ORIGINAL PAPER

The implementation of a quality management system based on the Q tourist quality standard. The case of hotel sector

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Abstract The Q Tourist Quality Standard is proving to be highly successful not only in Spain but also in several other countries across the European Union. The Q Certificate lays the ground for companies to build competitive differences not because they have obtained a certificate but because the groundwork the certificate implies means that they are capable of defining a quality management and control system which can achieve cost and differentiation advantages. The purpose of this article is to analyse the case of the Majestic Hotel in order to illustrate that the process must be implemented correctly if it is to create these advantages. The main results of the study show that, after an initial successful period, the project had to be shelved. The main cause of failure was the lack of involvement and commitment on the part of management. This led to inflexibility among the members of the organisation when it came to accepting change, a lack of training in quality and to a perception that a quality system was simply more "paperwork".

Keywords Quality system implementation · Q Tourist Quality Standard · Case study

1 Introduction

Spain's tourist industry has been facing increasingly stiff competition from other countries around the world over the years. Thus, some time ago, thoughts turned to how organisations in the Spanish tourism sector could make themselves stand out from other sun and sand destinations. This gave rise to the idea of implementing a Quality Certificate which would foster confidence among tourists using the services

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guaranteed by the certificate and also convince businesspeople in the industry that their companies were optimising their resources for the good of their internal and external customers. The system was pioneered in the Canary Islands before the Spanish government, believing it would be beneficial for the entire country, asked for the help of Canary Island organisations in drawing up the Q Certificate and implementing it across all organisations in the tourism industry. By using the system, the Canary Islands have gained an advantage over their competitors and have not seen their share of the sun and sand market fall. As a result, the number of organisations seeking to obtain the certificate has risen constantly.

While it is true that achieving the Q Certificate enables an organisation to stand out from its competitors, it should not be forgotten that one of the great advantages of the Q Standard is that it enables companies to define a quality management and control system for their organisation, and this brings with it cost and differentiation advantages. Nonetheless, attaining these benefits is subject, on most occasions, to an appropriate implementation process. This is the reason why the implementation processes for quality standards are a key factor in the success of the latter and as a consequence in enabling the organisation to develop its full quality potential.

In view of the considerations set out in the paragraphs above, this article has a dual purpose. First, we shall describe the implementation of a quality management system based on the Q Tourist Quality Standard in a major hotel establishment in the Canary Islands. We shall then try to discover the factors or circumstances which explain how and why such an important tourist enterprise, which uses quality as a basic argument in its competitive strategy, was unable to continue to make the effort required to keep the system alive and ended up losing its Q Certificate, and hence part of its differentiating pitch as perceived by customers.

With this purpose in mind, this article is structured as follows. After this introduction, Sect. 2 contains a theoretical review of the main foundations of advanced quality management systems. Sect 3 looks at the model offered by the Q Tourist Quality Standard, given the specificities of the case in question. Section 4 features a description of the main methodological foundations which have been used in this research. Section 5 contains the case study of the Majestic Hotel,[1] a magnificent establishment in the Canary Islands which, after successfully implementing a quality management system that met the requirements of the Q Standard for hotels and apartments and using it for several years, ended up shelving the project. Finally, Sect. 6 sets out our main academic and professional conclusions and implications together with possible lines of research for the future.

2 The quality management challenge

2.1 Advanced quality management systems. Total quality management (TQM)

Nowadays, companies are forced to operate in an extremely competitive and globalised marketplace, one in which customers are demanding and changeable,

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[1] This name has been used in our research to preserve the anonymity of the organisation being studied at the express request of the organisation.

technology makes rapid progress and the involvement of the entire organisation is required to stay one step ahead of and beat the competition. It is for this reason that companies focus all their resources on the market, work hard on all aspects of their product or service and define their customers since anonymous consumers rapidly lose importance (Dale et al. 2007). Customer loyalty is crucial for the organisation. However, if a company really wants to achieve sustainable competitive advantages, it needs to spread excellence across its whole organisation. Excellence is reflected in advanced quality management systems.

Management plays a fundamental role in advanced quality management systems, such as TQM, as it has to lead and engage all the members of the organisation in its quality strategy (BS 4778: Part 2 1991; Ross 1993; Spitzer 1993; European Foundation for Quality Management 2003a). Thus, one of the key factors in TQM is the importance of management leadership and its commitment to quality. If this support does not exist in the organisation, the changes that the implementation of a quality system entails will not take sufficient root and neither will the priorities which should guide the company. These changes include a shift in business culture. The management's ability to accomplish cultural change is based on how willing and inclined its staff are to adapt to this change, and on the economic and social context of the organisation. In addition, the achievement of excellence calls for the involvement and commitment of the members of the organisation. This means that all employees, no matter what their place in the hierarchy, will be informed about company goals and policies with respect to quality and will be motivated to play an active role in them, which once again serves to underscore the importance of management in the process. Implementing strategic human resources management is crucial in this area in order to achieve excellence goals. Management will need to actively promote team work across the organisation as a key factor in continuous improvement (Moreno et al. 2001).

