

# CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, TRAINING AND TQM A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WESTERN AND THAI HOTELS

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# **CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, TRAINING AND TQM**

## **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WESTERN AND THAI HOTELS**

### ***Abstract***

Managers within the hospitality industry make frequent reference to TQM principles. The extent to which these principles are applied effectively within the human resource management area of hospitality however remains under-researched. By applying TQM principles, this paper focusses on the relationship between customer service and training drawing upon comparative data from Western and Thai hotels. The paper also examines the perceptions of staff towards of hotels' guest-orientation and the provision of quality guest services. The researchers found that guest assessments of the performance of hotel frontline staff depend on their services function (eg front-office, housekeeping). The service quality skills needed by frontline staff were also found to differ in the case of Western and Thai hotels. Such differences merit proper consideration on the part of managers within the major hotel chains. The various findings may assist hospitality managers to determine appropriate strategies for the enhancement of guest services particularly in cross-cultural settings.

Keywords : TQM, training, customer satisfaction, hotel service quality

## **WHY TRAINING, TQM AND HOTELS?**

Since the American Hotel and Motel Association introduced the Quality Assurance (QA) technique in 1982, the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) has been widely applied within the hotel industry (Breiter & Bloomquist, 1998). Many hotels have subsequently attempted to apply TQM requirements to their operations, with particular emphasis on its application within and through the human resource management function (Boella, 1986; Umbreit, 1987; Redman & Mathews, 1995; Roberts, 1995; Go, Monachello & Baum, 1996; Soriano, 1999). In practice, relatively few properties have become what might be described as “TQM hotels” (Lyons, 1993; Quality Australia, 1993; Breiter, Tyink & Tuckwell, 1995; Carter, 1996; Partlow, 1996; Breiter & Bloomquist, 1998). In some cases this has been because they failed to satisfy or adhere to the basic TQM criteria, whilst others abandoned their initial attempts to become TQM hotels. In his survey of 75 hospitality companies, Roberts (1995) found that only 15 % consciously adopted the TQM philosophy. Even in the case of so-called TQM hotels, relatively few have actively implemented TQM with respect to human resource practices (Partlow, 1996). Despite the apparently low take-up of TQM, many researchers and commentators continue to urge the hotel industry to increase its emphasis on people management issues, as was evident in various of the reports presented at the 1999 Annual Congress of the International Hotel and Restaurant Association (Guthrie, 1999; Jenkins, 1999; Rumke 1999; Cassee, 1999).

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Many researchers have focussed on TQM as a means of achieving and then managing customer satisfaction. In the case of TQM organizations, it has been argued that every

activity should be focussed on customer-based concepts (Oakland, 1990; Johnson, 1991; Saylor, 1992; Sashkin & Kiser, 1993; Witt, 1994; Stahl, 1995; Tatikonda & Tatikonda, 1996).

For the reasons stated earlier it is not practical to undertake a direct comparison of TQM/non TQM hotels. However some interesting questions may arise concerning the relationship between cultures prevailing in a particular hotel setting and the approach adopted towards training. The authors have been unable to identify any previous studies focussing upon the different approaches adopted towards TQM related training in hotels in different countries. Western countries adopted TQM more recently than Asian countries. The present research investigates potential links between training and guest satisfaction occurring in Eastern and Western hotels. Specifically the research investigates whether there :

1. Is a causal relationship evident between TQM training and increased guest satisfaction?
2. Is a different relationship in hotels located in Western and Eastern countries?
3. Is a different relationship about how staff training should be undertaken between Western and Eastern based hotels?

## **TQM, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND TRAINING**

Total Quality Management (TQM) describes a series of business processes and has particularly been advocated as a means of improving customer satisfaction (Gundersen, Heide & Olsson, 1996). Many researchers define TQM explicitly in terms of customer

satisfaction (Oakland, 1990; Johnson, 1991; Crouch, 1992; Saylor, 1992; Sashkin & Kiser, 1993; Van De Wiele & Dale, 1993; Bell, McBride & Wilson, 1994; Witt, 1994; Stahl, 1995; Tatikonda & Tatikonda, 1996). TQM principles are largely absent in cases where customer satisfaction is regarded as neither important nor measurable (Luchars & Hinkin, 1996; Partlow, 1996). In the case of hotels, the prominence of staff/customer interactions leads to a greater emphasis on customer care (Denton, 1989; Hart, Heskett & Sasser, 1991; Waldersee & Eagleson, 1994; Rees, 1995; Carter, 1996; Gundersen, Heide & Olsson, 1996). It has been widely argued that training is essential if the principles of TQM are to be successfully implemented and operationalised (Wally & Kowalski, 1992; Motwani, Frahm & Kathawala, 1994; Kiesow, 1996; Bakka, 1998; Mathews et al., 2001).

Training undertaken in service environments such as hotels places greater emphasis on the “soft” aspects of TQM, such as teamwork and interpersonal skills, rather than the “hard” aspects, such as statistical tools and techniques (Mathews et al., 2001). In their evaluation of customer and employee perceptions of customer service quality in hotels, McColl-Kennedy & White (1997) identified a link with training programs aimed at bringing about more personalized service provision. In the hotel environment, the attempt to satisfy customer expectations is usually integrated with TQM training (Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Schmitt & Allscheid, 1995). Such training may cover issues such as empowerment, multi-skilling, interpersonal skills, guest-service, quality and teamwork. In the case of hotels that provide TQM training on an ongoing basis, a strong emphasis on implementation is required. Any courses that are developed should form an integral part of the process of employee orientation, thus influencing the extent to which employees become effective service providers (Denton 1989).

