

SERVICE QUALITY AND WORKER TRAINING IN 5-STAR HOTEL

Marcela Rebeca Contreras Loera^{1*}, Beatriz Perez Sanchez²,
Diana Guadalupe Flores Echeagaray³

¹ Technological University of Escuinapa, Mexico


² Juárez Autonomous de Tabasco University, Department of Economic
and Administrative Sciences, Mexico

³ Technological University of Escuinapa, Mexico


Abstract: The quality system of a hotel is based on policies, standards and protocols, which must be put into practice and defined to exert constant improvement in the quality of the services offered in each of its departments; On the other hand, training involves providing all hotel staff with techniques to improve the quality of services and in the same way provide human and economic growth to the company. The research aim is to analyze service quality and its relationship to worker training in a five-star HRHLC hotel; the case study of a hotel located in the tourist destination of Cabo San Lucas, B.C.S. in Mexico was used since it is an appropriate research design when one wishes to obtain concrete, contextual knowledge on a specific topic and allows one to explore the characteristics, key meanings and implications of the case. Information was collected through structured interviews and analysis of company reports. The results indicate that the hotel received an average rating of 8.8 regarding the perception of quality in service and customer attention, reflecting the fact that the hotel has an area of opportunity for improvement as being in a five-star category, the rating of quality service must be a minimum of 9.5. Regarding training, 100% of the staff received training on the use of the system, quality of service and safety and

¹ Marcela Rebeca Contreras Loera, PhD, Camino al Guasimal S/N, al Noroeste de la Ciudad, Colonia Centro, C.P. 82400, Escuinapa, Sinaloa, México, mcontreras@utescuinapa.edu.mx,

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7038-2460>

² Beatriz Perez Sanchez, PhD, Zona de la Cultura Av. Universidad S/N, 86025 Villahermosa, México, beatrizperez10@hotmail.com,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9184-0579>

³ Diana Guadalupe Flores Echeagaray, MSc, Camino al Guasimal S/N, al Noroeste de la Ciudad, Colonia Centro, C.P. 82400, Escuinapa, Sinaloa, México, dianaflres097@gmail.com,

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2885-9701>

* Corresponding author: Marcela Rebeca Contreras Loera, mcontreras@utescuinapa.edu.mx

hygiene; 80% have been in the company for less than 6 months, reflecting the high staff turnover. In conclusion the five-star hotel and four-diamond chain needs to address areas of opportunity to improve the guests' perception of quality and obtain the 9.5 rating that this category of hotel requires, as well as improve working conditions to increase staff retention.

Keywords: management, service quality, training

JEL Classification: M12, M10, M53

Introduction

The hotel sector is considered an essential part of the value chain of tourism activity since its infrastructure, capacity and service bring with it the ranking of the city as a world-class destination. Therefore, the fact that management ensures the hotel offers quality service becomes one of the most relevant elements in the development of tourism, that is, by generating quality, synonymous with satisfaction of guests, it produces sustainability of the city because there is an increase in the number of people of national and international origin attracted by the tourist destination. One of the factors that influences hotels to aspire to offer quality service in the industry is employee training since it seeks to professionalize the activity and thereby improve the requirements and offer excellent service to visitors.

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 900 million international tourists traveled in 2022, twice as many as in 2021, although it remains 37% lower than in 2019. Regarding the economic contribution of tourism, it contributed 2.2% to the global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021 (OMT, 2023). While in Mexico, tourism reported 31.9 million international tourists, with an expenditure of 19,765 million dollars, 7.5% of GDP to the national economy (INEGI, 2022); total rooms of 867,328 units with an increase of 1.6% more than in 2020. Hotel occupancy in the group of 70 tourist centers was 41.2%, increasing 15.2% compared to 2020 (SECTUR, 2022).

The hotel sector has a special significance within tourism activity; it includes all establishments that are professionally and habitually dedicated to providing accommodation to people, at a price, with or without complementary services (Mestres, 1999). The hospitality industry requires trained workers with certain skills and abilities to meet customer demands. Personnel training is key to providing the hotel company with people who can develop in the best way and be capable of providing quality services.

Derived from the standardization of processes, services and amenities, quality evaluation systems emerge based on compliance with certain criteria in a list of offers that are considered minimum for certain levels in the hotel industry. The most common and current system is that of star classification, which increases the type, number and quality of services depending on the number – from 1 to 5 (SECTUR, 2023).

