Review Article

Investigating customer's perspective of service quality management

Abstract

Using the properties management in Park Island, Hong Kong, as a case study, the purpose is to focus on investigating customer's perspective of service quality management.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The feedbacks from respondents were analyzed by using SERVQUAL model. Authors conducted twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Findings: The SERVQUAL model presented here, the result demonstrate the significance of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy in service quality management.

Practical implications: Based on the insights gained from respondents, providing service quality management can exceed customers' expectations and enhance the trusting relationship between customers and properties management companies.

Originality/value: This paper urges for the significance of investigating customer's perspective of service quality management. The aim of such an episode is to arouse all the properties management companies to strive the best to provide exceptional quality services in daily properties management.

Keywords: service management, properties management, service quality

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Introduction

With the rapid changing of life in Hong Kong in these few decades, including economic growth and thus improvement of living standard, education level, etc., people concerned more about their living standard. As a result, in order to win with a competitive advantage and successfully outperform other competitors in nowadays' keen market, more and more properties management companies are spanning utmost effort on improving service quality in managing properties.[1] The awareness of service quality was caused by the environmental change of the society including the high expectation and requirement of properties management, which is advocated and emphasized by those properties developers; most sensitive and quality demanding of service due to the downturn of economic environment; and advocated by the government through sustainable amendment of government legislation (amendment of BMO) as well as by the formation of Owners Committee.[1] In order to maintain a good service quality with high reliability, more and more industry practitioners have actively thriving ways to improve the daily quality management so as to ensure the exceptional service quality for customers. In order to make differentiation on a service firm to deliver consistent higher quality service over its competitors, it is paramount if property management companies area able to walk extra mile to meet or even do whatever that can exceed are those target customer's service quality expectation.[1]

In properties management industry, service quality is the key to sustain in keen competitive market. Therefore, the need to provide deliver quality service is paramount in order to meet the needs of customers and exceed their expectation.[2] Nowadays, properties management covers lots of facets from providing strict cleaning standard, monitoring 24-hour reliable security services, keeping maintenances, creating beautiful landscaping, operating clubhouses, planning and coordinating recreational activities, planning and organizing events, planning, implementing and educating customers to live green. The objective is to maximize the value of customers' properties. Not only the challenges for both the management and frontline staff of properties management are facing, but also very challenging to manage the diversified customers with different needs and expectations.

This study intends to investigate the customer's perspective of service quality in operation and management in Park Island. Park Island, regarded as "the leisure vacation island" which is a private residential area situated in Ma Wan, Hong Kong. It is regarded as the first largest ecofriendly residential area which covers a large green space since planning.[3] The management is devoted to plan, implement and educate the residents through various environmental protection programs, workshops and events.

The findings will supplement existing research and expand the findings into untapped areas. The value of this study is that it helps to investigate customer's perspective of service quality management and showcase the importance of exceptional service quality in daily management for properties management practitioners.

Literature review

Generally, quality can be described both as goods and service. It is difficult to access the quality of service. Normally, the quality of goods can be easy to evaluate since it is tangible and then it can be judged by assessing their style, color and hardness, etc. However, service is different. Service is intangible, heterogeneous and

inseparable.[4] Firstly, it cannot be courted and measured. Moreover, since it involves a lot of labour and thus it is difficult to assess. For the same services, different customer will view differently. It much depends on labour of such service. Furthermore, the customer's input will also influence the service performance. Service quality is even more difficult to define. Service has more diverse quality attributes result from wide variation created by high customer involvement. A set of service quality dimensions was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithamel and Berry. It has been used in many service firms to measure quality performance. Reasons with have multiple dimensions of quality are communicated.[5] Such dimensions include service reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles, availability, professionalism, timeliness, completeness, and pleasantness by Parasuraman.

The above ten dimensions were reduced to five which by grouping competence, courtesy, credibility, security, security and communication into one dimension, named assurance in 1992. The five dimensions are listed as follows:

 I. Reliability

It means the ability to perform the promised services dependably and accurately.

II. Responsiveness.

It means the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service.

III. Assurance

It means the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence

IV. Empathy

It means the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers.

 V. Tangibles

It means the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication.

According to Goetsch & Davis[6] when quality applies to service, it is not easier to define than to a tangible product. The definition included some criteria including fitness for using, meeting or exceeding customer's requirement and meeting or exceeding customer expectations. Fitness for use applies to the process of providing the service. Moreover, meeting or exceeding customer's requirement is much critical due to only the customer determines if the quality of service is acceptable. "Unless the customer's requirements are met, his or her evaluation of service quality will be negative".[6] Furthermore, meeting or exceed customer expectation is closely related to customer requirement. Normally, extras help services company beyond customer satisfaction and delight. Customers who receive outstanding service more than just satisfied, they would be delighted.