According to Partlow (1996), those hotel managers who apply the principles of TQM, will perceive training as a more important activity, and place greater emphasis on quality as a component of their training efforts. Many TQM training procedure manuals combine quality concepts with the more established guidelines about how to do the job, and how to work together as a team (Partlow, 1993; Witt, 1994). As the pace of change accelerates, driven by the application of new technologies, there is greater emphasis on standards and on the training required to achieve them (Olsen, 1996). To ensure its applicability in the workplace, it has been argued that TQM training should be introduced as soon as possible after induction training is completed (Tesluk et al., 1995; Marler, 1998). Implementation should also be performed objectively, systematically, continuously and with commitment (Oakland & Sohal, 1996).

According to the literature, the effectiveness of hotel training is measured most accurately by using guest-and-employee satisfaction surveys and guest-comment cards (Partlow, 1996). A number of studies have examined the relationship between service staff management, commitment and performance in service settings. Ulrich et al. (1991) suggested that there is a relationship between staff attachment (equivalent to organizational commitment), customer attachment and human resource management practices. Another model demonstrating such relationships was developed by Peccei & Rosenthal (1998). Their proposed model considers Commitment to Customer Service (CCS) to be a function of Employee Willingness and Capacity (to engage in continuous improvement and expend effort on behalf of customers). Employee Willingness refers to the service provider's affective, normative, calculative and altruistic orientation (equivalent to organizational commitment) to customer service (Etzioni, 1988). Employee Capacity is measured along seven variables relating to employee knowledge and competence, empowerment, and resource availability. Peccei and

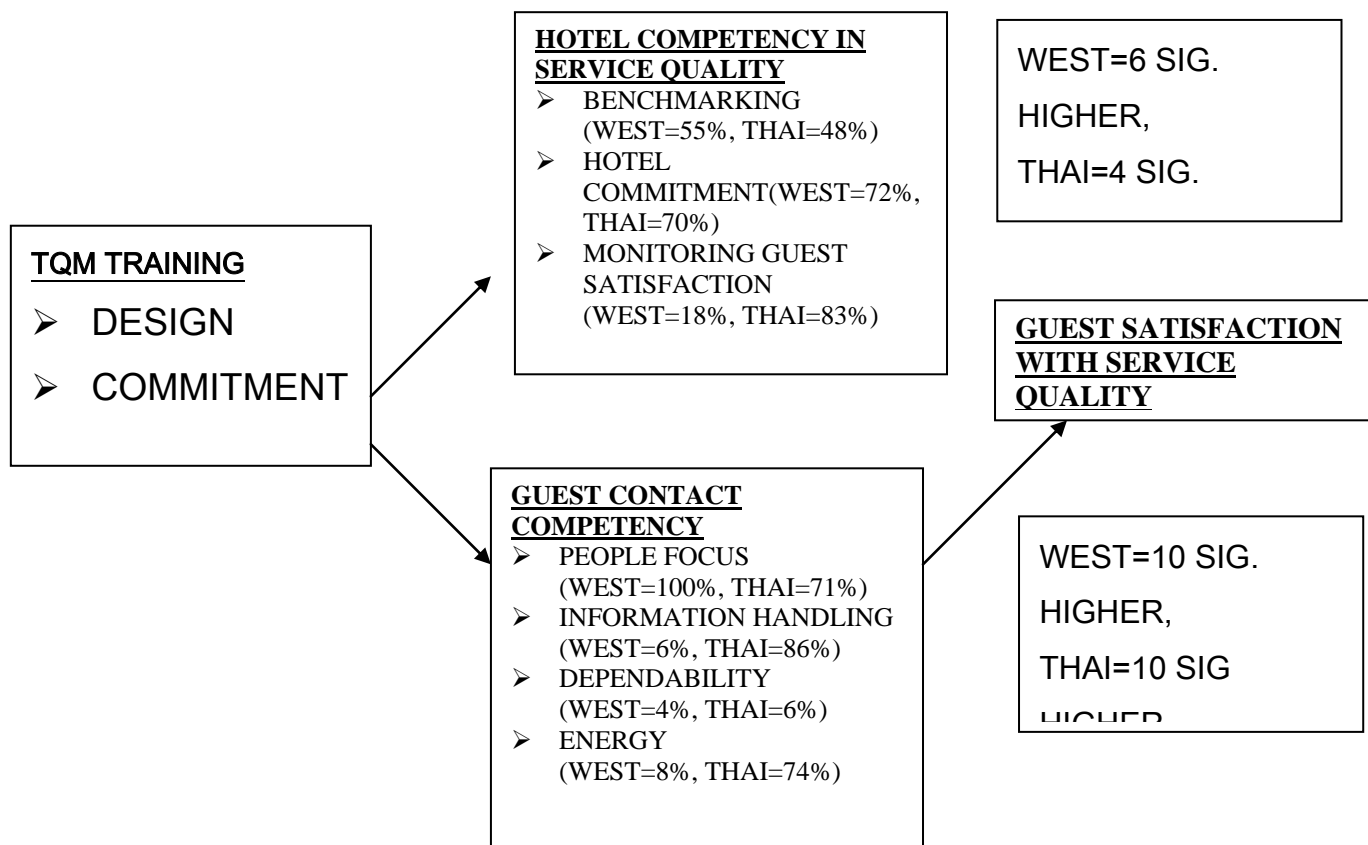
Rosenthal's results demonstrate a clear link between the Commitment to Customer Service and the Employee Capacity variables relating to employee knowledge and competence.

Worsfold (1999) proposed two models that involved the adaption of studies by Schneider and Bowen (1985), Zerbe et al., (1998) and Peccei & Rosenthal (1998). In Worsfold's first model, Employee Perception of Human Resource Management is linked to Service Behaviour and Service Culture Concern for Customers (equivalent to Hotel Competency in Service Quality and Guest Contact Competency in the present study). (1999) Service Behaviour is related to Customer Perception of Service Quality (equivalent to Guest Satisfaction of Service Quality in the current study). The second model shows that training (as one of the components of HRM practices) is related in turn to Capacity, which comprises employee knowledge and awareness of the activities of their employer organizations (equivalent to Hotel Competency in Service Quality in the study) and employee competence (equivalent to Guest Contact Competency in this study). There is a further link between Capacity to Commitment to Customer Service. This in turn leads to employee Service Behavior or service performance. From Service Behavior, there is a link to Customer Perception of Service Quality in the first model.

