Strengthening Affective Service Quality Management

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Abstract Using the daily properties management in Park Island, Hong Kong, as a case study, the purpose is to focus on the importance of strengthening affective competencies in service quality management. Design/Methodology/Approach - This paper used the daily operation and management in Park Island, Hong Kong, as a case study to illustrate the exceptional service quality provided in Park Island. The deep thoughts and feelings from customers were quoted and analyzed. Authors conducted twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews. Findings - The inspiring real-life experiences from respondents who have been living in Park Island were quoted. It has been reflecting the value of "PARK ISLAND" and demonstrating the significance of affective competencies in exceptional service quality management. Practical implications – Based on the insights gained from interviewees, strengthening affective competencies are necessary in order to provide exceptional services to exceed customers' expectations and to enhance the reputation of the management companies. Originality/value - This paper urges for the significance of strengthening affective competencies in service quality management. The aim of such an episode is to arouse all the kinds of management companies to strive the best to provide affective and effective quality services management.

Keywords Service management, Properties management, Service quality

1. Introduction

Park Island, named as "the leisure vacation island", is a private residential area situated in Ma Wan, which is located in the north-east part of Ma Wan. Park Island consists of over 5,000 residential units in 35 blocks with 3 large clubhouses covering an area of over 126,000 sq.m. In Park Island, over 40,000 sq.m are covered with greenery with gardens and mini farms, taking up nearly 40% of the site area. Since vehicle restrictions are enforced in Ma Wan to limit the emissions, the project by and large is described as a "pollution-free green city" which promotes one-stop green building and management (Chan, 2012). It is regarded as the first largest ecofriendly residential area which covers a large green space since planning (Chan, 2012). The management is dedicated to plan, implement and educate the residents through various environmental protection programs, workshops and events. Green concepts have applied in properties planning, designing, resources purchasing, architectural work, gardening, daily management operation and management as well as clubhouses activities and properties events management.

In the service industry like properties management, quality and perception of quality is essential. Thus, the need to deliver quality service is imperative in order to meet the needs of customers and exceed their expectation (Baharum, Nawawi, & Saat, 2014). The rising demand for higher management quality and more sophisticated facilities means that management services are no longer limited to cleaning, security and maintenance. In some properties, management companies even provide recreational services, green management and promotion, food and beverages, transportation and concierge services. Nowadays, properties management covers lots of facets from providing strict cleaning and pest control services, monitoring 24-hour reliable security services, keeping maintenances, creating beautiful landscaping, operating clubhouses, planning and coordinating recreational activities, planning and organizing events, implementing and educating customers to live green.

The objective is to maximize the value of customers' properties and enrich their living experiences in properties. The requirement for high standard of service quality in properties management has grown through the years due to the fact that customers have become more demanding in an increasingly competitive business environment. In addition, due to the various characteristic of customers that in turn will be influenced by culture, subculture, social class, family, friends, educational backgrounds, religion, experiences, mass media, social media, and advertising. In this regard, it is

very challenging to manage the diversified customers with different needs and expectations.

This study intends to explore the importance of strengthening affective competencies in service quality management in daily properties operation and management at all times. The findings and insights will supplement existing research and expand the findings into untapped areas. The value of this study is to answer questions concerning the role of affective competencies in exceptional properties management. This study illustrates the importance of delivering affective service quality in daily properties operation and management for properties management practitioners.

2. Literature Review

In the service industry like properties management, quality and perception of quality is essential. Thus, the need to deliver quality service is imperative in order to meet the needs of customers and even exceed their expectation (Baharum et al., 2014). The role of service quality in the success of businesses cannot be denied and it is vital for the managers to have a good understanding on what exactly the customers want (Akbaba, 2006).

Quality

Quality is judged subjectively by customer's own thoughts and feelings, it is something in a service or product that generates customer satisfaction (Grönroos, 1983; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Rust et al., 1996; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). No agreed definition of quality can be generated, rather different definitions are generated in different context (Reeves & Bednar, 1994). Multiple definitions are needed to describe the complexity of the quality construct for companies to address quality issues that change as products move through various stages from planning, implementing and promoting to the market (Garvin, 1984; Sebastianelli & Tamimi, 2002). Quality was defined as value (Feigenbaum, 1951; Abbott, 1955). Juran et al. (1962) identified the eight primary uses for the term "quality" in industry, and later Juran et al. (1974) defined quality as fitness for use. Levitt (1972) and Gilmore (1974) understood quality as conformance to specifications. Later, the quality research started to examine various dimensions, or attributes, of quality in different industries and contexts. Garvin (1984, 1987), provided a framework for understanding product quality in terms of eight dimensions: performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics, and perceived. Kano et al. (1984) categorized the attributes of product or service into two categories based on how well they are able to satisfy customers' needs. The first category are "taken for granted quality" and "surprising quality". The service research realized quality as a subjective customer perception of the service (Grönroos, 1983; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Buzzel

