

## Stakeholders' Awareness of Quality and Quality Management Systems in Zimbabwean Hotels

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### Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate the stakeholder's awareness of quality and quality management systems (QMS) in the Zimbabwe hotel industry. This study sought to investigate the stakeholder's awareness of quality and quality management systems (QMS) in the Zimbabwe hotel industry by (1) establishing the definition of quality, (2) exposing dimension of service quality, (3) identifying how customer satisfaction is measured and (4) identifying quality management systems and quality philosophy used in hotels. Appreciation of quality and QMS in the hotel industry can assist stakeholders to employ holistic measures to improve adoption of quality management systems in hotels and improve the operations of the hotels. The study followed a multi case study approach, with 9 hotels from Harare chosen purposively to represent the hotel industry in Zimbabwe. Managers and key stakeholders were interviewed and focus group interviews were conducted. Key questions on quality definition, dimensions of service quality and customer satisfaction measurement were asked and the data was analysed using thematic analysis -directed content analysis. The results showed that stakeholder in the hotel industry are very much aware of QMS, though in abstract. There is greater awareness of quality and QMS among group chain hotels than in independent hotels. There is need to upgrade on quality training in the hotel industry from collaborative perspective so that the stakeholders appreciate quality and QMS fully so that the industry remains competitive.

**Keywords:** Hotels, quality, quality management systems, stakeholders

### Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry have undergone enormous growth globally (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2018). This growth affords the industry huge opportunities and equally huge challenges; change in demand (Lee, 2016), new tourist profiles, aggressive competition (Ali, Hussain, Konar & Jeon, 2017), use of new technology (Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2016) and the emergence of traveller communities whose opinions are propagated over the internet (Lee, 2016). The new challenges require the hotel companies to improve their in-house efficiency and maintain a sustainable advantage (Muzapu & Sibanda, 2016). One of the most widespread ways of dealing with challenges of this nature involves the institution of certified quality management systems. Such systems have helped thousands of companies the world over to establish quality management practices that are audited by independent third parties (Wang, Chen & Chen, 2012). According to Chatterjee (2020) obtaining quality certification is a 'market signal' that enables 'an organisation to communicate

about its unobserved quality attributes and consequently a certified organisation may be able to gain an advantage against its non-certified competitors'. Over the last two decades, hotels have found quality to be a key to market distinction and competitive advantage (Gupta & Malhotra, 2013). Quality management practices such as; Total Quality Management, Standardisation of processes, The Six Sigma techniques, Lean Operations and Continuous process improvement ensure that procedures are carried out consistently, that problems can be identified and resolved and that the organisation can continuously review and improve its products and services (Gupta & Malhotra, 2013). Quality Management (QM) nowadays is a need in the countenance of intensifying competition among firms and demanding business operations in different sectors of the economy. The global market, demand for high quality goods and services and the creation of quality culture among consumers makes it clear that "quality" has become a universally well-defined term of customer perception and expectations beyond production of goods and services. If you ask ten people to define quality, you will probably get ten different definitions.

Implementing a quality management system (QMS) can bring benefits to hotel organisations, as it can improve efficiency and corporate image. There is a vast literature studying motives, barriers and benefits in relation to adopting a quality management system, paying special attention to, ISO 9001, total quality management, continuous improvement, lean, six sigma, balanced scorecard, Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) and assured safe catering. Tarí, Molina-Azorín, Pereira-Moliner and López-Gamero (2019) has highlighted the existence of internal and external factors affecting adoption of certified quality management systems. Quality management system can be used as a management tool that changes the operations and internal processes of hotels. Study by Chan (2011) reported motives for adoption of QMS such as improving internal control, reducing cost, enhancing service quality to reduce failures and complaints, improving efficiency, increasing labour productivity and motivating employees or providing the first step toward more developed quality models, such as Total Quality Management (TQM). Certification improves hotel quality image and quality differentiation; it can be implemented in response to pressure from customers or competitors. Several quality dimensions exist and these include performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics and perceived quality that an organisation can leverage to gain competitive advantage (Garcia & Rama, 2016). More specifically quality dimensions in the hotel services sector such as industry responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility have proved to be particularly important for establishment of competitive advantage (Rauch, Collins, Nale & Barr, 2015).

