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Mystery Shopping In Tourism Companies

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1. ABSTRACT

The main point of this case study is to put in context quality and many issues that are around this concept and, more concretely, how to control quality in tourism companies using a tool or strategy called mystery shopping. It has been evolving and it still does.

To illustrate the term of mystery shopping a little bit more, I have been mystery shopper for two days, trying to analyze the quality of a hotel, during a two days' stay. I have prepared a questionnaire in order to evaluate its quality. There have been many positive things, but all in all the total hotel experience has not been that good. At the end the results obtained have been analyzed and I have exposed some suggestions in order to improve the quality of the hotel.

The conclusion is that it is so easy to make a mistake and, because of that, damage the image and the total experience of your customer. In tourism companies the tool of mystery shopping is very interesting and useful and it will continue evolving as well as quality concept does.

2. INTRODUCTION

The service sector is continuously evolving in order to adapt to the new needs and demands of its users. Nowadays it is very important to focus every effort toward satisfying customer needs and, as time passes by, people change their mind and their needs and the only way to keep on improving is knowing our users. Society is continuously demanding quality, so here appears this more and more important concept: quality.

Quality and customer satisfaction are two basic values that every company should offer in order to differentiate among others and win competitive advantage. Taking into account the example of Mallorca, an island which economy is almost totally based on tourism, the concept of service quality is very important and, even more, it is important how to manage it.

As I said, over the years people change their minds and needs, quality changes at the same time and, so it does quality control processes too. There has been appearing new methods and one of them is mystery shopping. It is not that new, but it is increasingly becoming popular among companies and it is very interesting to know how does it work and a real application of it.

3. OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this case study is to analyze what quality stands for. Maybe it seems to be a relatively simple issue, but it isn't and, what is more, it can make the difference in the consumer choice. Because of that it is so important to really understand what is quality. To complete more this section and to increase

knowledge, I will talk about six generations of quality and then, more concretely what is service quality.

Once it is clear the concept of quality and which aspects does it include, there will be explained processes of how to manage it.

Then, it will be introduced the concept of the mystery shopper, its implications and the process that is followed to evaluate quality through this strategy.

Finally, it will be analyzed a real case of mystery shopping in which we will see how is a determinate company working in terms of quality and, at the end, I will give some suggestions –based on the results obtained- of how to improve it.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Concept of Quality

What is quality? There are many different definitions of quality and, in some way, all of them are right. One of those definitions is that quality is client satisfaction; in this case, quality is understood as the degree in which the customer needs and expectations are satisfied. Quality is seen as an excellence degree; it does not mean luxury, but quality is certain degree of excellence that offers a service or a product. We are talking about quality when we think about fit for purpose; one example of fit for purpose is *“an aircraft purpose is to be comfortable, fast and efficient – so that’d be the definition of a quality aircraft”* (Mar, 2017). Again, as Anna Mar said in 2017, quality is accordance with the specifications; here quality is understood to be the previous established quality standards objectives achievement. Finally, quality is conformance to requirements: there are some established requirements in order to give the idea of “what” is needed, so when those requirements are done or accomplished, then we are talking about a quality product or service.

Note that, when reading or talking about quality, the combination of the words *“consumers’ needs”* is very frequent. And this is not a coincidence, this is because a product or a service, even more nowadays, must be consumer focused, always trying to improve bearing in mind what does the consumer want or need. So the better the product or service satisfy the user’s needs the better the quality will be.

Quality is continuously evolving. As well as technology, the market and the economy change so do the customer demands. Those needs and wants are continuously changing: they have seen many products, they have listened and read about many other ones and everyday those clients are more demanding, and that affects directly to quality. It is essential for the company to be always up to date: here we have a **need for adaptation**.

The concept of quality has evolved until becoming a kind of management system which carries with it concepts such as **continuous improvement**. With the aim of improve the performance of organizational processes and working methods, the continuous improvement consists of a regular review of those processes and methods. By doing that, there are improvements continuously: the results are analyzed and then the changes or modifications are implemented.

4.2. Six Generations of Quality

It is important to know that the concept of quality is not that new, in fact there is a long history behind. The evolution of this concept is very interesting and thanks to Sotomayor Moreno, J. I. (2001) I can talk briefly about **six generations**.

