

Effects of Internal Service Quality on Work Engagement: *A Case Study of Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza¹*

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Article History

Received 25 Sept 2020
Reviewed 1 Oct 2020
Revised 2 Dec 2020
Plagiarism Checked
4 Dec 2020
Revised 20 Dec 2020
Accepted 25 Dec 2020

Keywords

assurance, empathy,
reliability, responsiveness,
tangibility and work
engagement

Journal of Business
and Social Sciences
Research (ISSN: 2542-
2812). Vol V, No. 2, Dec
2020

Abstract

This study examined the Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model with the Internal Service Quality (ISQ) dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy that impact on employee work engagement. This research work was conducted in Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza (SCP), one of the 5-star deluxe hotels of Nepal. The study has adopted an inferential research design to meet the study objectives regarding the impact of independent variables on work engagement of SCP Hotel. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 126 sample respondents out of a total of 503 employees of SCP hotel. The study reveals a significant relationship of work engagement with empathy and not with rest of the independent variables. Based on the findings it is recommended that employees should be taken good care of, and employers should be well aware of the employees' emotional level since empathy has shown a highly significant relationship with work engagement. Study results have scope of future reference whereby implementing SERVQUAL dimensions for employee work engagement and reduction in employee turnover and improved productivity.

1. Introduction and Study Objectives

Service quality is the measurement of performance of any organization that involves internal or and external customer assessments. Employees receive services and products from other members of the organization to carry out their jobs which defines them as the internal customers. In the same way, the

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notion of Internal Service Quality (ISQ) was proposed by Sasser and Arbeit who also considered employees as the internal customers (Al-Ababneh, Masadeh, Al-Shakhsheer, & Habiballah, 2018). ISQ is defined as the quality of services received by the employees of the organization. Studies have also pointed out the relationship of ISQ that is directly linked with job satisfaction and customers' satisfaction. Hence, a conducive workplace is a much-needed factor for an employee to give his/ her best (Umamaheshwari, 2014).

The roar of a developing economy begins from numerous individual ideas, creations and execution. Every nation's economic development depends upon the aggression of surviving in this competitive business environment. In the bigger picture, they all are categorized into diverse industry sectors where hospitality has been considered as one of the world's most important and largest industries (Pizam & Shani, 2009). The hospitality industry covers a wide spectrum of services offered like accommodation, transportation, recreation, leisure, food and beverage and so on. It has been booming like never before. As per UN Tourism organization, the hotel industry has grown 6 percent and reached 1.4 billion tourists in 2018 and this figure has been increasing continuously and added 4 percent over the first half of 2019. Unprecedented transformational changes brought by globalisation has created ample of opportunities and challenges to such industry. There are numerous opportunities sprouting in the Nepalese hospitality market which has led to the growth of many restaurants and hotels. One of the oldest industries in Nepal are the hotel industries and Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza (SCP) is the first 5-star hotel to be established in 1965 A.D.

Should it be hotels or any firms, investing in employees and treating them as the most important assets create a workforce that helps achieve a competitive advantage (Roberts, 2014). Based on the organization's goals, factors influencing employee work engagement should be closely studied and comprehensively determined. The effect of these factors may be considered in the overall performance of the employee (Cresnar & Nedelko, 2017).

Every business, small or big has a unified goal of achieving profit which is perceived as being highly correlated with external customer satisfaction. Henceforth, many organizations look upon customers as a direct source of income which creates blind spots over other important factors. For instance: to increase the revenue or performance of the business with a piece of cheese, the owner should feed their customers, or their employees have always been a great debate. Most of the time, we tend to miss out on the source of long-term success (feeding the employees first) and focus on the achievement of the final goal, customer's happiness. As famously quoted by Anne Frank, "Whoever is happy will make others happy too", employees tend to satisfy their customers when they are individually happy themselves.

Studies related to SERVQUAL dimensions has been conducted to explore external service quality rather than to evaluate internal service quality. Vassileva and Balloni (2014) stated that service quality is generally centred

to customers, i.e., external customers. The significance of studying not only service quality delivered to external customers but also service quality that are exchanged amongst the internal customer i.e. employees has been underlined by many researchers.

Service quality that employers provide is of paramount importance and this reflects when employees are fully engaged into their works. Satisfied employees provide pleasant customer service and a unique experience, and such cumulative experiences have progressively become the predominant motivation for customers to attract towards the product. Hereby, ESQ is more prominent and appealing to most of the researchers due to a facade of not being able to see the chain reaction of employee satisfaction or customer contentment.

