

HOTEL SERVICES QUALITY ASSESSMENT USING *SERVQUAL* METHOD. CASE STUDY: ATHÉNÉE PALACE HOTEL

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Abstract: *With more intense competition in the global market without quality and without special skills in its obtaining, assessment and continuous improvement, companies can not meet the increasing demands of consumers. Therefore, service companies must find those quality strategies that ultimately lead to achieving maximum consumer satisfaction. In order to assess the satisfaction and therefore, in order to improve service quality *SERVQUAL* method may be used. This paper illustrates the application of this method in the hotel services offered by the Hotel Athénée Palace in Bucharest.*

Key words: *quality, hotel services, quality assessment, quality of the staff.*

1. Introduction

In a world of competition and sophisticated demand quality is the way a company can survive. [4] The quality in the field of services is more and more important in the present economic situation [2].

According to the WTO, "the quality is the result of a process involving satisfying the legitimate needs of products and services, consumer requirements and expectations at an affordable price, in accordance with the quality standards related to the safety and security of tourists, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and tourism activity's harmony with the natural and human environment." [3]

Since tourism services are based on the interaction between customer and provider,

it is crucial to underline the importance of human resources in this industry. Therefore, although it should be led by management, the quality is the responsibility of everyone in the company.

The attitude, skills, behavior and tangible items such as the uniform, the communication way of the employee are of great importance and represent the organization's culture and value.

We distinguish four categories of essential skills for a tourism worker: [5]

- Technical Skills;
- Interpersonal skills;
- Skills for handling consumer;
- Problem solving skills.

Another buzzword regarding human resources is the empowerment, meaning "an organization providing personnel responsibilities while simultaneously creating opportunities for taking them" [6].

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For tourism services marked by spontaneity of interaction between customer and employee, empowerment of the first line personnel can lead to more flexible and faster processes.

2. Presentation of hotel Athénée Palace Hilton Bucharest

Athénée Palace is a major landmark of Bucharest, with a special history and architecture. The hotel is located in the heart of Bucharest business and shopping downtown, few hundred yards from Hotel Ramada Majestic and Hotel Capşa, and near the historical and cultural center, within easy reach to embassies, banks and government offices.

Athénée Palace is under the Hilton Worldwide umbrella since 1997. The hotel currently has 272 rooms and luxury suites, overlooking Revolution Square, Victoria Street or courtyard. The minimum price per room per night exceeds \$ 200. The hotel also has a swimming pool, a health club, a spa, a bar, "The English Bar" and two restaurants: Athénée Cafe is a European restaurant and Roberto's, an Italian one. There are facilities for business tourists which represent an important part of hotel guests, such as: 13 conference rooms that have the latest technology equipment, rooms which may be used to organise different events. [7]

The guests of Athénée Palace Hilton are, mostly, business travelers and tourists with high to very high income, known as luxury travelers. Those tourists are part of the sophisticated customers group, buying the services of hotels by reputation, facilities and luxury services offered. Business customers are present in Bucharest due to political, commercial, administrative and cultural importance of the city and international companies located on Victoriei Street and Magheru Boulevard.

The main competitors of the Athénée Palace Hilton are:

InterContinental is the first five-star hotel in Romania and the second built by the InterContinental hotel chain in a communist country, after Esplanade hotel in Zagreb. The 400 rooms are equipped with air conditioning and luxury furniture. In the hotel there is a restaurant, Modigliani, a brasserie, "Corso", a lounge bar and a pool on the 22nd floor.

Hotel Persepolis has decided to bring to light the brightness and atmosphere of times during the Roman Empire. In addition to rooms, the hotel has 8 luxurious studios. Prices vary between 130 and 160 euros for a double room and between 160 and 200 euros for a studio.

Capsa Hotel is located in the historic center of the capital. The unit has 60 rooms including 37 deluxe rooms, 10 rooms Junior Suites and one Imperial Suite. The prices range from 80 euros for a single room up to 450 euros for the Imperial Suite.

Carol Parc Hotel is located on the highest natural point in Bucharest on Filaret Hill. The hotel is distinguished from other five-star venues in the capital by a new standard of luxury in Romanian hotels. The interior is exclusive, as from a long forgotten era, with silk and wood wall coverings, Persian carpets and luxurious furniture.

Howard Johnson Grand Plaza hotel is located in the city centre. It is situated close to the most popular shops, restaurants and clubs and the most important sights of the capital. The hotel has a contemporary, minimalist design and has 285 rooms and suites. The hotel includes also three restaurants, an Asian one and two others that combine several "cuisines". H. J. Grand Plaza also has a health and spa center. Prices for a single room per night exceed 130 euros, a flat peaking at 300-400 euros.