Globally, inferior quality products have been synonymously associated with low to medium rated hotels in the hospitality and tourism industry from countries such as Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Ghana and South Africa (Fernández-Robin, Celemín-Pedroche, Santander-Astorga & Alonso-Almeida, 2019; Gorondutse & Hillman, 2014; Masrurul, 2019; Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017). Research shows that the problem is more apparent in developing countries but findings by (Sainidis & Robson, 2016) have also indicated that 43.3% of hotels in the United Kingdom failed to maintain the quality of their services during the recession. Zimbabwean hotels are without exception. The country is lowly ranked at 114 out of 136 countries, according to the 2017 Global Competitiveness Report by World Economic Forum. Since 2007 the average occupancy rate per annum of hotels in Zimbabwe has never exceeded 53% in the past ten years (2007-2017) according to ZTA reports. Zimbabwe has many tourist attractions and has natural wonders and sights that often get massive attention from both international and local tourists (ZTA, 2017). The country has vast business opportunities in tourism, mining, agriculture and manufacturing thus the hotels business is expected to be high but the opposite is true.

A study by Zengeni, Mapingure, Zengeni, and Marimbe (2014) show that local hotels are increasingly facing quality problems and need to adopt quality management systems to improve their competitive advantage by reducing costs of services, improving service delivery and improving quality of products. Maphosa (2014) investigated the causes of non-adherence to set quality standards in lodges in Zimbabwe. Zengeni et al. (2014) explored hoteliers' perception on ISO certification in Zimbabwe after realising that out of 110 registered hotels in the country only 8 were ISO certified. Their study sought to establish explanations for the low uptake of ISO certification and to craft strategies for enhanced uptake of ISO. Chivandi and Maziri (2017) investigated awareness and implementation of ISO 22000 food safety standards among customers, employees and management in branded fast-food outlet in Zimbabwe. Chivandi and Maziri (2017) study might have significant contributions in quality management but it was on in the fast-food restaurants which are very different from restaurants in the hotels. There are no studies that have been carried out in Zimbabwe hotel industry to find out the awareness of quality among hotel industry stakeholders. There is need to understand stakeholder's awareness of quality management systems in the Zimbabwe hotel industry for informed position in adoption of QMS. This study sought to investigate the stakeholder's awareness of quality and quality management systems (QMS) in the Zimbabwe hotel industry by: (1) establishing the definition of quality, (2) exposing dimension of service quality, (3) identifying how customer satisfaction is measured and (4) identifying quality management systems and quality philosophy used in hotels. Appreciation of quality and QMS can assist the hoteliers, quality authorities, hotel regulators and all the stakeholders in mapping feasible QMS implementation strategies (trainings, appropriate systems, requirements).

### Definition of quality

There are many definitions of quality and it is very difficult to define quality in the hospitality industry because of the unique nature of hospitality products which are intangible, perishable, heterogeneous and simultaneous in production and consumption. Quality is defined differently by quality gurus, standard association and organisations. Limited different definitions of quality and the authority that came up with the definitions are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Quality definition**

Authority	Definition
Crosby (1979)	Quality is conformance to requirements or specifications.
Juran (1974),	Quality is fitness for use.
Deming (1986)	Quality is multidimensional to produce a product or service that meets the customers' expectations to ensure customer is satisfied
Feigenbaum (1991)	Quality is the total composite product and service characteristics of marketing, engineering, manufacturing and maintenance through which the product or service in use will meet the expectations of the customer
American Society for Quality (1978), British Standard Institution (1991)	Quality is a totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy given needs.
Goetsch and Davis (2010)	Quality is a dynamic state associated with product, services, people, processes and environment that meets or exceeds expectations and helps produce superior value.
Kotler and Amstrong (2012)	Product quality is the ability to demonstrate a product in its function; it includes the overall durability, reliability accuracy, reparability and ease of operation of the product.
The Business Dictionary (2017)	Quality is an assessment of how well a delivered service conforms to the customer's expectations.

