
ROLE OF FRONT OFFICE STANDARDS IN DELIVERING PERSONALISED SERVICE TO THE GUEST

Divya Thakur
Asst. Prof.
BCIHMCT
New Delhi

Neha Sahni
Asst. Prof.
BCIHMCT
New Delhi

Sumit Pant
Asst. Prof.
BCIHMCT
New Delhi

Abstract

This project aims to critically evaluate the impact of standards on the delivery of customer service from a hotel front office perspective. The literature is concerned with three key areas: Standards; customer service and customer satisfaction and finally front office. The project uses telephone interviews with front office managers from a sample organization as its source of data collection. The organization in question is Q hotels; the project uses a sample size of five front office managers from across Delhi/NCR. The project then compares the literature review with the results from the research to ascertain whether there is an agreement between the two. Where there is no agreement between principles and practice, a discussion is undertaken as to why this is the case. The conclusion re-addresses the initial aim of the project; it critically evaluates how standards impact upon the ability of front office to deliver excellent customer service.

Keywords: Standards, Front office, Customer service.

INTRODUCTION

A review of the literature highlights that standards, are not just a choice, rather they are a requirement for any hospitality operation. However, the role standards have played and the lengths to which it is discussed in the literature, in recent years, has varied significantly.

With this in mind a brief historical overview of the role that standards have played within the literature over the last 20 years is provided. The 1990's saw a focusing upon the need for standards, not only within branded operations but also within hospitality in general. Lockwood (1999) confirms this. (Panagiotou, 2004) In an earlier publication (1994), he argued that standards are a core element of any operation. Towards the end of the 90's into the millennium, the focus upon standards took a back seat as hospitality operations began to consider the idea of enhancing the 'customer experience'. In turn, through managing the customer experience, customer loyalty could be achieved but more important was the idea that managing the customer experience could ensure the survival of a business (Pizam & Ellis, 1999). However, whilst the idea of managing the customer experience was at the forefront of the literature, it was still evident that in order to deliver this there needed to be a relating back to implementing standards to ensure that what was being delivered was to a high specification (Gentile et al, 2007). Lockwood (1999) defines standards as being required to achieve consistent performance and to ensure the

meeting of guest expectations. Standards can be viewed as a promise of, and an approach to, quality. (Ismail, Brunel University, 2010.) Lockwood (1999) observes that in delivering standards and, in turn, quality, control procedures and work instructions are needed. Standards not only detail what is to be done, who is meant to be doing the task and how it is meant to be done (control procedures) but also specifications (work instructions). Heskett (1987) comments that operating standards are concerned with how a business positions itself i.e. what is it exactly that the customers want? It is the standards that dictate the service but what actually constitutes good service? Heskett raises some fundamental questions that hotel operations must ask themselves when founding their mission statement and when communicating to the public what it is they want to deliver. (SHAFAWU). Furthermore, Heskett's observation, regarding business positioning, is an important one; a hotel cannot set its standards without knowing or being able to identify its key consumers, for example, implementing operating procedures geared towards dealing with leisure guests will not be appropriate if the hotel is a business hotel. Standards are a key part of the overall operating strategy of any business. However, standards within operations must be realistic. Lockwood (1999), explains that high standards may offer guests a perceived value however, they inherently may incur high costs. (Ismail, Brunel University, 2010.) Furthermore, with the promise of delivering high standards, the standard operating procedures (SOP's) need to be as equally detailed and accurate as the standards themselves in order for staff to meet and help deliver them. Lockwood (1999), goes further, he comments that standards need to be in line with delivery systems. In addition to Lockwood's comments it can be observed that it is the quality and ability of staff to be able to deliver a standard of service that matches that of the standards set. Standards exist within branded hotels to standardize not only the service offered but also the product; in order to deliver standards and therefore quality there needs to be SOPs in place, as highlighted by Jones (1999). SOPs are seen not only as a form of quality control but also are to ensure cost and revenue control. Jones & Lockwood (2004,p40) define SOPs as comprising of: "a simple statement of policy, followed by paragraphs indicating directives, procedures, explanation of forms, records to be kept, positional responsibilities and coordinating relationships." The use of SOPs ensure standardization throughout operations yet also ensures that the standard promised to the guest will be delivered (Heskett, 1987). To conclude, the most succinct and accurate explanation of standards comes from Jones (1999, p95), who summarizes the importance and reasoning for standards being in place as presenting: "a focal point at the interface of customer requirements and operating performance that will determine, to a large extent, the success of the operation as a whole." Furthermore, the standards in place need to be as well as controlled and directed, as without them good customer service will only be achieved by accident as opposed to through design.

