

Integrating Total Quality Management Philosophy in the Greek Tourism Sector

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Introduction

Quality is about meeting or even exceeding the customers' expectations. Nowadays most of the companies in all kind of industries pay lots of their attention to it because through continuous improvement of their offered products and services; they struggle for becoming better. This strategy is of vital importance in the tourism sector and especially to countries like Greece where tourism has a crucial role in the country's economic sustainability.

The tourism market contributes to a high extent into the endogenous development. Thus an emphasis in improving the quality is a thing to be done by all business units that want to be progressive and respond to challenges effectively.

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Methodology

The methodology that was used in this paper is the critical review of the current literature. Relevant literature selection was derived from popular online bibliographic databases, like Science Direct, Emerald, EBSCO host and scientific search engines like Google Scholar. Also, general search engines like Google have been used. The types of bibliographic sources included in the research are articles published on scientific journals, books, conference proceedings, company papers and studies, white papers, online sites and online journals. The selection of these literature sources was made on the basis of relevance to the topic of the paper and it is not exhaustive.

Literature Review

Total Quality Management (TQM)

“TQM is a process-oriented organizational philosophy focusing on quality management and aiming at customer satisfaction through the improvement of product and service quality” (Mehra et al. 2001). As it is commonly accepted, the term quality concerns the ability to meet or exceed what the customer expects. In order to do so, each type of organization needs to be aware of the characteristics that add value to the customer and lead to increased loyalty and satisfaction rates (Evans and Lindsay 2010). These are linked with offering improved quality of goods or services, cost reduction, sustainability, and increase in profits. Another definition of Quality Management was provided by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). In detail, quality management is seen as the activities which engage in the determination of quality objectives, responsibility, and overall quality policies. The latter are implemented in order to proceed to quality control, quality planning, quality improvement, and quality assurance.

The idea of TQM emerged due to the fact that quality has a rather broad scope and sense. It focuses on people rather than in quality control and aims at the customer satisfaction and the continuous improvement of product and service quality. In order to determine the parameters of the quality, specific components of organizations are useful. In specific, the parameters of quality should involve aspects such as human resource utilization, leadership, planning for quality, information and analysis, quality results quality assurance of products and customer satisfaction. Total Quality Management is a process that involves all employees within an organization at all levels.

After all, the key for future success within a mutable environment is to keep evolving though flexibility and adaption to changes. The process itself not only it involves but also engages the employees to establish procedures and standards in pursuit of fulfilling expectations. This is achieved strategically by giving an

emphasis on principles such as good understanding, sharing, and responding to customers through marketing concept and thus achieve a advantage against their competitors.

The Importance of TQM in the Tourism Sector

Nowadays, as Fayos-Sola clearly state the development requirements are considered to be integrated values. Those values depend mostly on tourism quality in all sectors of the respective economy and less on the economies of scale. It is important to note that tourism quality was based up to 1996 on economies of scale. To this end, current tourism-related businesses demonstrate an average product cost reduction orientation.

The main concept of Total Quality Management lies within the integration of the whole supply chain process. It is a management tool that enables organizations to monitor products and services provided from a different point of view which is pretty crucial. The customers' angle can provide a great opportunity to interfere with the planned and systematic procedures and activities that aim in developing customers' experience overall. In order to focus on quality assurance an emphasis should be given on quality control and design, especially during the delivery of the service or good (Evans and Lindsay 2010).

A quality service management system is mainly results-oriented. As Reyad mentions, end-users are mostly interested in service characteristics. Thus, quality service management deals with the providers of those services that have tangible results to demonstrate to their customers. Under this perspective, high quality of service is guaranteed during their stay. Additionally, staff knows how it can commit to the high-quality service provision (2005). Regarding the hospitality sector, the concept of quality is widely discussed concerning delivery of products and guest services. Organizations should decisively perform according to expected standards.

When such offers to customers meet or even exceed their expectations then they are willing to pay more for this extra quality that they received. As Hayes, Nine-meier, and Miller imply service quality is actually an experience for the guests during their stay/visit in lodging units (2011).