In Mexico, SECTUR (2023) points out that the Hotel Classification System (SCH) is a source of information that gives certainty to tourists, national and international, about the category held by lodging establishments in the country.

SCH is a methodological tool supported through a self-evaluation mechanism regulated by the Ministry of Tourism, which allows lodging establishments to know the situation of their facilities and services offered, as well as identify areas of opportunity, a fact through which they will be recognized by means of a category represented by stars. Each variable confers a score and the total is equivalent to a star category, except in the case that the tourism lodging service provider chooses to classify its establishment under the category of “without category” (SECTUR, 2023). For tourists, both national and foreign, SCH maximizes communicative clarity and simplicity by making use of the most common code in hospitality: the classification of hotels in a range of one to five stars, with half-star intervals. The number of stars intuitively reflects the type of offer that the hotel offers to its guests (Table 1), so that hotels with superior qualities also obtain a greater number of stars when evaluated.

Table 1. Hotel Classification System in Mexico with stars and their meaning

Total stars	Services offered by hotel, considering total number of stars
1	Essential
2	Basic services and infrastructure
3	Adequate facilities, complete and standardized service, without great luxuries
4	Luxury facilities and superior service
5	Exceptional facilities and services

Source: (SECTUR, 2023)

The research aim is to analyze service quality and its relationship with worker training in five-star HRHLC hotels. The case study of a hotel located in the tourist destination of Cabo San Lucas B.C.S. in Mexico was used. because it is an appropriate research design when one wants to obtain concrete, contextual knowledge about a specific topic and allows one to explore the key characteristics, meanings and implications of the case. The HRHLC hotel is a five-star hotel, it is part of an international chain operating in a local context in Mexico. Considering the reality it experiences helps to reveal deep and unknown meanings, as well as guide decision-making in relation to business problems, to report on complex realities, made invisible by everyday life, to understand internal processes and discover dilemmas and contradictions, helping to reflect on practices and understanding of reality. Yin (1994) points out that a case study is an empirical investigation that studies a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident.

The HRHLC hotel is a five-star establishment and is aimed at a sun and beach tourism market. It is one of the three hotels of the RCD hotel chain in Mexico, classified as diamond with the all-inclusive boutique hotel concept. RCD Hotels has 35 brand hotels around the world, with a presence in 75 countries. It has operated in the all-inclusive mode, located in Cabo San Lucas B.C.S. Mexico since June 2019.

It has 5,017 square meters of meeting space – with a convention center, legendary musical memorabilia, Rock Shop and a music program (the sound of your stay), exclusive for hotel guests. It has 639 rooms, six restaurants, five pool and spa areas, basketball and tennis courts. It operates on three shifts. It has 48 departments and certifications such as the National Sanitation Foundation, Posi-check, Clean Point, Room check, Water check, among others.

Literature review

Hotel companies today are aware that in order to remain in the market, they must make radical changes to the quality of their service, not only towards their external clients, but also towards their collaborators. The services offered are perceived by both the tourist and the worker, with a different experience from the experience during the accommodation process. The concept of quality in hospitality is subjective since it depends on the person who receives it, who will estimate whether in his opinion it meets what he expected from the service. This implies challenges since it is necessary to consider the objective, tangible and measurable elements that allow us to become closer to that previous idea that the client brings (Veloz-Navarrete & Vasco-Vasco, 2016).

Juran (1990) points out that quality is the set of characteristics that satisfies the needs of customers and adds that quality consists in not having deficiencies as its adequacy is used to satisfy the needs of the customer. On the other hand, Kotler (1997) indicates that quality is any activity or benefit that one party offers to another; These activities and benefits are essentially intangible and do not give rise to ownership of anything. Their production may or may not be linked to a physical product.

According to Gronroos (1994), the expectations or quality expected by a subject are a function of factors such as marketing communication, recommendations, corporate image and customer needs. The quality received is influenced by the corporate image, and at the same time, by two components: technical quality and functional quality. Service quality is the result of an evaluation process, which is the perceived quality of the service, where the client compares their expectations with the perception of the service received, that is, this methodology depends on two variables, the expected service and the service received.