OBJECTIVES

In order to meet this aim, the following four objectives have been set:

1. To understand role of front office standards in delivering quality service to guest.

2. To understand which aspects of front office are most crucial for guest satisfaction.
3. To determine perception of front office managers towards service standards in delivering customer satisfaction.
4. To critically examine standards in delivering customer service.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this paper is to analyze the discrepancy gap between customers' expectation and perception towards service quality of the front office staff in a hotel whose identity is intentionally concealed to make the study technically feasible and a hypothetical name, say XYZ hotel, is used here for identification. SERVQUAL is widely recognized and used tool to measure the service quality of the front office staff in a hotel. Thus, SERVQUAL is used here as a tool to find the gap towards service quality of the front office staff in a hotel.

POPULATION & SAMPLE

Population of this study includes guests who are visiting to XYZ hotel and the samples of 120 respondents were selected based on convenience sampling method. Administration of Questionnaire The questionnaire was based on the SERQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al (1998) with 22 statements under five dimensions. Slight modification is made to attributes of service quality dimensions of original model of SERVQUAL in order to make the attributes more relevant to the front office staff service quality. The responses were captured in five point Likert scale and the gap score is calculated by deducting expectations from perceptions (E-P).

ADMINISTRATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

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DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The project will use the literature to form a theoretical framework from which further research will seek to test this theory (Gilbert, 1993). As a result, this uses a deductive approach. However, as qualitative data is being collected this coincides with an inductive approach, whereby the data gathered is analysed for patterns and connections . This is relevant as it allows the researcher to focus upon attitudes, opinions and experiences of front office managers. In order to ensure that the research is reliable, deduction will once again be used to analyse the research for statistical data. As a result, an element of a quantitative approach will be applied, through the monitoring of key words used and asking respondents to answer questions using a scale. Whilst the disadvantage of this approach is that it only looks at surface value , the use of induction

will seek to re-address this, through making connections and relationships with the literature and to produce meaningful insights.

SUMMARY

· From the analysis it is found that, the majority of the respondents are satisfied with the cordial reception, answering to queries, patience and tolerance of staff members while answering, it is evident with the mean value of 3.68, 3.59 and 3.59 respectively. But majority of the respondents are having the dissatisfaction in promptness and timeliness. · From the analysis it is divulged that most of the respondents are satisfied with the facilities like cot, lamp, dressing table, sofa sets, bed linen, teapoy and others bath cum toilets, cupboard, wash basin, kits, dialling facilities and audio systems which is evidently proved with the mean value of 3.74, 3.59, 3.42, 3.38, 3.33, 3.32, 3.29, 3.26, 3.2, 3.19, 3.19 and 3.14 respectively. But in average 30-50% of respondents show their dissatisfaction towards the facilities. · From the analysis it is found that most of the respondents are satisfied with the catering services like cleanliness, taste, quality, quantity, appearance, price, hygienic way of serving, time taken and behaviour of staff with the mean values of 3.69, 3.58, 3.46, 3.38, 3.33, 3.32, 3.3, 3.22 and 3.16 respectively.

CONCLUSION

The study has recommended various suggestions which may be helpful for the hotels to attract more potential customers and to sustain the existing customers. As of the hotels are concerned, it is not a primary tourist spot and it cannot depend on a floating customers, but instead of that, it should purely depend upon the regular customers, whom may be the business men or the employees associated with any organization or institutions within the local limit. So, the hotel must consider in retaining the customers by providing enormous facilities and enhancing the value addition as recommended in the research. When these suggestions are taken into account that will convert the hotels as profit centres. So, the hotels should try their possibilities and pay keen attention in the various facilities like, customer care, catering services, and other amenities.

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