2.2 The TQM system implementation process

Although we shall look at the stages a company needs to go through to achieve Q Standard certification later on, we believe it is extremely important to be aware of the basic and essential aspects of the implementation process required for an advanced quality system. The ideas set out here will be helpful when it comes to understanding the success or failure of a quality management system such as the Q Certificate. Even though the implementation process for a total quality management system varies between companies, we can nonetheless pick out some general aspects which define a basic framework for action. These aspects are based on management involvement in the process. The implementation stages are detailed below (Moreno et al. 2001).[2]

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[2] These authors point out that the process of implementing a quality system depends on the type of organisation, the sector in which it competes, its conception of quality, and its management style among other factors. Nonetheless, they put forward the proposal set out below.

2.2.1 Awareness, training and management commitment

This stage is based around the management's leadership and commitment to quality. Without this it is not feasible to devise or implement a TQM system. Achieving this means training the managers about the most important and key aspects of TQM. When the company has a large workforce, quality committees need to be set up and used to analyse the organisation's status and compare it with the position it seeks to achieve through the new management system. This analysis should yield the information required to convince managers that change is necessary and get them to commit to the new principles and the new project to be developed. Management also needs to inform the rest of the organisation about the new ways of working and new styles of leadership. Companies which work with the organisation should also be informed about the new system. This first stage is crucial for the successful implementation of the system.

2.2.2 Mapping out a system of objectives

The definition of a strategy and system of objectives which include TQM principles are essential requirements for optimal quality management. Management has to make sure that each department in the company has a clear vision of the organisation's mission and strategy, and thus facilitate cooperation with other areas. Business strategy and strategic purpose are what will ensure that all initiatives from the different departments are consistently guided and coordinated by a shared purpose.

2.2.3 Planning, organisation and control of the TQM system

This includes issues such as process planning and design, the design of the organisation, mechanisms and means for participation, setting up work teams, training, and devising indicators and assessment systems. In addition to providing content and bringing them on stream, they also need to be assembled and linked.

(a) *Process planning and design*: the plan is the necessary framework in which to allocate resources and arrange them so that they attain the company's goals, combining fixed capital (facilities) with circulating capital (raw materials, etc.) through the design of the processes which are to use the resources.

(b) *Design of the organisation*: in order to satisfy customers, products, and services need to meet their needs, and this in turn calls for specific ways of working and organisational structure. In addition to high levels of commitment and participation, other relevant aspects include a reduction in the need for middle managers and hence decentralisation in the quality management of process handling, and producing the company's products and services by delegating responsibility to those who carry out these tasks. This leads to a reduction in quality costs. Delegation to those who are close to the company's critical operations will lead to a greater response capacity and faster response times.

(c) *Mechanisms and means for participation*: participation and commitment are achieved in lockstep by management which takes responsibility for making the company's strategic purpose and goals visible and communicating them; the participation of all its members and the organisational climate assisted by the management's commitment.

(d) *Setting up work teams*: as a basic tool for operations and continuous improvement. These teams include the Quality Committee and teams for improvement, development, etc. Teams enable problem solvers to be those who are closest to any problems that arise and hence the best informed.

(e) *Training*: lifelong learning means that the organisation's members can carry out their tasks more independently. The training programme needs to be systematic, continuous and consistent with goals. Its planning and start-up should run in tandem with the implementation of the TQM. It is extremely important that the staff being trained should be able to see an immediate use for what they have learnt in their daily work. This helps to reinforce the knowledge they have acquired.

(f) *Devising indicators and assessment systems*: encouraging initiative and participation means ensuring that recognition of the effort made by members and the corresponding prizes are based on an ambitious but realistic design and viable and objective measurement systems.

These general yet nonetheless highly relevant ideas are built into the Q Standard which is described in the next section.

3 The Q tourist quality certificate

3.1 In the beginning

The Spanish Institute for Quality in Tourism (hereinafter the ICTE) is a not-for-profit private organisation that has been specially set up for companies in the tourism industry. It promotes a quality system called the Q Certificate that is designed to help Spanish tourism companies compete at world level with other tourism destinations together with all the agents involved in the Spanish System for Quality in Tourism (SCTE). Since 2000, it has been made up of tourism organisations and companies which had previously belonged to different sector associations, and it is also backed by the Spanish government. Its main functions focus on standardisation, certification, promotion, training and providing assistance to companies on quality issues (ICTE 2008).

A pilot scheme was begun in 1994 in Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife. It involved the design, development and start-up of a Tourist Accommodation Quality System whose excellent methodology turned it into the model for the Q quality standard and for similar plans in other tourism-related areas including travel agencies, campsites, eateries, rural guest houses and ski resorts. Support from the Secretariat of State for Trade and Tourism has made it possible to define different quality standards within the Q Certificate that are specific to each tourism activity.

The Q Standard does not replace prevailing legislation but instead adds to it. All establishments must comply least with the law and the requirements for their category in order to be able to reach the expected level of quality. A specific level of service is guaranteed, leaving it up to each establishment to decide how much further they want to go beyond that. Companies need to include improved customer satisfaction, quality services and products, enhancement of current processes, and the involvement and engagement of all employees in the constant improvement of the organisation (ICTE 2008).

