

Quality Assurance Necessity and Mechanisms in Hotel Reception Departments Crete Case-A First Research

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Abstract: Quality is something we constantly ask for and target to, but we are always left with the notion that we can achieve more. The reason for that is because after good, there is definitely better (Andreas Metaxas, Maris Hotels Directing Adviser, where the first research took place). In 1994, the headquarters of the group decided to acquire in Maris hotels, a quality assurance system based on ISO 9000 certification. They decided to acquire ISO 9001 certification, considering that they need to certify the greatest possible number of activities and operations of the hotels that are identified with European Unions directions' requirements regarding tourism and quality fortification. These directions include booking, reception, cleaning, provisioning departments (kitchen, bakery, restaurant, bar), facilities (pool, gym), animation, material supply, equipment and facilities maintenance, biological purification. The research team decided to adapt the questionnaires to the operations of the reception department and to the needs of the certification and beyond. The research was initiated with interviews of all the tourist visitors in the hotels of Maris Group with a detailed record of the subordinate situation accompanied by a thorough collection of the remarks of the visitors.

Key words: Tourism, services, certification, hotel, research

INTRODUCTION

Being one of the biggest industries in the world, tourism is relative to many basic branches of the worldwide economy (Fennell, 2001). Therefore, tourism is the most important and rapidly evolving branch of world economy. It has also been acknowledged that tourism has evolved to the biggest industry world-wide, thus resulting in the creation of new tourist destinations (Doswellr, 1996). Tourism includes hotels, air companies, tourist operators, professional tourism companies, conference organization companies and tourism motivation, travel tourism organizing, car and boat letting, restaurants, shipping companies, transport companies, catering companies, advisor companies, etc. Humans continue to travel undirected by terms of when, who, where and why in a future travel. Throughout history, the need for traveling evolves along with time and money. For the next decade, there are indications that these factors will be constantly rising for the bigger part of earth's population. It is vital, though, to point out that the financial importance of tourism is clearly shown from its contribution to the global exportation, which is greater than electronic equipment, clothing and textile industry. The following study depicts 4 vital elements for tourist industry: Tourist

destination, tourist sights, transportation and lodging with feeding. Tourist operators function as mediators forming and promoting tourist products as in the following study.

The tourist services: Thus, tourist industries are affected by a number of factors some of which are considered as internal. By internal factors we refer to financial factors and human resources that can undoubtedly affect directly a company's operation. An insufficiency of financial resources, however leads to a lack in money that leads a company to failure. In addition to that, strategically correct choices on competition; a concrete internal structure and the different policies inherited may save or destruct a company. Recreation, that is the basis of traveling and the identification of its advantages can not obstruct the creation of undesired situations. One of the basic situations that could result in an unwanted outcome is lack of quality. The quality of offered services of the hotels of our country is lower when compared to corresponding categories of competitive countries. Giannopoulou Georgia-Anthoulas Tassos (2004). The problem is more obvious in developing and low-capacity regions, where a lack in acquiring specialized staff, a lack of infrastructure and other services is observed. Tourist services have to be

based on their quality. The waiter of a hotel may serve in the appropriate way, but should never show indifference. The receptionist, even if he should be serviceable in canceling a reservation, he should try hard to convince the client for the opposite. This, of course can not be considered as perfect service, as a cancellation does not imply the fulfillment of the customer. This is not the dynamics expected on matters of service, especially with reasonable arguments that are both client and company effective.

Hotel industry-hotel product: Hotel industry started to expand in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, but its current structure was formed after World War II. The development of technological methods, the improvements on work terms and financial development have led to the creation of a fertile ground for the fulfillment of personal needs, one which is exploration. The first problem one has to face when dealing with Hotel industry is definition. Both in Greek and in international bibliography the term is vague, as hotel industry is neither a science nor a theory, but practice. Later on, when analyzing the different underlying parameters, it was proven that hotel industry greatly affects the social, economical, ecological and cultural reality of each country. Surplus to that, the character of hotel product was made clear. These notions, besides determining the planning and programming of each hotel, define the capability framework of each company. Quality of service can not be easily defined, when referring to services. If a hotel room is not booked for more than one day, the potential profits are lost for ever (Keiser James, 1998).

