

APPROACHES TO QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HOTEL INDUSTRY

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Abstract

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The aim of the paper is to present possibilities and specifics of quality management in hotel services with the focus on the Servqual model. Servqual works on the definition of five dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Demonstrating the practical application of Servqual in selected hotels in the Czech Republic is also a part of the paper. Input data have been gained by force of a primary field-research with the help of a quantitative research via questionnaires and deep interviews. The results of the Servqual score for individual dimensions of service quality have also been used to calculate a total weighted score for the examined hotels and to outline benchmarking utilisation possibilities.

quality management, tourism, customer satisfaction, hotel industry, servqual

In the period of global competition environment, when a lot of substitution products/services/destinations are offered, understanding the term of quality is transformed not only as an issue that is necessary to be solved but quality is seen especially as a competition opportunity. Especially in European destinations that are not able to compete with exotic areas in the prices of their services the high quality of services and their suitable combination for a specific product has become a crucial competitive advantage.

The quality management has become an essential part of the companies' management willing to success on the given market. In tourism there are three basic concepts of quality management applied presently: the concept of business standards, the concept of ISO standards and the concept of total quality management. In tourism especially big companies are holders of certificates according to ISO standards, for instance international hotel chains or airline companies. Nevertheless, on tourism market there are many medium and especially small companies for whom such a kind of management is unsuitable, not only from financial reasons. These companies often use

various certification programmes. Certification in general is defined as "a voluntary tool that evaluates, checks and provides a written pledge that a facility, a product, a process or a services meets specific standards. The label is awarded to those who meet or exceed basic standards." In the area of tourism certification has a long tradition, for example "Michelin" guides for Europe have existed since the 20th century. Labels, guarantees and certificates then draw the attention to the exceptionality of such offers. Some labels and schemes are of a government character, some are purely private, but often there is certain coexistence and co-financing a state-a private sector. Total quality management is based on the participation of all organization members with the aim to reach a long-term success by force of satisfying customers' needs and also to reach a benefit for all members of an enterprise and a company.

The aim of the following text is to show the possibilities and specifications of managing quality services in hotel industry with the particular aspect of the practical application of the Servqual model in the context of comparing the qualitative level of the services offered in selected hotel facilities.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The vast majority of authors engaged in the issues of marketing management in tourism come out from the work of Morrison (1995) who considers typical features of services (tangibility, ephemerality, variability) and then defines basic specifications of tourism services that are necessary to be considered in management: shorter service exposure; more distinct impact of psyche and emotions during purchasing services; the process of purchasing services is usually a combination of rational and emotional thinking; a bigger importance of the "outward side" of the offered services when a combined effect of this tangible evidence conditions evaluating quality; the emphasis on the level and image; the dependence on complementary companies; easier copying services; bigger emphasis on off-season promotion. Middleton and Clark (1994) add seasonality as a significant specification of tourism – it is important in the context of managing different client segments in various time periods.

The quality in tourism has to be considered in a complex way, i.e. in the context of the whole chain of partial services – so called Supply Chain; for instance from a correctly compiled, offered and mediated trip – the packet of services, providing information on the trip and the destination, through the correct realization of all partial services. What is more, in tourism it stands that a customer compares the result (so service quality) to his or her dreamt-up ideal that has been created on the basis of imaginations, advertisements or recommendations, up to the realization, i.e. consuming the service.

The authors Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) have significantly influenced the area of managing service quality. Their works on the topics concerning customer expectations, service quality and customer satisfaction represent one of the first theoretical approaches towards measuring quality of services from a customer's point of view. They are considered to be the authors of the statement that the satisfaction of a customer is given by the proportion between an expected performance and expectations of a customer.

According to Křížek (2011) customer expectations is formed by the complex of previous purchase experience, relevant knowledge (internet references, blogs, press news...) and topical information (e.g. promotional materials of a hotel). Each organization and an organization in hotel industry, too, should pay due attention to customer expectation that has a tendency to increase and vary according to topical trends. So, defining customer expectation correctly

is considered to be the first and most significant step in providing quality services (Zeithaml, Bitner, 2000).

Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) defined two types of expectations. The first one is a desired service that represents the level of service a customer wishes to obtain. A desired service is influenced mainly by personal needs (psychological, social, physical...) and a customer's purchase philosophy (a customer's approach itself towards the service). In case of hotel industry this can be expecting a good meal or the hotel staff professionalism. The second expectation is an adequate service that demarcates the verge of service acceptability. An adequate service can especially be influenced by temporal service intensifiers, perceiving competitive services, a customer's role and situational factors. Providing a customer with a constant level of a service all the time is very difficult. That is why so called zone of tolerance has been created that lies between a desired and an adequate service. The zone of tolerance defines to which level a customer is willing to accept differences in providing a service. It is different for individual customers and for various service attributes. At the same time it is a source of so called critical moments emerging during the meeting of a customer and a service provider. If a customer finds himself or herself in the zone of tolerance, everything is all right – a critical moment appears only when it is exceeded (Zeithaml, Bitner, 2000; Swarbrook, Horner, 2007).

When evaluating service quality a customer compares the perception of a service provided with his or her expectations. Nenadál (2004) defined three possible differences between a customer's expectation and perception. If a perceived reality and a provided value exceed his or her expectations, a customer's enjoyment occurs. If there is a concord between expectations and perceived reality we speak about a total customer satisfaction. The last case is so called limited satisfaction when a perceived reality is not identical with original customer's requirements.

For evaluating customer satisfaction we can use tools that give a service provider rather a basic picture of satisfaction (e.g. systems of complaints, mystery shopping, satisfaction survey, simple questionnaire surveys)¹ as well as more sophisticated methods (Gap², Kano³, PFI⁴, ECSI⁵) that are based on the models the aim of which is to operationalize service quality and customer satisfaction in such a way that they can be observed and measured better (Ryglová, Vajčnerová, Šácha, 2012).

The models of IPA and CIT also rank among more sophisticated models for evaluating service quality from customers' point of view. The IPA model

1 Kotler, 2001; Kotler, Keller, 2007; Mateides, Ďádo, 2002

2 Gap analysis: Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, 1990; Zeithaml, Bitner, 2000

3 Kano model: Kano, 2001; Mateides, Ďádo, 2002; Nenadál, 2004

4 PFI analysis (Priorities for Improvement): Hill, Brierley, MacDougall, 2003

5 ECSI (European Customer Satisfaction Index): Fornel, 1992; Mateides, Ďádo, 2002; Ryglová, 2007

(Importance-performance analysis) represents a procedure that searches for the relative importance of various attributes of a service compared to the performance of a given organization, product or destination. One of the most important contributions of this model is the identification of key areas for improving service quality (Hudson, 2008). The CIT method – measuring critical events based on collecting direct interviews with clients who describe their own experience with provided services. On the basis of evaluating conducted researches factors are then earmarked that positively or negatively influence perceiving quality of provided services. The technique of critical events is used especially in the first phase of service quality research (Vašítková, 2008).

The SERVQUAL model has taken an important position among the methods for evaluating service quality that have been applied so far. It is considered to be the first concept of monitoring customer satisfaction ever. Servqual was created in 1988 in the USA and since then it has undergone several improvements and revisions. It focuses on the performance of model component “service quality” in which quality is defined as the difference between expectations and real performance (Zeithaml, Bitner, 2000). With the aid of the Servqual model it is possible to set individual contradictions of the GAP model (Kano, 2001).

A research tool used for obtaining topical input data Servqual is in the present version represented by a questionnaire the objective of which is to learn a client's opinions on 21 quality features. These quality features are grouped into five dimension of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. In the process of measuring contradictions two different evaluations are required from clients; the first one finds out the level of a service expected from an outstanding service provider in the given branch and the second one reflects their perception of a service really provided by a certain organization (Zeithaml, Bitner, 2000). The difference between the evaluation of expectation and perception is formulated by means of so called Servqual score. If the real quality evaluation is higher than expected, it is a sign of quality. Then clients assign the weight to the features according to their subjective evaluation of importance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the Czech Republic there is not a unified system of service quality management that would specialize on the branch of hotel industry only. Quality in tourism in the Czech Republic is remarkably influenced by standards that cover the issues concerning managing quality, security and health. Nowadays we can observe a trend to approach quality on the basis of manager systems; business and branch standards are applied and this is done especially in hotel chains. About 100 companies

in the Czech Republic (MMR, 2010) implement the system of managing quality according to ISO standards. Accommodation facilities can also become members of a united international system of Hotelstars Union that unifies classification criteria within the frame of several European countries and so in a certain way it solves the standardization of quality. This way of certification is voluntary and has a recommendation character. In the area of gastronomy and catering there exists the system of HACCP that is given by the Czech Republic legislation dealing with the safety and harmlessness of a product. In particular, international and foreign hotel chains regularly work in the context of quality management with values of their clients' satisfaction indexes.