3.2 The Q standard

The Service Quality Q Standard is the document which sets out the requirements which must be met by an establishment's quality system. It does not refer solely to the outcomes of service provision processes but rather seeks to constitute a management tool so that service provision values are obtained through efficacious and efficient processes and the commitment of the resources assigned to these processes (ICTE 2001).

The Tourism Standards developed at the SCTE are midway between the ISO 9000 and the EFQM Business Excellence Model. These standards entail a more wide-ranging quality and continuous improvement management philosophy than that offered by the ISO 9000 series, and hence are linked with advanced quality management systems.

Quality Standards have been developed for 16 tourism subsectors:

- Quality Standard for Tourist Hotels and Apartments.
- Quality Standard for Travel Agencies.
- Quality Standard for Restaurants.
- Quality Standard for Campsites.
- Quality Standard for Ski and Mountain Resorts.
- Quality Standard for Rural Tourism Accommodation.
- Quality Standard for Time Share Companies.
- Quality Standard for Small Tourism Accommodation.
- Quality Standard for Protected Nature Areas.
- Quality Standard for Tourist Information Offices.
- Quality Standard for Tourist Information Offices covering more than one town.
- Quality Standard for Spas.
- Quality Standard for Convention Bureaux.
- Quality Standard for Conference Centres.
- Quality Standard for Beaches.
- Quality Standard for Tourist Coach Companies.

The Q Standard focuses on service and management. It does not include facilities as they are covered by legislation which regulates accommodation and in any case are a basic resource that management has to take into account to provide the minimum service expected by the customer. The application of the standards is modular, in other words depending on the establishment's category and based on the services it offers.

The Q Standard for hotel establishments is divided into eight main areas, each of which covers one of the services in an establishment which provides accommodation. These departments are management, reception, cleaning, food services, entertainment, maintenance, supplies and storage, and special events.

There are two types of requirements in the standards which make up the Q Certificate (ICTE 2008). The first type are called *management requirements* and consist of elements which are fundamental and essential for ensuring service quality, irrespective of the business sector concerned. In the hotels and apartments standard, for instance, the minimum features the management system must have are clearly set out department by department.

The second category is called *process requirements* which encompass the attributes and variables in service provision or process performance. In the standard covered by our study, the process requirements are set out for each of the departments indicated in the management requirements. This is because they specify the variables to be taken into account in each department, and it is these variables which determine whether or not the service has been provided with sufficient quality depending on the hotel category into which the establishment falls. Obviously enough, the standard does not require the same things from a 2-star hotel as it does from a 5-star establishment, and the same is true of apartments. The variables are based on customer needs and requirements which means they can change, and the requirements increase as the category of the establishment increases (ICTE 2008).

3.3 Reasons for implementing the Q standard

The reasons why companies might want to implement the Q Standard include the following (ICTE 2008):

- It contributes toward enhanced business management, which is reflected in the excellence of the product/service and increases competitive advantage. Pearch and Kitka (2000a, b) share this view.
- It generates more highly skilled, well trained staff and the company wants all its employees to be committed and engaged.
- It provides a specific tourism-orientated management tool which adapts constantly to all changes in the industry.
- As the establishment is aware of customer expectations, it can assess whether their degree of satisfaction is higher. Gotzamani (2005) takes a similar view and sees it as a major competitive advantage with respect to competitors as it is possible to observe the way in which the customer perceives the company and act accordingly.
- It contributes towards the continuous improvement of the establishment, a point noted by authors such as Zuckerman (2001), Tsim et al. (2002) and Gotzamani (2005).
- It enables recognition not just by customers but also by tour operators and the tourist industry in general.

- Finally, the Q Certificate can be used to set the company apart from other establishments and as a means of promotion and marketing.

3.4 The implementation process

Given the purpose of this article, we shall focus on the Q Certificate model which is specifically geared towards the Spanish tourism sector. This model is based on the models which form the foundations of the ISO 9001:2008 Standard and the EFQM Excellence Model (European Foundation for Quality Management 2003a, b). The Q Certificate is proving to be highly successful not only in Spain but also in several other countries across the European Union. Although it does contain sections dealing *inter alia* with campsites, ski resorts and apartments, we shall only look at the hotel establishments section in line with the purpose of this article.

The implementation process is similar to the one to be found in the EFQM Model, as it is based on prior self-assessment by the company which identifies areas for improvement and actions which should be carried out (European Foundation for Quality Management 2003a). Company management has detailed information about the requirements which have to be met, and hence it decides, based on its priorities and budget, which actions will be worked on first and which will be deferred for subsequent implementation (Conti 1993; Finn and Porter 1994; Hillman 1994). The breakdown of the Q Certificate implementation process is detailed below (ICTE 2008):

Stage 1 *Application to join the Spanish System for Quality in Tourism*: associations and companies alike can join the Spanish System for Quality in Tourism by paying a variable membership fee which registers their organisation.

Stage 2 *Reception by the establishment or organisation*: once the company has joined the Quality System, it is sent the Q Standard for its sector and the guide to carrying out the self-assessment by e-mail.