To sum up, the essence of hotel product is mostly psychological, both in terms of motivation and in terms of client requirements, as it is not uniform. It consists of a great number of factors that should be maintained high in order to achieve selling it. Of course, a follow-up department of a hotel is reception department.

Reception services: In hotels, reception department is staffed by many employees that perform different tasks. If each employee is responsible for a part of the client's stay, then the reception staff can offer specialized services as well. Reception services include booking, arrivals, room and price assignment, costumer services, room record keeping, billing and arrangements and client record keeping. Reception is responsible for coordinating the offered services to the clients and assuring their satisfaction (Roupas Wasilios-Laloumis Dimitrios, 1998).

In order to achieve the satisfaction of both the customers and the employees, it is necessary to create a

reception work description, specialties and shifts. The reception department is responsible for many distinguished tasks as

- Arrivals and room rack operation, money manipulation, billing registration, departure customer service.
- Mail and notification reception, customer direction, filing.
- Answering machine and telephone center operation, getting up booking, booking registration and filing Karagiannis (1997).

The successful operation of reception tasks also requires general skills acquired through training or experience. The hotel reception can be the primary centre of attention to its potential clients mostly from movies depicting an employee asking the client to sign a book. That makes reception the hotel's most interesting department where thousands of activities take place since the hotel works 24 h a day (Denney *et al.*, 1995). Practice skills, knowledge and expertise can constitute a valuable employee. Last but not least, skills required for reception are mathematic inclination (for logistics) and typing skills (for computer). In any case, the enterprise planning includes certain elements that in turn consist of sub elements. The total, enterprise planning that is, is the result of mixing, in a sensible way, these different parts and composes the operational axis of the enterprise. Each department and especially the reception have to offer and improve the quality of the provided services to the customers. The personnel's ability to reply to enquiries, to offer alternative solutions and to satisfy the requirements of the customers is very important for the hotel to achieve its mission (Kapiki-Piweropoulou Tanja, 1998).

A characteristic and recent example is hotels. Some foreign tour operators decided that from 1996 and onwards would only send their customers in Greece to ISO certified hotels. The reaction to this decision was ambiguous. Many hotels considered this decision as a surplus obstacle, while others accepted it under the scope that their quality surpassed ISO certification. The reaction depends mostly on the culture of the person in charge (hotel owner or manager). However, in the rest of Europe there are institutions that have already acknowledged the necessity of quality. For example, European Union founded EFQM ((European Foundation for Quality Management) in 1998 targeting on assuring the competitive advantage for European enterprises by a customer-service-oriented quality assurance.

Quality: How can quality be defined? Quality is the set of properties and characteristics of a product or a service that affect the ability of the latter satisfying confirmed or stated needs (Varifakis *et al.*, 1989). This implies that the importance of achieving quality on a social group level (whether this is working, or productive unit or service) is very important. Of course, motivation, training, practice, programming, research and application is required in achieving quality (Antoniou, 1990). Comparing a product enterprise and a service enterprise, we can observe that that a product enterprise can easily define the qualitative characteristics of the product and the margin they should be in, in order to declare that the product is qualitative or not. In services, this is more difficult because the analysis and definition of a service's qualitative characteristics is difficult itself, not to mention the margin they should be in. This implies a minimum and a maximum threshold. These thresholds are cost-dependent mostly and as an example one can consider that a hotel should have clean public use facilities. This is a qualitative characteristic. If these areas are cleaned at least once per day and not more than twice per day, then a margin is created. If the hotel decides to follow a policy below minimum threshold then quality is lost, whereas if the managers decide to exceed the maximum threshold then the cost is too high. Quality assurance system is planned so as to offer both assistance and effective quality practice methods for the enterprise. Quality oriented enterprises should operate on a quality management system (James, 1998). Quality management system, thus, is the most common work plan and control administration targeting on time and cost efficiency. It should also be targeting on a gradual quality improvement. It should also be well-defined and validated. The employees should be able to produce objective evidence of a well-planned and controlled quality approach. Thus, the system should be revised periodically and should be reviewed by the owner or the manager of the enterprise. Revision and review files should be created. In order to acquire ISO 9001 certification, an enterprise should plan, produce, test, offer to the market, provide technical assistance or post-sales activities of a service or product. If it produces, tests, offers it to the market and provides service then the ISO 9002 certification is more appropriate, while if the enterprise just checks the final product then the most appropriate certification is ISO 9003. Quality and the way it is achieved are therefore important for the enterprise profile and operation. The aforementioned applies only for the reception department. However, assuring a high level of hygiene for food and beverages that a tourist enterprise offers is accomplished through alternate systems as HACCP.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A step before-preparing for the research: As the general manager Mr. Metaxas mentioned during research: We decided to face any technological, social, financial and personal challenges, by accepting national standard requirements of our supplied services, with the ultimate goal of providing full customer satisfaction. Research coordination was assigned to an external counselor and to a group of enterprise members, under guidance and participation of the general manager. It was decided that the certification should be first be given to the older and bigger hotel unit of the group (Creta Maris hotel), with the perspective of extending the certification to the rest of the hotel units of Maris group, with which the central hotel unit shares common operations and functionalities (F and B department, bakery, kitchen etc). Therefore, the progress and achievement of the enterprise can only be realized when a dedicated administration unit accepts the challenge of evolving and lead a new total quality strategy and creation of appropriate circumstances that would allow everybody to adapt to this strategy (Logothetis, 1992).