The first one is called **Quality by inspection** and some of the investigators were Edwards Deming, W. A. Shewhart, Armand Feigenbaum and Joseph Juran. In this generation, the most important idea is to make sure the customer never receives defective products. In that way the company is aware about how important is the product quality. An important contribution was the Deming Cycle or Deming PDCA Cycle. In the 1950's, Edwards Deming created this kind of diagram to illustrate a continuous process that consists of Plan, Do, Check and Act. He proposed that business processes must be placed in a continuous feedback cycle in order to identify and modify those process parts which need some improvements. The starting point is to PLAN; defining the vision and objectives, then DO; implementing the defined plan establishing follow-up control to measure its performance, the third one is to CHECK; verifying or reporting the results and establishing performance indicators, and finally ACT; deciding and automating changes in order to improve the process.

Moving on to the second generation, let's talk about **Quality Assurance**. Juran contributed with a strategy of three steps: Planning, Control and Improvement. Here we can see that there is a change, a transition in which quality moves from being a tool to be a business strategy. Quality must to be process oriented, assuring the accomplishment of all the previous established specifications.

The third generation is **Total Quality Control** and, according to the Ishikawa diagram, it consists of developing, designing, manufacturing and maintaining a quality product. This flow implies team work because it cannot be done by individuals. It has to be well known and implemented by all the employees and members of the company. It is important to be consumer oriented and to look for the quality rather than for the short run utilities. So, in order to achieve the Total Quality Control there must to be followed six steps: determine goals and objectives, determine methods to achieve those goals, provide staff training, carry out the work, check or verify the results and implement the needed actions.

The fourth one is **Continuous Improvement Quality** and it has as objective to implement the Crosby quality system. That system works with four absolute principles so as to the quality administration, and those principles are the following:

- Quality implies meeting the requirements
- Quality comes from prevention
- The quality standard is zero defects
- The measurement of quality is the non-compliance price

Knowing that there is a quality problem, which is that problem and then follow the previous principles is crucial in order to achieve the improvement. Here it is also needed to provide staff training and to know the basic concepts of quality. So here there are the steps for quality improvement according to Philip Crosby:

- Commitment of management
- Form teams for quality improvement
- Establish measurement standards
- Control of quality costs
- Create a quality awareness
- Plan the zero defects day
- Staff training or education
- Set attainable quality goals
- Eliminate the error sources in processes
- Recognition of the workers involved
- Tips and suggestions for achieving quality
- Repeat the process

Now let's go on to the fifth generation: **Processes Reengineering**. Taking into account the market, we have to do something to differentiate our product in front of our competitors' products. So here appears a need for modifying the organizations structures and processes, which is the processes reengineering. As Michael Hammer said "*to look for a better way to do the things represents a continuous improvement for the company*".

By last, the **Organization Rearrangement** is the sixth generation. In order to face new challenges, it is required a previous training and there are some strategies that can be done to achieve that. The most important are *Empowerment*; where there is a staff training making easier the decision making process, *Downsizing*; which want to reduce the exceeding productive power although sometimes it means fire some key employees, *Outsourcing*; subcontracting some complementary processes it want to increase efficiency and effectiveness, *Just in Time*; it helps to decrease the inventories making possible that all business units receive the income, results and benefits planned with the minimum resources, and *Benchmarking*; through a deep study of what do the competitors it is possible to find their competitive advantage and improve the company strengths.

All these quality generations through the years have made possible to improve the quality strategies and to develop new quality management methods and standards –some of them are explained later.