Stage 3 *Initial training about starting up the project*: once the guide to carrying out the self-assessment has been received, those in charge of performing the self-assessment need to read it and learn how to tackle it so as to perform their own diagnosis. This enables them to find out about their current situation and map out the actions required to comply with the Quality System.

Stage 4 *Self-assessment of the establishment*: simultaneously with point 3, the company reviews its management system using its own or subcontracted personnel to check which requirements are met and where there are deficiencies or deviations and also to set out the areas for improvement that have been identified.

Stage 5 *Training in quality tools*: those who are responsible for implementing the system in the hotel establishment are entitled to specific training by the organisations and associations that are members of the Quality System. This is one of the key stages in ensuring the success of the

implementation process as it enables the entire organisation to receive training in quality issues.

Stage 6   *Drawing up relevant improvement plans; documentation, implementation and quality tools*: once the self-assessment has been performed, the improvement plan is drawn up with specialist assistance from experts to adapt it to the requirements of the Standard and implement it successfully.

Stage 7   *Certification application filed with the certifying organisation*: the company has to send a written application for a certification inspection to the Spanish Institute for Quality in Tourism (ICTE) 2 months in advance.

Stage 8   *Choice of the audit firm*: the company selects one of the audit firms approved by the ICTE which checks compliance with the established requirements.

Stage 9   *Certification audit*: an auditor performs the external assessment of each of the requirements set out in the standard.

Stage 10 *Audit report*: the auditor sends its audit report within 10 days. This report includes the assessment results and the deviations from the Standard. If these deviations are not important, the company has to draw up its corrective action plan and send it to the ICTE, also within 10 days.

Stage 11 *Certification Committee and obtaining the "Q" Certificate*: the quality certificate is awarded or refused by the certification committees for the company's sector. These committees check the audit assessment and any action plans.

Stage 12 *Monitoring the level of quality*: the standards also provide for monitoring the operations carried out by each service unit so as to ensure that their quality is maintained over time. A number of different monitoring mechanisms (audits, indicators, complaints systems, suggestions, etc.) are used to this end.

Stage 13 *Monitoring and renewal audits*: for the company to continue using the Certificate it must pass a Monitoring Audit that looks at critical points (Rich 1997; Edgeman and Dahlgaard 1998) and a Renewal Audit which covers all the points in the standard. This system is very similar to the one used in ISO 9001:2000 standard certification. (it should be remembered that the Q Certificate is partially based on this standard).

3.5 Causes of failure

After the application of the Standard and the implementation of the resulting quality system, there are two mechanisms for assessing the establishment (ICTE 2008): self-assessment, which is internal, and audits, which are external. The former sheds light on the business situation with respect to the Standard, while the latter provides an objective assessment from a different perspective as it is carried out by people from outside the company. Even though we have underlined the numerous advantages of the system, it may be the case that an establishment is unable to

comply with it because its employees believe that it is more harmful than beneficial or due to other issues which lead management to decide not to continue with the Q Certificate.

The main reasons why this may take place are set out below. Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that as there is no specialist literature on the subject, we have collated these reasons from papers which provide similar analysis for ISO 9000 standards, as the spirit and structure of the Q Standard is inspired by the ISO 9000. The reasons are as follows:

- Change in culture: by stressing customer satisfaction and continuous improvement, i.e. the customer must be given more for the same cost, the company breaks with traditional ways of thinking about work and this leads to resistance among employees and managers alike.
- Adaptation: an attempt is made to adapt the traditional system to the standard by adding processes. According to Biazzo and Bernardi (2003), an examination of cases of certified companies shows that *inter alia* there are no formal processes in place for dealing with ideas for improvements and/or problems in work processes. There is no formal structure for improvement processes, and there is a clear lack of skills and training programmes for problem solving and tools and techniques for improvement.
- Lack of conviction on the part of management: even though one of the strengths of certification is based on company management being fully convinced about and committed to the idea that quality is the best option for running the organisation, sometimes this is not the case. Some managers think that rules and regulations are a nuisance, and that the only thing they do is hold back the organisation.
- Unrealistic requirements or ritualistic implementation: sometimes it is believed that the standard is simple and that not too much importance should be attached to it. This demotivates the entire company and does not foster continuous improvement.
- Finally, Wealleans (2002) also mentions not setting aside enough time for getting the system ready for certification, excessive documentation of the system and complacency about the ways in which it is implemented.

4 Research methodology

In this section, we shall set out the strategies, methods and techniques used in the research to gather and analyse the information required to achieve our goals, namely to describe the Q Tourist Quality Standard implementation process at the Majestic Hotel and to explain the reasons which led to the Standard and the certification achieved through it to be shelved.

Based on these twin goals and bearing in mind the importance of examining the phenomenon in the context in which it took place, in this project we have used a qualitative methodology consistent with this approach (Bryman 1988; Pettigrew 1990; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Lee 1998; Hurley 1999; Shortell 1999; Sofaer

1999; Skinner et al. 2000; Bernal 2006; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008; Lee and Lings 2008). Within the broad array of strategies, methods and techniques used in the field of qualitative methodology, authors such as Yin (1981, 1989, 1993, 1999), Hartley (1994), Stake (1995), Chetty (1996), Pérez Aguiar (1999), Saunders et al. (2003), Cepeda (2006) and Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) recommend the use of case studies as the basic research strategy. Specifically, and in line with the goals referred to above, we developed a case study that was both descriptive and explanatory (Yin 1989, 1993) which aimed to explain how and why the Majestic Hotel, having successfully implemented a management system based on the Q Tourist Quality Standard, later shelved the project.