Research motivation: The general and organizational process of quality assurance covered the following areas of interest:

- Publishing-approval-distribution and check of documents.
- Enterprise plan, responsibilities and duties.
- Review process of quality assurance planning.
- Education and training.

The specialized process of quality assurance covered:

- Offered services.
- Customers.
- Good supply.
- Security and hygiene.
- Maintenance.
- Special services.
- Planning and developing new services.
- Reception.
- Booking.
- Provisional department (restaurant, kitchen, bar, banqueting).

More specifically, client subject were classified into the following categories:

- Sales promotion.
- Booking.

- Booking programming and checking.
- Reception and client assistance.
- Main courante.
- Customer complaints and corrective actions.

Supplier approval and more specifically:

- Supplier registration.
- Material choice.
- Material ordering.
- Material delivery counter and check.
- Material storing and distribution.

The area of supply, approval, marking, storing and distributing materials was classified as a top priority as food is an especially elegant vector in hotels. The evaluation and choice of distributors was based on criteria developed by the quality committee and the counselors. The experience and directions given by the head of the kitchen (chef), warehouse-keeper and all engaged members were also taken under serious consideration.

Application steps of quality policy: Quality policy of the group is defined by the following parameters:
The group services should:

- Satisfy the clients' expectation and requirements.
- Comply with the requirements of the legislation.
- Respect and protect the environment.
- The effort for constant improvement should be unceasing, based on constant check of the supplied services.
- The administration department should create team spirit in offering quality services.
- The enterprise makes every possible effort in order to make clear to the employees its dedication in providing quality services.

All necessary financial resources are provided in order to be used in:

- Constant infrastructure improvement.
- Human resources training and education.
- The operation of an effective quality system targeting on prevention of unsatisfied customer cases and prevention of unwanted effects from the operation of the enterprise on the environment and society.

Special attention was given to the biological cleansing system, with the aim of minimizing any kind of burden imposed on the environment by wastes. The target was achieved 100%.

In the main kitchen of the hotel, certain nutritional requirements, or allergic problems of the customers are hanged on a special table that are browsed through by the reception department and registered on a special booklet that is forwarded to the kitchen. The kitchen's and restaurant's personnel, check on these notices, so as to ensure that their nutritional demands are fulfilled. In addition to that, usual customers enjoy personal gifts from the hotel, if during their stay they happen to celebrate an anniversary of birthday.

Research undertaken: The research was undertaken during April-October 2004, on a specimen of 591 customers of Creta Maris hotel, located in Hersonissos Herakleion Crete. This hotel is the biggest hotel of Maris Hotels Group, certified with ISO 9001-140001. The group also owns Bella Maris, Silva Maris and Candia Maris hotels.