In the present study, employee Service Behaviors and Customer Perception of Service Quality are combined with Guest Satisfaction in service quality. This approach is justified on the basis that the guests are the ones who assess the service performance of the service staff. Worsfold's (1999) two models clarified the relationship with training through changed hotel competency in service quality, and guest contact competency leading to guest satisfaction with service quality. Figure attempts to provide a conceptual model of the flow from training

(recommended as a first step by Tesluk et al., 1995 and Marler, 1998) to increased competency, and finally satisfaction.

**FIGURE 1: The Relationship Between TQM Staff Selection and Training And Between Guest Satisfaction and Service Quality**





Note: This conceptual figure incorporates t-test findings representing the number of variables significantly higher at 95% when compared between competency (hotel and guest) and satisfaction separately for the Western and Thai samples.

## **CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

Drawing upon the work of Worsfold (1999), Schneider & Bowen (1985), Zerbe et al. (1998) and Pecci & Rosenthal (1998), Figure 1 models the assumption that TQM training leads to increased competencies. These competencies may be divided into service quality (Partlow, 1996), hotel competency and guest contact staff competency (for example, refer to : Denton, 1989; Hart et al., 1991; Rees, 1995 and Carter, 1996). The achievement of benchmarking standards and a greater commitment to service quality and to monitoring guest satisfaction competency lead to improved hotel competency and consequential guest benefits (Partlow, 1996). Enhanced competency in guest contact may also impact upon guests through the development of a positive relationship with guests, a focus on guest needs, competent handling of guest questions, reliability and dependability in serving guests. Increased competence in turn leads to increased guest satisfaction (for example refer to : Gundersen, Heide & Olsson, 1996; Oakland, 1990; Crouch, 1992; and Sashkin & Kiser, 1993). A series of surveys were developed with a view to testing this model. The first was for TQM Training and Hotel Competency, the second for Guest Competency and the third for Guest Satisfaction (Partlow, 1996).

### **Guest-Orientation Questionnaire (GOQ)**

This questionnaire consists of two sections, namely “training” and “hotel competency in service quality”. The “training” section is developed primarily from the literature review. Examples of references to TQM training include Clutterbuck, Clark & Armistead’s (1993) concept of TQM training procedures and the concept of “just-in-time” based training attributed to Tesluk et al., (1995) and Marler (1998). In the absence of relevant empirical

work, the present questionnaire was developed independently by the researchers. Given that the participating hotels were not TQM hotels in the strict sense of the term, the term “training” was preferred to the alternative “TQM training.” It was also felt that the use of the label “TQM” could lead to respondent bias, by prompting a tendency towards positive answers. The grouping of items within the “training” section was consistent with the elements of Oakland’s (1989) quality training cycle. In the case of the section “hotel competency in service quality”, the variable “customer orientation” was modified to facilitate the evaluation of hotel competency in service quality management, a variable noted in the study by Solis et al., (1998). In the case of another study by Rao, Solis and Raghu-Nathan (1999) this variable was divided into two constructs, namely “customer orientation” and “benchmarking”. In the present study, the “customer orientation” construct became the “guest-orientation” construct and “benchmarking” construct.

### **Guest Contact Competency Questionnaire (GCC)**

According to Saville & Holdsworth (1999), competencies are clusters of skills and behaviours which form the basis of successful performance. In developing their “Customer Contact Competency Inventory,” they undertook extensive research to establish the essential areas of performance in sales and customer service roles to be included within the inventory. Key qualifications for frontline staff operating in a TQM environment were noted as customer service including sales skills, quality orientation and customer focus. The inclusion of the skills in the inventory indicated a degree of suitability for the purposes of the present study. The inventory is used to rate an individual’s performance on the basis of 16 customer contact competencies. Respondents use a 5-point likert scale to investigate the frequency with which the person being rated exhibits those behaviours (from “hardly ever” to “always”).

Each respondent also ranks the most and least typical behaviours of the person being rated, based on 3 points namely most, not marked and least. The Saville & Holdsworth (1999) questionnaire (32 sets of 4 items, totaling 128 items and “most” and “least” ratings) is too long for a complex study involving several survey constructs and is shortened and reworded here but retaining the same scale with “most” and “least” ratings.

### **The Hotel Guest Satisfaction Survey (GSS)**

The third survey relates to “Guest Satisfaction in Service Quality”. In the present study, hotel guest satisfaction is measured by asking guests to evaluate the service skills exhibited by frontline staff. The key service skills required by frontline staff in the three departments: front office, housekeeping and food and beverage were considered to be intangibles, and these form the focus for measurement. Hotel guests are asked to rate each item using a five-point scale ranging from “1 = poor” to “5 = outstanding”. Five-point scales have been used in previous comparable studies and are viewed as more user-friendly for respondents (Lewis, 1987; Saleh & Ryan, 1992; Webster & Hung, 1994; Hartline & Jones, 1996; Min & Min, 1997; Tribe & Snaith, 1998; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000; Spinelli & Canavos, 2000). To prompt forced responses and reduce possible bias, an option marked “9 = no idea” was included for each item. It was acknowledged that guests may stay in hotels without making use of any food and beverage services.

### **Piloting**

The research instruments consisted of two staff questionnaires and one guest questionnaire and have been pre-tested in an Australian and a Thai hotel. In the case of the frontline staff,

the instrument measures perceptions of training and competency in service quality and asks staff to provide a self-assessment of their own guest contact competency. In the case of the guests, the instrument assesses their satisfaction towards the guest contact competency exhibited by frontline staff. The pre-test concluded that the instruments are reliable and valid. Most of the coefficient alpha values in the three questionnaires between the two hotels were quite high (between 0.70 – 0.90). All were in the acceptable range according to Garson (2001).