There are two important aspects when using case studies; the number of cases to be analysed and the selection criteria (Yin 1989; Céspedes and Sánchez 1996; Pérez Aguiar (1999); Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). Number-wise, we chose a single case as this enabled us to carry out an in-depth study. In terms of selection criteria, the Majestic Hotel was chosen for a number of reasons. First, it was one of the first organisations in the whole of Spain to use the Q Standard as its reference framework, which ensured we would find extensive experience in the use of this comparative standard. Second, we knew that it had shelved the project. Finally, it is a cutting-edge organisation in its business sector and in its geographical area of influence which operates using a differentiation strategy fundamentally based on service quality and customer care.

A number of semi-structured in-depth interviews were held to gather information, although it should be pointed out that most of them were not in person but carried out using new information and communication technologies (Windows Messenger and Skype). The interviews were held with the Quality Manager who was questioned over a total period of two and a half hours. In addition, numerous documents were analysed in order to triangulate the information gathered (organisation chart, job descriptions, company information on its corporate website, internal publications, newsletters and so on).

Finally, we used pattern matching to analyse the information which enabled us, as noted by Pérez Aguiar (1999), to compare events, behaviour and circumstances which might be suggested by the theoretical approach with the events, behaviour and circumstances found in practice.

5 The Majestic Hotel: study of a Q Tourist Quality Certificate project

5.1 Majestic Hotel: general information

The Majestic Hotel is in Tenerife, Canary Islands. When it opened in 1993 it had a workforce of 130. It currently has over 300 rooms and 600 employees, and this figure goes up significantly in the high season. It was designed and built to be a hotel for foreign and domestic guests with high purchasing power. Hence, its competition strategy is based on differentiation and this has made it into a benchmark hotel in Spain.

The hotel's philosophy is that its customers should not have to leave its premises for any type of service. As a result, it has always had more departments than would
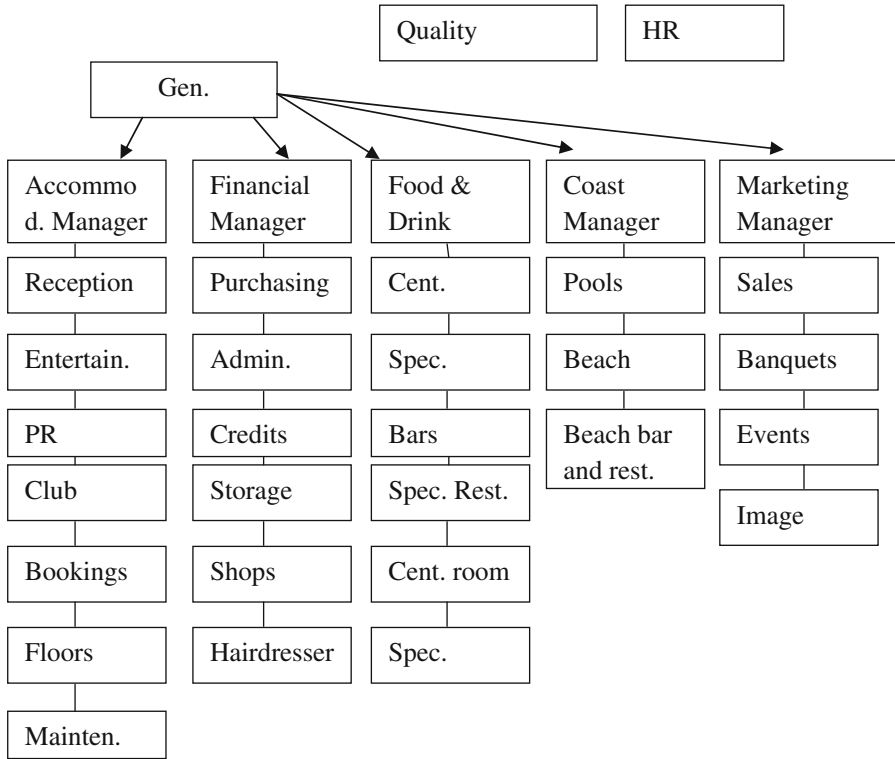
Fig. 1 Organisation chart

traditionally be found in a hotel: reception, floors, storage, purchasing, maintenance, food and drink divided into a central kitchen, specialist restaurant kitchens, central room and specialist restaurant rooms, banquets, sales, marketing, events, club house, entertainment, bars, room service, image, human resources, hairdressing, shops, swimming pools, beaches, administration, credits, public relations and bookings.

The company's organisation chart is shown in Fig. 1. Some departments, such as floors include the laundry service and public areas in the hotel as well as rooms. The same is true of specialist kitchens and specialist rooms, which include Italian, French, Canary Island, innovative cuisine, Spanish, and fast-food cuisine and the exclusive restaurant. Beach bars and restaurants encompass the ice-cream parlour, the juice bar and the four beach bars. As Fig. 1 shows, the hotel's organisational chart is highly complex.