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Research methodology: It was asked from the customers to evaluate ISO 9001 and 14001 standards that the hotel had been awarded and the quality of service offered from Booking, Reception, Cashier's, Call Operator, Night Guard and Groom departments. The scale was 1 (Unsatisfactory), 2 (Insufficient), 3 (Satisfactory), 4 (Very good) and 5 (Excellent).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data information: According to clients' estimation, a mean value was calculated for ISO standards and each evaluated department per month. These values are shown in Table 1.

The clients presented a stable behavior during research time, evaluating higher the environmental standard (ISO 14001) than the operational standards (ISO 9001). This resulted in a higher mean value of the former (4) as opposed to the latter (3,93) shown in Fig. 1.

As for the each respective department, the highest mean value was presented by booking department (4.37), followed by reception and groom departments (4.35), the cashier's department (4.31), night guard department (4.29) and call operator department (4.27). As it is obvious, these evaluations present the extremely high quality standards inherited by Maris Hotels Group, which are beyond the typical requirements of ISO standards.

Table 1: Research result

	ISO 9001	ISO 14001	Booking	Reception	Cashier's	Call operator	Night guard	Groom
April	3.90	3.91	4.64	4.43	4.56	4.30	4.25	4.11
May	3.82	3.93	4.30	4.51	4.38	4.38	4.36	4.45
June	3.74	3.77	4.35	4.37	4.19	4.19	4.26	4.36
July	4.10	4.22	4.58	4.43	4.39	4.33	4.46	4.58
August	3.97	4.04	4.21	4.10	4.15	4.21	4.20	4.24
September	4.02	4.06	4.21	4.27	4.30	4.29	4.22	4.32
October	3.99	4.05	4.28	4.36	4.19	4.20	4.26	4.36
M.V.	3.93	4.00	4.37	4.35	4.31	4.27	4.29	4.35

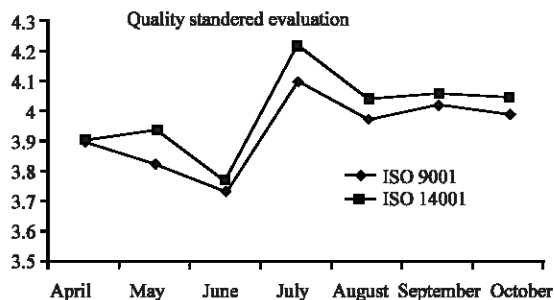


Fig. 1: ISO certificates evaluation

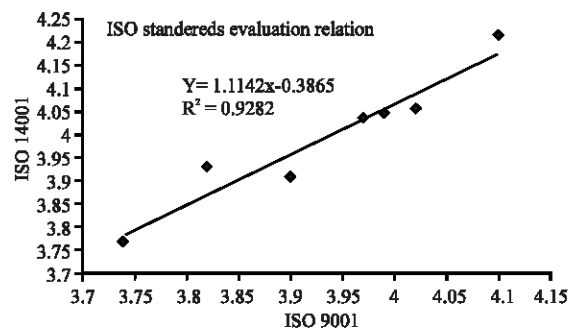


Fig. 2: ISO standerds evaluation relation

During acquiring and estimating the questionnaire results, the research team decided that despite the fact that ISO 9001 represents hotel operations and services, as opposed to ISO 14001 that represents environmental issues; both standards affected one another from the customer's point of view and there was a high interconnection between the evaluation of the quality standards and each department. This, according to the research team, was due to the fact that the client's were not able to evaluate the quality standards of the hotel as a whole and eventually their opinion was formulated according to their interaction with each reception department.

As for the interconnection between the two quality systems' evaluation, the estimation based on retrogression method enhanced statistically the empirical notion (Fig. 2) that there is a linear relation between the resulted mean values per system during research time.