Source: Authors based on literature

From Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant and Crawford (2015) synthesis of literature on definition of quality in higher education indicated that Garvin in 1988 noted that most definitions of quality were transcendent, product-based, user-based, manufacturing-based, and value-based. Transcendent quality is something that is intuitively understood but nearly impossible to communicate, such as beauty or love. Product-based quality is found in the components and attributes of a product. User-based quality is if the customer is satisfied, the product has good quality. Manufacturing based quality is if the product conforms to design specifications, it has good quality. Value-based quality is if the product is perceived as providing good value for the price, it has good quality. Divergences in the definition of quality are likely among and within different organisations and people as a result of focusing on different dimensions of quality (Kumar, Raju & Kumar, 2016).

Dimension of product quality are also referred to as dimension of customer satisfaction (Hoe, 2018) which is the ability to demonstrate a product in its function; it includes durability, reliability accuracy, reparability, features, performance, aesthetics and ease of operation of the product (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). The dimensions of product quality are also embedded in the definition of product quality; which is the collection of features and characteristics of a product that contribute to its ability to meet given requirements (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). It is the ability of the product to fulfil and meet the requirements of the end-user (ISO, 2019). The management of dimension of product quality have an effect on customer satisfaction, according to Hoe (2018) in Malaysian engineering industry perceived quality has the highest impact on customer satisfaction leading to loyalty and that performance, features, reliability has influence on customer satisfaction.

The concept of service quality is based upon the theories of customer satisfaction proposed in Europe and the Americas (Garvin, 1988; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1990). Masrurul (2019) defined service quality as a realistic and cognitive discrepancy between experience-based norms and performances concerning service benefits. In the hotel industry a good service is reflected in cleanliness, safety, maintenance of rooms and considerate attitude of staff (Samori & Sabtu, 2014). The indicator of service quality would also be customer satisfaction, which is the final product generated by the service. Parasuraman et al. (1990) believed that service quality is a result of comparisons between the consumers' expectation and actual performance of the services. The concept of service quality (perceived services – expected services) was used to provide additional definitions. Service quality assessments not only included the results of the services, but also the means by which it was delivered as well. Most hotels have similar facilities in the current competitive environment; the survival of hotels depends on the delivery of service quality resulting in customer satisfaction (Masrurul, 2019). Mutle and Shonhe (2017) cited Wilkins (2007) noting that there are three main types of service quality in hotels; physical product, service experience and quality of food and beverages. Service quality is related with customer satisfaction (Masrurul, 2019) and customer satisfaction is associated with customers revisit intention (Samori & Sabtu, 2014). If an effective image is portrayed to customers, it will create competitive advantage for hotel (Tessera, 2016). Service quality dimensions are more difficult to define than product quality dimension. Services and products share many attributes, services have more diverse quality attributes than products and they are evident in different given definitions of service quality. The wide variation in service quality dimension from product quality dimension is also created by high customer involvement in services. Customers employ many tangible aspects to judge quality of products; style, hardness, colour, label, feel, and package when purchasing goods than services. When purchasing services fewer tangibles aspects exist to evaluate quality; customers depend on other aspects to evaluate service quality. Service quality dimensions are the aspects or

characteristics which customers use to evaluate service quality. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1990) identifies ten dimensions that influence customer's perceptions of service quality as reliability, responsiveness, tangibility, communication, credibility, security, competence, courtesy, understanding and access. Delgado-Ballester (2004) identified five dimensions of service quality which are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy which are more of a compressed ten dimensions given by (Parasuraman et al., 1990).

### **Customer satisfaction**

Service quality influences customer level of satisfaction (Kasiri, Teoh, Sambasivan & Sidin, 2017). Customer satisfaction is a business philosophy that tends to be the creation of value for customers, anticipating and managing their expectations, and demonstrating ability and responsibility to satisfy their needs. Service quality and customer satisfaction are critical factors for the success of any hotel business (Tefera & Govender, 2017). The key to achieving sustainable advantage lies in delivering high-quality service that results in satisfied customers. Service quality and customer satisfaction are key factors in the battle to obtain competitive advantage and customer retention. Many researchers (Gorodutse & Hillman, 2014; Masrurul, 2019; Tessera, 2016) conceptualise customer satisfaction as an individual's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance in relation to his or her expectations. The reasons for measuring customer satisfaction are to know if there are happy customers and unhappy customers. Measuring customer satisfaction makes it possible for an organisation to interact and communicate with customers on regular basis learning and determining their needs so as to respond accordingly (Juneja, 2018). By measuring customer satisfaction an organisation can know how likely in future a customer will return from metrics that can analyse the current situation and improve the quality of service provided. Providing customers with higher quality service enable organisation to charge high prices. Measuring customer satisfaction enables the identification of certain customer information which is critical in running the business smoothly since customers are the most important asset for any organisation (Juneja, 2018). Getting customer feedback helps organisations make improvements but customer satisfaction is affected by a number of factors that need to be taken cognisance.