5.2 The implementation of the Q Certificate at the Majestic Hotel

5.2.1 Reasons

The decision to try to get the hotel to obtain the Quality in Tourism Q Certificate was taken because company executives were looking for a new source of

competitive advantage through quality. Achievement of the certificate would bring with it recognition and prestige and would help to differentiate the hotel from its competitors. According to the interviewee, "the managers were not really sure that quality was the best management system, but they did have a hope that it might be and that even if they had to invest in it, they would see significant internal and external benefits".

5.2.2 The implementation process

The implementation of the Q Certificate at the Majestic Hotel in 1993 was difficult because the Standard had only just been created, and hence there was little experience about the most effective way of putting it in place in an organisation. In fact, the Standard was so new that not even the people who were shaping it knew how to do things so as to be able to achieve the goal. During the implementation of the standard at the Majestic Hotel, it should be noted that the quality system manager had to respond to unforeseen circumstances and problems that came up as the process of implementing the standard took its course. On many occasions he had to use his common sense rather than the guidelines included in the Standard.

As noted above, implementation came up against many obstacles. The main stumbling block, which still exists in the organisation, was the reluctance of employees to start up the system which they viewed as being "useless". This reluctance demonstrates the existence of a significant cultural problem. As far as the workers were concerned, implementing the standard meant an increase in paperwork, orders, restrictions, impediments, hindrances and constraints. In our interview, the Quality Manager commented that "there was just no way of getting them to see that their working system and use of time would improve with time." The majority of the employees were very experienced and this contributed to their perception that the way they did their work, which they had been doing in the same way for years, was the right way to do what the organisation required of them in their jobs. This attitude led to a negative reaction to any advances in the field of quality and was particularly prevalent amongst the organisation's most senior employees. In contrast, it was believed that newer workers would make the process easier.

The departments which presented the biggest obstacles to implementation were normally those that were not used to working with papers, registers and manuals, including the restaurants, kitchens and bars. Floors, for instance, had spent years getting used to controls, lists and so on and hence did not put up resistance to the implementation of the system, as they did not find it as hard to deal with the forms. In Reception, Administration, Banquets and all those departments which normally use computers, papers and documentation, there were no problems other than the ones found in other departments, namely a reluctance to change and a failure to engage on the part of the hotel's personnel.

In an attempt to make implementation of the system simpler, no processes were changed but instead manuals and documentation were adapted to extant processes. The changes that met the most opposition were bringing in registers, which had not existed beforehand, and ensuring that the regulations were effectively, actually and

systematically complied with, in other words setting up checks on temperatures, hygiene, storage, rotation and best-before dates among other things.

The management's lack of commitment also meant that as the structure for dealing with quality issues had not been put in place, the single Quality Manager was unable to do his job properly or achieve objectives. In 1998, the company had 650 employees as well as an extremely complex organisation chart. Simply supervising the start-up and maintenance of the system would have required a number of people, yet there was only the Quality Manager. Management stressed that tasks should be done by departmental heads. If these departmental managers had received training in quality, there probably would not have been any hitches. However, as this was not the case, the organisation's decision to hand over this responsibility to these heads was a form of suicide.

Management did not want to "spend" on quality, which was reflected in all internal actions. "Quality was supposed to be something that could be done on top of your everyday work, when employees had some free time," the Quality Manager told us. "No money, time or effort were put into it; it was hoped that things would come off on their own. For a company that really wants to put a system like the Q Certificate in place this is simply unconceivable." Despite the Board's approach, the Operations Manager and the Quality Manager tried to raise awareness on a constant basis. Many people thought that their advice or instructions were right and useful, but they found it hard to carry them out or did not know how to, or they lacked sufficient willingness. That meant that these two managers had to battle against all the other employees and management itself. Many executives were in favour of the standard, but were faced with the opposition of their work group, and depending on their degree of conviction, sooner or later gave up. A Quality Committee was set up towards the end of 1998, which was made up of a member from each hotel department. This committee provided a multidisciplinary vision, as it had to monitor many aspects. It was very helpful having people from different departments contribute their experience and points of view. Just as with ISO standards, the Q Standard required the organisation to be internally and externally audited in order to achieve the certificate.

5.2.3 Results of the audits

The first audit was carried out in 1998. The hotel passed it and achieved certification. As the Standard had been planned in Tenerife and the hotel managers were part of the Standard's organisation, the Majestic had gradually adapted its work system to the Standard and hence had no problems in gaining the certificate. It should be noted that the Standard at that time was much vaguer than the one used today, and thus it was relatively easy for the hotel to get its certificate.

It was decided to implement the quality system in all departments at the same time, as all managers and some employees were given training in it. Managers were then tasked with implementation under the supervision of a coordinator and with the help of specialists from the Tenerife Association for Quality in Tourism (ATCT).

