

# Total Quality Management (TQM) practices: Challenges faced by hotel managers

Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts (JTHCA)  
2017, Vol. 9 (2) pp 293-304  
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UiTM Press  
Submit date: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2017  
Accept date: 25<sup>th</sup> Aug 2017  
Publish date: 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2017

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## Proposed citation:

Anuar, J., Sumarjan, N. & Radzi, S.M. (2017). Total Quality Management (TQM) practices: Challenges faced by the hotel managers. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts*, 9(2), 293-304.

## Abstract

Total Quality Management (TQM) has appeared to be significant in the hotel and tourism industries over the last decades. With the intense competition among organizations in hotel and tourism industries to fulfil customers increasing demand patterns, many organizations have restructure their TQM practices for the betterment of the organization and encounter challenges during the implementation of TQM for maximum benefits. Limited study has addressed issue pertaining to challenges encountered specifically in the service industries. In-depth interviews with eight hotel managers (Human Resource Department) from several hotels in Kuala Terengganu were established. Findings revealed that the challenges encountered from the hotel managers consists of employees' involvement; employees training; top management commitment, product and service designs and quality systems. The managerial implications, recommendations and scope for future study are presented in the end of this paper.

## Keywords:

Challenges, hotel managers, Total Quality Management, practices

## **1 Introduction**

Hotel and tourism industry in modern economy is roaring in both developed and developing countries. It plays a crucial role to the world economy in terms of its GDP contribution as well as employment. The World Travel and Tourism Council has announced that in year 2015, the tourism sector generated 10% of the world gross domestic product. It is more than automobile industry (7%) and even chemical industry (8.6%). Additionally, tourism generated 5.4% of international export and nearly 30% of service export according to the statistics in 2014 (Zaitseva, Goncharova, & Androsenko, 2016). The performance of hotel and tourism industry is also universally accepted in context of its quality (Samat, Ramayah, & Saad, 2006). Quality management initiatives have been a recent trend and efforts are still going on. These initiatives are indeed helpful in assisting many organizations to perform well. Several quality management theories, concepts and frameworks have been executed by many organizations advocated by Deming, Juran, Crosby (Garvin, 1986) and other quality gurus, as well as the practical frameworks of different quality awards such as the Deming award, Malcolm Baldrige National Quality awards (MBNQA), and the European Quality awards (Behara & Gundersen, 2001).

Extensive reviews of quality management studies have been executed among academic researchers due to its multi-directional nature and the constantly increasing success of quality management practices. Several studies that focused on specific service context include hotels, restaurant and tourism (Bellou & Andronikidis, 2009; Daghfous & Barkhi, 2009; Eraqi, 2009), hospitals (Hazilah, 2009; Wardhani, Utarini, van Dijk & Post, 2009), education (Mehralizadeh & Safaeemoghaddam, 2010), banking (Ho & Lin, 2010) and Information Communication Technology services (Mahadeo & Durbarry, 2008; Santouridis & Trivellas, 2010; Sohn, Chang & Moon, 2008). The significance of quality management studies has been portrayed through its practicality and relevancy among organizations in Western European countries (Yusuf & Aspinwall, 2007). It is noted that most of the quality management theories had been initiated in developed countries. Looking at the positive outcome from Total Quality Management (TQM) practices, it is therefore dominating several industries and sectors worldwide. Gunasekaran and McGaughey (2003) highlighted that TQM focuses on service quality and customer satisfaction.

However, there are challenges (Bhat & Rajashekhar, 2009; Talib, Rahman, Qureshi, & Siddiqui, 2011) with regards to quality management practices that hinder its implementation. These challenges act as a barrier for organizations to achieve its full benefits of TQM practices. Hence, it is evidently important to investigate the TQM challenges faced by hotel managers. The rest of the paper is organised into four sections. The second section provides TQM practices in service industries and challenges on quality management implementation in service industry, following section covers the methodology and the contribution with conclusions drawn from the

study closes the paper. The implication, recommendations and future scope of present work will be discussed in the last section of the paper.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 TQM Practices in service industry**

TQM practices appeared to be the predominant factors to accomplish business excellence (Talib et al., 2011). It is indeed a critical factor especially in acquiring high performance in service industries. Wali and Boujelbene (2003) further agree that organizations need TQM practices in order to accomplish its vision. Several benefits were listed from the implementation of TQM such as improved quality, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage and increased productivity (Antony, Leung, Knowles, & Gosh, 2002).