### **Sample population and data collection**

For the purposes of the present study, non-probability sampling was judged to be the most suitable technique within each sample group. In this approach the sample is selected on the basis of personal judgment or convenience. Sampling was confined to hotels in the USA (Washington DC), Australia (Melbourne and Sydney) and Thailand (Bangkok). There are a number of reasons for the choice of country and city. The selection is consistent with a desire to compare Western and Eastern hotels. There is an exclusive focus on city-centre hotels with four or five-star ratings, because of the propensity to apply TQM concepts amongst such properties towards their operations generally and to the human resources function in particular. The incidence of such practices is higher than is the case with smaller and more modest hotels (Kelliher & Johnson, 1987; Price, 1994; Lucas, 1995; Hoque, 1999). The distinction between four and five star hotels is of limited value, since from a guest point of view, star ratings are not a guarantee that a particular level of service will be provided (Lipcer & Shaw, 1990). Ingram & Daskalakis (1999) found that four-star hotel guests have higher expectations and express greater satisfaction with the service quality provided to them

than their five-star hotel guest counterparts. On this basis, the four and five-star rating levels are considered broadly equivalent and as constituting a single population.

The final samples are divided and collected separately for the Thai and Western hotels in order to create two separate sample groups. Although eleven hotels in total were initially sampled only four hotels reached a high response rate, two Western (Melbourne 160 guest questionnaires; Washington D.C. 143 guest questionnaires). The response rate for the staff questionnaires was generally higher across all hotels and the hotel selection for each of the two samples (East and West) was therefore based upon the samples for the guest questionnaires. In the Western sample for the selected hotels, the sample size was 667 staff surveys and the Thai sample was 672 surveys.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The different guest assessments across the three departments in all of the hotels in the Western hotel sample and in the Thai hotel sample were identified using ANOVA. Principal Components (PCA) is used to reduce the number of variables in each section of the questionnaire and to group these variables into key factors (the analysis was standard in terms of using varimax rotation and eigenvalue cut off at one for component selection. Since the variables in “Hotel Competency in Service Quality” and “Guest Contact Competency” involved different concepts from the variables in “Guest Satisfaction in Service Quality”, a directional t-test is used to find out if guest satisfaction is higher, or equal to or lower, when compared with the staff factors in “Hotel Competency in Service Quality” and “Guest Contact Competency”. The t-test was used because a further SEM causal analysis could not be used to measure the links between competency and satisfaction.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

A one-way ANOVA identified significant differences between the staff samples in the three departments across all dimensions, and the samples of guests assessing the staff in the three departments. From the results of the one-way ANOVA, the number of significant differences between the three groups based on the three departments in all the hotels in the study is fairly high (51 out of 104 = 49%), as well as in the Western hotels (22 out of 104 = 21.1 %) and in the Thai hotels (22 out of 104 = 21.1 %). These differences indicate that there are differences between guests and staff and that these differences vary in the case of both Western and Thai hotels.

### **Principal Components Analysis**

The Principal Components Analysis (PCA) identified groupings around the various dimensions noted in the study model. Four factors were evident in the TQM training dimension, namely: 1) design, 2) commitment, 3) needs and 4) result (refer to Tables 2 and 3). In the case of Western Hotels needs precede result. Relative to Thai hotels this indicates a reversal of the order of dimensions 3 and 4.

The rotated factor solution for the sample in the Thai hotels accounts for 64% of the total variance. According to Tables 1 and 2 the Western and the Thai hotel samples exhibit two common factors: Factor 1 (design) and Factor 2 (commitment). In the case of design (Factor 1), the Western hotels rank training opportunities most highly and helping solve problems and improving work processes as last. Conversely, the Thai hotels rank helping solve

problems and improving work processes as their first aspect and opportunities in training as the second last with only on-the-job training rated lower. In the case of commitment (Factor 2), the first and the second aspects for the Thai samples are training costs and benefits and expense, not long-term investment. For the Western sample, the first aspect is single event, rather than process. This might imply that the Thai hotels sample is more concerned about the cost of training whereas the Western hotels sample is more concerned about training continuity as part of a longer-term process. However, concern in the case of the Western sample about the cost of training is evident in the second and third aspects. It may be concluded that both the Western and the Thai hotel samples shared common concerns about training costs. In the case of the Western hotel sample, the lowest ranked item was “taking away providing direct guest service” and for the Thai hotel sample it was “single event, not process”.

**TABLE 1: TQM Training Variables Factor Matrix:  
Western Hotels – Frontline Staff**

| FACTOR 1<br>DESIGN   | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 2<br>COMMITMENT                           | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 3<br>NEEDS                 | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 4<br>RESULT  | Factor<br>Loading |
|--|-------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---|-------------------|
| Opportunities<br>in training<br>(OPP)                                | 0.824             | Single event, not<br>process<br>(EVENT)          | 0.786             | Something<br>wrong<br>(WRONG)     | 0.921             | Managers’<br>satisfaction<br>in staff guest<br>relations<br>skills<br>(MGR) | 0.805             |
| Seminars and<br>meetings about<br>quality<br>(MEET)                  | 0.777             | Expense, not<br>long-term<br>investment<br>(EXP) | 0.757             | Filling new<br>positions<br>(NEW) | 0.714             | Guest<br>relations<br>skills (GRS)  | 0.577             |
| Only on-the-<br>job training<br>(OJT)                                | 0.773             | Training costs<br>and benefits<br>(COST)         | 0.742             |                                   |                   |   |                   |
| Helping Solve<br>problems and<br>improve work<br>processes<br>(SOLV) | 0.742             | Taking off direct<br>guest service<br>(DUTY)     | 0.703             |                                   |                   |   |                   |
| <b>Reliability<br/>Cronbach<br/>Alpha</b>                            | <b>0.822</b>      |  | <b>0.779</b>      |                                   | <b>0.711</b>      |   | <b>0.557</b>      |

**Note:** Results of varimax rotated factor matrix in the frontline staff sample of the Western hotels for the 12 variables of TQM training dimension.



