Developing front office service as benchmarking at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to know the implementation of service attributes and the benchmark of Front Office Department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel to develop the services quality in front office department. The method of the data collection applied for this research are participant observation, interview, questionnaire, guests comment and documentation. This research used 30 respondents of front office staffs and the data was analyzed qualitative descriptively. The result of the study identified that, the implementation of service attributes in all sections in front office department is very good and all sections have score more than 4,0. The benchmark is Guest Service Agent with average score 4.95 or 20.89%. The lowest section is Telephone Operator with average score 4.43 or 18.69% because during working not care with SOP, not implement the service attribute so well, and the staffs have less knowledge on IT. The front office department should do the improvement and development on the service quality and the attitude of the staff. As the benchmark, the Gust Service Agent has done many ways to improve the service quality. The best way to improve the service quality, the hotel can use the benchmark as the standard to find the best strategy and technic how to improve and develop the service quality of the front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel. The Guest Service Agent as the benchmark in front office department should be maintain their service as standard of the other sections to develop the service quality in the front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel.

Keywords: front office, service attributes, benchmarking

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Introduction

Based on the last five-years data of Tourism Department of Bali Province (2019), the development of accommodation in Bali especially star hotel is increasing every year. It gives influence to the competition in the hospitality industry due to the number of similar hotels increase every year. The competition is not only occurred between hotels but also between departments in a hotel that aims to provide excellent service. Therefore, remembering that service is the main thing that will be sold in the hotel industry, the hotel industry is increasingly focused on developing services. The important thing is to understand how the quality of services is perceived by customer to attract and retain customer in competitive market (Hemmington and Wang, 2018). Service is defined as a business which is working to serve or doing something for customers but not producing goods (Tjiptono and Chandra, 2016:10). It can be argued that, the main thing that the hospitality industry sell to the customer is the services, therefore the staff of the hospitality industry should be able to give the best services to the customer to make the customer satisfaction or the hospitality industry should be improve and maintain the services performance of their staff.

The hospitality industry could maintain the quality of service using the competitive benchmark as the standard. Benchmarking is a process of identifying, sharing, and using knowledge and best practices by measuring against defined standards or benchmark or it in-

volves continuously monitoring the value customers put on the company's product and comparing it with the best (Okombo, 2013). Through the benchmark, the hotel can know the best practice or strategy to develop service quality.

A benchmark refers to a standard, which is the actual measurement or data collected to carry out the benchmarking process (Okriwi, 2010). Thus, the benchmarking process leads to establishment of benchmarks. Benchmarking is a process of comparing and measuring the performance of a company with other companies to get the advantage of information that will be used for the improvement of continuously (Paulus, 2013).

The main purpose of benchmarking is to find the key or the secret of success and then adapt and improve it to be applied on the organizations that carry out the benchmarking (Wince, 2018). There is some type of benchmarking such as (1) Internal Benchmarking is the simplest benchmark it is the benchmark of operations within the organization because most companies have similar functions inside their business units. In the company, benchmark is used to comparing the organization's internal activities and processes of one unit or branch with the other unit or branch. Internal benchmarking is the process of identifying, sharing and using the knowledge and practices inside the organization (Soni and Kodali, 2010); (2) Competitive benchmarking it could happen after internal benchmarking, competitive benchmarking involves the comparison of the company's product, services or processes with those of direct competitors in the same market. In services part the competitive benchmarking is known to improve service performance by as much as 60 percent in less than a year (Min and Min, 2013); (3) Functional Benchmarking is focuses on specific function on the company and comparing with the other company that have same function; (4) Process Benchmarking is focuses to finding the best work processes by emphasizing on the similarity of procedure and functions rather than business practices of the company.

Front office is an information centre that located in the front of the hotel, also known as the first and last impression of the hotel (Pramasari, 2017: 14). The guest who come to the hotel will do the registration at front office and finishing the transaction to get the room key (Markito & Yulianto, 2013). The purpose of the front office are (Wachidyah, 2017): a) Increasing room occupancy rates as well hotel revenue from year to year; b) Increase the number of subscribed guests; c) Meeting the needs and satisfaction of guests good, precise, and fast; d). Form the positive image of the hotel, the front office do the fucntions based on the purpose of the hotel. Front Office Department is the most important part in hotel operational because as the tip of horn of all department and the activities in a hotel, start from booking a room, telephone operator, handle check in and check out, receive the guest request and handle the guest complaint (Hadi, 2014).

Service can be concluded as doing something for the guests such as the action of helping and assistance but not producing goods in a hotel (Arimbawa, 2018). Front office services is serving all of the hotel's guest administrative and giving the information that the guest needs from check in until the guest check out. Front office has an important role in the operation of a hotel because the front office is not only responsible for guest reception and registration, but in all activities concerns of the guest needs, starting from room booking process, reception when guest come, information during stay, and the process at time the guest will leave the hotel (Wachidyah, 2017). There are some sections where all of the sections are dominated by a front office manager (Sujatno, 2008:23 in Yulanda and BSI, 2017) such as: 1) Guest Service Agent (Receptionist); 2) Guest Relation Officer; 3) Concierge or bellman; 4) Telephone Operator; 5) Tour desk or business centre.