### **Service quality measurement**

Service quality measurement is a very important part in the quality enhancement process as it gives feedback about the type of service offered and the level to which it meets customer's requirements (Jankalova, 2016). SERVQUAL is one of the most used and well acknowledged models, used by researchers in measuring service quality in hotels of all sizes (Ahmad, Ahmad & Papastathopoulos, 2019). Accordingly, some modifications of the SERVQUAL model were done to cater for the models' shortfalls to the LODGEQUAL, DINESERV, DIVERPER, HISTOLQUAL and HOLSERV models (Adeinat, 2019; Al-Ababneh, 2017; Tefera & Govender, 2017). These modifications looked like amendments of SERVQUAL model to match the size of the hotel nevertheless still could not service the requirements of the hotel and tourism industry. Their major weakness has been that they were mainly developed for process outcomes as opposed to the service outcomes they were intended to measure (Al-Ababneh, 2017).

The adoption of QMS demands investment in time to implement new concepts, time to train, time for people to recognise the benefits and move forward into new or different organisational cultures (Fonseca, 2015). In the hospitality industry, there have been many recent developments in QMS and frameworks against which organisations may be assessed or measure themselves. Most frameworks can be put into three broad categories namely,

consultants or experts based, awards or formal assessment based and academic or empirical based (Yusof & Aspinwall, 2011). Works of quality gurus such as Deming (1986), Juran (1988), Crosby (1979), Feigenbaum (1991) and Ishikawa (1979) are the rudiments of quality management in many organisations today. The main philosophies, practices of quality management as proposed by each of the gurus.

### **Quality management models/system**

The quality management system is a set of coordinated activities to lead and control an organisation in terms of quality (ISO, 2015). After a review of literature in the internationalisation of quality management standards, Tari et al. (2019) observed a number of authors who defined QMS as that part of a management system that focused on leading and controlling an organisation in relation to quality ( Fonseca, 2015; ASQ, 2019). A number of recognised QM systems have been developed for use all over the world in different industries. Internationally, the QM systems are drawn upon TQM (Juran, 2016); organizations apply different quality initiatives such as ISO 9001, continuous improvement, six sigma, lean production, benchmarking, and business excellence models. TQM is an idea of management ensuing from the work of quality authorities (Biswakarma, 2017). TQM is grounded on three important principles which are; customer orientation to satisfy customer requirements and expectations; process orientation (input-process-output) and continuous improvement as derived from the works of quality experts (Deming, 1986; Ishikawa, 1985). The ISO 9000 reports on several aspects of quality management and comprises some of the ISO's eminent standards (ISO, 2015). The standards present direction and tools for organizations that want to produce products that continuously meet customer's requirements, and of enhanced quality (Nyambwa, 2017).

Lean production originated in the Toyota Corporation, it is a yardstick of lean thinking which many service companies have implemented as a quality management system (Matombo, 2014; Mahmutay, Jusufi, Zylfijaj & Grubi, 2015). Its main principle is the determination on identifying and refining steps in an operation that the customer considers valuable, and to remove unnecessary or wasteful steps in a process (Lee, Larry & Manoj, 2012). Six Sigma is a QM system applicable in both service and manufacturing organization than lean (Kwaka & Anbari, 2006). Six Sigma as a QMS has five steps which are DMAIC (define, measure, analyze, improve and control) (Heizer & Render, 2014). Holt and Eccles (2015) defined benchmarking as the continuous measurement and examination of business performance and practices against the organizations which are measured as best competitors. Through benchmarking, organizations compare themselves with the finest and constantly evaluate their practices, processes and methods to assure the strength of their competitive position in relation to their competitors. Benchmarking stimulates organizations to learn and change in order to reach higher customer value (Gwimbi & Nhamo, 2016).