Thus, this study aims to measure the effects of internal service quality on employee engagement.

2. Literature Review

In this contemporary business world, the prosperity of an organization is determined by the active involvement of employees in their work. Work engagement is the positive behaviour and participation at work that leads to a progressive performance. It is also about seeking proactive commitments and investing themselves fully in their roles (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011). These employees are the people who are energetic and immensely dedicated to their work. Studies have also investigated the relationship of these engagements and creativity levels, organisational citizenship behaviours, task performance and customer satisfaction (Albrecht & Bakker, 2018). Work engagement is also about describing the abilities of employees to bring their full capacity in connecting with people, developing innovative services and solving problems. These employees become so captivated in their work that they lose track of time and discard the external distractions (Leiter & Bakker, 2010). It is important to understand that employee work engagement is the emotional commitment to the organization and its goals where, work engagement plays a specific role of commitment, precisely towards the work. These commitments are not only limited to happiness and satisfaction but goes beyond (Kruse, 2012).

Internal Service Quality (ISQ)

ISQ is the state of satisfaction realized by an employee as an internal customer by reason of his or her perception of a service delivered by another employee as an internal service provider. The big influencers of employee work engagement is Internal Service Quality (ISQ) provided by an organization as it is the quality of different dimensions of work environment that results in employee satisfaction. The study holds a middle ground of a match between personal and organizational characteristics in maintaining ISQ (Joshi & Chadha, 2016). Along with the organizations' participative action, individual traits of employees also create a greater enforcement in reaping the best value and effectiveness of ISQ.

The notion of internal service affecting the work performance of employees could be due to the job redesign, positively influencing the work engagement through job resources (Albrecht & Bakker, 2018). Similar to ISQ, other internal factors play a major role in uplifting the productivity of internal customers which is an important aspect for the overall goal of the organization.

On the contrary facet, an effort from the organizational side of ISQ might not always be enough. Employees could also take initiatives by asking for support, feedback, starting creative new projects and opportunities for self-development which has been explained by Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Albrecht & Bakker, 2018). To enhance the engagement activities, it can be more fruitful when both the parties – employees and organization are proactive. Though the research is more inclined towards the personal characteristics of employees, it supports the findings of Joshi and Chadha.

ISQ Dimensions

For almost the past three decades, dimensions of service quality (SQ) in relation to the customers' satisfaction has been a dynamic area of study. Many research works have been conducted regarding the contentment of the consumers through various measurements of SQ. Likewise, research has explained these measurements of SQ presenting external service encounters by reviewing nineteen different models (Seth, Vrat, & Deshmukh, 2005). The popular and mostly used tool amongst all of them is SERVQUAL model. Firstly, there were ten different dimensions (credibility, accessibility, understanding the consumer, communication, responsiveness, reliability, tangibles, courtesy, security and competence) identified by (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985) which was later consolidated into five broad dimensions to just tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

Measurement of ISQ

On measuring the effectiveness regarding the service quality and employee satisfaction, most of the scholars and businesses usually apply SERVQUAL as an investigating tool (Umamaheshwari, 2014). It helps in measuring the gap between expectations and perceptions of customers. The suitability of this model is highly applicable to the service sector. As we can see that the SERVQUAL instrument was a predominant method used to measure customer's perception of service quality (Al-Ababneh, Masadeh, Al-Shakhsheer, & Habiballah, 2018). Nevertheless, studies have argued that the components of SERVQUAL could be modified to measure the ISQ provided to employees of different departments within the same organization and also the measurement of employees' perception towards those ISQ areas (Kang, Jame, & Alexandris, 2002). Besides, the SERVQUAL instrument was first utilized by (Reynoso & Moores, 1995) as a measure of ISQ.

The initial instrument of the SERVQUAL model aims to obtain a concise scale through iterative procedures guided by empirical criteria to be useful for a variety

of service firms. The mentioned five dimensions have unwavering psychometric properties which helps in analysing the internal quality service of our targeted organization (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality, 1988). When the model tracks service quality trends in a periodical time and as a combination with other forms of service quality measurement, SERVQUAL can be very valuable in research. Many companies including retail as well as service organizations could use this model for directing their managerial decisions and examining their quality service.

Internal Service Quality and Employee Work Engagement

Most of the contemporary service organizations have started to sense the importance of ISQ and taking corrective actions with their service towards the internal customers. This is based on the notion of the service profit chain model – employees' perception of internal service quality eventually influences the service quality offered to the external customers. Hence, this chain effect impacts the revenue of the organization in generating more profit (Heskett et al., 1994).