Nowadays, the competitiveness in the hotel industry improving continuously, especially in the Kuta area, many new five star hotels can be the competitors of Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel. Hence, Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel should have the solution to maintain the existences in the hotel industry. Based on the guest comment from the website of trip advisor and the observation at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel especially in front office department there are some complaint that usually happens about the service such as the attitude of the staff and the quality of the service less than the standard. Therefore, the front office department should improve and develop the service quality to compete with the others. To improve the service quality the hotel can use the benchmark as the standard to finding the best strategy and technic how to

improve and develop the service quality of the front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel.

Based on the background described above, the research questions or problems are: How are the implementation of Front Office Service attributes and How to develop service quality in Front Office to be a benchmark at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel?

Methodology

The study was conducted for 4 months at Front Office Department Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel located at Jalan Kartika Plaza, South Kuta Beach 80352, Badung, Bali. Phone: +62 361 751067 website: www.discoverykartikaplaza.com. This research used the service attributes as the variables such as (Min and Min, 2006): 1) Courtesy of employee; 2) Handling of complaints; 3) Convenience of reservation; 4) Promptness of check-in and check-out; 5) Variety or quality of sports and recreational; 6) The efficiency of business center facilities; 7) Hotel and tour guide. The primary data obtained from the questionnaire, interview and The secondary data are the guest comment from the website of trip advisor, website, journal, books, the historical, job description, SOP and organization structure. The total of the respondents are 30 persons coming from five sections in Front Office Department such as Guest Service Agent, Guest Relation Officer, Telephone Operator, Tour Desk and Bellman. The data was analyzed by validity test and reliability test used SPSS 23 software, Descriptive Qualitative Analysis and Statistic Descriptive Analysis.

Results and Discussions
Results

The questionnaires were checking by validity test and reliability test before processing data to make sure that the all of instrument is valid and reliable. The processed by SPSS 23 the result is all of the instrument is valid because r-count is higher than r-table. All of the instruments are reliable because all of them has value more than 0,6. There are one of the guest comment from website of trip advisor can be seen on Figure 1.

(Source: www.tripadvsor.com)
Figure 1. The Guest Comment on Trip Advisor

Based on Figure 1, the guest said that the quality of the service in reception is different from their expectations as five stars hotel with good and friendly staff and nice service, but in the reality the don't get good service and some facilities were bad. The problem that shown in this comment was the service and the attitude of the staff especially in front office department as the first impression of the guest coming to the hotel. The staff did not serve the guest based on the standard of five stars hotel so the service quality of the staff need improvement and development based on the standard of five star hotel to make the guest feel satisfaction and happy to stay in the hotel. There are also the questionnaires of the front office staff as the evaluation of the staff how they serve and give the service to the guest. The implementation of

service attributes in five sections of Front Office Department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The Implementation of Service Attribute

No	Position	The Variable Score						
		X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7
1	Guest Service Agent	4.89	4.89	5.00	5.00	4.94	5.00	4.96
2	Guest Relation Officer	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.89	5.00	4.83	4.89
3	Operator	4.16	4.5	4.5	4.33	4.58	4.5	4.44
4	Tour Desk	4.83	4.33	4.35	4.11	5.00	4.83	4.89
5	Bellman	4.89	4.61	4.43	4.63	4.94	4.94	4.89

(Source: Data processed)

1. Courtesy of employee

Courtesy of employees is about the appearance of the guest and how the staff welcoming the guest with smile and greeting. In this variable the best score is obtained by Guest Relation Officer (GRO) with the average score 5.00 and the lowest score is Telephone Operator with the average score 4.16. This is the most important variable especially for front office as the welcoming guest and the first impression of the hotel. In front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel the implementation of this variable is very good but still need the improvement, because there are some staff that not following the rule or the standard operational procedure when they are working.

2. Handling of complaint

Handling of complaint is how the staff receive and give advice or solution for the complaint. In this variable the highest score is obtained by Guest Relation Officer (GRO) with the average score 5.00 and the lowest score is for Tour Desk with the average score 4.33. The implementation of handling complaint at front office is very good because the average score of all section in this variable is more than 4.5 but all of the sections need to improvement especially for tour desk. although they rarely receive complaints, they must have the skills to be able to handle them in case of complaints at any time.Guest Service Agent who is the most often receive the complaint they should improve the skill and knowledge how to handle the problem and give the solution.

3. Convenience of reservation

Convenience of reservation is how the staff fulfill the guest needed and comparing the reservation with the system in hotel. In this variable the staff should have the communication skill with the guest and with the partner in reservation. Because it could happen because the human error or the broken system so to fix this problem the reception usually will call the reservation team. In this variable the best score is taken by Guest Relation Officer (GRO) and Guest Service Agent (GSA) with the same average score 5.00 and the lowest is Tour Desk with the average score 4.35. The implementation of convenience of reservation in front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel is good and all of the section has average score more than 4.0. The convenience of reservation most often happen is about the room reservation, because of that GSA should has good communication with the reservation team. Even the tour desk not handling the room reservation but they also handling the reservation for the tour package, because of that they should implement this variable well to less the problem about reservation.