4.3. Service Quality

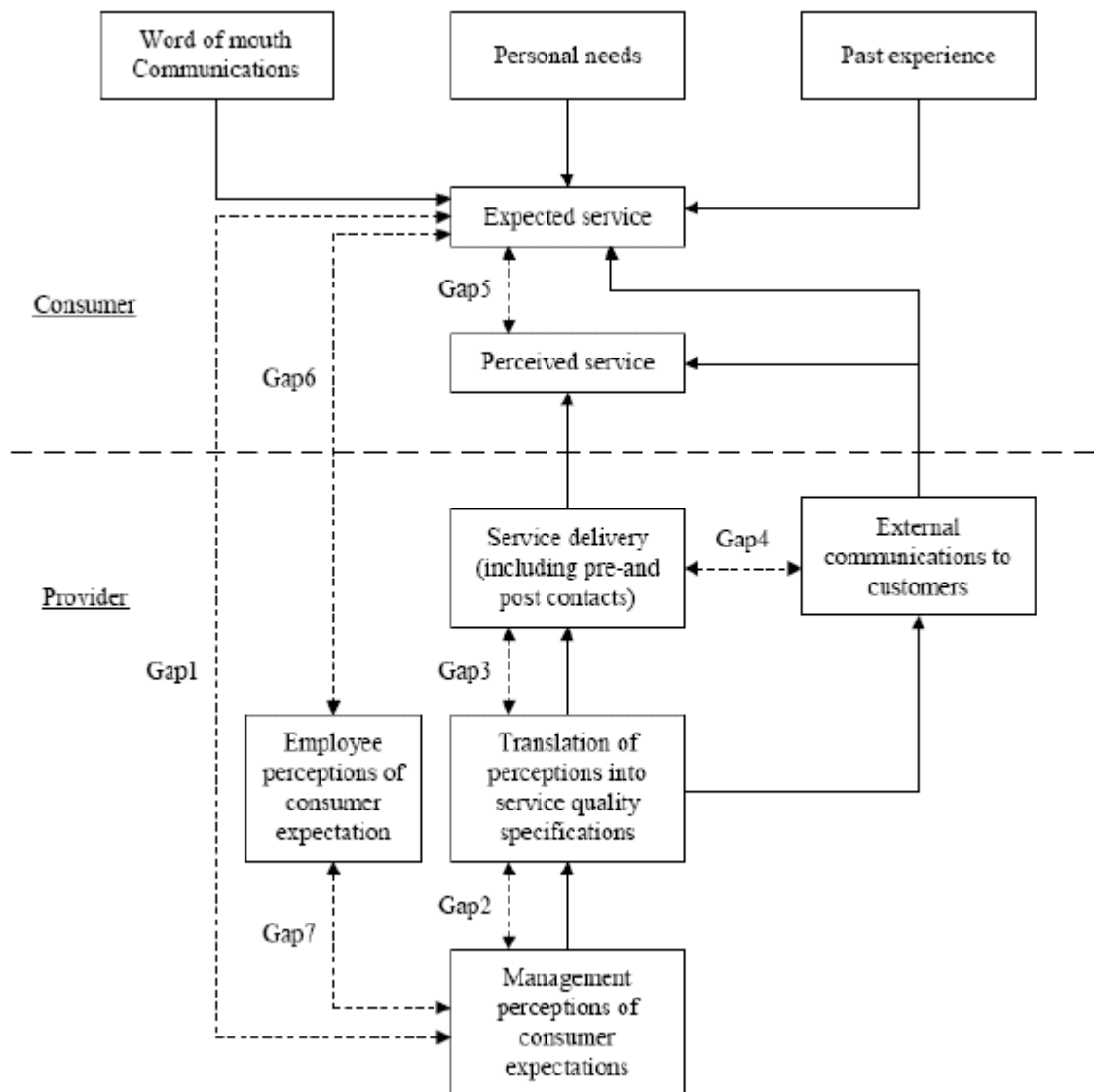
Moving on to the next point, to dive deeply inside the quality concept, I would like to focus on service quality. In an island such as Mallorca, it is well known that the main sector is the service one, so it is very important to know how to measure its quality.

The definition of **service quality** could be the difference between customer expectation of a service and the perceived service (Shahin, A. n.d.). Then, if customer expectations are higher than the final real performance, perceived quality is unsatisfactory, so here appears customer dissatisfaction

(Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Lewis and Mitchell, 1990). If we want to offer a good service quality it has to be measured and managed, so the most common method for measuring it is the SERVQUAL approach.

The **model of service quality gaps** identifies and shows that there are seven major gaps in the concept of service quality related with managers' perceptions and service delivery to final customers. Those gaps are shown in Figure 1, and here there is a brief explanation of each one:

- **Gap 1:** Difference between customers' expectations and management perception: this can occur because there is a lack of marketing research orientation.
- **Gap 2:** Difference between management perceptions and service specifications: as a result of bad standardization or a lack of goal setting.
- **Gap 3:** Difference between service specifications and service delivery: due to inappropriate supervisory control, lack of teamwork, or lack of perceived control.
- **Gap 4:** Difference between service delivery and external communications: because of an inadequate communication between departments (horizontal communication) and also a propensity to overpromise.
- **Gap 5:** Difference between customer expectations and customer perceptions of the service delivered: here customer expectations are influenced by personal needs, but also by word of mouth recommendation and customer past experiences.
- **Gap 6:** Difference between customer expectations and employee's perceptions: due to the misunderstanding of customer expectations by service providers.
- **Gap 7:** Difference between employee's perceptions and management perceptions: this occurs because of a difference understanding of the customer expectations by managers and by service providers.



