CASE STUDY

Designing Quality Processes for a Service Organization

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DESIGNING QUALITY PROCESSES FOR A SERVICE ORGANIZATION

by

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1 INTRODUCTION:

This paper is based on the actual work that was carried out for a service organization before its expansion from a 200-room to a 500-room hotel. The paper covers the background, key indicators of change, the documentation of the processes, bringing the aspect of quality into these processes by making them measurable and tangible and the implementation of the documented procedures. The project had three major phases: the discovery, the goal setting and the implementation stage. For the convenience of the readers these phases have been further classified into sub-categories, listing all the details that were carried out in each phase. In any service organization the processes are equally important as any production unit, but documenting and implementing quality into these processes is a tedious job specially if you want these to be quantifiable standards. In today's demanding customer awareness environment if any service organization wants to get a competitive edge, it will have to review its processes and try and implement quality standards into these.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The building of the organization was thirty years old and the management had planned a massive extension. When the extension was near completion the management started planning the service concepts and quality standards. This was like bringing about a cultural change in the organization because the top management was talking about internationally accepted five star standards. Hence this project was commenced and was looked at as a key project because it was the staff that was going to deliver the service and let the customer experience service excellence.

2 DISCOVERY

2.1 PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION:

It was assumed that the existing staff will hold most of the key positions in the extension wing, new staff was to be hired and trained by the existing staff.
Some of the existing staff of the hotel was working in it since its inception and was used to the procedures which were laid down 30 years back, without any major alterations. Adopting international 5 Star service standards meant doing away with obsolete procedures and adapting new cost-effective and time-bound processes that would cut down on the delivery time by maintaining customer satisfaction. This was like bringing about a cultural change in the hotel and preparing them for the enhanced service standards, which they were to practice in the near future.

2.2 COMMITMENT FROM THE TOP MANAGEMENT:
Like any other successful quality project, the commitment of the GM and the top management was of high importance. The top management demonstrated their commitment to the project. Staff gatherings were arranged and information regarding the project was shared with the staff. The project was highlighted and workshops were conducted for all operational department heads. The management was aware of the fact that in service industry no matter how good a building you have, if the staff is not trained to handle the customer in an efficient manner then every thing else would fail.

Normal resistance, as in any change-oriented project existed because staff was used to performing a specific task in a particular manner and presumed that there could be no better way of doing it. To reduce the resistance, involvement of the stakeholders was very important. All information regarding the project was made public, its objectives, its stages and its progress. With the commitment of top management the resistance was not that visible and cooperation was extended.

2.3 IDENTIFYING THE TARGET GROUP:

2.3.1 The first contact of the customer is Front-of-the-house-staff, whether a telephone operator, a parking valet or a receptionist. All Front-of-the-house staff was a priority for this project and at later stages a similar exercise could be repeated for back-of-the-house staff as well.

2.3.2 Key Front of the House positions were specified. These positions had a very broad range as they stared from the parking valet, waiter, room maid, telephone operator, lift operator and were going up till the level of Guest Relations Manager, Reception Manager and Restaurant Manager etc.

2.3.3 Overall 28 positions were identified as the target group.
2.4 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT:

2.4.1 develop standardized service concepts, meeting the external and internal user's requirements

2.4.2 standards had to be time-bound

2.4.3 with possibilities of measuring them in tangible terms

2.4.4 simplicity, avoiding unnecessary complexity, duplicity of work and standardisation throughout the whole organisation.

2.4.5 highly developed interfaces with the other processes, non-value added activities were to be avoided as much as possible

2.4.6 documenting them simply and clearly

2.4.7 training the existing as well as the newly inducted staff on these standards

2.5 STUDYING THE EXISTING PROCESSES

2.5.1 A diagnostic review of all current processes and procedures of the above positions was to be conducted.

2.5.2 This review would identify weaknesses & strengths of the existing processes, procedure and staff.

2.6 JOB ANALYSIS APPROACH was applied:

2.6.1 Extensive survey comprising of interviews and on-site observations of the job in question, of the target group was conducted. At least three individuals working on the same position were interviewed.

2.6.2 Job tasks were specified highlighting the importance and time spent on each task.

2.6.3 Processes of performing each job were spelt-out in detail.

2.6.4 Supervisors and Departmental Heads were interviewed for the same tasks, their responses were matched with the actual and this provided a comparison of actual versus expected, thus identifying the gaps.