The key factors to achieve success are quality and efficiency in service and competitiveness at the business level. Providing quality service implies efficiency in communication and processes in all areas of the company. The service is diverse since the client or guest focuses their attention on dimensions of quality such as response time, courtesy, and atmosphere, among others (Matsumoto Nishizawa, 2014). Veloz-Navarrete and Vasco-Vasco (2016) point out that there are various approaches for the analysis of service quality (SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, DINESERV, LODGSERV, HOTELQUAL, HISTOQUAL), which agree that quality is addressed considering different dimensions such as the tangible aspect, reliability, responsiveness, security and empathy (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of approaches and original service quality indicators

Original Indicators	Scalar and Author	Dimensions
Staff	SERVQUAL, Parasuraman et al. (1988)	Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, security and empathy
	SERVPERF Cronin and Taylor (1992)	Based on five dimensions of SERVQUAL model
Facilities and operation	DINE SERV Stevens et al. (1995)	Five dimensions of SERVQUAL model
	LODGSERV Knutson et al. (1990)	Dimensions of SERVQUAL model
	HOTELQUAL Falces et al. (1999)	Personnel, facilities and organization of service
Organization of service	HISTOQUAL Frochot and Hughes (2000)	Responsiveness, tangibles, communication, consumables, empathy

Source: (Veloz-Navarrete & Vasco-Vasco, 2016)

Competitiveness is a consequence of a market with a great deal of and very good supply that forces quality to be promoted as an added value; being competitive means giving more in the best conditions, at the right time and at an appropriate price (Gallego, 2002). For this reason, human resources are a fundamental element that will be supported by the material and financial resources required for such cases, but in all cases it will be the human factor that marks the route to be followed and the results to be achieved. The key to success in a hotel establishment is its staff.

The hotel as a service company must take care of two fundamental aspects for the development of human resources: training and motivation. On the one hand, the employee must be provided with the necessary knowledge to carry out his or her work (training) as well as continuous training within the job itself and complementary training outside of the daily routine. This is one of the most satisfactory and motivating actions, profitable both for the staff and the hotel. On the other hand, the employee must be stimulated (motivation) to ensure that they work in an environment of cordiality, which in general terms promotes their improvement and satisfaction at work, adequately carrying out their work and this is precisely having a recommendable organizational culture.

Chiavenato (2011) points out that training is a short-term educational process, applied in a systematic and organized manner, through which people acquire knowledge, develop skills and competencies based on defined objectives, while for Calderón (1997) training is conceived as a response to the lack of qualified personnel, the growing and accelerated process of organizational changes, the need to have prepared personnel and the prevailing challenge that man has as such. He also mentions that the importance of training varies; this depends on the point of view from which one sees it.

According to Werther and Davis (2000), training must be given to the worker during the hours of their work day, unless, taking into account the nature of the services, the employer and worker agree that it may be provided in another way, as well as in the case in which the worker wishes to train in an activity other than that of the occupation he or she performs, in which case, the training will be carried out outside the work day.

Training is delivered using various means, one of them is technology, which is used to offer the worker different techniques for training, considering the use (content-oriented, process-oriented, mixed), time (before or after admission), place (inside or outside the company), among others (Table 3).

Table 3. Classification of educational technology for training

Due to use (content)	Oriented Reading	Programmed instruction, computer-based instruction
	Process-oriented	Role play, sensitivity training, group development
	Mixed (content and process)	Case studies, games and simulations, conferences and various techniques at work
Due to time (season)	Before joining the company	Induction or integration program in the company
	After joining the company	Training on premises (in service) or outside workplace (out of service)
Due to location	In workplace	Training in tasks, job rotation, job enrichment
	Outside workplace	Classes, films, panels, cases, role-plays, debates, simulations, games

Source: Authors' own elaboration with data from Chiavenato (2011)

Research methodology

The research was carried out with the case study strategy since it is an appropriate research design when one wants to obtain concrete, contextual knowledge about a specific topic and allows one to explore the key characteristics, meanings and implications of the case. This methodology is mainly applicable in the analysis of social phenomena. Stake (1998) states that "it is the study of the particularity and complexity of a singular case, to understand its activity in important circumstances". The case study methodology is designed to delve deeper into a particular situation. For his part, Bell (2005) points out that this methodology provides the opportunity to study in depth a part of a certain problem with a time that is generally limited. The subject of analysis can be a phenomenon, a person, an event or a very specific case, where the analysis must be carried out within the environment in which the object of study develops (Muñoz, 2011).