**TABLE 2: TQM Training Variables Factor Matrix:  
Thai Hotels – Frontline Staff**

| FACTOR 1<br>DESIGN                                       | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 2<br>COMMITMENT                  | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 3<br>RESULT   | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 4<br>NEEDS           | Factor<br>Loading |
|--|-------------------|---|-------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Helping Solve problems and improve work processes (SOLV) | 0.805             | Training costs and benefits (COST)      | 0.777             | Managers' satisfaction in staff guest relations skills (MGR) | 0.832             | Filling new positions (NEW) | 0.729             |
| Seminars and meetings about quality (MEET)               | 0.796             | Expense, not long-term investment (EXP) | 0.768             | Guest relations skills (GRS)                                 | 0.807             |                             |                   |
| Opportunities in training (OPP)                          | 0.718             | Taking off direct guest service (DUTY)  | 0.604             |  |                   |                             |                   |
| Only on-the-job training (OJT)                           | 0.469             | Single event, not process (EVENT)       | 0.502             |  |                   |                             |                   |
| <b>Reliability Cronbach Alpha</b>                        | <b>0.727</b>      |   | <b>0.648</b>      |  | <b>0.689</b>      |                             |                   |

**Note: Results of varimax rotated factor matrix in the frontline staff sample of the Thai otels for the 12 variable of TQM training dimension.**

In Tables 1 and 2, the order of Factors 3 and 4 is reversed between the two samples. The Western hotels sample rate finding and assessing training needs ahead of evaluating training results, while the Thai hotels sample indicate training results ahead of training needs. The sequence is also different in the case of Factor 3 which started with “something wrong” and ended with “filling new position.” in the case of the Western hotel sample. In the Thai hotel sample this became Factor 4 and had only one variable, “filling new positions.” We may conclude that for the Western hotel sample, training will focus on the type of actions required when something goes wrong, followed by when new positions are filled. In the case of the Thai hotel sample, training will generally be focussed when new positions are filled. Factor 4 of the Western hotel sample began with “guest relations skills” and was followed by “managers’ satisfaction in staff guest relations skills”. For the Thai hotel sample, Factor 3 had the first ranking variable as “managers’ satisfaction in staff guest relations skills” followed by “guest relations skills”. Cultural differences may account in part for these

distinctions. The “individualism” of the Western hotel sample suggests that staff rate their own guest relation skills, before allowing managers to evaluate them. And the “submissiveness” of the Thai hotel sample suggests that staff allow managers to assess their guest relations skills before they rate themselves.

As is indicated in Tables 3 and 4, three factors were evident in the case of hotel competency in service quality: 1) benchmarking 2) commitment and 3) monitor. The differences between Western and Thai hotels are found in the sequence of Factors 2 and 3. Commitment was Factor 2 and monitor was Factor 3 whereas the order is reversed in the case of the Thai hotel sample. For the Western hotel sample, the unrotated factor solution for the 11 variables accounts for 71.4 % of total variance. The rotated factor solution for the Thai hotels accounted for 58.9% of total variance and also confirms the 3 factors.

As is shown in Tables 5 and 6, although Factor 1 is the same for both samples, the sequence of the other factors is different. However, both samples have benchmarking ranked first, indicating a willingness to compare the quality of their hotels with leading properties internationally. The Western hotel sample indicates that competitors are more important for the comparison of current process quality. The Thai hotel sample indicates that the study of best practices of other hotels rated more highly than comparing quality with their competitors. For the Western hotel sample the hotel commitment to service quality comes before monitoring guest satisfaction. In the case of the Thai hotel sample, monitoring guest satisfaction comes before commitment to service quality. In the Western hotel sample, commitment to creating satisfied guests comes before managerial actions in attracting importance to guest satisfaction, followed by the goal exceeding guest expectations. The Thai hotel sample also indicates the commitment of the hotels to having satisfied guests first

followed by exceeding guest expectations, followed by managers' actions in giving importance to guest satisfaction. There are also different viewpoints concerning the *monitoring* factor.

**TABLE 3: Hotel Competency In Service Quality Variables Factor Matrix:  
Western Hotels – Frontline Staff**

| FACTOR 1<br>BENCHMARKING                           | FACTOR<br>LOADING | FACTOR 2<br>COMMITMENT            | FACTOR<br>LOADING | FACTOR 3<br>MONITOR                | FACTOR<br>LOADING |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Current quality compared with world leaders (QUAL) | 0.868             | Satisfied guest commitment (COMM) | 0.892             | Guest complaint monitor (MONI)     | 0.840             |
| Process quality compared with world leaders (PROC) | 0.829             | Managers' actions (ACT)           | 0.814             | Guests' feedback (FEED)            | 0.839             |
| Process quality compared with competitors (COMP)   | 0.820             | Hotel's goals (GOAL)              | 0.664             | Guest satisfaction tracking (TRAC) | 0.372             |
| Best practices (BEST)                              | 0.819             |                                   |                   |                                    |                   |
| Current quality compared with the competitors      | 0.800             |                                   |                   |                                    |                   |
| <b>Reliability<br/>Cronbach Alpha</b>              | <b>0.919</b>      |                                   | <b>0.780</b>      |                                    | <b>0.616</b>      |

**Note:** Results of varimax rotated factor matrix in the frontline staff sample of the Western Hotels for the 11 variables of hotel competency in service quality dimension