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is a philosophy that emphasises improving processes, practices and methods to enable companies to offer customers what they primarily want at the first time, every time (Chikosha, 2016). According to ASQ (2019), CQI is a continuing effort to improve products, services or processes. The efforts are aimed at incremental or breakthrough improvements in product quality over time. Corporate culture creation is not core in CQI but at core is the process of quality improvement. Business Excellence (BE) models are used as QMS tools in many countries to assist organizations to improve their performance (Ioannis & Dimitrios, 2017; Kanji, 2012). TQM is the basis of BE because the fundamental ideas are the same; participation of top management, stakeholder involvement and holistic approach (Kanji, 2012; Maganga, 2018). The most distinguished BE

models applied world over are Deming Prize, European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model and Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA).

### **Benefits of QMS**

Adoptions of QMS such as ISO 9001 by organisations have shown significant improvement in the quality of their product (Chivandi & Maziri, 2017; Isabiry & Pelsler, 2017; Ngwenya, Sibanda & Matunzeni, 2016; Watiki, 2014). Watiki (2014) has studied hotels in Kenya to understand factors prompting customer satisfaction and the association between service quality and customer satisfaction. His findings suggest that service quality supports 74.2% of customer satisfaction. This implies that QMS contributes 74.2% of customer satisfaction whereas the other factors contribute 25.8%. Masrurul (2019) showed that Bangladesh tourism organisations using quality management systems were performing well with good and effective relations with customers and employees. He surveyed hotel companies and results pointed out that a high proportion of companies being certain of their reputation, products and services improvement after adopting QMS. QMS adoptions have led to expect design, product, processes and supplier relationships according to research done at Delta, one of the biggest beverages manufacture in Zimbabwe (Madanhire & Mbohwa, 2016). Benefits and improvements brought by QMS are also internal improvement, greater quality awareness and improved awareness of problems within the work organisations. Product development processes based on QMS have improved (Biswakarma, 2017; Chan, 2011; Gorondutse & Hillman, 2014; Mugondi, 2015; Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017; Tefera & Govender, 2017; Tessera, 2016;).

### **Research methodology**

A multiple case study approach was followed in the study. A number of individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted from the 9 graded hotels in Harare that were not four- and five-star hotels. Purposive sampling was applied in selected hotels using their rating as a quality signal. Harare was chosen as a purposively to represent all hotels in Zimbabwe. The data was generated from the hotel managers and key stakeholders' managers who were interviewed individually and also from junior staff members in focus group discussions. The in-depth interviews lasted thirty to forty minutes and focus group interviews lasted between one hour to one hour thirty minutes in order to capture all diverse views in the discussions as proposed by (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The researchers used both interviews and focus group discussions in the study so as to get a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and for methodology triangulation. Triangulation is the use of different data collection techniques within one study in order to ensure that the data are telling you what you think they are telling you (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016). With more than one referent point, the researcher was able to know where the truth lies. The researchers recognised the value of using multi-methods for corroboration of findings and for enhancing the validity of data. The hotels were coded as H1 to H9, managers were coded as M1 to M9, focus group discussions were coded as FG1 to FG9 and key stakeholders were coded as K1 to K4.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts. Data were analysed for content using thematic analysis – directed content analysis. The themes used in the research were guided by key themes found in the literature review which makes them valid and reliable since they are based on proven theories and previously related results (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2018). Margaret (2019) defined qualitative content analysis as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. There are three approaches (Conventional qualitative content analysis; Directed content analysis; Summative content analysis) to qualitative content analysis (Margaret, 2019; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017) and these are

based on the degree of involvement of inductive reasoning. Finally, the researcher draws conclusions from the coded data. This included making sense of the themes identified, developing a series of statements that organise the data analysis around the study research questions (Yin, 2017). The table was drawn to display themes and sub-themes that emerged from interviews and focus group discussions. Questions asked during the focus group interviews and managers interviews were formulated by the author based on key concepts (themes) found in literature review. Questions asked during key stakeholders' interviews sort to find the relevance and influence of the key stakeholder in QMS implementation.