Few aspects were changed, but the ones that did tried to:

1. Comply with the standard in areas such as the requirement that all personnel must wear an identification badge. In the hotel people always said that the image and uniforms used meant it was not feasible to wear a plastic badge. At the same time, established standards were easily surpassed.
2. Draw up manuals which specified how each job in each department of the hotel should be done. These "Job Descriptions" gave a step-by-step guide to the tasks involved in each position.
3. Set up control and register systems. In many cases, this had to be done from scratch.
4. Review processes and draw up improvement plans. As this was the last part of the process, there was a tendency not to specify them and just to react if a problem came up. This made things even more complicated because the previous stages had not been fine tuned.

As can be seen, no major changes were made to the way of working. In fact, if a new system is intended to work and not be rejected by people, radical change cannot be made. The nature of the work made it possible to gradually introduce small changes such as the implementation of checklists, improvements to work processes and the setting up of interdepartmental work groups.

As the Q Standard became more well defined, retaining the "Q Standard for Quality in Tourism" certification at the Majestic Hotel became increasingly difficult as departmental managers and employees had little quality management culture and training. In line with the rules of the system, departmental, quality committee and departmental manager meetings were held. The fact that the hotel's organisational structure was highly complex (a large number of very varied departments) meant that the task of mapping out and implementing a quality management system proved to be more difficult than usual. Thus, for instance, when the maintenance department was doing things properly, the floors department was not complying with the rules. The lack of coordination in departmental operations meant that the quality coordinator (manager) did not have enough time at meetings to check that all the departments were performing assigned tasks.

In the case of meetings between departmental managers and their staff, success depended entirely upon the manager. Some were used to chairing meetings and ran them properly and effectively with people turning up and taking part without any difficulties. Unfortunately, these managers were in a minority. In general, managers viewed the meetings as a nuisance, could not see their usefulness and consequently were unable to take advantage of them. As a result, they either did not hold them or they ran them badly. This then transferred to quality meetings with the added drawback that the system called for meetings at all levels to communicate projects, goals, needs, changes in indicators, error correction, etc.

Something else to be borne in mind is that high staff turnover in the sector meant that there were always members of staff who were closed to change or who could not adapt to the system, which demonstrates the inefficacy of recruitment and selection procedures.

The resistance to change and stiff opposition that employees had shown at the beginning of the project turned into idleness or indifference over time, as employees did not directly oppose orders but nor did they observe them.

An internal audit was held prior to the external one as required by the system. This is what the Quality Manager had to say about it: "We did them relatively well, although I have to admit that because we weren't used to them sometimes we felt a bit foolish. There were also some people who didn't take it seriously enough and others who were quite the reverse, as if they were in the Gestapo. Once again, the lack of a quality management culture meant that a lot of effort was wasted (OK, this tin is past its sell-by date, so try to make sure it's not here when the auditor comes round. Or, so what? Are you going to tell me what to do? Let's go and check your work, I'm sure we'll find a few things, etc.)."

The second external audit was held in 2001 and it was passed with great difficulty, with all best practice components, such as doing the checklists being skipped so as to do the minimum. The only thing done to comply with the standard was to fill in the paperwork after having done things. This strengthened the idea that the Q Certificate merely increased the workload. Although the hotel passed, both management and departmental heads promised that in the next audit everything would be shipshape.

However, the problems identified by the auditor in this second audit were as follows:

- *Lack of consistency in the system*. Some things were done and others were not or were simulated. This is relatively easy to detect as a quality system is rather complex and interrelated and inconsistencies are pretty easy to spot. Thus, for instance, it was claimed that raw materials were monitored but there were no registers or the registers were blank. Temperatures were said to be strictly controlled but there were no registers or entire weeks were missing.
- *Mistakes in processes*. The most important areas for improvement here concerned best-before dates for food, washing bed sheets and mattress cases and properly filling in checklists.
- Some *manuals had not been completed* and some departments were even still at a very basic stage in implementation, which hindered bringing things up to date for the audit.

The third audit was carried out in 2005. By that time the only employee in charge of running the quality system had left the hotel. Because of this, the auditor found major problems and deficiencies at the Majestic Hotel and gave management a very serious warning.

The quality manager had been replaced by a departmental head with little experience in the field. He tried to organise the information and take on board the external auditor's requirements but as the documents were not correctly organised by department he found it impossible to carry out the task. Certification was once again achieved but with great difficulty.

In 2007, the quality manager came back. The decision was then taken not to have an external audit in order to renew the Q Certificate. "It's a mistake because the quality system would have brought us a lot more if we had used it properly, but it's also true that the way we were doing it meant it was useless and a burden," commented the

manager in the interview. "I think that we got into the quality system because people thought it would bring us more benefits, but we haven't complied with its standards and we're pretty disappointed".

5.2.4 Final outcome

The changes resulting from the implementation of the system consisted mostly of strengthening appropriate techniques and eliminating erroneous ones. The manager said that some things had been implemented extremely well, such as the incident report form that all departments have to fill in every day which provides management with immediate and reliable information and means that everyone is up to date with any issues at the daily meeting. However, there are some departments in which there are not normally any incidents or which do not understand that even when there are none the report form still has to be filled in saying that nothing has happened. In general, processes, documents and requirements which have a clear cut impact have not been difficult to bring in; they have not created more work and hence have not called for extra effort by their users who indeed see them as bringing benefits.