& Gale (1987, p. 111) stated that "Quality is whatever the customer say it is, and the quality of a particular product or service is whatever the customer perceives it to be". According to Grönroos (1990, p. 37), "it should be remembered that what accounts is quality as it is perceived by the customers". Identically, Zeithaml et al. (1990) argue that only customer's judge quality, and all other judgments are not important. According to Rust et al.'s (1996), customer service is all about perceptions.

Service Quality

Service quality is an abstract and elusive concept because of the well-known distinctive natures and characteristics of services which is intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity, and inseparability of production and consumption (Zeithaml et al, 1985; Rust et al, 1996; Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). Thus, quality can vary from person to person, and from situation to situation (Kandampully, 2002). Perceived service quality, was defined as the difference between customer expectations and perceptions or also known as gap analysis (Parasuraman et al, 1985; 1988). The gap analysis model is based on the expectancy disconfirmation theory. Expectancy disconfirmation theory predicts that customers will judge that quality is low if performance does not meet their expectations and quality increases as performance exceeds expectations (Oliver, 1980). Hence, customers' expectations serve as the foundation on which service quality will be evaluated by customers. Service quality depends on the degree of the actual service performance in satisfying customer's needs and expectations, thus, service quality can be understood as the conformance of the customer's requirements to the service received (Chakrabarty et al., 2007). It is important to bear in mind that customers are the major evaluator of the service quality where they determine the success of a product or service (Kelesbayev et al., 2015). In this regard, customer surveys are the effective tools in measuring service quality (Homburg et al, 2013). In this study, researchers conducted in depth interview in order to explore the customer's expectation in service quality management.

Affective Competencies

Affective competencies represent the awareness of a person has about the aesthetics, beliefs, spirituality, passion, values, attitudes, commitment, emotions, feelings, self-concept, identities, characters, interests, personality, relationship skills and appreciation (Hall, 1976; Bloom & Krathwohl, 1984; Nanthachai, 2002; Schuck & Grootenboer, 2004). They include soft skills that are defined as the interpersonal, human, people, or the behavioral skills (Kantrowitz, 2005; Rainsbury et al., 2002). They also include work commitment, work effectiveness, and respect for others (Horng & Lu, 2006). In psychological level, emotion and cognition are highly overlapped which means emotion and cognition are shaping and influencing each other (Caine & Caine, 1991).

3. Methodology and Research Methods

A descriptive research design is adopted by using a qualitative approach, with customer's views on service quality management in Park Island. Research on service quality has traditionally employed a variety of deductive processes, testing a plethora of hypotheses and pre-determined theories. Service quality researchers have typically approached the problem from a positivist perspective, utilizing quantitative research techniques such as surveys and questionnaires, and processing data with the help of statistical data analysis tools. While mostly deductive in nature, such research tools tend to measure a set of predetermined hypotheses, searching for answers to the "what" questions and not allowing for any additional factors to enter the researcher's process of reasoning (Yin, 1994). Qualitative research is based and derives strength from its inductive approach, it focus on specific situations or people, and emphasis on words rather than numbers (Maxwell, 2005). Respondents in the service interaction context have been shown to demonstrate a multitude of contributions and it is very likely that their attitudes, behaviors, perceptions and experiences of service quality differ. In order to gain a degree of emotional depth, which is not possible to achieve simply by analyzing quantitative data, a qualitative research approach has been chosen as a more appropriate research strategy. Qualitative research is considered to be "concerned with understanding things rather than with measuring them" (Gordon & Langmaid, 1988, p. 2), whereby the "subjectivity and the authenticity of human experience" (Silverman, 2010, p. 138) allows the researcher to gain an insight into the different meanings, perceptions, feelings and attitudes of research subjects (Holloway et al., 2010). The researchers conducted twenty face to face in-depth interviews with interviewees who are living in Park Island, so as to collect more comprehensive and useful data.

