout the world.
- Information collected during the inspection process is then stored in a confidential database, and can provide some of the most comprehensive benchmarking data in the luxury worldwide market segment. In turn, clients of Leading Quality Assurance will be able to measure their service standards against other similar products in a particular destination, country, and region on a worldwide basis.