**TABLE 4: Hotel Competency Service Quality Variables Factor Matrix:  
Thai Hotels – Frontline Staff**

| FACTOR 1<br>BENCHMARKING                           | FACTOR<br>LOADING | FACTOR 2<br>MONITOR                | FACTOR<br>LOADING | FACTOR 3<br>COMMITMENT            | FACTOR<br>LOADING |
|--|-------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Current quality compared with world leaders (QUAL) | 0.834             | Guests' feedback (FEED)            | 0.853             | Satisfied guest commitment (COMM) | 0.808             |
| Process quality compared with world leaders (PROC) | 0.817             | Guest satisfaction tracking (TRAC) | 0.689             | Hotel's goals (GOAL)              | 0.597             |
| Best practices (BEST)                              | 0.734             | Guest complaint Monitor (MONI)     | 0.465             | Managers' actions (ACT)           | 0.575             |
| Process quality compared with competitors (COMP)   | 0.564             |                                    |                   |                                   |                   |
| Current quality compared with the competitors      | 0.530             |                                    |                   |                                   |                   |
| <b>Reliability<br/>Cronbach Alpha</b>              | <b>0.815</b>      |                                    | <b>0.605</b>      |                                   | <b>0.581</b>      |

**Note: Results of varimax rotated factor matrix in the frontline staff sample of the Thai Hotels for the 11 variables of hotel competency in service quality dimension**

Western hotels should firstly monitor guest complaints, then acquire guest feedback and finally track guest satisfaction. Thai hotels should firstly ask guests for feedback before tracking their satisfaction and finally monitor their complaints. It is apparent that Western hotels attach greater importance to guest complaints, while the Thai hotels emphasize guest feedback.

The guest contact competency PC analysis derived 4 dimensions namely 1) information handling 2) energy 3) people focus and 4) dependability. The differences between the Western and Thai hotels (see Table 5 ) is found in the sequence of Factors 2 and 3: for the Western hotels energy was Factor 2 and people focus was Factor 3 whereas for the Thai hotels people focus was Factor 2 and energy was Factor 3. The unrotated factor solutions for both of the samples confirms the 4 factors. These account for 60.9 % of the total variance in the case of the Western hotel sample and 62.7% in the case of the Thai sample.

Factors 1 and 4 were the same for both samples with information handling skills rated as most important in contacting guests and dependability skills rated as least important. For the Western hotel sample, Factor 2 is *energy* and Factor 3 is *people focus*. For the Thai hotels sample Factor 2 is *people focus* and Factor 3 is *energy*. From this finding it appears that Western hotels place greater emphasis on serving guests before building relationships with them. Thai hotels built the relationship with guests before making an effort to serve guests. Only the *energy* factor has the same sequence in both of the samples, indicative of similar approaches to the use of energy in serving guests. The other three factors have a different sequence. For the Western hotels sample, the first ranked item within handling information (Factor 1) is using initiative before finding facts, then solving problems and lastly getting results. For the Thai hotel sample, the order is getting results, using initiative, solving problems and lastly finding facts. This difference is interesting as it hints at the different logic of East and West where the Western logic is to derive results by a series of actions and the Eastern approach is to focus on the results first. For the *people focus* factor, the Western hotels sample used their specialist knowledge before building relationships with guests and finally convincing them. The Thai hotels sample communicated orally with guests, then convinced them and finally built relationships with guests. Again, a reverse of the order in the logical approach between East and West. For the *dependability* factor, the Western hotels sample made their guests feel dependent on them by organizing time and prioritising work, before being reliable and showing commitment to the hotels and task completion.

**TABLE 5: Guest Contact Competency Variables Factor Matrix:  
Western Hotels – Frontline Staff**

| FACTOR 1<br>Information<br>Handling       | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 2<br>Energy | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 3<br>People<br>Focus | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 4<br>Dependability | Factor<br>Loading |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Using initiative                          | 0.797             | Guest focus        | 0.844             | Specialist<br>knowledge     | 0.774             | Organization              | 0.862             |
| Fact finding                              | 0.788             | Team<br>working    | 0.707             | Relating to<br>guests       | 0.670             | Reliability               | 0.856             |
| Problem solving                           | 0.594             | Resilient          | 0.461             | Convincing                  | 0.588             |                           |                   |
| Results driven                            | 0.590             |                    |                   |                             |                   |                           |                   |
| <b>Reliability<br/>Cronbach<br/>Alpha</b> | <b>0.737</b>      |                    | <b>0.575</b>      |                             | <b>0.604</b>      |                           | <b>0.695</b>      |

**Note:** Results of varimax rotated factor matrix in the frontline staff sample of the Western hotels for the 14 variables of guest contact competency dimension

**TABLE 6: Guest Contact Competency Variables Factor Matrix:  
Thai Hotels – Frontline Staff**

| FACTOR 1<br>Information<br>Handling       | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 2<br>People<br>Focus | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 3<br>Energy | Factor<br>Loading | FACTOR 4<br>Dependability | Factor<br>Loading |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Results<br>driven                         | 0.749             | Communicating<br>orally     | 0.830             | Guest focus        | 0.709             | Reliability               | 0.852             |
| Using<br>initiative                       | 0.618             | Convincing                  | 0.782             | Team<br>working    | 0.605             | Organization              | 0.717             |
| Problem<br>solving                        | 0.613             | Relating to<br>guests       | 0.566             | Resilient          | 0.547             |                           |                   |
| Fact finding                              | 0.539             |                             |                   |                    |                   |                           |                   |
| <b>Reliability<br/>Cronbach<br/>Alpha</b> | <b>0.790</b>      |                             | <b>0.721</b>      |                    | <b>0.564</b>      |                           | <b>0.483</b>      |

**Note:** Results of varimax rotated factor matrix in the frontline staff sample of the Thai hotels for the 14 variables of guest contact competency dimension

The Thai hotels sample adopted the opposite approach, making themselves reliable in the eyes of guests first, then organizing time and prioritising work later. Again the reverse logical order.