2.6.5 Existing job descriptions were also studied.
2.6.6 A survey of Knowledge, skills and abilities was conducted for the existing staff. This provided the basis for the analysis of existing staff capabilities and strengths.

2.7 Some of the key findings:

2.7.1 It provided an interesting comparison of actual versus expected. The job descriptions had not been revised for more than a decade and the actual performing of the job deviated a lot from what was spelt out in the job descriptions.

2.7.2 The old employees were training the new ones and thus all the processes were being passed on to the entry level through word of mouth. If a new employee wanted to follow his/her job description it would end up in a conflict between what was being practiced in reality and what was mentioned in his job description.

2.7.3 The managers and department heads had misinterpretations as far as the performance of a task was concerned. These were an eye opener for the management and were also a desperate cry for having the processes redefined and documented.

2.7.4 This provided a foundation to proceed on with the project and promised further commitment from the top management.

3 GOAL SETTING:

3.1.1 Brain storming sessions were held with the top management to come up with a vision and a mission statement.

3.1.2 Once the over all organization's mission statement was defined, we started out with the contribution of each department in achieving this mission statement and thus formulated a service concept or the role of each individual unit. The staff of the concerned unit helped in writing the service concept of their unit. This was done during intensive workshops in which the staff mediated among themselves in areas of disagreement and arrived at a consensus.

3.1.3 After defining the service concept of each unit, brainstorming sessions were conducted and thus service concept for each position of the target group were formulated i.e. the contribution of each position in achieving the overall organization’s mission statement.
SERVICE CONCEPT OF TELEPHONE EXCHANGE:
A section which is the gateway of the hotel. The guest experiences the service standards of our hotel through prompt response from this section.

THE ROLE OF THE TELEPHONE OPERATORS:
A Telephone operator with up-to-date information of the hotel and a pleasant voice creates a Deluxe image of the hotel.

Service concepts of all departments and their positions were time consuming but were necessary for developing a sense of ownership among the top management as well as the target group. This provided a meaning to the job that each employee was performing. The job of the doorman was not opening the doors, but it was to welcome the guests in a pleasant manner and the task that he was performing could be defined as opening doors. A sense of belonging and doing a very important job in the hotel was the core essence of the above exercise.

3.2 EXTERNAL FEEDBACK:

During this phase a survey was conducted for obtaining feedback from the customers. The main source for data collection was Guest comment cards and customer feedback questionnaires. The main objective was to use customer feedback as the minimum required standards of performing each job, however the standards were to be designed in a manner in which they would exceed the customer expectations. This study provided us with a gauge to crosscheck and redesign the service standards, if necessary according to the requirements of the customer.

4 IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

4.1 Once the importance and purpose of each position was defined on an organizational and individual level, listing of specific standards for the performance of each job was started.

For each of the 28 positions following performance standards were documented:
4.1.1 Vision statement

4.1.2 Mission statement of that particular department/section.

4.1.3 The contributions of that particular position in helping the hotel achieve its vision.

4.1.4 Major functions of the department/section

4.1.5 The standards of appearance.

4.1.6 The standards of hospitality.

4.1.7 Safety and Security standards

4.1.8 Job description of that particular position.

4.1.9 List of routine work for the position

4.1.10 Minimum standards of performance of each task, most of these were time-bound.

The above documentation was a lengthy project as at each stage we had to cross check and go back to the concerned department head. A close coordination with the concerned department/section head was maintained all the time. As the operations staff seldom had time to sit and review each documented process so it turned out to be a time consuming stage. Frustrations were at their peak during this phase.

The processes were documented in the form of a simple manual exclusively for each position of the target group. These were to be distributed to all the existing staff as well as any new staff joining the organization. This also meant that the existing staff had to be trained as trainers for the new staff. With an addition of 300 rooms it was envisaged that there would be a 50% increase in the existing staff. Thus, the following were planned:

- Workshops
- Training
- Hands on experience
- On the job transfer of knowledge

4.2 TRAINING OF THE TRAINERS:

All existing supervisors were trained as trainers in intensive training of trainers workshops. The background and the importance of these service concepts were
also explained during this training. Each trainer was given a copy of the Service Concepts pertaining to his/her position.