Table 2: ISO 9001 evaluation factors

	Pearson correlation ISO 9001	Sig. (1-tailed) ISO 9001
ISO 9001	1.000	
Booking	0.101	0.415
Reception	-0.271	0.278
Cashier's	0.062	0.447
Call Operator	0.140	0.382
Night Guard	0.244	0.299
Groom	0.245	0.298

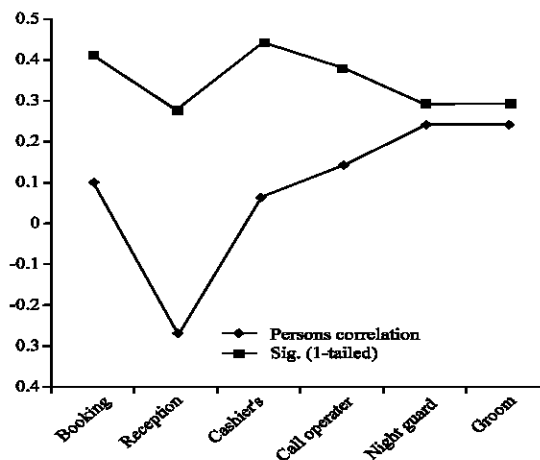


Fig. 3: Research results

From the estimation of ISO9001 standard evaluation, Table 2 and Fig. 3 table was formulated, showing that there is no statistical correlation between the mean value of the quality standard achieved and that of each respective department.

From the estimation of ISO9001 standard evaluation, Table 3 was formulated, showing that there is no statistical correlation between the mean value of the quality standard achieved and that of each respective department.

Despite the aforementioned, a further analysis of the data acquired using multiple retrogression method, showed Fig. 4, that both ISO 9001 standard evaluation and ISO 14001 standard evaluation, resulted from the total department evaluation, since ISO 9001 score results from the following linear formula:

$$Y_{ISO\ 9001} = 14.11 - 3.74X_1 - 2X_2 + 7.03X_3 - 9.66X_4 + 5.63X_5 + 0.38X_6$$

Where, $Y_{ISO9001}$ is the mean value of the standard and $X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6$ are the respective scores of booking, reception, cashier's, call operator, night guard and groom departments. The correlation is, in fact, definite since multiple assignment factor $R^2 = 1$.

Accordingly, ISO 14001 score results from the following linear formula:

$$Y_{ISO14001} = 12.87 - 4.23X_1 - 2.1X_2 + 7.2X_3 - 10.1X_4 + 7.35X_5 - 0.16X_6$$

Where, $Y_{ISO14001}$ is the mean value of the standard and $X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6$ are again the respective scores of booking, reception, cashier's, call operator, night guard and groom departments. The correlation is also definite since multiple assignment factor $R^2 = 1$ (Fig. 4).

Research outcome: We are in front of a dramatic change in the relationship between tourist organisations and their employees and their clients. The traditional sales can not be considered effective. A deeper company-client relation

Table 3: ISO 14001 evaluation factors

	Pearson Correlation ISO 14001	Sig. (1-tailed) ISO 14001
ISO 14001	1.000	
Booking	0.073	0.438
Reception	-0.171	0.357
Cashier's	0.038	0.468
Call Operator	0.265	0.283
Night Guard	0.430	0.168
Groom	0.448	0.157

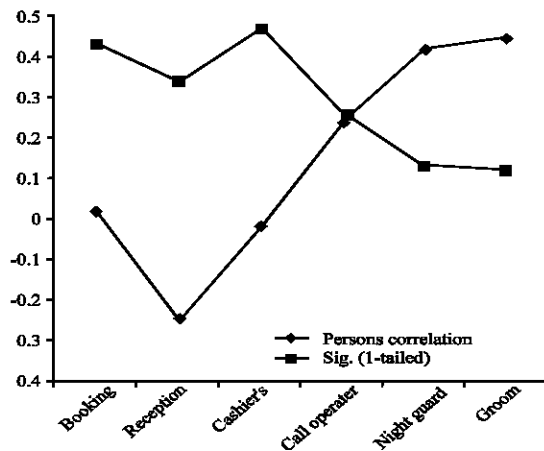


Fig. 4: Multiple assignment factor $R^2 = 1$

needs to be established, with the active performance of the employees in providing more complicated and specialized services, not only satisfying the narrower needs of the clients, but combining services characterized by brainwave and innovation. It is obvious, that Maris Hotels Group gained from the high score acquired by their customers, with regards to their services, thus resulting from maintaining high-quality standards policy. The statistical analysis of the research data enhanced the opinion that reception departments characterise the hotel unit and that the higher the quality of service they offer, the better the opinion formed by the customer.

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