The intense competitions among various organizations in service industries has witnessed them to provide high quality products and services as a mean to attract and keep their customers. Therefore, they adopted and adapted several TQM practices with the prime objective to improve their positions in the market place. An overwhelming published literature can be seen on quality management practices adopted by practitioners and academicians in multiple service industries. For example, Ueno (2008) in his work has highlighted seven predominant TQM practices in the promotion of service quality consisting of: recruitment and selection, training, teamwork, empowerment, performance appraisals and rewards (including measurement and recognition), two-way communication and organizational culture. In addition, Claver-Cortés, Pereira-Moliner, Tarí and Molina-Azorín (2008) discovered that there are four important TQM factors in the hotel industry service settings, consists of; training, information and communication technologies and information systems, environmental management and performance. Meanwhile, Khamalah and Lingaraj (2007) investigated managerial perceptions of the implementation of TQM in small and large service organisations and discovered seven key factors including benchmarking, quality improvement programs, teambuilding techniques, supplier involvement, training, reward and recognition.

Furthermore, Samat et al. (2006) extracted out seven TQM practices from 25 TQM practices as prescribed by Sila and Ebrahimpour, (2002), they are: management support and commitment, employee involvement, employee empowerment, information and communication, total engagement, customer focus and continuous improvement. Saravanan and Rao (2004) in their study on automobile service stations, define 12 quality management dimensions, they are: top management commitment and leadership, benchmarking, customer focus and satisfaction, service marketing, social responsibility, human resource management, employee satisfaction, service culture, SERVICESCAPE, continuous improvement, technical system and information and analysis. In addition, Sureshchander, Rajendran and Anantharaman (2002)

established 12 major TQM practices comprising of: top management commitment and visionary leadership, human resource management, technical system, information and analysis system, benchmarking, continuous improvement, customer focus, employee satisfaction, union intervention, social responsibility, services capes, and service culture, which has been extended from the TQM practices. Moreover, Brah, Wong and Rao (2000) in their study on TQM and business performance in Singapore service sector has demonstrated 11 constructs of TQM implementation which consists of; top management support, customer focus, employee involvement, employee training, employee empowerment, supplier quality management, process improvement, service design, quality improvement rewards, benchmarking and cleanliness.

## **2.2 Challenges on quality management implementation in service industry**

Several organizations experienced tremendous challenges in accomplishing TQM goals as part of their effort to acquire TQM initiatives (Jun, Cai, & Peterson, 2004). Among the challenges is organizational culture (Bhat & Rajashekhar, 2009). Bhat and Rajashekhar (2009) in their study has discovered 21 challenges which are adopted from the 90s study, Tamimi and Sebastianelli (1998). The top five challenges are employees are not given proper training especially in problem identification and solving techniques, employees reluctant to do new way of how certain things are being practice, no benchmarking conducted to observe other organization practices, organization lack of resources to implement TQM and lastly quality is not effectively measured. Generally, majority of the challenges fall under the management that were unable and incapable to conduct a total system approach.

Additionally, a study conducted by Helms and Mayo (2008) that focuses on employee's perspectives has discovered four major categories that contribute to the organizational TQM failures. It includes poor attitudes of employees, poor services given to customers, employees not attentive and socializing around as well as slow service to customers. In addition, Amar and Zain (2002) inaugurated 11 challenges that contributed to the unsuccessful of TQM implementation. It comprises of Human Resource Management practices, organisational culture, interdepartmental relations, attitude towards quality, employees dislike new changes, materials, machines, equipment's, information, method, and training. On the other hand, Jun et al. (2004) has replicated 25 potential challenges adopted from Tamimi and Sebastianelli (1998) study and tested it in few Mexican organizations. They then compared the results with US organizations. The similar findings entailed that lack of proper training were given to employees, employee resistance to change and unbalance management compensation with organizational TQM initiatives.