JW Marriott Bucharest Grand Hotel is the first hotel in Europe under the brand name JW Marriott. Located near the Parliament Palace is just 15 minutes from the historic and the financial district. The building is distinguished by its grandeur and style and the interior design overwhelms by elegance. It has the most spacious hotel rooms in the city and a total area of 1,700 square meters for conferences and banqueting. The hotel has 379 different rooms in terms of comfort and 22 apartments. It has also restaurants, gardens, cafes, bars, fitness centers, treatment, a spa, a pool, a sauna, solarium facility and others.

Of the four star hotels that offer the same services as the Athénée Palace, the most important to mention are: Double Tree by Hilton, Hotel Ramada Bucharest North, Hotel Ramada Majestic, Hotel Ramada Park and Hotel Ramada Plaza.

Suppliers. From the opening to the present, the hotel has completed a number of contracts with companies specialized in the promotion and commercialization of the offered products and services. For example, the hotel's interiors have been imposed by the hotel chain and there were used only quality materials, furniture, accessories and technical side, all were brought from abroad, mostly from America. The hotel has contracts for courier services with DHL, the global market leader and FedEx. For food and non-food service, the hotel has contracted with leading companies such as Heinz, ATIFCO, Pearls Unisol, Citrus, as well as with first-class beverage emblems Hilton, Heineken, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Evian, Bridge Advertising.

3. Applying the SERVQUAL method for Athénée Palace Hilton services

In this chapter it is assessed the quality of Hotel Athénée Palace Hilton Bucharest

services using SERVQUAL method. This method involves the analysis of tangible items, the company's reliability, responsiveness, trust and empathy. There will be studied customer expectations in relation to purchased services and their perceptions after the point of delivery. The term "expectations" refers to positive communication requirements and the potential consumer perception about product characteristics. [3]. The degree of similarity between these expectations and perceptions will determine the quality of services provided within the unit. If perceptions met customer expectations, it can be said that the Athénée Palace Hilton services reached the promised quality. If perceptions exceed customer expectations is much better because it means that the provider has succeed to provide higher than expected.

The analysis was made using a survey conducted among hotel guests. Given the fact that the hotel has a social page with clients on Facebook.com, respondents were selected from among those who have posted comments on their page. The 10 subjects were chosen with secondary and higher education, three women aged 20-39 years and 7 men, 2 persons aged 20 to 29 years and 5 people between 30-49 years. They were chosen in different ways to get different views of social groups and people of different ages. More men were selected because those chosen are only Romanian citizens and most business people traveling in Romania or abroad are male.

In the questionnaire were introduced only statements about Athénée Palace Hilton employees in all dimensions, because we are interested in customer perception in connection with their activities.

To achieve the analysis is necessary to determine the service quality requirements, such as:

THE ATTRIBUTES OF TANGIBLE ELEMENTS

EXPECTATIONS:

1. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should behave appropriately.
2. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should have appropriate attire.
3. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should be well trained.
4. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should add extra value to the offered services.

PERCEPTIONS:

1. Athénée Palace Hilton employees behave properly.
2. Athénée Palace Hilton employees have appropriate attire.
3. Athénée Palace Hilton employees are well trained.
4. Athénée Palace Hilton employees add extra value to the offered services.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF RELIABILITY

EXPECTATIONS:

5. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should provide the requested services on time.
6. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should show understanding for the tourists problems.
7. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should provide all the promised services to the tourists.

PERCEPTIONS:

5. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should provide the requested services on time.
6. Athénée Palace Hilton employees show understanding for the tourist's problems.
7. Athénée Palace Hilton employees provide all the promised services to the tourists.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF RECEPTIVITY

EXPECTATIONS:

8. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should always be willing to help tourists.
9. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should be permanently accessible (easy to find) and willing to answer questions from tourists.
10. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should respond quickly and without delay at tourist's requirements.

PERCEPTIONS:

8. Athénée Palace Hilton employees are always willing to help tourists.
9. Athénée Palace Hilton employees are permanently accessible (easy to find) and willing to answer questions from tourists.
10. Athénée Palace Hilton employees respond quickly and without delay at tourists requirements.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF CONFIDENCE

EXPECTATIONS:

11. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should always be polite, kind to tourists.
12. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should have the necessary skills to solve the requirements of tourists.
13. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should inspire confidence to the tourists.

