

Improving the Effectiveness of Moroccan Tourism Services: A Total Quality Management Approach

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ABSTRACT

Using a sample of Moroccan tourism related service organizations, this study examines the extent of implementation and effectiveness of Total Quality Management (TQM) practices. In the process, the operational and strategic benefits of TQM to these organizations are analyzed. These benefits have the potential to positively impact the vital Moroccan tourism service sector.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important sector of the Moroccan economy. According to WTO (2008), the contribution of “travel and tourism” to the Moroccan economy in 2008 is expected to reach \$14 billion. This represents 19% of the country’s GDP. Furthermore, the growth in Moroccan tourism is expected to continue for the near future. WTO estimates that in 2018, the revenue contribution of tourism to the Moroccan economy will reach \$25 billion. However, Moroccan tourism still suffers from serious shortcomings relative to other countries in the area (see Table1).

Traditionally, Morocco attracted tourists, who were interested in seaside resorts, or the rich cultural heritage. These two segments of tourism, traditionally, competed for the largest share of the Moroccan tourism market. Until 1998, tourism in Morocco was dominated by seaside tourism. Since that time, cultural tourism took over (Berriane, 2002; Bauer, et. al.,2006; Hazbun, 2003). Besides these two important segments, rural, desert, and health care tourism are gaining strength in recent years. Nusser (2005) investigates the potential of rural tourism in the southern part of Morocco (desert). In the process, he developed a SWOT¹ analysis for the regions of Ouarzazate, Zagora, and the valley of Drâa. The analysis showed that the Moroccan government is trying to use cultural heritage to promote the positive effect of tourism to keep families from moving away from these regions to close by cities. In general, other benefits of rural tourism identified included the development of rural infrastructure, setting up nature reserves, upgrading modest facilities, like down-hill skiing in the Middle-Atlas (Peyron, 2003; Chemonics, 2006).

¹ Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Treats

Realizing the positive impact of tourism on the national economy, the Moroccan government took several initiatives to promote tourism. The Vision 2010 is a case in point. This vision represents a systematic governmental effort aimed at attracting millions of tourists to Morocco. (Water, 2002). However, despite governmental efforts, Moroccan tourism has not reached its potential. In this context, Moroccan tourism still suffers serious shortcomings which have a negative impact relative to their immediate competitors. These shortcomings stem from tourism related practices which could be improved. Specifically, practices which have direct impact on the service encounter aspect of the tourism service could be improved through the systematic applications of process and quality improvement initiatives such as Total Quality Management (TQM).

The objective of the study at hand is twofold. First, the extent to which process and quality improvement initiatives based on TQM are implemented in tourism related organizations. Second, the effectiveness of these initiatives is addressed for benchmarking and improvement purposes.

BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT LITERATURE

Increased customer sophistication and the globalization of business activities are forcing business organizations to re-engineer their cultures, operations and systems to support customer-focused and quality-driven competitive business strategies. Manufacturing organizations have successfully deployed total quality management (TQM) practices in support of strategic choices (Splitzer, 1993; Flynn, Schroeder, and Sakakibara, 1995; Au and Choi, 1999; Tata and Prasad, 1998; Prajogo and Sohal, 2001; Powell, 1995). In this context, however, service organizations are still lagging behind their manufacturing counterparts in terms of their strategic commitment to TQM (Au and Choi, 1999; Dotzour and Lengnick-Hall, 1996; Sohal, 1994; Shortell, O'Brian, Carman, and Foster, 1995). The apparent reluctance of service organizations to utilize TQM based-strategies is alarming, especially in light of the increased significance of the service sector to national and global economies. For example, service activities in the U.S. accounted for a 20% of the Gross Domestic Product, employing 53% of the U.S. workforce in 2001 (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2002). The trend signifying the increasing importance of the service sector is expected to strengthen in the future (Lemak and Reed, 2000). Given the nature of most service operations where the customer is the focal point, the need to have a customer-focused and quality-driven strategic orientations seems to be a necessity rather than a luxury. As such, the effective implementation of TQM in service operational settings would be expected to be the rule rather than the exception. However, the bulk of evidence appears to strongly contradict this contention. As such, most successful TQM implementation and applications are still found in manufacturing rather than service operational settings.