## **3 Methodology**

In-depth interview with the hotel managers from eight Human Resource Department of several hotels was conducted. The objective of the interview is to

investigate the challenges experienced by hotel managers in establishing total quality management practices at their organizations. Managers were contacted to participate in the study. Consent was signed upon their agreement to be interviewed. The characteristics of all hotels involved in the study were: located in Kuala Terengganu area, four-five star rated hotels, implement Total Quality Management practices at their hotel and listed among the 63 hotels in Terengganu that were registered with the Malaysian Association of Hotels, Terengganu Chapter (MAH, 2016). Consequently, 20 out of the 63 four-five star rated hotels that were listed adopted Total Quality Management practices at their organizations. All respondents were invited through e-mails and phone calls to take part in this study. Twelve hotels reluctant to participate owing to person in charge with regards to subject matter is not available, hotels were running high occupancy, hotels occupied with activities such as staffs training and events. Eight hotels involved in this study are indexed with Hotel 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Managers requested privacy and disagree to reveal themselves to protect the hotel’s reputation. Thus, the hotel’s names will not be revealed for anonymity purposes. Creswell (2008) highlighted that one-on-one in-depth interviews contribute to richer data though it is more time consuming, costly and labour intensive.

Researchers adopted purposive sampling for participants’ selection. Human resource managers were preferred due to their in-depth knowledge in handling quality management practices at their hotel. Majority of the hotels do not have their own Quality Manager or specific department that focus on quality management. The jurisdiction of TQM practices and approaches falls under the Human Resource Department. The interviewees’ characteristics for each hotel were reported in Table 1. Researchers conducted each interview session approximately between forty-five minutes to one hour. Sets of questions were referred for these semi-structured interviews. The interview sessions that were recorded using audio-visual tapes was then transcribed verbatim, reviewed comprehensively and summarized into themes, categories and concepts. Table 1 illustrates the interviewees characteristics.

Table 1: Interviewees characteristics

Hotel	Position	Gender
1	Human Resource Manager	Male
2	Asst. Human Resource Manager	Female
3	Asst. Human Resource Manager	Female
4	Human Resource Manager	Male
5	Asst. Human Resource Manager	Male
6	Human Resource Manager	Male
7	Human Resource Manager	Female
8	Human Resource Manager	Male

*Note: Self compiled by researchers*

## 4 Discussion

In this study, an attempt has been made to investigate the challenges faced by hotel managers in establishing TQM practices at their hotel. The extensive literature review summarises that a total of 17 TQM practices were frequently used for the successful implementation of TQM in service industries. Given the importance of Total Quality Management in hotel operations, respondents were interviewed on their perceptions and experiences while administering total quality management practices at their hotel. Five themes were derived from the data analysis that consists of employees' involvement; employees training; top management commitment, product and service designs and quality systems.

### 4.1 Involvement

Employees are recognized as a source of competitive advantage, as a result of changes occurring in the work environment that led to flattening of organizational structure (Campos, da Costa Mendes, Albino Silva, & Oom do Valle, 2014). All respondents agreed that the number one challenges that they encountered in implementing total quality management practices at their hotel are their internal customers.

One respondent highlighted that; *"Some of my staffs have been working for the hotel for quite some time. They are used to the usual practices on how certain things are being completed. They are hard to accept changes"*.

Another respondent postulated, *"All the quality approaches that being introduced will only go to the drain if employees are not together with the management to do it"*, also supports this. The respondent reported an example of frequent briefings that need to be done in every department.

The purpose of briefings is to disseminate information among all employees with regards to the department operations. Thus, management has introduced that every department need to conduct at least one briefing daily. But surprisingly, respondent mentioned that briefing only take place once a week at some departments.