PERCEPTIONS:

11. Athénée Palace Hilton employees are always polite, kind to tourists.
12. Athénée Palace Hilton employees have the necessary skills to solve the requirements of tourists.
13. Athénée Palace Hilton employees inspire confidence to the tourists.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF EMPATHY

EXPECTATIONS:

14. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should pay individual attention to each tourist.

15. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should show sincerity and understanding to the tourists.

16. Athénée Palace Hilton employees should understand the specific needs of tourists and treat them properly.

PERCEPTIONS:

14. Athénée Palace Hilton employees pay individual attention to each tourist.

15. Athénée Palace Hilton employees show sincerity and understanding to the tourists.

16. Athénée Palace Hilton employees understand the specific needs of tourists and treat them properly.

To these attitudes respondents should provide points from 1 - 5. 1 mean a very low level for expectations and a very low performance for perceptions and 5 indicate the highest level of expectations and excellent performance. It is very important that those who complete the questionnaire to provide entry points to both expectations and perceptions in order to obtain a valid result for analysis.

After collecting the data, they are stored in a table and then the sum of all responses recorded is calculated at a certain dimension and a relevant media for that dimension.

For tangibility dimension we have:

$$\Sigma (PE) SQ1 = 7 \Rightarrow SQ1 = 1.75$$

Customers have been very satisfied with their needs being fully met by the provider through tangible items. The highest score recorded by three points, is the question number 1 and items with the lowest score equal to 1 were those referred to in question 3 and 4.

For reliability dimension we have:

$$\Sigma (PE) SQ2 = 3 \Rightarrow SQ2 = 1$$

In this case we say that tourists were surprised by the staff, since expectations have been exceeded by the services received. The element with the best score

recorded within this dimension was the number 7 and diametrically opposed to this element is the one in question 5.

For responsiveness dimension we have:

$$\Sigma (PE) SQ3 = 3 \Rightarrow SQ3 = 1$$

The analysis shows that in this case customer expectations were exceeded by perceptions these being pleasantly surprised by the hotel staff responsiveness. The best result was recorded by question number 8 and the lowest result was in question number 10

For trust dimension we have:

$$\Sigma (P-E)SQ4 = 3 \Rightarrow SQ4 = 1$$

The result of this indicator shows that customer expectations regarding trust in employees and their services were overcome by perceptions after performance time. Best score was recorded on question 11 and the lowest result was recorded in question 13.

For empathy dimension we have:

$$\Sigma (P-E) SQ5 = 6 \Rightarrow SQ5 = 2$$

Average of resulting elements from this last dimension is equal to 2, which means empathy felt by tourists far exceeded their expectations. The question that has recorded most positive responses is number 14. This question is followed by understanding shown by hotel employees to the specific needs of each client and honesty and empathy felt by tourists. Each of these last three questions has positive answers, which demonstrates that customer expectations were exceeded in every case of perception.

Following these answers we can say that Athénée Palace Hilton employees are trained to be dedicated to their work and to come to solve the problems faced by every tourist, because tourists' satisfaction reflects positively on their financial situation. This is evidence that the investment in employee trainings, their

motivation and quality strategy chosen is felt and seen as viable by tourists.

Considering the analysis results a classification of dimensions was performed according to the average size obtained classification that is found in the following table.

Table 1
Classification of dimensions based on average obtained from analysis

No.	Dimension	The average size of the service quality
1.	Empathy	2
2.	Tangibility	1.75
3.	Responsiveness	1
4.	Trust	1
5.	Reliability	1
	Total	6.75
	The overall quality of service	1,35

Upon completion of this classification, we can see that all dimensions have positive average values. This is favorable for the hotel as it signifies a perception that exceeded the expectations of tourists on the services of its employees. Given the overall value of quality of service provided by staff Athénée Palace Hilton, 1.35, we can say that customers were satisfied with service delivery.

4. Conclusions

Brand awareness and quality services to the highest standards resulted in the recognition of Hilton Hotels by a great number of customers all over the world, whether businessmen, political personalities and athletes, as evidenced by the continued growth of average annual number of tourists. The same applies to the Athénée Palace Hilton Bucharest, whose history over a century supplements brand reputation under whose umbrella is.

Quality of products and services is the basis of sustaining competitive advantages for many companies. [1]

It is known that in service industry, the success of a company depends heavily on the quality of employees. For this reason, the orientation towards their interests is a key objective of personnel policy in the Hilton hotel chain, strategy adopted also by Athénée Palace Hilton Bucharest.

The SERVQUAL analysis shows that investment in staff training is beneficial and brings positive results, customers appreciating how each employee performs the tasks.

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