Graph 1. Model of service quality gaps. Source: Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985.

Taking a look at this diagram and the short explanations of the service quality gaps, we can conclude that to measure service quality we have to take into account customer expectations and customer perceptions of the service delivered, which is exactly the gap number 5.

All in all, there is also another model which is the North American Quality Service Model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985) that shows 10 dimensions that are used by customers to evaluate the service quality. Those dimensions are the following:

1. **Credibility:** honesty of the service provider.
2. **Security:** feeling of freedom of danger or risk.
3. **Access:** approachability and ease of contact with the staff.
4. **Communication:** ability of communicate in a language that customers can understand and listening to them.
5. **Understanding the customer:** making the effort to know customers and their needs.

6. **Tangibles:** appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials.
7. **Responsiveness:** willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service.
8. **Competence:** having the skills and knowledge required to perform the service.
9. **Courtesy:** politeness, respect and friendliness of contact personnel.
10. **Reliability:** ability of perform the service in a reliable and correct way.

Those are the service variables that show or define quality and, thanks to that, we are able to detect mistakes or failures and then establish and implement actions in order to improve them.

Now, focusing on the tourism sector and more concretely on hotels, we know that there are a lot of aspects to take into account: lot of aspects to measure before, during and after the service provided in order to offer the best possible quality. If a hotel know what are the expectations of their guests, then it can meet them or, if possible, exceed those expectations. The hotel has to learn about these guests and try always to improve towards the next one. By the way, the hotel will create itself a better image, it will increase the work life harmony and it will offer every time better experiences.

4.4. Quality Management

As it has been said, if we want to offer a good product (good or service) to our customers we must take care of its quality. Quality could be the difference for a user between choose our product or another one: so we have to always work towards a good quality product, and then we have to manage it.

There are some quality management tools that are very useful in order to make easier this important task, one of them is a set of seven principles.

“Quality management principles are a set of fundamental beliefs, norms, rules and values that are accepted as true and can be used as a basis for quality management” (ISO, 2015).

In order to guide the improvement of the performance of an organization, the QMPs can be useful. Those seven quality management principles are:

1. Customer focus: it is crucial to focus de quality of our product trying to meet customer needs and exceed customer expectations. By doing this, a company is able to attract and retain customers. Once more, it is very important to know and understand the needs and wants of our current and future customers.

2. Leadership: in order to be able to align the processes, resources, policies and strategies to achieve the established objectives, we need unity of purpose and direction and we can achieve this through leaders at all levels.

3. Engagement of people: achieving the quality objectives of the organization is easier if people are recognized and empowered. If we want to create and deliver value, it is essential to involve and respect empowered and competent people.

4. Process approach: two key words here are “interrelated processes”. To optimize the performance system, and the system itself, the processes must be well understood and managed; by understanding the activities and how does the system work we can achieve good quality results.

5. Improvement: continuous improvement to create new opportunities, to be able to react to future condition changes and, of course, to maintain the performance levels.

6. Evidence-based decision making: due to the complexity and difficulty of this process, if we analyze and evaluate the information, evidences and data we could make better decisions.

7. Relationship management: the organization’s performance is influenced by stakeholders (interested parties). So, to optimize their impacts, we have to manage and take care of these relationships.

If an organization takes all of these principles into account it will be able to manage its quality without wasting extra time and efforts.

4.5. Mystery shopping

Arrived to this main point, we already know some different ways to analyze how a company is working in terms of quality; so now we are going to focus on this one. To explain what is this about, we can focus on the figure of mystery guest.

The mystery shopping, also known as mystery guest or anonymous audits, is an internal service for the company which hire it, through which consumers (here known as mystery shoppers) audit the different aspects of a service anonymously. They act as they were real users or clients and, in that way, they can make quality perceived reports.

By using mystery shopping, companies can recognize or detect improvement opportunities wherever the service stage is.

In a nutshell, the procedure of a mystery guest service, in this case evaluating a hotel, consists of an evaluator going into a hotel pretending to be a client and with a questionnaire, previously well designed and prepared depending on the demand of the company who hire it. During and after the stay at the hotel, the mystery guest answers all the sections of the questionnaire and writes notes of all the mistakes, failures and other things that he or she could detect of the quality of the hotel; then the final report serves as a kind of “radiography” of how is the hotel working –including the procedures, the staff, the tangible aspects and also the intangible ones. All in all, this is a different way of making sure that you know how is your hotel working, if everything is going as expected and revealing all the things that have to be changed and improved. Thanks to that, it is possible to detect problems you would probably never know through other way. There is always a chance to improve, and you just have to find it.

