

A study on Hotel Front Office Practices and its Impact on Guest Satisfaction with Reference to the Vivanta by Taj Blue Diamond, Pune

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Abstract

The case study of Vivanta by Taj Blue Diamond, Pune focuses on finding the innovative practices of the Front Office Department and measuring their impact on guest satisfaction. Based on the findings it was observed that there was a positive impact of innovative practices, service quality, courtesy, competency and responsiveness (CCR) of staff on guest satisfaction level in the hotel.

Keywords: Innovative Practices, Guest Satisfaction, Service Quality

Introduction

The hospitality industry is striving to evolve itself and enhance the guest experience. The hotel front desk is a vital part of the Front Office operations because it creates the guest's first impression. In this era of competition the hotels have adopted new practices to improve their level of performance and at the same time delight the guest. Each guest is treated with utmost consideration to make him feel special. As there is a lot of competition in the market every hotel distinguishes itself by adopting innovative practices to help attract more and more guests.

Vivanta by Taj Blue Diamond is the brand of Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) and was launched in the year 2010 to cater for the business clientele. The hotel (Blue Diamond, the previous name) was established in Pune in the year 1973 by the Kirloskars, was later taken over by the IHCL group and renamed. Earlier Blue Diamond was the only 5 star hotel in Pune along with Le Meridian

and Sun and Sand. Gradually the competition increased and more and more hotels started coming up. It became necessary for the hotel to give the best services and to do something new for their guest to keep them happy. The guest had more options to choose from and it was important to retain the guest and give them the lifetime experiences so that they became the loyal customers. The guest's frank opinions helped the hotel to change a few of their practices and implement the new, cost-effective and innovative ones in the industry.

According to a survey Wi-Fi technology, on line reservations and high speed internet access are the leading technological facilities being provided to customers by the hotels. (Hotel Industry Trends in Technology, Sustainability survey, 2013).

Today's customer wants quick service. The hotel offers flexible and simplified procedure for check-in. It includes in- room check in where the guest doesnot have to wait at the counter for his turn to come or do the check-in process. The guest is escorted by the Guest Relation Executive and the rooming is done. With the development in technology, the quick kiosk check- in concept was initiated where the guest checks in himself. The Counter check- in system is practised by the hotel as it is not possible to do in- room check- in for all the guests. The group check in is done in the coach by the front office staff to save on the time factor for the guests. The group members are given pre-assigned rooms off the rooming list. The front desk staff interacts with the guests, is attentive and strives to handle all customer complaints calmly.

The new practices implemented include digital boards usedby the drivers while going for the guest pickup,

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the travel desk executive sending the details about the chauffer prior to the pickup, which helped the guest to track the chauffer easily, traditional welcome with arti and tikka along with cold towels and some refreshment, small mini bar facility provided to the guest to treat themselves in the car.

The staff members are trained to be familiar with the room styles, features and locations throughout the hotel. The desk employees are trained to be familiar with the local area and sightseeing spots. The guest satisfaction tracking system helps the hoteliers to understand which facilities are more important for the guests, leading to guest retention.

The new guest services are introduced to develop better relationships with the guest. The hotel conducts weekend activities for the couples and children. Kids are offered kids registration card at check in where they would write about their favourite food and drink and those are served in the rooms for them as a surprise. The guest are recognised on each of his/her visit and after completing the 10th, 25th and 50th visit, the stay is celebrated with dinner in the hotel's restaurant along with a gift.

Objectives

1. To study the various current trends in the hotel front office department.
2. To assess the guest satisfaction levels with respect to the implementation of the current trends at Vivanta by Taj Blue Diamond, Pune.

Significance of the Study:-The paper is a case analysis to understand the current Front Office practices and the related guest satisfaction, an important component for hotel chain like Taj Hotels, Resorts and Palaces to retain their brand name and customer loyalty. It is essential that each property maintains the standard of the group of company and brand. As different international brands are entering the Indian market, the company needs to retain its position in the ever growing competitive market. The findings of the study will also assist in formulating an action plan for the future improvements in the Front Office practices.

The study will help those aspiring to join the hotel industry to understand the kind of practices existing in the Hotel Front Office, the guest expectations and their preferences. The study will help the researcher in better understanding

about the concept of guest satisfaction and guest retention. It will also lead to a lot of learning about the Front Office Practices in the hotel.

Literature Review

The literature review for the study was done from various theses, trade journals, various books and internet.

Riza Munira Binti Shamsudin, 2012, the research states that Guest satisfaction is a differentiator and a critical success factor for the hotel. It shows the results of the study of performance management of Front Office department and guest satisfaction. The hotel performance is impacted because of the attitude and the motivational levels of the employees.

Asad Mohsin, 2010, the study aims to assess the service quality perception of customers of the hotels and helps the management to identify areas that need attention to meet and exceed customer expectations. The results indicate that there is significant difference between expectations of the guests and the actual experiences.

Melia, 2010, the study suggests the satisfaction of the guest as important success factor for the hotel's survival. Guest satisfaction plays important role and it helps hotel to improve their standards as well as imparts knowledge about the competitors.

Alin Sriyam, 2010, the study suggest that if the front office staff is efficient and cooperative it will lead to customer satisfaction in the hotel.

Kong Hai -Yan, 2006, the study focuses on the Front Office staff in the four and five star hotels in China. The findings suggest that work in this department of hotel is challenging, demanding and communication is an important skill for the staff. It also says that high-quality human resources are lacking in the hospitality sector and emphasises on professional development and training in order to improve the skills of staff in the front office.

Minghetti Valeria, 2003, the article suggest that to increase the occupancy levels, consecutively the revenue levels and the guest experience, the hoteliers must understand the needs of the guest, their preferences in the hotel. It states that it will create value for the customers and help in the retention of the guests. The study has developed methodological framework to analyze the guest-hotel relationship.