Since the year 2000 the strategic document “The National Policy for Quality Support” has existed in the Czech Republic. It is followed by „The Strategy of National Quality Policy in the Czech Republic for the period of 2008–2013”. One of the aims of this strategy is implementing a new system of standardization and certification of service quality in tourism (MMR, 2011). Ministry of Regional Development (MMR) has already begun a few projects concerning service quality in tourism – one of them is the system of service quality and innovations in tourism called CzechQuint. Then, MMR is planning to found The Institute of Quality of the Czech Republic – IKCR, the main function of which will be to create a national system of quality and to determine rules for awarding the label of quality “Q” that is inspired by similar systems from Spain, Switzerland or Germany, for example, and represents appreciating the work of individual business subjects; at the same time it will serve as a certain promise of verified quality of provided services for customers (MMR, 2011).

The Servqual application

For the practical application of the Servqual model for managing service quality in hotel industry two types of accommodation facilities were intentionally selected – hotels lying in the protected landscape area of Zdarske Vrchy. The first hotel is an independent accommodation facility in private ownership and the second one is an accommodation facility that is a part of a hotel chain. From the viewpoint of accommodation facilities classification these selected hotel can be ranked among those in the medium quality level. Not only their position but also the structure of predominantly home clients and the main orientation of the hotels are common features of these hotel facilities. They are especially visited for their characteristic position that provides visitors with the whole range of opportunities in the form of active resting, recreation, tourism and sports activities.

One of the partial objectives was to compare the level of service quality in competitive hotels on the basis of the Servqual model application by means of revealing a customer contradiction – gap, i.e. the

difference between expectations and perceptions of a customer.

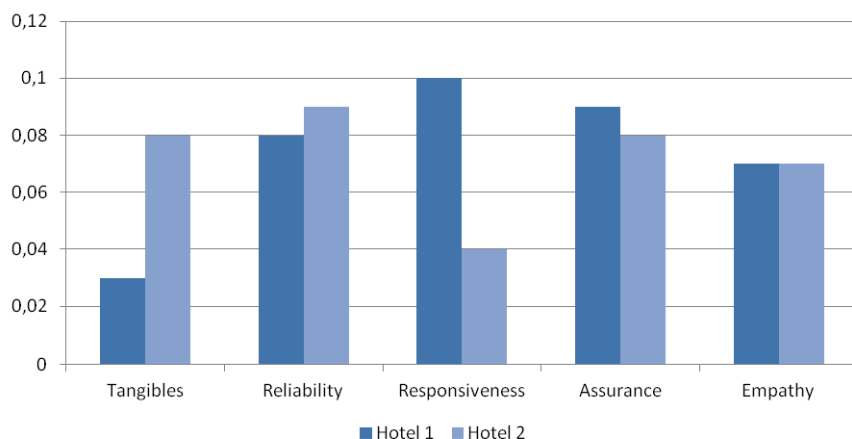
The input data of the model were obtained by means of a primary field research when using a quantitative research in the form of personal and written questioning in case of the customer gap and depth interviews for the gap on the service provider's side. The extent of the selective set was 152 responders – clients of hotel 1 and 106 responders from hotel 2. The basic conception of the questionnaire for hotel customers was based on standardized Servqual questionnaires. Suggested survey questions come from the five quality service dimensions mentioned above („tangibles“, „reliability“, „responsiveness“, „assurance“, „empathy“). Within the framework of the questionnaire the relative importance of individual attributes of a quality service for a customer is found out, too, and this is done by means of a distributive scale (a responder divides the complete sum of 100 points among individual quality features). The obtained weights are then used for calculating a weighted Servqual score. The structure of the questionnaire was slightly modified for the needs of the research in hotel industry – some questions in the basic Servqual questionnaire were reformulated and at the same time a few questions were even omitted due to their little relevance for the hotel branch.

The ranking of individual quality dimensions of the Servqual model according to importance came out equal for both researched hotels. The customers of the selected hotels considered *the influence of the environment = tangibles* to be the most important quality attribute – this is not that surprising as the environment of a hotel surrounds clients during their whole stay. The following no less important dimensions were *the ability to react = responsiveness, reliability and assurance*. The least weight was placed to *empathy*. The distribution of weights to individual service attributes was very balanced.