The mystery shopping, at the very beginning, was a technique in order to prevent the robberies of the employees at banks and department stores, used by private investigators. Then, along the 70's and 80's there were various consultancy firms that empowered the employment of this mentioned technique. Thanks to the Internet, it was through the 90's when mystery guest is popularized. Nowadays it is not a tool used to watch over the employees, but it is a tool used by the companies which let employees be part of the continuous improvement process.

It is a fact that nowadays, in a mature market such as the Spanish one, service is a very important differentiation variable to take into account. The conclusion of some studies is that it is cheaper to get loyal customers instead of getting new customers.

If a company offers a service that really fits its client needs and wants, then it can get loyal customers or, at least, those clients can tell the benefits of that company to new ones. So, all in all, the company wins.

This method may be misunderstood by some people, because it can be seen as a way to penalize the employees who are not working as the company want and, what is more, to fire them. *“It is used more as in indicator of customer service and satisfaction rather than simply a method for policing bad employees”* (n. a., 2017, History of Mystery Shopping and Services Provided by Shoppers).

Focusing on the accommodation sector, more concretely on hotels, we can say that mystery shopping is so meaningful. With the progress of Internet

and the use of social network, people is able to access to all the information they need in order to take a decision about in which hotel accommodate. Users now can see all the hotels of a determinate location, the price they are commercialized in every operator and its online reputation. Hotel reputation now is not only about word of mouth, but also through the reviews and online rankings.

To use correctly the mystery guest strategy in order to better improve the quality service, it is very important to know well our clients' needs.

It is crucial to avoid differences or gaps between perceptions and expectations, because it can make the customer feel dissatisfied; and this can happen when the hotel thinks that it knows what do the clients want and, in fact, it is not true. Because of that, we need to make sure that all the needs and wants of our customers are well identified and updated.

So, concerning we want to identify those needs to offer a better service for the customer, the second step is to make sure that all the staff are accomplishing the standards of the company and all the procedures are well implemented. If we don't do that, all the previous work will not be useful at all.

As it is said in a study made by *trivago* and *Instituto Tecnológico Hotelero (ITH)* about Mystery Guest (2016), the cost we have to pay for this tool could be a possible inconvenient. There are some different factors that may vary the final price of the service. Following the line of the hotels sector, one of these factors is the total number of hotels: if you want to contract a service of mystery guest and your hotel chain has 10 hotels around a country, won't cost the same as if you have 25 hotels around the world, for example. The number of hotels and the location and distance among all of them could increase the price of that service. Another factor is the frequency in which the evaluators are coming to the hotels: depending on what are you looking for concretely you will contract that service to evaluate your hotels more frequently or less, so the more the frequency is, the more expensive it will be. Also, take into account that it is also important the number of evaluators that will be needed more evaluators to carry out the mystery guest. Besides, a third factor is the questionnaire itself: in order to implement the mystery guest procedure, the questionnaire is maybe one of the most important elements to take into account. Depending on what does the hiring company want, there will be a specific number of questions and with more or less complexity, which will also vary the price of that service. But, at the end of the day, it is crucial to bear in mind what will be the benefits and, considering that, determine which is the amount of money you could invest in that evaluation method.

5. REAL CASE STUDY

5.1. Quality questionnaire

It has been elaborated a questionnaire to put in practice the mystery guest procedure.

Here it is the questionnaire divided into different sections in order to make it more understandable and easier to fulfill when answering and then to analyze the results. This questionnaire will be used to analyze the service quality of the 4 stars' hotel of Mallorca *Mar Senses Puerto Pollensa* and, after that, make some suggestions to improve it.

1. BEFORE THE CHECK-IN – Answer the questions:
<i>-Where have you heard about this hotel?</i>
I was looking for a hotel and I used the meta searcher trivago. There I found this hotel and finally I booked it at Booking.com.
<i>-Why did you choose this hotel?</i>
Because it had good reviews and the photos looked so good.
<i>-Who have you travelled with?</i>
I went with my boyfriend.
<i>-Which kind of room have you had during your stay?</i>
We chose a double room, the Junior Suite.
<i>-Which kind of meal plan have you booked?</i>
We booked the half board meal plan.