## **Results**

### ***Description of research sites***

Hotels in Zimbabwe are either independent hotels - family-owned, owned by small companies and or owned by group chain hotels. The staff establishment of most independent hotels was relatively small ranging from ten to fifty personnel with 60 rooms on average. The group chain hotels staff establishment was hundred personnel with 100 rooms on average. The environment at the hotels was quite welcoming with friendly staff giving that personal touch comfort. The staff offered visitors local knowledge and recommendations on activities and places to visit. Hotels in Zimbabwe offered a wide range of facilities and services extending from accommodation and food to business support like office services. The services and amenities offered differed from one hotel to another from independent hotels to group chain hotels. Most independent hotels had limited facilities and were not offering full hotel service. The target market of hotels in Zimbabwe is business travelers and tourists however in Harare the dominant market target generally is business travelers as given by a manager from TBCZ.

## **Theme analysis**

### ***Quality defined***

Staff and managers were asked to define quality in their own understanding and according to their respective organisation's definitions. Managers said they had no quality definitions as given by their organisations. The managers give different definitions of quality according to their understanding. One manager M3 from hotel H3 indicated: We do not have a definition of quality according to our organisation. If taking from the organisation I define quality using the organisation core values; quality is freshness, integrity, vibrancy, consistency and synergies in all that we do. Staff members were also asked to define quality during their focus group discussions and they gave varying definitions of quality. They indicated that from their organisation quality definition is not written down but it is in performing given work according to expectations. A member of focus group FG2 indicated that: We have never been given the written down quality definition here. Quality is only explained in offering good service to our guests. Members of the group agreed with him. It is in Hotel H6 where they showed that the quality definition is written but they could not remember it. The focus group FG6 member indicated: There is a document that we have here which speaks of quality, defining it and a lot of things on quality practice. But the document is somewhere nowhere to be found as it was difficult to use. Of the four key stakeholders interviewed, only one key stakeholders KS3 had a clear definition of quality. He acknowledged that they use ISO definition of quality. Key stakeholder KS3 definition of quality as: The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. Other key stakeholders had no written down definition of quality. Key stakeholder KS1 vehemently throwback quality issues to other stakeholders. KS2 indicated: We are not responsible for quality in the hotels hence we do not have a written down definition of quality. We are concerned with registration and licensing of hotels only.

This proposed that in hotels there is no single definition of quality, despite hotel operations being hinged on quality.

### ***Dimension of service quality***

From the focus group discussions, it looks like hotel staff dress smartly in uniforms and maintains the hotel inside and outside environment so as to be appealing to customers. One member from focus group FG3 indicated that: Our dressing is part of our product, we are always in uniforms. The uniforms are different among departments but the colours have a resemblance to the hotel colours. We are given two pairs of uniforms twice per year. Here you can be punished for failure to dress properly. Another member from the same focus group FG3 hilariously commented: You can see we are smart as the hotel itself. The hotel is maintained clean from outside to the rooms. Everything we use here is branded. These same sentiments were relative similar to comments from other groups. In focus group, FG8 one member remarked: We get uniforms after a long time here; we end up putting shirts that are shading colours with tone collar. Sometimes guests complain of the rooms as they fail to get promised room service and facilities like expected in the standard of the rooms. From the focus group FG1 members impressed of being very fast, polite and friendly when serving customers. One member noted: Here we serve our clients in shortest possible time and giving them what we promise. Especially at the front office clients are served within three minutes of arrival and complaints are referred for solution quickly. Another member commented that: We are all trained in our areas of work that's why we can deliver service to our clients within promised time. Our customers have confidence with us. We give them service that they want, we do not prescribe service to them but they describe to us and we deliver. Other focus group discussions expressed mixed appreciation of service quality as depicted by their comments. This suggested that some other hotel staff members were not well versed with the service quality variables.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