Branson (2012) turns the pyramid upside down where he firstly prioritizes his employees, then the customers, and then the shareholders in the Virgin Company. Branson believes that well-motivated and happy employees tend to make the customers happy as well. This shows a strong implication of employee well-being above all the stakeholders, on a company's health.

The relationship between ISQ and employee well-being, commitment and satisfaction has a positive correlation on influencing the employee performance progressively. Correspondingly, it is important to focus on ISQ due to a direct as well as indirect significant effect on employee enactments (Sharma et al., 2016). This research deals with employee work engagement which is a synonymous element to these performances. Also, good job resources such as social support, coaching, autonomy, task significance and opportunity for personal development are also the branches of ISQ which need to be enhanced to develop work engagement (Cankir et al., 2015).

Various studies have argued upon the positive relationship between ISQ and job satisfaction (Nazeer et al., 2014; Sharma et al., 2016; Naser et al., 2013). Moreover, the dots between job satisfaction and work engagement could be connected with the findings of (Yeh, 2013). This shows that the employees who are content towards their job, tend to perform more work engagement. Besides, it could also go the other way round where the dedicated employees who are actively engaged with their work can consequently gain satisfaction with their job too (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015).

Singh (2016) supported the previous findings of (Andronikidis & Bellou, 2008) that have determined the enhancement of overall performance of the employees which is possible due to the help of ISQ in improving those employees' customer-oriented behaviour. ISQ working as an independent factor in affecting the work

engagement plays a major role in the development of the total performance. Besides, improving the internal service delivery enhances high job performance increasing the employee commitment level. The studies have not only examined the private organizations but also the statement holds true for public agencies too.

External Service Quality over Internal Service Quality

Most of the organizations invest their efforts in measuring the perception of external customers without focusing on the internal assessment of the individuals, units and departments. This can be especially viewed in service-oriented organizations (Nazeer et al., 2014). It identifies the lacking importance of internal customers' over the external ones in these service industries. As a fact, this supports the research gap of this study where many service industries are highly focused towards the end customers' service quality. This can be further supported with various studies regarding service quality focused on customers' service quality perception (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Babakus & Boller, 1992; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Carman, 1990), while relatively little attention has been given to explore the employee service quality perception and their satisfaction as debated by (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2010). Hence, the attention given towards ISQ can be seen very minimal (Hallowell et al., 1996). This has been argued by another research regarding the reason behind limited research on ISQ over customer quality service. It has been determined due to the service researchers who are mostly from a marketing background and the multidisciplinary nature of internal service (Brandon-Jones & Silvestro, 2010). However, most of the studies have also shown and discussed the importance of ISQ on both employee and customer behaviour because of the consumer's perception and attitude that is directly dependent on the employees' performance (Dhurup & Mohamane, 2007; Dhurup, 2012; Johnston, 2008; Heskett et al., 1994).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework has been derived from various empirical studies (Al-Ababneh et al., 2018; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2010; Al-Bilbiese & Al-Nuaimi, 2017) showing the relationship of five Internal Service Quality dimensions affecting the employee work engagement. It is developed through research works performed on past findings and studies. The framework helps in assisting throughout the designing and execution of this research.

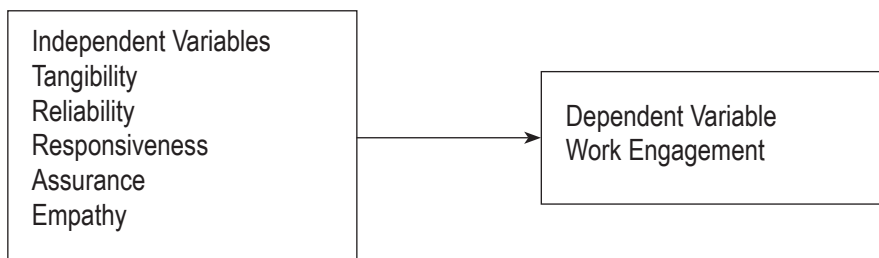


Figure 1: *Study Framework*

Based on (Al-Ababneh et al., 2018; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2010; Al-Bilbiese & Al- Nuaimi, 2017)

3. Research Methods

The participants of the study included 126 employees from the total 503 employees of Hotel Soaltee Crown Plaza (SCP). Out of 126 questionnaires distributed, all were usable for further analysis. There were no missing responses in both categorical and scale items that included a total of 25 items. The respondents responded to these items on a 5-point Likert scale and ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Information regarding Gender, Age, Education, Married Status, Monthly income, experience at Soaltee Hotel and their motivation to work there were also collected.