2. CHECK-IN – Give a mark from 0 to 10 and answer the questions:

-Is the hotel well located?

9. It is located in Port de Pollença, just 100 meters from the beach. But, although it is near the beach, the port and many restaurants, it is located almost at the end of the town.

-Is the hotel accessible?

10. It is easy to access from any point by walk, by car and by bus. There are some towns where buses cannot go through, but here I saw buses arriving in front of the entrance that brought people from the airport.

-Was pretty the entrance of the hotel?

10. It is so pretty: the walls are made of stone, the name of the hotel is illuminated at night and there are some fountains and palms.

-When you arrived, which was your first impression of the hotel?

10. When you just see the hotel, the impression is so good. The entrance is so beautiful, it seems so luxurious and it makes you think that it will accomplish all your expectations.

-How was the welcome of the staff of the hotel?

10. The receptionist was so pleasant with us. She smiled all time, and she solved all our doubts even before we made the question.

-What about the time you spent at the check-in? Did you spend so many time?

10. We only had to wait 5 minutes because there was another guest doing the check in. Then, our check in was so fast: the receptionist took our personal details, gave us the keys of the rooms and she gave us a fast explanation of the meal schedule. Finally, she explained us how to arrive to our room and she gave again a happy welcome to the hotel.

-Did the receptionist talk your language?

Yes, the 4 receptionists we talked with during the two days talked Spanish and Catalan with us.

3. RECEPTION – Give a mark from 0 to 10 and/or answer the questions:

-Was the entrance of the hotel easy to find?

10.

-Was the reception clean and tidy?

10.

<i>-Was the reception spacious?</i>
10.
<i>-Was good background music?</i>
10.
<i>-Had the reception comfortable places to stay or wait?</i>
10.
<i>-Were there maps or routes suggestion supplied at the reception desk?</i>
Yes. There are some maps and the receptionist explains the client the closest places and points of interest, and also some routes to go where the client want if necessary.
<i>-How was the general atmosphere of the reception?</i>
It transmits good vibrations. The colors are very fresh and Mediterranean. There are many sofas and couches of different style and very comfortable. The music was really nice and relaxing. All in all, the reception gives the customers the right welcome and a perfect way to start the stay.

4. THE ROOM – Give a mark from 0 to 10 and/or answer the questions:
<i>-Was there a welcome present at the room?</i>
0. No, there was nothing.
<i>-Was the room clean and tidy?</i>
7. The room was tidy but it could be cleaner as it was. The floor was not 100% clean, and as it was reformed the year before, there are still some kind of annotations at the corners of the walls and some blot too. The fridge was not so clean, it was old and a bit worn out.
<i>-About the room, were the bed sheets clean and comfortable?</i>
7. The bed sheets were clean but not comfortable. They were rough and stiff and they were not enough cozy to sleep well.
<i>-Did everything work well? Did something go wrong?</i>
10. Everything worked well at all.

<i>-If anything had to be fixed, how many time did you wait?</i>
There was nothing to be fixed.
<i>-Did the door close correctly?</i>
10. Yes.
<i>-Were there enough mirrors?</i>
7. Yes, but the images were a bit distorted.
<i>-Was the sound well isolated?</i>
4. No. We could hear everything: the sound of people going into the pool, the doors of the closest rooms opening and closing, the plumbing movements of the nearest room.
<i>-Do you have any comment or complain?</i>
When we just arrived into the room, there were not bath towels, so we had to talk with reception to ask for them. The curtains didn't close completely, so at early morning the sunlight goes into the room and it is disgusting. Some TV channels didn't work well at all.

5. THE BATHROOM – Answer the questions:
<i>-Was all the bathroom clean?</i>
Yes.
<i>-Were all the typical bathroom amenities disposed? (Shampoo, shower gel...)</i>
Yes.
<i>-Was the water temperature easy to regulate?</i>
Yes.
<i>-Was there some problem with the tap?</i>
No.
<i>-Did the drains work well?</i>
Yes.

<i>-Did the hairdryer work well?</i>
Yes.
<i>-Were the towels changed periodically?</i>
Yes.
<i>-Was the bathroom easy to ventilate?</i>
No. The bathroom was in direct contact with the room. The bathroom doesn't have an own window or ventilation. So the Only ventilation channel was the room window.
<i>-Were there enough toilet paper and towels available?</i>
Yes.
<i>-Were the plugs adequate and secure?</i>
Yes.
<i>-Was the shower screen or shower curtain clean?</i>
Yes.