The study addresses the case of a five-star hotel located in the tourist destination Cabo San Lucas B.C.S. in Mexico, considering the reality that exists in the reception department, which carries out its activities 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with the

participation of 48 collaborators. This department is important because it is the operations center for administrative procedures for the registration, entry and exit of the client. In this area there is the first and last contact with the client, in addition to offering the necessary support throughout the guest's stay. Likewise, customer satisfaction depends on the attention provided by the staff in this department and will be key to whether or not the customer returns to the establishment.

The study had a descriptive scope, which refers to a basic level but implies having a good base of prior knowledge about the phenomenon of study that seeks to describe subjective representations that emerge in a human group about a certain phenomenon, specifying characteristics and profiles of people, groups, communities or any other phenomenon that is subjected to analysis (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018) with a trans-sectional or cross-sectional research design, collecting data at a single moment, at a single time. Its purpose is to describe variables and analyze their incidence and interrelation at a given time (Hernández, 2014). With a qualitative approach, considering the fact that it is framed in the naturalistic scientific paradigm which, as Barrantes (2014) points out, is also called naturalistic-humanistic or interpretive and whose interest focuses on the study of the meanings of human actions and social life, implies a research approach to reality based on the study of situations in the same contexts where they develop, allowing the interpretation of reality phenomena by studying people. As Taylor and Bogdan (1984) point out, it is about resorting to a research methodology that allows us to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of the people who live it.

Data collection was carried out through a structured interview with workers from the reception department of the HRHLC hotel, using a questionnaire with ten questions, as proposed by Hernández and Mendoza (2018) through a conversation between an interviewer and the interviewee, which was performed in order to obtain answers on the topic.

The study sample was a census sample that consisted of 48 employees of the reception department of the five-star hotel. The sample is considered census because 100% of the population was selected considering it a manageable number of subjects. In this sense, Ramírez (1997) establishes that the census sample is one where all the research units are considered as a sample. Hence, the population to be studied is specified as census because it is simultaneously universe, population and sample. Given that the population is small, the entire population was taken for the study and this is called census sampling. López (1998) believes that the census sample is that portion which represents the entire population. Additionally, reports about the department were analyzed, considering digital platforms such as TripAdvisor and Medallia, in which the guest rates the quality of the service they receive at the hotel. It should be noted that data collection through the client was limited since one of the company's policies is not to disturb the client and the client is only asked to complete an online satisfaction survey.

Research results

Service quality is the result of the customer's evaluation because it compares expectations with the perception of the service received. The criteria for ranking hotels include amenities, property quality, cleanliness, food services, entertainment, room variety, ease of access, and location, among others. The quality of service places a five-star hotel above its counterparts. The service must be consistent and exceptional. The staff must be highly-trained to meet guests' needs as they arise or anticipate them.

The information on the quality of service in the reception department of the HDHLC hotel was collected from the company's internal reports, generated on the platform and website that the hotel uses for contact with the customer, such as Medallia, TripAdvisor and social networks, among others. On these platforms, the guest posts opinions about their experience during their stay at the hotel.

In the case of Medallia, the metric reports show an average rating of 8.8 regarding the perception of quality of service and customer attention, reflecting that the hotel has an area of opportunity for improvement since being a five-star hotel, the rating of a quality service must be a minimum of 9. Likewise, on this platform, customer opinions were found such as: "the food needs better work", "need a better variety of food"; "the check-in clerk denied us and made us wait until 3 pm to check in"; "definitely doesn't sit right with me because the check-out time was 6 am"; "the quality and the variety of food needs to drastically improve", "it's supposed to be a 5-star resort, I've stayed at other 3&4-star resorts with way better food".

The TripAdvisor report reveals comments with guest experiences, such as:

"Semi-bitter: I go for an inspection visit for my wedding; I didn't like the lack of options for breakfast, despite there being 2 or 3 restaurants that are open for this, there is a lack of options. The waiting lists at the a la carte restaurants for dinner are very long. One day they close one and the guests crowd the open ones. Go line up from 5.30 pm so you have a good place reserved".