Similarly, inferential research design has been undertaken to understand the association between variables whereas exploratory research design is also considered the suitable approach regarding the nature of the problem being investigated for this study. Through the administration of self-administrative surveys, data was collected assimilating online platforms. To achieve the results, frequency, descriptive and regression analysis was carried out while for testing internal consistency of each scale, Cronbach alpha was calculated.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha Test

ISQ Factors & Dependent Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Tangibility	0.922	4
Reliability	0.899	4
Responsiveness	0.927	4
Assurance	0.952	5
Empathy	0.896	4
Work Engagement	0.825	4

Note. Data from survey conducted in 2020

Table 1 shows the Cronbach's alpha coefficient all above the value 0.7. It depicts a high reliability status of the independent and dependent variables listed above. Hence, the instrument is considered to be reliable.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

All the information and responses mined from primary survey are gathered, coded, categorised and properly organised for data management and analysis and analysed data are presented with the help of the tables below:

Table 2
Categorical Analysis

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	71	56.3
Female	55	43.7
Total	126	100.0
Age		
18-30	63	50.0
31-40	41	32.5
41 or above	22	17.5
Total	126	100.0
Education		
Up to Intermediate	37	29.4
Bachelors	65	51.6
Masters & above	24	19.0
Total	126	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	56	44.4
Unmarried	70	55.6
Total	126	100.0
Monthly Income (NPR)		
less than 25000	51	40.5
25000-50000	47	37.3
50001 and above	28	22.2
Total	126	100.0
Experience at Soaltee Hotel		
less than 5 years	72	57.1
6-15 years	29	23.0
more than 15 years	25	19.8
Total	126	100.0

Note. Data from survey conducted in 2020

Along with the majority of young respondents, dominance of male employees with 56.3 percent and females with 43.7 percent indicates the lesser proportion of female respondents in this study. And the majority of young respondents depicts a higher number of unmarried employees working in SCP hotels, i.e., 55.6 percent. Likewise, 51.6 in the education section indicates the most participants hold bachelor's degrees. Moreover, the utmost income level is in the bracket of less than 25,000, i.e., 40.5 percent. And most of them have an experience of less than 5 years.

Table 3
Analysis of Motivating Factors

Motivating factors	Frequency	Percent (%)
Tangibles	22	17.5
Reliability	68	54.0
Responsiveness	104	82.5
Assurance	51	40.5
Empathy	29	23.0

Note. Data from survey conducted in 2020

Table 3 represents a multiple-choice response regarding the internal service quality determinants that motivate the employees to exercise positive work engagement. With 82.5 percent, responsiveness is considered to be the highest motivating factor while the least motivating factor can be seen as in tangibles with only 17.5 percent.

Table 4
Regression Analysis

	Beta	T-value	P-value	VIF
(Constant)	.161	.949	.345	
Tangible	-.046	-.394	.694	8.898
Reliability	.075	.639	.524	8.667
Responsiveness	.133	1.255	.212	7.365
Assurance	-.063	-.673	.502	5.838
Empathy	.817	10.550	.000	3.706
R Square	0.806			
Adjusted R-square	0.798			
F-value	99.499			
	(0.000)			

Note. Data from survey conducted in 2020

Dependent Variable: Work Engagement

Based on Table 4 findings following regression have been developed:

$$Y = 0.161 - 0.046X_1 + 0.075X_2 + 0.133X_3 - 0.063X_4 + 0.817X_5 + e$$

Where, Y=Work Engagement, X1=Tangible, X2=Reliability, X3=Responsiveness, X4= Assurance, X5= Empathy and e= error term

Coefficient analysis in Table 4 shows the relationship between the dependent variable and each independent variable.

Based on Table 4, regression analysis has been performed. Evaluating the overall beta of the independent variables, the highest impact is created by empathy with 0.817 followed by the lowest positive impact of reliability with 0.075. Alongside,

the negative impact has been created by the tangibles and assurance variables with 0.0456 and 0.063 beta value.

The empathy variable has 0.000 p-value which states that the emotional expressions of the organisation is considered as a significant impact in the work engagement of Soaltee Hotel's employees. Likewise, the remaining other independent variables show a less significant impact of the infrastructures, transparency, problem-solving solutions and secure environment of the organisation in the work engagement.