According to the obtained results the average customers' expectations and their average

perception almost agreed surprisingly in case of both hotels. The clients of hotel 1 had the highest expectations in case of the dimensions of *assurance* and *responsiveness*. Concretely, this concerned the professional behaviour of the staff, the behaviour eliciting trust and the speed during providing services. What concerns the dimension *tangibles* the guests expected the most concerning the appearance of the staff and the transportation in the hotel surroundings. The customers of hotel 2 also had the highest expectations in case of the attributes of *responsiveness* and *assurance*. After analysing individual features in a more detail the clients expected the most in case of the speed of providing services, the quality of meals and perfection in service provision.

The obtained positive weighted Servqual scores did not show any customer gap for neither of the researched hotels (pict. 1). The customer expectations were mostly equal to the perception of the service provided in reality. In some cases customer perception was even exceeded. In case of the first hotel the lowest score was found out in the dimension *tangibles* (0.03). During evaluating individual features of service quality two features were found – the overall appearance of the hotel and the hotel room – that had a negative score. At the same time the guests had the most remarks and complaints about these two features. Rather a low score was also obtained by the sports and technical equipment of the hotel. The second hotel had the lowest score in the dimension *responsiveness* (0.04). The guests remarked about and complained the most of the dimension *tangibles*, concretely the hotel equipment for children, sports and technical equipment of the hotel and the transportation on the surroundings of the hotel reached the lowest average Servqual score. The highest score in hotel 1 was obtained by the dimension *responsiveness* (0.10), in case of the second hotel it was the dimension *reliability* (0.09). Customer expectation referring to the dimension *tangibles* was more noticeably exceeded in case of the second hotel. The guests of



1: The comparison of the weighted Servqual score of the researched hotels
Source: adapted according Marková, 2012)

hotel 1 perceive the influence of the environment slightly worse than those of the second hotel. On the contrary, the expectations of the customers concerning *responsiveness* were more noticeably exceeded in case of hotel 1. The customers of hotel 2 fancied that the hotel staff could react to their requirements better.

The total weighted Servqual score between the two researched hotels reached almost the equal value in both cases. For hotel 1 the value of 0,0727 was calculated which is only a slightly higher value than the Servqual score of hotel 2 that reached 0,0704. For effective decision-making in the area of managing the quality of the services provided in the selected hotels it is inevitable to deal with the results of the Servqual score for concrete features of individual quality dimensions based on the applied model in detail.

Next partial objective was to reveal and calculate the contradiction on the management's side, which represents the difference between customers' expectations and perceiving these expectations by the management of the hotel. In Kano's GAP model it concerns so called "first gap" that is at the same time considered to be the most important gap on a service provider's side. The most frequent cause of this gap is insufficient knowledge of customers' needs and expectations or insufficient interaction between a hotel management and its guests.

The management's perception was surveyed for both hotels. However, in case of hotel 2 not enough relevant input data of the model were obtained, so below the results for only hotel 1 are presented – here 12 members of the hotel management participated in the analysis. The obtained results were used to compare average customers' expectations and the perception of these expectations by the hotel management. It was found out that in all surveyed dimensions except for the dimension "the influence of the environment = tangibles" customer expectation slightly exceeds the perception of this expectation by the hotel management.

In the next step the relative importance of service quality attributes of the hotel facility from the hotel management's point of view was surveyed. Then, it was compared to guests' results (Tab. I). The guests regarded the influence of the environment as the most important quality dimension – this was followed by the ability to react and reliability. On

the other hand, the hotel management assumed that reliability was the most important attribute when evaluating quality of services. Then they assigned the same weight to the attributes concerning the influence of the environment and the ability to react. The least weight – just like in case of the guests – they assigned to empathy.

The weighted score calculated for individual quality dimensions signalizes the possible contradiction between customer expectations and perceiving this expectation by the hotel management; it also considers the relative importance of individual attributes for both groups of responders. The contradiction on the service provider's side is expressed by negative figures. From the results for individual dimensions it is evident that there is a contradiction concerning the dimensions reliability and assurance. In case of these dimensions the hotel management estimated their customers' expectations incorrectly. The scores for other dimensions reach positive figures, so the hotel management has a chance to exceed their customers' expectations in these areas and so to increase their satisfaction. The total weighted gap score reaches the positive value of 0.001 that does not signalize a gap on the service provider's side. This value is almost zero, so according to these obtained results the hotel management almost perfectly reveals their customer's expectations; in some cases it is even able to exceed them. The total results are presented in table 1 as it follows.