From the interviews it appeared that hotels give customers questionnaires, comment books and feedback forms to remark on the quality level of service they get during their stay in the hotel before they checked out. Manager M6 from hotel H6 indicated: Before our customers check out, we give them customer satisfaction survey forms to fill so that they comment on the service quality level they received throughout their stay. When comment they usually proffer suggestions to advance our services. Junior staff members in the hotels buttressed this in the focus group discussions. From focus group FG2 a member raised: We put some questionnaires in customers rooms for them to complete. Before they leave, we request them kindly if they have filled the questionnaire. Majority of the customers fill the questionnaires and we take their suggestions to improve our services. However, we do not do it daily, it is done usually quarterly. Hotel H4 manager M4 correspondingly stated: We sometimes talk to our customers one on one to find out what we need to improve in our services so as to offer quality service. Hotel managers indicated that they also learn from each other through other relationships with key stakeholders in the hotel industry. Organisations like Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe and the universities and colleges had provided platforms for establishing relationships. Manager M1 from hotel H1 noted: For instance, we interact with other hotel managers at Sanganai Travel expo every year where we exchange notes. ZTA organise symposiums where we get new ideas on how to improve our services. Managers also tried to improve and stimulate their employee's capacity to satisfy customers by organising training workshops. Members of staff were also invigorated to originate best methods of service delivery. The manager M2 from hotel H2 indicated: We regularly hold meetings and training works and train our employees on customer care. At the meetings, we put customer

feedback on the agenda highlighting what the customers will be complaining about and commending on with an idea to improve our service delivery. Almost all the managers reiterated the importance of meetings and workshops in addressing issues that affect customers satisfaction. The findings pointed that customer satisfaction is critical in hotel organisations. The findings further suggested that managers from the hotels understand the significance of empowering their employees so that they become competent in executing their duties so as to satisfy the customers. The results indicated that the hotel managers did appreciate the importance of collecting customer feedback for use in improving the quality of service.

### ***QMS - Quality philosophy***

The study showed that most hotels in Harare have developed their own quality systems for them to be competitive. Group hotels use quality systems depicted by the group and independent hotels have their own quality systems. Manager M3 from the hotel H3 noted: Our quality philosophy is RTG based, we use the standard operating procedures which are the same in the whole group of our hotel. We are ISO 9001-2015 certified. The SOPs change often as we adopt new technology. One more manager M7 from hotel H7 noted: We use an international brand; we are licensed to use it. Inspections are done regularly to check if we are now in compliance and recommendations are given for us to improve. Other hotels showed that they are not using any recognised quality system instead they are borrowing different concepts to come up with their own quality systems. Manager M4 from hotel H4 remarked: Our QMS is not similar or even affiliated to any known philosophy. It is a hybrid as we believe hybrid is the best, we have combined different concepts to come up with our own QMS which is fit. Manager K3 confirmed that: We have ISO certified quality systems of some hotels although the number is still small. The results showed that other chain group hotels used recognised quality philosophies while the small independent hotels do not use recognised quality philosophies.

### ***Benefits of QMS***

Managers and junior staff from the hotels indicated that there are many benefits that can be attributed to the adoption of quality management systems in the hotels. From the interviews, the manager highlighted the benefits of QMS that are operational, financial and managerial. Manager M1 from hotel H1 noted: QMS is a management tool here, it helps us to determine our staff levels, budget and ensures maximum customer satisfaction. Our operations are mapped using QMS. One member from focus group FG6 commented: Our standard operating practice is blueprinted from the hotel QMS hence we produce excellent service which is similar. A manager from key stakeholder K4 noted: Hotels that are quality certified and those that use recognised QMS perform better. Those hotels are expanding opening new hotels. This was confirmed by manager K3 from a key stakeholder: Organisation that we have ISO certified started realising more profits and they are expanding their businesses.

### **Discussion**

Quality is synonymous rather than antithetical among managers and staff in the hotel industry. Quality was given different definitions and appreciated in all the hotels and among key stakeholders in the hotel industry. This proposed that quality was key in the sustainable management of hotels. The findings corroborate with Garvin (1998) acknowledgements that disagreements on the definition are possible among and within different organisations and people as a result of focusing on different dimensions of quality. Most of the given definitions of quality were transcendent, product-based, user-based, value-based and none of the definitions was manufacturing-based. The interesting given definitions of quality given in

hotels include quality is freshness, integrity, vibrancy, consistency and synergies in all that we do and quality is offering good service to our guest. This corroborate well with Juran (1974), Deming (1998), Crosby (1979) and Feigenbaum (1983) definitions of quality; that quality can differ on conformance, fitness, specification and meeting the requirements of customers. All the given definitions of quality indicated that there is a high level of quality awareness in the hotel industry as the definitions are loaded with themes of definitions from quality gurus as noted by Goestch and Davis (2010) that a definition of quality should be unifying with dynamism changing with customers' expectations and view of the world. The formal definition of quality was given by SAZ as totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs which is similar ISO 9001:2015.