Table 8
Summary of Hypothesis

Statements	P-value	Remarks
H ₁ : There is a significant impact between tangibles and employee work engagement.	.694	Not Accepted
H ₂ : There is a significant impact between reliability and employee work engagement.	.524	Not Accepted
H ₃ : There is a significant impact between responsiveness and employee work engagement.	.212	Not Accepted
H ₄ : There is a significant impact between assurance and employee work engagement.	.502	Not Accepted
H ₅ : There is a significant impact between empathy and employee work engagement.	.000	Accepted
H ₆ : There is a significant impact between income level and employee work engagement.	.079	Not Accepted
H ₇ : There is a significant impact between marital status and employee work engagement.	.020	Accepted

Furthermore, the R-square states that the independent variables explain the dependent variables by 80.6 percent. It consists of many other factors as well that influence the dependent variable. Here, the F-value is 99.499 where the corresponding p-value is 0.000 which states that this regression model is acceptable.

5. Data Analysis and Discussions

The purpose of conducting this research is to identify the impact of all ISQ dimensions on employees' work engagement (dependent variable) of SCP hotel. The ISQ dimensions are the independent variables of the study including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The research was accompanied with the help of a primary survey through an online-based SERVQUAL model questionnaire, performing a quantitative method.

Result was generated with a sample size of 126 employees at SCP hotel. The distribution in this study has male respondents with 56.3 percent and female

respondents with 43.7 percent. Likewise, the majority of them are unmarried with 55.6 percent and employees having less than 5 years of experience are with 57.1 percent as per the responses. Most of them are young respondents within the age group of 18-30 with 50 percent and 31-40 with 32.5 percent, 41 and above with 17.5 percent. Moreover, the utmost income level is in the bracket of less than 25,000 with 40.5 percent and other categories had 25001-50000 with 37.3 percent and 50001 and above with 22.2 percent. The multiple response question of motivating ISQ dimensions show a result of responsiveness with 82.5 percent, empathy with 23 percent, reliability with 54.0 percent, assurance with 40.5 percent and tangibles with 17.5 percent.

The regression analysis states that empathy is the only one factor that has a significant impact on the employee work engagement of SCP hotel with p-value of 0.000. Whereas other independent variables, tangibles (p-value = 0.694), reliability (p-value = 0.524), responsiveness (p-value = 0.212) and assurance (p-value = 0.502) does not have a significant impact. And these independent variables explain the dependent variable by 80.6 percent.

There are some studies who have taken different variables besides SERVQUAL dimensions. Hong et al. (2014) used independent factors like rewards, organisational trust, internal communication and work life balance where the finding shows significant relationship between organisational trust and work engagement. Further, Othman et al. (2019) undertakes leadership, compensation and organisational culture, whereas Mansoor and Hassan (2016) analysed internal communication, teamwork and collaboration, job roles, company management with work engagement. These variables could also have been affecting the work engagement of SCP employees which has not been implied in this research.

6. Conclusion and Implications

One of the major challenges that organisations face these days is internal service quality. Although there are numerous research-works on service quality, there is only a handful of empirical evidence of employees' work engagement specifying in the hotel industry. Generally, the service quality is studied in determining the customer satisfaction. Here, ISQ is supposed to focus on the employees' work engagement as it is one of the vital factors in testing the efficiency of modern dynamic organisations, particularly the hotel industry.

It has been clearly depicted from the study that the employee work engagement of SCP hotel is positively affected by empathy only. As mentioned above, there could be various other factors that keep the employees motivated and energetic at their work. However, the overall performance and contentment level of the employees seem satisfying which portrays them as happy internal customers; they could be getting affected by various other autonomous dimensions of the organisation. Therefore, to achieve a genuine system of engagement, it is

believed that employers and employees need to jointly craft a positive, trusting, respectful and mutually beneficial working relationship and thus provide the high service quality to the internal customers.

The work engagement of internal customers i.e. employees in the organisations directly affect the relation with customers and eventually with their satisfaction. This ultimately leads to organisational success and failure. Thus, these studies indicate that employees should be provided with high service quality. Based on the result of this study, they should be well alert on the employees' emotional level since empathy has shown a highly significant relationship. Further, to have in-depth and explore new findings other than the use of statistics, qualitative research could also be carried out. This can help to explore the reason behind why the employees behave the way they do. Also, their motivational level can be dug in more deeply for the analysis. This research is conducted through a SERVQUAL model with five ISQ dimensions only, other factors could also be used to extract the results regarding employee work engagement.

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Funding

The author received no funding or financial support in carrying out the research.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest because of their affiliation and other formal positions.