Research methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach and a semi-structured interview protocol was designed as the data collection method. The questions for the interviews were based on an extensive review of the literature from studies. Informants for this study were comprised of residents from Park Island. Qualitative research is considered to be "concerned with understanding things rather than with measuring them" Gordon & Langmaid, whereby the "subjectivity and the authenticity of human experience" by Silverman, This enables the researchers to gain an insight to the wider and deeper meanings, perceptions, feelings and attitudes of research subjects.[7]

In this study, researcher chose Park Island "the leisure vacation island", which is a private residential area situated in Ma Wan, Hong Kong. The interviewees were the residents in Park Island. The sample group comprised twelve females and eight males respondents, aged 30-55. Their education levels were secondary (4), bachelor (6) and master (10). This prompted the researchers to make a subjective selection of the sampling units to obtain a representative sample of the research population by Sekaran. A sample was required for the study because of limited resources for the researcher and it is impracticable to collect data from entire research population. Due to limited resources available to the researchers made it difficult to collect data from the entire research population. In the current investigation, interviewing would be discontinued once 'saturation' was reached. At this point, no further insights would be contributed from the interviews by Myers. In qualitative research, sample size is not the major concern, but the usefulness, richness and meaning of data.

Twenty respondents were selected and interviewed the identical interview questions in the same order to make sure consistency in the data collection process. All of the interview questions were open ended and designed to allow respondents to expand upon their responses. In some cases, probing questions were posed to elucidate informants' answers. The interviews were digitally recorded and handwritten field notes were compiled to later reflect upon during the data analysis process. The interviews were conducted at Park Island with duration between 40 and 55 mins.

Results

As SERVQUAL instruments capture service quality in multiple dimensions, this study utilized those aspects developed by Parasuraman et al.[8] to analyze the feedback of respondents regarding the service quality management in Park Island. SERVQUAL has five elements,[9]

a. Tangibles: Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.

b. Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately

c. Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

d. Assurance: Stemming from competence, courtesy, credibility, and security; knowledgeableness and the courtesy extended by employees and their corresponding ability to inspire trust and confidence.

e. Empathy: Derived from access, communication, and understanding the customer, this attribute comes from caring and individualized attention that a firm provides to its customers (Table 1).

Table 1 Customers' feedback on service quality management are displayed as below

Tangibles

Establishment of livable environment

Effective communication

Beautiful landscaping

Implement Energy conservation measures

Promote waste recycles

Proper maintenance of decor and facilities

Modern look lobby and equipment

Install 7 color recycle bins

Public facilities are visually appealing

All staff are neat appearing

Reliability

Effective communication

Refined property management

Active problem solving

Management office provides its services at the time it promises to do so

Staff check all the documents seriously

Responsiveness

Organize monthly consultation meeting

Organize monthly owner committee meeting

Effective follow up measures to handle customer's concern

Management office never too busy to respond to customer's request

Management office provide prompt services

All staff are very willing to help customers

Assurance

Proper management of public funds

Proper maintenance of public facilities

Proper financial management

Effective Pest Control

Strict access control

Employees are consistently courteous towards customers

Employees are knowledgeable to handle enquiries

Empathy

Protection of residents' properties in adverse weather condition

Effective educative environmental events and measures adopted to response to climate change

Attained Caring Company Award

Blood donation days arranged several times in a year

Customer Services representatives at lobby reception understand specific needs of customers.

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the above case study, we learnt more about customer's perspective of service quality. The exceptional service quality management should be implemented in all properties management at all times. Park Island management is very attentive to understand the real needs and expectations in the estates and buildings they serve. They value customers' compliments as well as suggestions for improvement. Feedbacks from staffs and customers will be taken seriously, However the exceptional service management is all about providing continuous services from the hearts, definitely not only concerns about appearance and gestures, but the sincerity from the hearts that can be felt by customers in every facet of service management. Last but not least, demonstrating the importance of exceptional service quality in daily properties management at all times.

Recommendations

1) To pay attention to intangibles for improving quality of services.

2) To check quality and allocate resources to anticipate customers' expectations accurately.

3) To weave and nurture an exceptional service culture to all properties management staff.

4) To provide regular meetings and workshops to enhance service quality management.

5) Most importantly, to continue to deliver exceptional service quality in all facets of properties management.

Limitations

This study is not immune to limitations. The first limitation resides in adopting a qualitative approach. Sample size is not a significant issue, even the small sampling size of interviewees. The focus has been on generating insights on the service quality of Park Island. The research findings should not be generalized to the population in large since this was never the intention of the researcher. This study has employed in-depth interviews for data collection, the accuracy of this study will depend on the researcher's ability to assist respondents to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences in their perception of the service quality management in Park Island as research findings. Consequently, it is recognized that the results of this study present a snapshot of thinking and feelings amongst a specific group of customers in Park Island at that specific time. Although the authors make no claims for the generalization of the results, this study has focused on the service quality management in Park Island. These findings are useful for all the properties management companies to enhance service quality management. Future research should adopt quantitative research method to increase validity and reliability of the result.[10–13]

Acknowledgments

Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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