Another respondent highlighted that, *"Our hotel still experiencing high employee turnover, therefore it's quite difficult for us to totally have the quality practices since our staffs come and go"*.

Hotel is just a stepping-stone for certain people before they can have an establish career. Therefore, employees are not keen to get involve with any new quality approaches introduced by management. However, serious efforts can be seen at certain hotels ensuring their internal customers satisfy and indirectly involve with their quality management approaches.

The respondent mentioned that, *“We are inspired by Tan Sri Tony Fernandez on how he runs Air Asia. To us, when our employees are happy, they then can make our customers happy through their good services”*.

These hotels also encourage their employees to give opinions for the betterment of their hotel performance. For instance, employees can write in a comment card suggesting monthly hotels food and room promotion or upgrading current facilities.

#### **4.2 Employees training**

From the findings, it was found that all respondents agreed that having a proper training in establishing total quality management practices is essential to the hotel daily operations. The purpose of these training is to create awareness and implement the right procedures throughout the operation. Specific trainings related to various departments are in need. For instance, trainings in Front Office Department can focus at telephone etiquettes on how to handle customers over the phone, grooming since front office staffs are the ambassador of the hotel, customer service approaches since they deal a lot with external customers as well as training on how to handle fussy customers since front desks need to maintain their professionalism. However, almost 63% of the respondents (5 out of 8 respondents) argued that less training was given to employees due to the hotel’s budget constraint. Most of the trainings conducted by Head of departments and supervisors were informal and short (take place approximately 15-20 minutes).

Researchers therefore strongly suggest that trainings being conducted in a creative way such as through interactive fun games and activities or inviting managers from nearby hotels to share their experiences. Thus, these methods might not only save the hotels’ training budget since it does not require a huge amount of money for training purposes, but will benefit the employees and management. Furthermore, the standard operating procedures and training for all employees pertaining to quality management approaches should be implemented to ensure all employees know how to employ the right procedures in their daily operations. It would be a disastrous event to the hotel teams if accidents for instance, happen in the workplace without proper enforcement of safety procedures. Standard procedures are a must for the hotel to ensure proper guidelines for all employees and trainees are adhered to. Having a proper total quality management approaches is a crucial key for the successful performance of the hotel organization. The fundamental analysis of this paper is that an effective total quality management policy should be driven by an effective plan and guidelines adopted by the decision makers in the hotel.

#### **4.3 Top Management Commitment**

This study has shown that far from embracing quality management approaches there are additional limitations that contributed to the inefficient quality management practices; top management commitment. It is apparent that top management

commitment lead to possibility of higher staff's motivation and efforts in implementing quality practices.

One respondent stated, *"Some of the supervisors and assistant managers have limited working experiences. They show less interest to conduct a proper quality method to their staffs"*.

Another respondent emphasized that *"It's difficult to initiate such program... the quality management program... especially when the leader does not recognize the contribution of these techniques towards customer satisfaction and company's profitability"*. Furthermore, another respondent highlighted, *"Management is always right and therefore employees should follow whatever management asked them to do without questioning"*.

Researchers believed that softer approach is preferable to productive and healthy attitudes among employees. Empowerment, freedom to express opinions, better rewards and higher expectations can encourage employees to perform well. On the other hand, frequent monitoring and follow-up of related matters to operation should be done. Top management should display exemplary examples so that employees can then follow. It is vital for the organizations to have a strong foundation of top management commitment. Active and visible leadership is more appropriate to deal with resistance to change by adopting total quality values and practices (Campos et al., 2014).

#### **4.4 Product and Service Designs**

Findings of the study also discovered that respondents faced product and service design value challenges. According to Aktas, Çiçek and KÄ±yakc (2011), values can be defined as 'enduring goals that serve as guiding principles in people's lives' and are 'conceptualised as explicit or implicit formulisations of the "desirable" that influence individuals means and ends of action'. In delivering value and quality service, one respondent highlighted that there is an urgent need to redesign their hotel storage facilities. This is due to maintain and prolong the shelf life of the items/equipments. The respondent believed that to have a successful quality management practices in terms of providing quality food to customers, a proper hotel storage facility is appropriate.