Due to the initial problem of a lack of awareness about the benefits of a quality system, it is very unlikely that the Majestic Hotel will consider reintroducing it. Nonetheless, it is quite probable that if it really wanted to do so it would be successful. After its experience with the Q Certificate, the hotel has been putting together and following its own quality management system ("its system") since 2007, even though this might be a little risky bearing in mind the organisational complexity of the organisation in addition to all the causes which led to the failure of the implementation. We suggest this because one of the advantages of any reference framework for the implementation of quality management systems, whether these be ISO standards or the Q Standard, is that it provides guidance about setting up and running the system. In this respect, standards aid with building a quality system, inasmuch as they help to systematically devise, plan, design, review and improve it. While an "own quality system" does adapt to different circumstances as employees, legislation and market conditions change, it does so based on the opinions of many people (managers and employees) who are not always be objective, and even if they were, their interests would not always be the same as the management's.

Giving up on the Q Certificate does not mean that everything that was done has been rejected, as shown above. For instance, this year, drawing up manuals has been included as one of departmental managers' performance-related pay goals. This group is now making greater efforts than in all the previous years put together to achieve this target.

The company says that the quality system is not bad but the official requirements are too costly for the benefits it brings, which is the same as the view taken by employees who refuse to comply with it.

6 Conclusions

As the Majestic Hotel case study shows, efficient implementation of a quality management system based on the Q Tourist Quality Standard can bring an

organisation numerous benefits such as prestige, differentiation from competitors, enhanced internal efficiency, improved processes, customer satisfaction and publicity. Nonetheless, as we have also found in the same case study, the problem lies not so much in the implementation and certification of the system but rather in maintaining the level required by the standard in its different sections over time. Continuous compliance with the requirements of the Q Standard year after year is not easy and requires a great deal of time and effort.

In addition, one of the aspects which makes for the continued success or spectacular failure of a project is the human factor as it is the most difficult one to control. Employees are not convinced about the benefits of the system, since they believe that it involves more work which is not fairly rewarded. At the root of this problem, we find the real cause of the failure of this process: the lack of leadership and engagement shown by members of the company's management. Their lack of commitment to the quality system is transmitted to the rest of the organisation's staff and means that they themselves do not observe the system's requirements in their work. At the same time, they do not become a point of reference for other members of the organisation.

As we saw after the review of the literature, implementation of the Q Standard consists of a 13-stage process. In the case of the Majestic Hotel, this process was carried out simultaneously and in fewer stages, yet despite this, the company managed to achieve certification. The reasons why the Majestic Hotel decided to implement the quality management system may perhaps explain the failure of the process. Management was not seriously convinced of the potential of a quality management system, which goes way beyond obtaining a certificate.

Another aspect which should be stressed is the fact that the main reasons for the Majestic Hotel dropping the Q Certificate are human and not technical or related with the system. Thus, failure comes as a result of employees not being sufficiently trained in quality issues, their belief that using the system is a headache and not beneficial which leads to them not carrying it out as required or leaving work unfinished, and management's inability to motivate them.

However, even if an establishment is not certified, as is currently the case with the Majestic Hotel, this does not mean that it does not provide complete quality service and that its guests are not satisfied. What is true, though, is that managers will be missing out on major opportunities for improvement, which may contribute not so much to an enhanced corporate image but rather to cost savings. In the case under study, however, the position is quite the reverse as the establishment continues to be in a superior hotel category and delivers service that its customers always praise. In fact, since it shelved certification, occupancy levels have not fallen and agencies continue to recommend the hotel to their customers, even though we believe the shelving of the system is still too recent to make it possible to draw reliable conclusions as to its consequences. It should also be noted that the changes brought in when the Q Standard was implemented are still in place and there is no intention of reversing them, so any possible negative effects will take even longer to appear.

This article may have some implications for both the academic and business fields. In the case of the former, it could become a starting point in the development

of an innovative line of research into the Q Standard and its implementation process in companies, as at present there are virtually no theoretical or empirical scientific works which deal with the issue. As for businesses, hotel managers who are thinking about bringing in the Q Standard may find some ideas in this article which will help them to approach the process with greater prospects of success and avoid factors which in the future may endanger the efficiency of their projects.

However, the article does have some limitations which must be recognised. One of them stems from the methodology used, as studying one or two more cases would have enabled us to draw much more realistic conclusions about the phenomenon. Likewise, it would be better to interview more people at different levels in the company hierarchy as this would help to enhance the triangulation of the information and consequently increase the quality of the case study.

Finally, and in addition to the point noted above, future research could involve carrying out studies similar to this one in other business areas in the tourist industry. There are 17 versions of the Q Standard which cater for the wide variety of organisations that operate in the industry, and hence it would be of interest to observe the differences between the case study presented here and other organisations in the other 16 tourism fields. Equally, it would also be useful to analyse intra-sector differences, in other words to examine whether or not the factors and the implementation process vary in the same Q Standard business area (for instance, hotels and apartments) between organisations which are in different parts of the country.

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