"Quality and good service: I stayed with my wife and daughter in a room with two beds and a crib (you have to request it) with a terrace and jacuzzi next to the pool and on the first floor. Excellent rooms, very elegant and with good details with drinks such as a bottle of tequila and chocolate (for being members), very good general cleaning and the room had a tablet to manage the TV. The hotel had a variety of restaurants and a good distance between them. The staff, the best, very diligent and attentive to any need and request; the opportunity for improvement: for greater excellence, solve issues such as a little delay/dirt from the pipe when filling the jacuzzi and some stains/scratches on the tables".

"Sergio is the Man: the staff have been amazing. The pool service by Eden pool has been the best we've ever experienced at an HT Resort. Sergio has been incredible and is a tremendous personality to have pool side. He is funny, charismatic and his willingness to talk and to laugh with pool side guests while serving an incredible amount of drinks has been a daily highlight for our group. Give the man a daisy card and he is in his element. »I highly recommend the strawberry, sexy with a little bit of spice«".

Training staff in the hotel can increase guest satisfaction, which is why it is important to train workers as it contributes to improving service, speeding up the completion of tasks and improving the quality of the services provided. In this way, the customer tends to evaluate the place better, return frequently and increase recommendations to visit the company.

Regarding the training of staff at the HRHLC hotel, it was found that 60% of those surveyed collaborate directly at the reception, 30% perform the function of bellboy and 10% answer the telephones. Regarding job seniority, 50% have one to five months, 30% six months and 10% one to two years in the company. The interviewees point out that there is a lack of motivation since there are no incentives for staff, job dissatisfaction due to long working hours and multifunctional tasks owing to lack of personnel, days off that are not taken as a consequence of covering shifts on holidays, long response times that affect the service and low remuneration, among others.

In response to the question, When you joined the company and the department where you work, did you receive any training? 100% affirmed that they did receive training both when joining the company and in the functions for the development of their position. Regarding the frequency of the training that the worker receives, 60% indicated that it is every fifteen days, while 40% received training every month.

In reply to the question, Have you received training or a user manual for the Opera system? 60% of employees indicated that they had received training on the use of the Opera system, while 10% had not and 30% indicated that they would like to receive it (it should be noted that Opera is the most used property management system in hotels; it is used for reception management, room management, reservations, accounting, management, etc., using interfaces that help communication between departments and facilitate daily operations, and browsing the intranet. It allows one to view and/or change the status of each room, make charges, move them and/or close an open account, among others). Regarding the type of training related to customer service and attention, 80% of those surveyed responded that they received it and 20% indicate that they had not. 80% confirmed that the training was via in-person conferences at the hotel facilities and 20% indicated that they received training through courses or workshops outside the company.

In reply to the question: Have you received training or a user manual for the Nuvola system? 70% said yes, 10% no, and 20% indicated they would like to receive it (Nuvola is a cloud-based hotel operations software system for optimizing services and guest engagement from a single destination. An all-in-one system connects the back end to the front end, inherently developing a staff accountability system, providing cost savings opportunities for hotel leadership, and improving the guest experience through communication solutions for task management and guest messaging). Regarding the type of training, 80% received training on safety and hygiene practices and service quality, while 60% received training on the use of technologies, customer service and attention, while 10% received training on office parcel management.

Conclusions

Based on the results, it is concluded that a five-star hotel is an establishment tailored to demanding guests, service-oriented, with high standards of comfort. The quality of service places it above its counterparts; the service must be consistent and exceptional; the staff must be highly trained to meet customer needs, be attentive and intuitive, showing courtesy and interest in satisfying guest requests. Waiting times should be non-existent or at least short, with staff available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The hotel must promote a spirit of excellent service among its staff.

Regarding the quality of the service, an area of opportunity for improvement was identified as it was rated 8.8 by clients for service and customer service, which is a result below the minimum of 9.5 since it is an international chain hotel, classified with five stars and should offer an amplified standard of service and customer attention, that is, with renowned labels for the guest, with the purpose of making the customer feel important. In addition to the low rating, the clients' reports about the poor service received indicate that there are shortcomings that affect the quality of the service, which means that it is necessary to analyze the workers' capabilities, identifying whether they have the necessary training and service attitude since it is necessary to be prepared to meet the demands of the current client and the service offered by a hotel with five-star hotel characteristics.