A respondent stated, *"Our hotel is among the famous and established hotels in Terengganu, but the building is very old and facilities are out-dated"*.

Moreover, one respondent reported that their quality management approaches is unbalance with the current facilities that they have. The responded said, *"After taking all the operation costs, we plan to have our in-house laundry. Previously we outsource our linens. But the quality of space used for laundry room is very poor given that the current space is not relevant to fulfil current needs"*.



On the other hand, researchers suggest that all respondents grab the opportunity of technology emergence that has a great impact on quality management approaches. For instance, all the documentation in Front Office Department such as the guest reservation forms, guest check-in forms, daily occupancy report and room availability chart can be stored in hard drive. It goes the same to Housekeeping Department on storing data pertaining to room status and guest requests. Less space therefore is required to store all the files and less time is needed to do the data entry. On the other hand, it is agreed that hotel pays great attention to refurbishment. It doesn't need to be a tremendous refurbishment for the whole hotel (closing business for renovation will incur cost) but it can be done from department to department. For instance, the installation of automatic and safety door (scanned card). It will assist hotels in ensuring guests safety all the time. Thus, it contributes greatly to hotel quality management approaches. The installation of these improved technology should be well balanced with expertise needs in terms of maintenance, emergency needs and recordkeeping.

#### **4.5 Quality Systems**

Quality orientation has becoming the focal point in business practices and customer behaviour (Wang, Chen & Chen, 2012). All respondents stated that they have standard procedures at their workplace, for instance in serving food to guests for Food & Beverage department. Another standard procedure in the department is the usage of forms and logbook on items on loan/for loan. However, majority respondents reported that the procedures are not being followed.

One respondent saying *“It’s frustrated to see employees take things for granted and do not follow the procedures precisely. How are we going to give good services if employees just do things at their leisure?”*.

Additionally, another respondent postulated, *“Though we have system at our hotel, but certain things especially when it involves outside suppliers, are being done manually. Example, Front Office staffs need to call the newspapers vendor daily on the amount and type of newspapers that we want”*.

It is interesting to discover that majority of the hotel managers expressed belief on the needs and importance of having suppliers and vendors connecting to the hotel systems but there is little evidence of strategic thoughts on the implementation of having a supplier-hotel relationship system. This is probably due to different systems used between suppliers and hotel. Additionally, hotel also have several vendors for various departments such as numerous suppliers for hotel newspapers, linens and uniforms, electrical items, hotel systems, frozen food, fresh items liked fruits, raw meats, vegetables and also different suppliers for food and beverage glassware and chinaware items.

## 5 Conclusion

The findings identified in this study are in line with what have been heavily reviewed in the literatures: employees' involvement; employees training; top management commitment, product and service designs and quality systems. The challenges encountered by one hotel vary from another hotel depending on the characteristics of the hotel (star-rated, location, type of business). There is no uniformity in TQM practices among hotels. As a conclusion, it can be summarized that total quality management practices can be viewed as activities associated with the development of hotel's tangible and intangible assets as well as daily operation procedures in order to produce great services for the betterment of the hotel's competitiveness, operational efficiency and better image within its market place. The quality management project should be driven by an effective plan and guidelines adopted by hotels. Looking from managers' perspectives, this study confirms the significant commitment from the top management in the development process of a total quality culture, particularly in the context of employee's involvement, employees' training and competitive product and service design as well as quality system.

Cultural change towards quality definitely begins at the top of the organization (Campos et al., 2014). As the analysis revealed, the decision makers of the hotel (general manager and head of departments) should identify and take into accounts all the challenges that can limit the potential performance when implementing quality management policy. Uniquely, this study provides challenges encountered by hotel managers in establishing quality management practices, focusing on 4-5 star hotels in Terengganu. Future research may extend on other locations to discover the quality management pattern. In conjunction with that, future research can also focus on internal and external employees point of views with regards to quality management initiatives.

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