Only one factor is identified by the PCA for the dimension of guest satisfaction with service quality in both samples accounting for 71.9% of variance for the Western sample

and 71.3% for the Thai sample. Since only one component is extracted, the solutions cannot be rotated. The reliability tests indicate that the Cronbach Alpha coefficient is 0.98 for both the Western and Thai samples.

Overall, guests rate front office staff first with respect to individual attention, housekeeping staff first for sympathy/reassuring, and food and beverage staff first for sympathy/reassuring. As indicated in Tables 7 and 8 the different assessment by hotel guests of frontline staff across the three departments highlights differences between the Western and Thai hotels. Western hotel guests rank individual attention first for front office staff, whereas they assess sympathy/reassuring first in the case of Thai staff. For housekeeping staff, Western hotel guests rate sympathy/reassuring as first. By contrast, guests assess the availability of staff first in the case of Thai hotels. For food and beverage staff, Western hotel guests require sympathy/reassurance from staff first, but in Thai hotels guests rate the staff first for their complaint handling skills. Guest satisfaction with service quality is higher in the case of Thai hotels than in Western hotels. A possible explanation is that the Thai staff are multi-skilled in guest contact competency, having a natural capacity for sincere hospitality as a result of their religion and upbringing (Selwitz, 1992; Meyer & Geary, 1993; Panmunin, 1993).

**TABLE 7: Guest Assessments of Departmental Staff - Western Hotels**

| GUEST SAMPLE ASSESSING FRONT OFFICE STAFF |                | GUEST SAMPLE ASSESSING HOUSEKEEPING STAFF |                | GUEST SAMPLE ASSESSING FOOD & BEVERAGE STAFF |                |
|---|----------------|---|----------------|--|----------------|
| FACTOR 1 GUEST SATISFACTION               | FACTOR LOADING | FACTOR 1 GUEST SATISFACTION               | FACTOR LOADING | FACTOR 1 GUEST SATISFACTION                  | FACTOR LOADING |
| Give individual attention                 | 0.877          | Are sympathetic/reassuring                | 0.896          | Are sympathetic/reassuring                   | 0.902          |
| Feel appreciated for the guest's business | 0.859          | Feel appreciated for the guest's business | 0.860          | Treat as a valued guest                      | 0.888          |
| Treat as a valued guest                   | 0.856          | Treat as a valued guest                   | 0.858          | Feel appreciated for the guest's business    | 0.887          |
| Are able to handle guests' complaints     | 0.852          | Are able to handle guests' complaints     | 0.848          | Give individual attention                    | 0.882          |
| Are dependable                            | 0.850          | Are helpful                               | 0.842          | Are able to handle guests' complaints        | 0.881          |
| Are sympathetic/reassuring                | 0.850          | Are always available                      | 0.841          | Are dependable                               | 0.869          |

**Note:** Results of unrotated factor matrix in the three groups of guests assessing the three departments in the Western hotels for the 18 variables of guest satisfaction dimension (only the first-ranking 6 variables)

**TABLE 8: Guest Assessment of Departmental Staff – Thai Hotels**

| GUEST SAMPLE ASSESSING FRONT OFFICE STAFF         |                | GUEST SAMPLE ASSESSING HOUSEKEEPING STAFF         |                | GUEST SAMPLE ASSESSING FOOD & BEVERAGE STAFF      |                |
|---|----------------|---|----------------|---|----------------|
| FACTOR 1 GUEST SATISFACTION                       | FACTOR LOADING | FACTOR 1 GUEST SATISFACTION                       | FACTOR LOADING | FACTOR 1 GUEST SATISFACTION                       | FACTOR LOADING |
| Are sympathetic/Reassuring                        | 0.868          | Are always available                              | 0.907          | Are able to handle guests' complaints             | 0.919          |
| Give individual attention                         | 0.852          | Are consistent in giving good service standard    | 0.897          | Are consistent in giving good service standard    | 0.918          |
| Treat as a valued guest                           | 0.851          | Give individual attention                         | 0.895          | Are dependable                                    | 0.916          |
| Feel appreciated for the guest's business         | 0.847          | Are able to solve guests' problems by him/herself | 0.887          | Are helpful                                       | 0.913          |
| Are able to handle guests' complaints             | 0.847          | Are competent and professional                    | 0.882          | Are able to solve guests' problems by him/herself | 0.912          |
| Are able to solve guests' problems by him/herself | 0.841          | Feel appreciated for the guest's business         | 0.881          | Give individual attention                         | 0.909          |

**Note:** Results of unrotated factor matrix in the three groups of guests assessing the three departments in the Thai hotels for the 18 variables of guest satisfaction dimension (only the first-ranking 6 variables)



## **T-test Analysis**

Referring back to Figure 1, for Western and Thai hotels the directional t-tests demonstrate significantly higher satisfaction from guest competency than hotel competency in service quality. In both samples of hotels guest contact competency is the most critical dimension in the relationship (10 significant values) shared equally between East and West. In Western hotels, competency in service quality (6 significant variables) impacts on higher guest satisfaction to a greater extent than is the case in the Thai hotels (4 significant variables).

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS**

In the present study four critical indicators of TQM training are examined in the context of developing key hotel training strategies, training design; the commitment by hotels to training; hotel training needs and training results.