Park Island was selected in this study because Park Island, named as "the leisure vacation island", is a private residential area situated in Ma Wan, which is located in the north-east part of Ma Wan. The researchers used purposive sampling because of its capacity to obtain useful informative and rich data from respondents. All of them are customers that have been experiencing the services in Park Island. In this way, extensive experiences of these respondents formed a basis for opinions which made their comments valid, reliable and trustworthy. The sample group comprised ten female and ten male respondents, all aged 30-55. Their education levels were secondary (4), undergraduate (6) and postgraduate (10). This prompted the researchers to make a subjective selection of the sampling units to obtain a representative sample of the research population (Sekaran, 2003). A sample was required for the study because of limited resources for the researchers. Due to limited resources available for the researchers, thus it is impracticable to collect data from the entire research population.

In the current investigation interviewing would be discontinued once 'saturation' was reached. At that point, no further insights would be forthcoming from the interviews (Myers, 2013). Researchers believe they have taken in all that can be known or understood about a phenomenon under study (Richards, 2010). This approach is consistent with the view that sample size is not the dominant concern, in qualitative research, with greater importance attached to richness and depth of data.

Data collection took place in Park Island. The researchers undertook one-to-one in-depth semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 40 to 60 minutes at nearest cafe. Respondents were given information about the purpose of the study and written consent was obtained. Topics and questions were designed to elicit responses regarding each participant's attitude, feelings, and perceptions about service quality. This study will include a mixture of positivist, emotionalists and constructionist interview research approaches, do that both 'what' and 'how' questions are covered in the interview (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Most of the interview questions are open-ended in order to produce more detailed responses. Probing questions are prepared to further encourage the interviewees to express more responses to the question. Repeating and rephrasing technique for the questions or asking the interviewees to express more and more in-depth. The main interview questions are seeking the customer's views, thoughts and feelings on the service quality management in Park Island.

Further questions and prompts were included to enquire their feelings, perceptions and attitude for identifying any specific circumstances which may have contributed to service quality management. The interviews were digitally recorded and summaries were written up. Data are textual and generated through different methods such as interviews. Qualitative data analysis is interpretive, whereby researchers seeks to interpret the meanings that respondents themselves give their views and experiences (Hennink et al., 2011). Responses were analyzed using manual coding, scanning the recordings and flagging emergent themes and common views (Veal, 2006). Finally, the results were grouped into similar conceptual areas according to prevalent themes. The constant comparative analysis forms the backbone of the data analysis. Member checking was deployed in order to double-check the conclusions. A trustworthiness check was performed using respondent validation and to overcome potential researcher bias. This supports the credibility of the more generalized findings that were developed by the researchers (Maxwell, 1996). These safeguards ensured that the data were interpreted in a transparent manner.

4. Findings and Discussion

With the technological advancement, lots of information technology have been using for the daily properties management in Park Island.

- Closed-Circuit Television (CCTVs) have been using in properties and clubhouses management. It is a system that with surveillance camera installed to monitor the

specific areas of the properties especially in main entrance and boundary area for security purpose. CCTV systems are equipped with motion detection function incorporated that can be applied to detect the motion of the CCTV monitoring areas. If there are any movement or motion passes the CCTV camera, the motion will be detected and triggers the alarm of the system or pop-up of the targeted screen. This function improves the security level of the properties and effectiveness of security measures as a building may installed with lots of CCTV cameras and it is not easy to check all of them at the same time (Tse, 2018).

- Electronic Patrol System have probe, patrol buttons, a patrol station which for downloading the patrol data to computer and also a modem for sending of the patrol data to control room. The probe is an electronic metal stick which used to store the patrol data and upload the data through the patrol station. The patrol button is the electronic chip that pre-installed the information of location of the patrol point. By the implementation of electronic patrol system, the security guards are only be required to tag the patrol buttons with the probe and the patrol record will be save in the probe rather than marking it down in the patrol books manually (Tse, 2018).

- Smart Card System and Access Control System have been using in all lobby towers and clubhouses access. It included a pocket-sized card with a chip, card reader, a server and integrated circuits to transfer the data between card reader and server. With the smart card system, the workload of security guards can be partly shared as smart card system provide restriction of the access to lobby towers and clubhouses. So, security guards can concentrate on enhancing customer relationship and building management. The smart card system is a cost-saving machine, it helps to facilitate the more efficient use of manpower. Compared with manual authentication work, it can ensure the effectiveness on access control and security measures. In this regard, residents do not need to remember many passwords for accessing their own properties (Tse, 2018).

- Building Management System (BMS) have been using to monitor and control the building service facilities such as lighting, air conditioning system, chiller system, fan coil system, ventilation system, lift and fire service system. All the aforementioned facilities are linked with computers with the sensors and control boards installed in the facilities. If there are any malfunction of the facilities or failure of operation, the BMS will send a signal to control room in order to alert the management staffs to carry out immediate emergency handling and repair. Even for energy saving purpose, the management staffs can set the operation schedule for all of the building service facilities and it will operate at the designated time automatically for achieving energy saving target accurately (Tse, 2018).