4.3 **INDUCTION/ORIENTATION:**
It was decided that these service concepts would be a part of the orientation of each newly inducted employee of the hotel. Each new employee will be assigned with a supervisor acting as a mentor and explaining these service concepts and giving training on it. To reinforce these standards they were linked to the confirmation of a new employee. After three months of joining the organization and receiving training on these standards a standardized quiz will be given to the new employee and this could be the basis of his/her confirmation in the organization.

5 **CONCLUSION**
Documenting processes and bringing the aspect of quality is not the end, but is the beginning of a new and a challenging ear, because it requires continuous improvement and vigorous training, an era full of challenges that require continuous improvement.

5.1 **LESSONS LEARNT:**

5.1.1 If such a work is carried on its own by the HRD department, without taking into consideration the concerned staff then it might be a failure as the technical aspect of each job is only known by its experts i.e. the people who are monitoring and performing it.

5.1.2 Have clear objectives

5.1.3 It is a constant uphill task

5.1.4 Commitment of the top management is necessary. Motivation from the top would keep the fire burning.

5.1.5 In order to reduce resistance, involvement of the stakeholders/target group is a must.

5.1.6 A motivated team committed to the cause is essential for success.

5.1.7 A constant rechecking of the technical aspects with the concerned department/section.

A soft opening was performed six months prior to the grand opening. These six months were the staff training time; extensive training workshops were conducted. All new staff was hired in advance and was trained for six months on the documented processes and procedures. The staff demonstrated commitment
as they could see the importance of their role in achieving the overall organization's mission. From the above we can conclude that a service organization needs to have a clear long term vision and mission statement and this is to be inculcated down the line. The service industry 's survival is on its service standards, if the product is of high quality but does not correspond with similar service the impact would weaken. Like production industry, service organization can gain a competitive edge if it delivers standardized service and incorporates the aspect of quality in it. When a customer experiences excellent service, he would expect a similar service in future as well; hence, consistency of service is required. Unless there are clear, concise and specified service standards, the staff will not be able to keep its service consistent, therefore delivering the promised service would not be possible and would result in customer dissatisfaction.
# ANNEXTURE-1

(TELEPHONE OPERATOR)

**CONTENTS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.NO.</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>CONGRATULATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>OUR VISION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF TELEPHONE EXCHANGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>OUR STANDARDS OF HOSPITALITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>SERVICE EXCELLENCE/ TEAM WORK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>TELEPHONE OPERATOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>ROUTINE TASKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>PROCEDURES AND MINIMUM STANDARDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>PRACTICING PATIENCE AND POLITENESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>GUEST SECURITY/PRIVACY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>STANDARD ANSWERING PHRASES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>VARIOUS FEATURES OF TELEPHONE EXCHANGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>IN CASE OF A BOMB THREAT CALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>IN CASE OF FIRE EMERGENCY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>PREVENTION AGAINST ACCIDENTS OR INJURIES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANNEXTURE-2

PROCEDURE FOR ATTENDING INCOMING CALLS:
1. Answer the call with-in the first three rings
2. Answer the call with a smile on your face as this will make your voice pleasant and Cheerful.

| Remember: | Answer the phone promptly, there could be an emergency or it could be a long distance call. |

STANDARD ANSWERING PHRASES

EXTERNAL INCOMING CALL: “Good Morning/ Good Afternoon/ Good Evening (according to the suitability of time) (name of the organization) ”.

INTERNAL INCOMING CALL: “Operator, may I help you.”(According to the suitability of time) (name of the organization)

4) Attentively listen to the caller without interrupting.
5) Do not jump to conclusions/ listen carefully.
6) Repeat the message
7) Gently tell the guest that he/she is going to be connected “Thank you I will connect you.”
8) Speak the caller’s language.
9) Speak clearly. (Make sure that you are never eating/drinking when answering the phone.
10) Listen actively with full concentration.

IMPORTANT: Make sure that there are no noises and distractions in the switch room, as the caller can hear the background noises as well.

The above sample is of a process of answering a call; similarly there were processes of how to put the call on the hold? how long can a customer be kept on a hold? what to do if you need to put the customer on a hold for more than the standard hold time? etc.