6. THE FOOD – Answer the questions:
<i>-Was the breakfast area easy to access?</i>
Yes, very easy.
<i>-How was the lighting of the area?</i>
Very good. The artificial light was great enough and also, during the day, there was wonderful natural light thanks to the transparent glass walls.
<i>-Was easy to find a seat to breakfast?</i>
Yes, so easy. There were many people but also many seats available.
<i>-Was the food displaced in clean places?</i>
Yes, it was.

-Was there enough variety of food for vegetarians?

There was vegetarian food but there was not enough variety of any kind of food.

-Were all the foods and beverages regularly replenish?

No, and it was disgusting.

-Do you have any comment or complain?

There was not enough variety of food, the meat was dry and difficult to eat, and the desserts were not so good.

7. FACILITIES AND OTHER ASPECTS— Answer the questions:

-Evaluate the facilities and different aspects of the hotel:

- Balcony/terrace: **9**
- Air conditioning/heating: **8**
- Elevator: **8**
- Room: **10**
- Bed: **10**
- Bathrooms: **8**
- Room furniture: **8**
- Room equipment: **7**
- Reception: **9**
- Breakfast: **7**
- Lunch/dinner: **6**
- Gym: **9**
- Spa: **5**
- Staff members: **10**
- Location: **9**
- Atmosphere: **9**
- Peacefulness: **8**
- Cleanliness: **8**
- Price: **10**

-Was the hotel well indicated? (rooms, common zones...)

Yes.

-In case of Spa, gym or Sauna, were they clean and did they work well?

The gym and the Sauna were nice, but the Spa water was not hot enough, so almost nobody used it because of that: the water was cold.

-In order to solve doubts or questions, there were hotel staff in the different areas of the hotel?
Yes.
-Did the elevators work well?
Yes.

8. CHECK-OUT – Answer the questions:
-Was the staff of the hotel friendly and nice with you?
Yes, she was not the same member staff of the first day, but she was so nice with us.
-Was the checkout process easy and fast enough?
Yes, it was so fast and easy.
-Did the staff give you a feedback questionnaire?
No.
-Will you recommend this hotel to any friend or relative?
Not at all. The hotel was very nice but, at the end, the mistakes (food and Spa) were important enough to become an unsatisfactory experience. It was a 4 stars' hotel, and that requires more quality and it can't make those kind of mistakes.

5.2. Analysis of results and evaluation of the hotel quality

Now I'm going to explain this mystery guest real case, and I will analyze the questionnaire results.

The process started designing and developing a test/questionnaire for the hotel that had to be evaluated, in this case the hotel is *Mar Senses Puerto Pollensa -4 stars*. This questionnaire is made of five different parts or sections with containing different questions. These sections are:

- *Before the check-in*; it is just to show the basic characteristics of the coming stay, to put the initial conditions into context and also to know what are the expectations before the stay, just knowing these basic facts.
- *The check-in*; here are evaluated some main aspects of accessibility, location and appearance, the "first impression", and the check-in process itself.
- *The reception*; in this section we can appreciate the easiness to find the hotel entrance, the cleanliness, the general atmosphere and the check-in

process itself. This is very important because is the first real impression the guest has with the hotel, is like a touchdown. An in that first moment, the experience could be nice or it could start negatively.

- The room; evaluating this main point of the hotel experience will be very useful, because the room is where the guest has to feel super comfortable because it will be its “home” and the place where he or she will rest, clean, sleep. All the areas of the hotel must be working well, but the room should be as a temple for the guest.
- The bathroom; this part is thought to show characteristics such as availability of amenities and towels and the cleanliness of the bathroom, where the hygiene is very important.
- The facilities and other aspects; here are evaluated the different facilities and some other aspects of the hotel such as peacefulness or the staff members.
- The check-out; this is the last section and it is where the guest leaves the hotel, and where he or she has the last contact (almost in the hotel) with the staff members. In this point is where the experience concludes.

Then, once the questionnaire has been prepared, it took place the real experience; the two days’ hotel stay where the evaluation was done, where the questionnaire was implemented. So here comes the analysis of the results obtained from the questionnaire.

First of all, the reviews of other guests that were found in Booking.com were good and the pictures showed a very beautiful hotel. Taking into account that it isn’t known the expectative of the pasts guests, the reviews are so subjective and they are no representative. But, at the same time, I have to say that the pictures are truly representative. The hotel was exactly the same as the pictures showed, so here there are no anything to add.