Employees in hotels are given branded uniforms with theme colours of the hotels. The findings are in line with Aldehayyat, Al Khattab, and Anchor, (2011) who observed that managers should pay more attention to the physical aspects of the service quality as customers gave lowest ranking of quality compared to expectations in the tangible dimension. Employees were trained on customer service which showed thrust for quality in the hotel industry. The training occurred at the hotels by managers or hired experts and even at organised seminars by key stakeholders like ZTA winter school This is in line with Ali, Hussain, Konar and Jeon (2017) argument that hospitality managers should train their personal to offer polite, respectful and friendly service.

It is also evident that some independent hotels that have employees with a mixed appreciation of service quality and have low levels of quality awareness. The hotels with low levels of quality awareness lacked skilled workers who are not able to gain the trust and confidence the customers, hence they are not competitive. Delgado-Ballester, (2004) asserts this noting that if customers are not comfortable with the employees, there is a likelihood that they will not visit the company again. Repeat business is gained if customers get the impression that they get tailor suited and quality attention, they want to be recognised and given specialised service. Most of the hotels use customer questionnaires, feedback forms, comment books to get feedback from customers on their service. Chain group hotels are ahead in getting customer feedback as they even use a phone, emails, blogs, WhatsApp and websites to get feedback from the customers. The process of getting feedback from customers is holistic as both managers and junior staff are involved in the process which highlights great awareness of quality importance. Hotels obtained customer feedback but did not show any service quality measurement tool used by the hotels. This is not in line with Jankalova (2016), who highlighted that it is very important to get customer feedback on the type of service offered and use it to measure service quality level so as to enhance the service type offered to meet customers' requirements.

Most of the independent hotels have developed their own QMS that is not derived or linked to any quality accrediting institutions or gurus. Chain group hotels have adopted accredited QMS or are using recognised group affiliated QMS. The results show that customers in different categories of hotels had different levels of satisfaction and confirm the assertion by the Standards Association of Zimbabwe (SAZ), that the perceived service expectancy would be better at a 5-star hotel than at a 2-star hotel. This implies that quality has a direct effect on customer experiences in hotels. Consequently, star grading significantly influences customer experiences in hotels (Mhlanga & Tichaawa, 2016). The results reverberate well with Oakland (2003) view that QMS demand investment in people and time; time to implement new concepts, time to train, time for people to recognise the benefits and move forward into new or different organizational culture. Investment requires resources and independent hotels lacked the resources to invest in formal QMS, despite there being many QMS frameworks against which organisations may be assessed or measure themselves.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that stakeholders in the hotel industry are very much aware of QMS, though other stakeholders are aware of it in abstract. The hotels appreciate the benefits of adopting QMS and the ones using the formal QMS are sustainably competitive in the industry. Managers and staff explained quality according to their own understanding and did not define it according to any quality gurus or scholars. Only one key stakeholder SAZ had a clear definition of quality and is offering various QMS certifications to the hotels including ISO 9001:2015. An acceptable definition of quality in the hospitality industry can be given as quality is freshness, integrity, vibrancy, consistency and synergies in all that we do and quality is offering good service to our guests. There is a need to upgrade training on quality and quality management systems in the hotel industry to improve the competitiveness of the hotels. The hotels need to measure customer satisfaction by adopting common customers satisfaction measurement models or come up with tailor-made models. SAZ should look at ways of encouraging more hotels in the country to be ISO certified, this can be sharing testimonials of QMS benefits from the few that are certified using even other industries. The level of QMS awareness is high among group chain hotels than in independent hotels.

The study propositions valuable evidence to organizations that may want to adopt QM systems regarding the drivers that effect the successful implementation of QM, barriers that hinder QM implementation, the benefits of adopting QM and the probable QM systems that can be implemented. Submitted evidence regarding QM in Zimbabwe will help prepare other organizations that want to implement QM systems for sustainable competitiveness. The results can guide tourism bodies that are responsible for quality management in making informed decisions towards QM systems implementation. Data were collected only from hotels in Harare which might not be a true representative of Zimbabwe's hotel industry. The study followed a qualitative approach and there is a need to adopt quantitative approaches in future studies for deeper insights using statistical methods to compare themes/variables.

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