Tom Baum, 2001, the researcher emphasises on the changing functions of the front office operations. It includes the role the personnel, multi skilling, balancing between technologic advancement and delivering of quality customer care, expectation of faster response to more complex methods of communication, bench marks for various services. It gives an insight into the various changes in the front office practices and how technology is working as an enabling force and not replacing the traditional roles. It also addresses the importance of educating and training the employees for better performance.

Judy Siguaw, 1999 discusses about implementing outstanding or best practices to improve operations. When effective practices were implemented in the front office especially check-in and check-out, there was an increase in the guest and employee satisfaction, along with considerable profit improvements. The practices include sharing with employees the savings from revised work practices, particularly those that prescribe standard times for each activity.

Heron has defined customer satisfaction as a measure of how the customer perceives service delivery. It suggests that satisfaction of the customer is a function of service performance and is related to the customer expectation. The service performance needs to exceed customer's expectations and then the customer will be satisfied. On the other hand, customers are more likely to be dissatisfied if the service performance is less than what they have expected.

Kotler defined that satisfaction is a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance in relation to customer's expectation.

Research Methodology-

1. **Research Design-** The research will be descriptive and explanatory regarding the various services of the Front Office Department and the satisfaction levels of the guests .
 - (a) Primary data- It was collected through the guest online feedback forms (Guest Satisfaction Tracking System) of Vivanta by Taj Blue Diamond, Pune.
 - (b) Secondary data- The secondary data was collected through books, trade journals, published papers and internet.

2. **Sample Size-** The respondents for the study were 84 guests who stayed at the Vivanta by Taj Blue Diamond, Pune between 1st June 2015 and 30th June 2015. The guests were randomly picked and they responded to the online feedback form.
3. **Research Instrument-** The guest feedback survey was used as an instrument for data collection. The questionnaire included factors of service quality related to the front office department of the hotel.

The questionnaire had various levels of degree of satisfaction related to the Front Office practices and services, which range from 0 to 10 (10 is for the highest satisfaction, whereas, 0 is for the lowest satisfaction).

The guest also recommended certain improvements in the services and the practices that existed in the hotel. They were also asked about how well the staff handled the various situations and complaints related to the operations.

Limitations

1. The current study cannot claim to be wholly conclusive as it is limited to a small sample size from only one city of India.
2. Not all parameters were rated by all the respondents which limited the scope for detailing.

Results & Discussion- The primary data collected through the online guest feedback (Guest Satisfaction Tracking System) was analysed by the percentage method and the representation was done in graphical form. The data was analyzed as per the responses obtained from the respondents and interpreted to draw the following conclusions.

The results obtained from the data collected through the hotel guests are as follows-

Vivanta by Taj Blue Diamond, Pune is a 5 star, Business Hotel with an inventory of 110 rooms and is located in the downtown area of Koregaon Park. The various parameters under the study include Front Office Practices like the most important arrival and departure process, courtesy, competency and responsiveness (CCR) of the reception staff, telephone operator, chauffeur and travel desk staff. It also considers the factor of airport transfer by the hotel and meeting the personal preferences of the guest, especially the repeat customers. When a guest checks in, the first point of contact for him is the front office department in

the hotel. From the results it can be inferred that most of the guests were satisfied with the services and practices of the Front Office department. Most of them have marked it as excellent in the feedback. When the guests check in, they have already judged the services and have made the impression about the hotel. It was observed that the CCR of the front office staff was rated highest, followed by the of airport transfer by the hotel and CCR of Chauffer. Some respondents have rated the CCR of the Front desk staff low as the details related to room reservation were incorrect, guest queries were not attended to on time by the receptionist. Such observations were considered from the special comments put up by the guests. The rating for the departure process is better than the arrival but the percentages for these parameters should be much higher for a star category hotel. Departure process was carried out satisfactorily or as per guest perception. The percentage rating for CCR of telephone operators and travel desk staff was satisfactory. Looking at the number of respondents, it can be concluded that not many used the telephone services because of the use of personal mobile phones.

Meeting the personal preferences or special requests of the guest was rated excellent by some guests, but the some observations show that not all requests and guest preferences were not taken care of, like certain requests for special amenities were not attended to. As a brand the hotel considers only those feedbacks rated as excellent, to be acceptable and all other parameters are worked upon by making changes in the existing practices to be more effective.

Conclusion

The most important elements in guest satisfaction leading to repeat customers are standardized products, motivated and trained staff and quality management. An overall view of the study shows that most of the guests are satisfied with the overall services of the Front Office department. The Front office department on the whole seems to be one area which is a key promoter of the guest satisfaction. The motivational techniques used for the staff like the

Star-o-meter (earning star points for the quality services offered), Employee of the Month Award, displaying such information on the display boards for everyone to know are effective motivational tools. It can also be said that the training practices as well as the recruitment policies for the hotel are effective. The Front Offices practices followed during the departure like sending the bill a night before the departure or slipping it early morning with the news paper for the guest to check, offering goody bags and gifts while leaving the hotel, catching such moments in the photos and mailing them to the guest, answering the queries and effective handling of complaints have added to the level of guest satisfaction. It gets reflected in the loyalty of the guests towards the Taj brand of hotels.

Suggestions and Recommendations:-

1. Vivanta by Taj being a business hotel, the guest expects to have a free Wi-Fi service as the global trend.
2. Emphasis should be given on selling of the hotel travel desk services, chauffer services for airport pick up and local transport which will serve as an additional revenue source for the hotel.
3. As a global trend the telephone operator services to be merged with the front desk services.
4. To enhance the guest stay and overall experience employees to be made more sensitive towards the needs and preferences of the guest through briefing & training programs.

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