To continue, we can see that all the answers of the sections of Check-in, Check-out, and reception have been so positive. Que evaluation shows that the reception itself –including physical aspects and atmosphere-, the staff members’ behavior and service given and the processes (check-in and check-out) are of really good quality. All of these aspects show the good quality of their standards and they give a really nice and professional image. The only thing that left was a welcome drink, to make the initial experience perfect.

Moving on to the room and bathroom, there are some things that need to be highlighted. There wasn’t any welcome present at the room, although it is not such important as the fact that there were not bath towels when we arrived. We had to talk with reception in order to get them: the reason was that it was a mistake, they always put bath towels in the rooms; but as well as it happened to us, it could happen to anybody else. In addition, the sound was bad isolated, the curtains didn’t close completely and some TV channels didn’t work well, so it was so disgusting. The bathroom had not its own ventilation because it was in direct contact with the room, but it didn’t affect negatively at all. But, all of those things broke the good vibrations or good experience we were living.

In fourth place, talking about the food, there are also some things to improve. The lunch/dining area and also the staff members were so nice, but there was not

enough variety of food, the quality of too many food dishes was inadequate and the beverages at breakfast were not refilled as regularly as needed. It is not what you expect of a four stars' hotel. In few words, the gastronomy experience was simply bad.

Finally, about the facilities and other aspects of the hotel we can see that the general evaluation is so good, but there is one specific fact (leaving aside the food aspects) that breaks this average: the Spa has the water cold. The views of the gym and the Spa were awesome, the distribution was also great, but the water was not as hot as expected to be a Spa of a hotel with that category. A guest that pays an amount of money to live and feel the difference between this hotel and another one cheaper (but maybe with the same quality) wants to go to the Spa and relax. And it was empty because of that: the water was cold. I highlight this fact because trust me it was the last straw.

5.3. Final suggestions

In order to give some tips to improve the quality of the hotel, I will list some suggestions based on the previous analysis of the questionnaire results.

1. Offer a welcome drink (cava, smoothie, natural fruit juice) at the reception while doing the check-in process. It will give the guests a good welcome feel and it gives a perfect initial experience. It could make the process even more easy to bear –maybe while the receptionist is introducing the personal details in the data base-, and gives the guests a refreshing introduction to the hotel.
2. The cleanliness of the room and the presence of towels and amenities is so important, and two of these three things were wrong. It must be more controlled and the quality must be daily verified. Summarized: always towels and better cleaning in the room.
3. Isolate the sound of the rooms. Indispensable. It cannot be accepted a four stars' hotel were the guests of a room can hear every time the adjoining room is opening the tap or is having a shower (and all the other things that are hearable).
4. Redesign the room curtains. Guests should be able to close them if they don't want sunlight at the early morning, among other reasons.
5. Reestablish all the TV channels: all must be working, if one channel is not working and cannot be fixed, then those channels must be out of the list.
6. Offer a bigger variety of food and make sure the quality is good. It must be fresh food and well cooked.
7. The staff members of the lunch/dining room must be more attentive to the food and beverages to refill them as soon as they are running out.
8. Set new standards for the Spa taking into account the temperatures on the hole, and not only separately. The experience of the Spa should be like feel in another universe, disconnect and relax.

Those are some suggestions that may help the hotel to improve the guest total experience.

6. CONCLUSION

We have seen that quality has changed a lot over the years and it has adapted to consumers' needs and wants. Bearing in mind that we want our company to be successful not only now, but over the years, it is crucial to manage quality and to constantly improve it. It is not only a fact of prepare a strategic plan that takes into account quality, but it is about making sure that we never stop growing and improving.

It is known that it is very easy to make a mistake offering a service, and it can completely break the total experience of a customer. If it occurs, it is not only bad because you have a dissatisfied customer, but it can create and spread a bad image and bad reputation of your brand.

In tourism companies the method of mystery shopping could be specially interesting for some reasons. First of all, as we are talking about services –and not about goods, which are easier to standardize quality controls- and we know no two experiences are the same, there is no real certainty that a service is going to work out correctly, people can make mistakes... there are a lot of facts that could make difficult to control service quality. In addition, talking about companies of the tourism sector, it is very important to take into account their service quality if we are in Balearic Islands. As it has been said, our economy is based on tourism, so we must learn how to control and manage the quality of those companies.

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