When tourism-related organization creates value for its customers then it is more likely to maintain these customers also in the future. This is crucial because experience shows that retaining the same customers can be less expensive and less time consuming than trying to get new customers, Trivellas et al. (2015a, b) and Vasiliadis et al. (2015). Within a highly competitive market like Greece where rivalry is intense, the idea of focusing in quality is increasingly accepted especially by hotel businesses no matter the size. Customers also seem to appreciate this idea and they are becoming more conscious regarding their rights and their anticipations. Soteriadis and Varvaessos also confirm that high service quality has been used by hotels in order to establish competitive advantages. To this end, under this perspective quality management can assist hotel companies to increase their

competitiveness (2006). Development can be achieved through stepping into the shoes of customers, consider what their expectations are and carefully design the succeeding procedures. In addition, by empowering the staff and through appropriate training a company can secure the constant implementation of the process and secure it. Furthermore, self-evaluation via measuring tools is very important in order to apply modifications and potential changes. Feedback is necessary and quality standards needs to be updated and keep up with trends.

Discussion

TQM has contributed to the solution of various organizational problems and to the organizational performance improvement (Joiner 2007). Nevertheless, there are strong evidence that the level of its implementation might differ among different organizations and especially hotels. Overall, though, TQM seems to have a positive influence in the performance of those organizations. The results are visible in all levels, from enforcement of teamwork and better reward systems till the empowerment of service details and customer feedback.

Trivellas and Reklitis (2014) also claim that “job satisfaction is directly related to staff’s values and opinions about the working conditions and the climate, human relations and communication, security and supervisory support, teamwork and flexibility”. Thus enabling the business is becoming more responsive to changes that arise from both internal and external sources. This leads to the mitigation of uncertainty in decision-making process and to the fulfillment of the customers’ needs appropriately. TQM and market orientation are related and are both catalysts to the performance of the organization. This is so critical specifically if we consider how mutable factors of the external environment can be and that changes can occur fast. Furthermore, it is logical to pursue quality accreditation under the schemes of EFQM, ISO and Eco-labels.

Conclusion

Tourism is the key element of development for a country like Greece. This can be attributed to its contribution to the country’s GDP and GNP, encouragement of investments, increase of employment and development of the economy in a dynamic way. The integration of this development through the focus on quality results in the development of valuable and unique production coefficients in the local economies. Additionally, businesses operating the sector can be clustered according to the needs of niche/specialized markets. Tourism industry, as a service sector appears to be associated closely with the provision of high-level services and to an extent quality. In the long run, TQM provides opportunities that lead to differentiation of products and services provided. This enforces the organization

with competitive advantages that benefit the sustainability of the organization. After all, quality assurance is not a short-term process but a long term commitment and cooperation with the customers.

A proper identification and recording of the impact should be implemented in order to reassure the quality and set priorities. There are various mechanisms that aim to deliver quality within the tourism services. They have to deal with the involvement of the customers in the standardization in the quality process that allows them to measure quality. Thus the organization will be able to make improvements and more investments. The most important factors related to businesses' success are related with customers' satisfaction and their retention throughout the years. As it is mentioned earlier it can be much more difficult and costly to attract new customers than try to maintain the customers you have now. This can be achieved by providing incentives that fulfill the customers' expectations or even exceed them. Continuous improvement of quality, regular training of the personnel, as well as, customer orientation is crucial to the organization's sustainability in the long run. These elements are also obtained using simulation modeling of the corresponding processes (Sakas et al. 2014, 2015).

Suggestions for Further Research

Further improvement and excellence in terms of service quality is required for modern tourism businesses. More researches could be made regarding the overall customers' experiences that provide a more comprehensive aspect. Quality might differ depending on the customer's perception and background and this has much to do with culture. So an organization should take into account the different groups of tourists it serves and customize the experience it provides since experiences are rather personal and only exist to one's mind (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Time of responding is crucial nowadays, so organizations should be proactive rather than reactive. For that reason, an insight to the upcoming trends would be necessary; not only at a level of Greece but also at a worldwide level.

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