For a hotel that operates with 70% to 97% occupancy all year round, staff training is one of the most important activities to guarantee so that the company functions better and there are better staff and manager relations, which improve teamwork. It is necessary to know the factors that influence the worker's behavior and that generate the perception of poor quality in the service. Although it is true that the staff receives training upon entering the company by the same staff, with topics related to the position and customer service, the fact that the majority have a maximum of five months seniority, indicates that the staff's tenure is short, with a lack of motivation, job dissatisfaction due to long working hours, multifunctional tasks owing to the lack of personnel, days off that are not taken as a consequence of covering shifts on holidays, long response times that affect the service and low remuneration, among others. Therefore, it is necessary to implement a model of excellence focused on the worker, which favors improvement of their conditions and increases retention in the company.

Quality in customer service is one of the essential points that must be met in a company that deals directly with customers, fulfilling the goal of maintaining preference in the hotel. This represents a process of continuous improvement in all areas of the company that have contact or can influence the satisfaction of customer needs or anticipating them. Therefore, the habit of interpreting customers' needs and expectations and offering them an agile, flexible, useful, safe and reliable service must be developed through training.

When hospitality industry employees have access to the necessary knowledge and put it into practice during their daily activities, decision-making and problem-solving are more effective. To ensure that clients feel satisfied during their stay, it is important that hotel staff have identified the work to be carried out and the knowledge of practical processes that improve the hotel's performance, which is why

training is the master key in the hotel industry. In summary, the five-star and four-diamond chain hotel needs to address areas of opportunity to improve the guests' perception of quality and obtain the 9.5 rating that this category requires, as well as improve the working conditions to increase worker retention.

In service-providing companies, the behavior of employees takes on special relevance; if a customer is confronted by a tactless employee, all the company's efforts will be fruitless. Organizations linked to tourism sell quality, which makes them dependent on the attitudes and motivation of their workers and personnel management.

The human component within organizations has a first-order role, recognizing that equipment and capital are no longer the main resources, giving way to innovation and adaptation to change as the central axis for business development and in which man represents the key to organizational success. For this, it is important that companies have competent people, with certain knowledge, skills, motivations, and commitments to take advantage of their potential and generate value, likewise, evaluate the functions performed by staff in five-star hotels and place greater emphasis on training in order to generate motivation and enthusiasm among human resources.

This research addressed the case study of a company providing accommodation services, which means that the findings correspond to a specific reality and do not allow generalization, thereby identifying as a future line of research the realization of the topic with a quantitative approach, considering five-star hotels at a regional, national or international level.

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JAKOŚĆ USŁUG I SZKOLENIE PRACOWNIKÓW W 5-GWIAZDKOWYM HOTELU

Streszczenie: System jakości hotelu opiera się na zasadach, standardach i protokołach, które muszą być wprowadzone w życie i zdefiniowane w celu ciągłego podnoszenia jakości usług oferowanych w każdym z jego działów. Z drugiej strony szkolenie polega na zaproponowaniu wszystkim pracownikom obsługi hotelowej technik poprawy jakości usług i tym samym przyczynia się do rozwoju pracowników i rozwoju przedsiębiorstwa. Celem badania jest analiza jakości usługi i jej związku ze szkoleniem pracownika 5-gwiazdkowego hotelu w Los Cabos, BCS. Badanie przeprowadzono z podejściem ilościowym, informacje zebrano, wykorzystując ankiety dla pracowników recepcji oraz na podstawie analizy dokumentów firmowych. Wyniki wskazują, że klient ocenia jakość usług wysoko, średnio na poziomie 8,8, obsługa klienta w usługach takich jak check-in-out, wyżywienie wyniosła 9. Okazało się, że 100% pracowników zostało przeszkolonych w zakresie korzystania z systemu jakości usług oraz bezpieczeństwa i higieny; 80% pracowało w firmie przez 6 miesięcy, co odzwierciedla dużą rotację pracowników. Można wnioskować, że 5-gwiazdkowy hotel i sieć 4-diamondowa powinny skupić się na możliwościach poprawy postrzegania jakości przez gości i uzyskać ocenę na poziomie 9,5, której wymaga ta kategoria, a także poprawić warunki pracy w celu zwiększenia trwałości zatrudnienia pracownika.

Słowa kluczowe: zarządzanie, jakość usług, szkolenia

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