### **Training Design**

When designing training programs and activities, it is suggested that considerable importance should be attached to quality issues that do not appear to be currently not driving satisfaction levels. There should be an emphasis on helping to solve problems and on improving work processes. Targeted seminars and meetings may provide staff with a clearer picture of quality. Opportunities to attend training programs should be extended to all staff and managers. On-the-job training is considered to be important in the case of staff who lack relevant job knowledge. It merits greater emphasis in the case of Western

hotels along with greater training opportunities generally. By way of contrast, on-the-job training in the case of skilled staff in Thai hotels may cause negative perceptions towards the hotel employer, since it may be perceived as evidence of insufficient support by senior management for the resourcing of training and a lack of care toward their staff by managers. Training programs focussing on quality issues, using initiative, convincing skills and oral communication and in particular English language are greatly needed by staff in Thai hotels. For staff in Western hotels, convincing skills, resilience skills and on-the-job skills should be incorporated more within hotel training programs.

It appears likely that frontline staff will have enhanced perceptions of the hotel's commitment to benchmarking service quality, training results and training needs, if Western hotels were to attach greater importance to TQM training design. Such an approach would encourage frontline staff to demonstrate more commitment to their hotels. In the case of Thai hotels, the provision of training programmes with a TQM emphasis would be more likely to enhance staff perceptions of the hotel's commitment to service quality, training results and training needs. In Western hotels the design of training programs and associated activities for frontline staff should emphasize a people focus and energy skills. For Thai hotels, training should involve activities, rather than formal training programs perhaps partly because most of the Thai staff have already received substantial training in these programs.

### **The Commitment by Hotels to Training**

A commitment to training involves reducing the following negative perceptions. Upfront costs are obvious, but the benefits are distant and substantially unquantifiable; training is

often seen as an expense and not a long-term investment; and training is perceived as a single event, not a process; and removes staff from direct guest service. In transforming commitments into action, hotels should adopt long-term training plans aimed at achieving measurable results. Each staff member should have his or her own long-term training plan, designed in conjunction with their supervisors and managers and these plans should be updated annually. This approach will prevent staff from becoming bored as a result of serial attendance at repetitious training programs, thereby avoiding a waste of time and money. In Western hotels, commitment to training creates positive staff perceptions by boosting their skills in information handling and dependability. In the case of Thai staff, a commitment to training increases information handling, dependability and energy skills.

### **Hotel Training Needs**

Accurate identification of training needs will improve the perception of benchmarking, the monitoring of guest satisfaction and commitment to service quality, as well as having significant positive effects on the perception of the design and results of training. Hotels should identify and assess training needs based on long-term training plans of individual staff. This should not be limited to new staff, filling new positions; or when something goes wrong. Staff involvement in the identification of training needs can also help to decrease negative perceptions towards the design and results of training for both Western and Thai hotels. It may also lessen the staff sense of dependence, and enhance positive perceptions of hotel competency in service quality. Training needs may emphasise skills with a people focus, energy and information handling in the case of Western hotels and skills of a people focus and energy skills in the case of Thai hotels.

## **Training Results**

The effectiveness of the training provided in hotels should be evaluated on the basis of the guest relation skills exhibited by frontline staff, and the satisfaction of management with staff guest relation skills. In the case of Thai hotels, effective training can lead to improved perceptions of hotel competency and particularly service quality. The needs of the training participants should relate to training design and assessment, and this will lead to greater guest satisfaction. In the case of Western hotels, positive staff perceptions that training results lead to guest relation skills are confined to energy skills. In the case of Thai hotels they are confined to people focus skill. It is suggested that the outcomes of training should be presented in ways that create an impressive, fair and challenging feeling amongst hotel staff. As such the results of training should avoid a perception of performance appraisal by management. One way might be to manage training in groups or teams, and this is particularly recommended in Thai hotels.

## **Guest-Orientation Quality and guest satisfaction with service quality**

Hotel competency in service quality has a significant impact on the level of guest satisfaction with service. For Western hotels, staff perceive that there should be more attention given to quality, with a view to achieving improved guest satisfaction. In Thai hotels, four different staff perceptions merit particular attention with a view to minimising guest dissatisfaction: setting quality as the number one priority, placing additional effort on the delivery of quality, having a commitment to satisfying guests and manager actions in achieving guest satisfaction.

Overall, housekeeping was the department that had the greatest influence on guest satisfaction. It is recommended that particular importance is attached to the perceptions of housekeeping staff concerning hotel competency in service quality.

It is suggested that hotel managers should focus on the provision of guest services associated with frontline staff based primarily on individual guest attention. In the case of Western hotels, guests appear to require individual attention and appreciation of their preferences on the part of front-office staff. They also require sympathy and reassurance from both housekeeping and from food and beverage staff. It is suggested that Thai hotels should stress both individual attention and sympathy and reassurance from front office staff. Additionally, availability of staff and sympathy and reassurance should be stressed by housekeeping staff; and complaint handling and sympathy and reassurance from food and beverage staff.

In order to reduce the incidence of complaints, guests in Thai hotels require greater individual attention from front office and from food and beverage staff. In the case of Western hotels, guests are likely to complain less when they are given greater individual attention by housekeeping staff.

Throughout this paper and as outlined in Figure 1, it has been shown that TQM and training have a significant impact on the satisfaction that guests have with service and indeed, training increases staff competency and causes positive changes in the level of satisfaction of guests. It is suggested that hotel managers should attach greater

importance to the application of TQM principles, particularly through training programmes that are likely to impact upon guest satisfaction with services.

### **Opportunities for further research**

The present survey covered only hotels in Thailand as representative of hotels across the Asian region. There are likely to be differences with other Asian countries that have not been identified in the survey, and this research should be seen as a starting point rather than as definitive. It is also recommended that hotels in other Western countries or in other regions be included in future studies. Other areas of human resource management merit further investigation. Employee relations based on TQM principles may for example, be worthy subjects for future research.

Research questions on the relative value of TQM training have not been measured in the current research. No sample was taken of a non TQM (or training) hotel to compare satisfaction between TQM and non TQM hotels. Despite this limitation the study has provided an improved understanding of relationships involving customer satisfaction, training and TQM in multiple cross-cultural settings.

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