5. Park Island's Affective Services

It is a fact that competitive environment and technological advancements have profound impacts on the properties management services. The success of properties management services is based upon exceptional service delivery. Computerized technologies have transformed properties security services conveniently and efficiently. Undoubtedly, CCTV, motion detector and other new technologies can be applied to provide accurate, efficient and convenient security services to customers. Applied high technology can positively affect the customer satisfaction (Tse, 2018). In properties management, when designed and implemented properly, technology can support better service delivery and achieve greater efficiencies to delight customer's needs. Also, it helps to support staff by creating a better work-life balance. Even though technology can improve service efficiency and accuracy, whereas the function of human interaction and communication in service process are far more important and impressive. Customers are the core; they are the users to determine what enables great efficiencies and convenience. The excerpts below showcase the importance of affective competencies performed by customer service representatives in their daily customer services duties.

"As I am 68 years old, I hesitate to use computerized system. I love to seek help from real customer services representatives directly as they can follow up my request in a thoughtful manner".

"No one can deny that technology plays an irreplaceable role in this world. It can improve the accuracy of security standard as well as ensure efficiency. However, the communication between services personnel and customers should not be neglected. Because the communication between customers and service representatives can help to form a bonding between management companies and their customers".

"Even I am happy to use smart card to enter my tower lobby, I could only feel welcomed and warm to be greeted by customer service representative in every morning".

Park Island management set strict and professional grooming requirement, guidelines for gesture and Q&A conversations for all of the frontline services representatives. Mysterious visitors have been checking four times per month to monitor the high standard of services performance. Monthly training and open sharing session are held for all frontline services representatives, cases from customers' compliments as well as area for improvement are shared among staff for further enhancement. Feedbacks from staff will be listened and follow-up by management. All in all, the exceptional service management is all about providing continuous services from the hearts, definitely not only concern about appearance and gestures, but the sincerity from the hearts that can be felt by customers throughout the

years at all times.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the exceptional service management is all about providing continuous services from the hearts, which is a kind of affective competencies. Service quality is definitely not only concern about appearance and gestures of the service representatives, but the sincerity from the hearts that can be felt by customers in every facets of service management. Identifying accurately the specific expectations of customers, the dimensions of the service quality around which customers make their quality evaluations, and their relative importance for customers carries vital importance in quality improvement efforts. Having knowledge about these areas would definitely help management to improve the service quality management. Thus, demonstrating the importance of affective service quality in daily properties operation and management at all times and always remember the value of "PARK ISLAND". Despite all the challenges for both the management and frontline staff of properties management are facing, customers would appreciate for those who are demonstrating the mission of "We Serve You Best" by fully utilizing their affective competencies in services. Realizing the power of affective competencies by providing services straight from the hearts which is the golden rule and fundamental philosophy to win the trust, appreciation and respect from customers' bottom of their hearts.

The value of "PARK ISLAND" is

P-Proactive
A-Affective
R-Reliable
K-Kind
I-Inspiring
S-Safety
L-Loving
A-Attentive
N-Noteworthy
D-Determined

Based on the above case study, we learnt that the exception service quality management should be implemented in daily operations and management. Strengthening affective competencies in service quality management are important to meet and exceed customer's expectations.

7. Recommendations

1. To weave and nurture an authentic, affective, attentive service culture to all properties management staff.
2. To provide regular meetings and workshops to enhance affective service quality management.
3. To conduct monthly sharing sessions to strengthen the mutual support among team members.
4. To conduct a detailed analysis of expectation, perception from customers so as to detect the areas for improvement and design services to meet or exceed guests' expectations.
5. Most importantly, to continue to deliver affective service quality in all facets of management.

8. Limitations

Like all research, this study has a number of limitations which the authors attribute to the relative weakness of interviews to present valid, reliable and trustworthy empirical evidence. Since this study has adopted a qualitative approach, sample size is not a significant issue, despite 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 to be generalized to the population at large since this was never the intention of the researcher. As this study has employed in-depth interviews as the main mode of data collection, the efficiency and effectiveness of this study will depend to some degree on the researcher's ability to assist participants to derive their thoughts, feelings and experiences in their perception of the service quality management in Park Island. The findings are based on the interviewee's views about service quality in Park Island. Consequently, it is recognized that the results of this study present a snapshot of thoughts 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.

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