Applying the Servqual model revealed the whole range of contributions for the area of managing service quality as well as a few imperfections. Especially the length of the questionnaire is the weakness of Servqual. Other facts can also be considered to be theoretical disadvantages of the model – for instance the fact that the model monitors especially the process of providing a service, which means that it surveys the level of individual service quality features and does not follow the overall impression or the overall satisfaction with the accepted service enough. This problem can be solved by adding questions that concern loyalty, in other words questions finding out the probability of a next visit to a hotel or possibly positive recommendations to potential clients. The defined dimensions of the Servqual model cannot be assumed to be totally universal as the number

I: The total results of measuring contradictions on the hotel 1 management's side

Dimension	Average weight (%)	Average customer's expectations	Average management's expectations	Gap score
Tangibles	20.00	5.59	5.55	0.32
Reliability	25.00	5.82	5.78	-0.33
Responsiveness	20.00	5.81	5.77	0.10
Assurance	19.17	5.94	5.90	-0.13
Empathy	15.83	5.76	5.72	0.04
Total weighted gap score				0.0010

Source: adapted according Marková, 2012

of dimensions as well as the number of features/statements within these dimensions should reflect to the context of the given service. For the needs of the hotel industry sector it is suitable to expand it with the dimension concerning the influence of the environment that includes features like the hotel locality, the quality of served meals or the appearance of a hotel room that have a significant impact on the perception of hotel services quality. During the practical application we can meet the problem of a client's concrete definition of his or her expectations towards selected features of service quality.

The Servqual model contributions for the area of managing services in hotel industry lie especially in various possibilities of using individual results of the model. The individual features of the model can operatively be adapted in the context of a surveyed service. The model enables to set the importance of individual service quality dimensions, and then it is also possible to identify key factors within individual dimensions that customers are the most and the least satisfied with. By means of the Servqual model not only the customer gap of the Kano's Gap model can be quantified but also those remaining contradictions on the service provider's side that make finding concrete causes of customer dissatisfaction possible. Provided that the quality of services is continually measured in a hotel, it is possible to conduct periodical comparisons of model results in individual periods and so to follow the development of individual variables of the model in time.

Evaluating the quality of services by means of customer satisfaction quantification can not be considered to be the only output of the model. The Servqual model can also be used in hotel industry as well as in other business branches for the following purposes:

Analysing target groups of customers: Servqual can also be used as a tool for segmenting customers. Within

the frame of individual segments a hotel can obtain additional information on customer expectation and perception, customer satisfaction or the relative importance of individual quality dimensions and so the results of the model among individual segments can be compared. In case of the surveyed hotels it could be interesting, for example, to compare the segments of common recreants and congress tourists.

Analysing customer expectation: the expectations of customers have a tendency to change all the time depending on topical trends, previous purchase experience, other people's references and so on. Servqual makes monitoring these expectations possible. Analysing customer expectation then shows which areas in the process of service provision a provider should focus on primarily.

Defining quality standards: the standards of hotel services should be based on customer expectation.

Benchmarking: The Servqual results can become a significant tool for comparing service quality in individual accommodation facilities. Not only competitors but also for example hotel chains within internal competition represent a great challenge; by means of Servqual they can compare and evaluate their hotels and to judge how these hotels succeed in satisfying their guests and at the same time to attest following given standards.

Evaluating internal quality: Customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by the internal quality of a company that is represented especially by the staff of the company. A dissatisfied employee can radically influence the process of service provision. Monitoring staff satisfaction should also be in every service provider's interest as they also have some expectations towards their employer. For such purposes Servqual can be used to reveal staff expectations and satisfaction. The following relation between the satisfaction of staff and customers is a subject of authors' further research.

SUMMARY

Managing quality of services represents a continuous process that can be demonstrated by the set of several activities. These are applying a suitable system of quality management, for example, then active participation of top management and all organization staff on managing service quality and – last but not least – it is measuring the effects of the system selected for managing service quality. The quality of services in hotel industry can be measured by customer expectation and perception when the contradiction between these two features is expressed by customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The paper shows the possibilities and specifications of managing service quality in hotel industry with the aspect to the Servqual model. Demonstrating the practical application of Servqual on selected hotels in the Czech Republic is also included. The input data were gained by means of a primary field research with the help of a quantitative survey in the form of questioning and depth interviews.

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