Service quality is a multi-dimensional construct. Thus, service quality may be viewed based on the attributes of the service delivery system, the extent of customer satisfaction and/or the interactions among the different elements of the service system which define the service encounter (Chase and Bowen, 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988; Klaus, 1985). As such, efforts aimed at improving service quality should focus on both front-end and back-end at the service operational service (Yasin, Zimmerer L., Miller, and Zimmerer T., 2002; Yavas and

Yasin, 2001; Yasin and Yavas, 2001; Czuchry, Yasin, and Norris, 2000; Yasin and Yavas, 1999).

Yasin, Czuchry, Jennings-Jarvis, and York (1999) proposed a Rapid Assessment Methodology (RAM) to improve service quality in a healthcare operational setting. The RAM attempts to integrate quality improvement efforts into a form of system-wide quality improvement philosophy. In a series of studies comparing operational practices and related quality initiatives in manufacturing and service organizations, the need for service organizations to benchmark their manufacturing counterparts was understood (Yasin, Wafa and Small, 2003-a; Yasin et al, 2003-b; Yasin and Wafa, 2002).

Total quality management (TQM) and associated quality improvement initiatives have gained wide acceptance in the manufacturing environment. In recent years, some service organizations in different service industries such as healthcare, insurance, hospitality among others have shown interest in TQM (Hasan and Kerr, 2003). This interest may be attributed to the positive impact of TQM on the strategic and operational facets of organizational performance (August, Krishnan, and Kadir, 2000; Reed, Lemark, and Montgomery, 1996; Hasan and Kerr, 2003; Zahiri, Letza, and Oakland, 1994). Research dealing with the empirical relationships between TQM and the operational and strategic facets of organizational performance in different service operational settings has not been forthcoming. Such research is needed to give service managers the bottom-line justification for implementing TQM.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSITION

The research presented in this paper is part of a stream of research aimed at understanding the facets of effective TQM implementation in different tourism related service organizations in Morocco. As such, this research attempts to explore current TQM implementation practices and their operational and strategic outcomes and benefits. The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 is designed to guide the analysis presented in this study. The framework is formulated based on the TQM literature (Samson and Terziovski, 1999; Sureschchandler, Rajendran, and Anantharam, 2001; Kanji and Wallace, 2000; Liu, 1998; Hendricks, and Singhal, 2001; Easton, and Jarrel, 1998). Consistent with the framework in figure 1, three propositions are advanced.

Proposition 1- Moroccan tourism related service organizations in different service operational settings tend to be different in terms of their willingness to implement TQM.

Proposition 2- The extent and nature of strategic outcomes and benefits to Moroccan tourism related service organizations due to TQM implementation tend to be different in different service operational settings.

Proposition 3- The extent and nature of operational outcomes and benefits to Moroccan tourism related service organizations due to TQM implementation tend to be different in different service operational settings.

The research instrument used in this study was developed based on the manufacturing and service TQM literature (i.e., Ferrer Fernandez and Banuelos, 1993; Flynn et al, 1995; Fine and Bridge, 1993; Hasan and Kerr, 2003; Madu, Chu-Hua, and Chinho, 1995) and feedback obtained from practitioners through unstructured interviews. A panel of practitioners and academicians examined the instrument for face validity before it was used. This process resulted in few changes in the instrument. The final research instrument consisted of 84 questions. Eighty of these questions utilized a Likert type scale, while four questions were open-ended.

This research instrument was sent to a sample of Moroccan tourism service related organizations which included among others, hotels, resorts, and restaurants. Official directories and personal contacts were used to reach the participants.

RESULTS

The initial results obtained show that most of the organizations surveyed are not implementing TQM in a systematic fashion. Perhaps the decision-makers in these organizations either do not understand the strategic and operational potential benefits of TQM, or their organizations lack the know-how to apply it.

CONCLUSION

Moroccan tourism has great economic potential. However, past efforts to reach this potential have not totally succeeded. This reach aims at improving effectiveness of tourism related services through the applications of process and quality improvement initiatives such as Total Quality Management (TQM). Improving the effectiveness of tourism related services will be a step in the right direction in the effort to reach the great economic potential of Moroccan tourism.

REFERENCES

(Can be obtained for the authors)

Figure 1: Improving Tourism Service Effectiveness Through TQM Implementation