4. Promptness check-in and check-out

Promptness check-in and check-out out that is how the staff handling check in and check out process fast and as the rule of standard operational procedure. The result of the questionnaire highest score is taken by Guest Service Agent (GSA) with the average score 5.00 and the lowest score is Tour Desk with average score 4.11. The implementation of promptness of check-in and check-out in front office at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel is very good, all of the section has score more than 4.00. All of the staff of front office department should be care with the guest who will check-in and check-out especially for tour desk, even they not directly join in check-in process but they can do something to help the check in process. Example when the

room not ready yet, the tour desk staff could be offers some tour packages or the business Centre product to the guest. So, the guest not feel boring to waiting their room and complaint.

5.   Variety or quality of sport and recreational

Variety or quality of sport and recreational that is how the staff could describe detail information about the recreational facilities to the guest. In this section the highest score is taken by Guest Relation Officer and Tour Desk with the same average score 5.00 and all of the section it has good score that is more than 4.5. The lowest score is Operator with the average score 4.58 but they still have score more than 4.5. Telephone operator is the most important to know all information about hotel facilities and local or international news. Because if the guest asking something from the room, they will ask to telephone operator, beside if there are any telephone from outside the telephone operator will pick up and if the caller ask some information the telephone operator should be can answer the question. So the telephone operator should improve the knowledge about the hotel facilities and the update news about local and international by reading the book, watch tv and searching on internet.

6.   The efficiency of business centre facilities

The efficiency of business center facilities that is how the staff assist the guest friendly and polite and giving the information about tour package to the guest. In this section the highest score is taken by Guest Service Agent (GSA) with the average score 5.00 and the lowest average score is Telephone Operator with average score 4.5. The implementation of The efficiency of business center facilities in front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel is very good, all of the section has average score more than 4.5 even there is tour desk as the business center to handle and serve the guest, the others section still have good score. It's mean the others section can give the information and knowledge about tour desk and business center to the guest so well.

7.   Hotel and tour guide

The last service attribute is hotel and tour guide that is sharing about the information around hotel and Bali area and could give some advice about the near destination. In this variable all of the section has good score more than 4.0 the highest score is Guest Service Agent (GSA) with average score 4.96 and the lowest score is Telephone Operator who has the average score 4.44. It means the telephone operator is less information about the hotel and Bali with the destination and attraction. The implementation of hotel and tour guide in front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel is good but still one section who has the important part in this variable is telephone operator has the lowest score. They should improve the knowledge about hotel area, tourist attraction or destination, restaurant and all about Bali, because some of the guest will need information and asking about that by phone from the room.
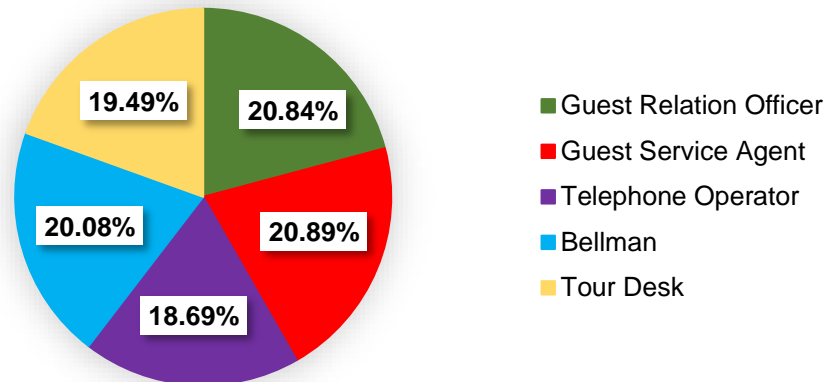
Based on the result of the data process that all of the section in the front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel are has good score, more than 4.0. It's mean the implementation of the service attributes in front office department is very good but all of the section need improvement especially for the knowledge about the hotel and hotel area, skill to handling complaint, appearance and greeting that has the main part in services. The front office department as the information source of the hotel, so all of the staff should know update information even about hotel and outside as the knowledge if the guest asking some information.

Discussion

Benchmarking in Front Office Department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel

Benchmarking is the process to comparing one of the organization or division with the other organization or division to get the standard performance of the organization or division. In this thesis is used internal benchmarking, it is the simplest benchmark that's comparing the organization or division in the same company that may have same function. Internal benchmarking is used because in this thesis was comparing the internal activities of each section in front office department where it is the simplest benchmark beside the others type of benchmarking. Internal benchmarking is used to comparing the service performance of the all section in the Front Office Department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel.

The purpose of this benchmark is to finding the section with the best service performance to be the standard or reference of the others section and department to improve the service performance. The benchmarking is happened by five section in the front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel that may have same function and service such as Guest Relation Officer (GRO), Guest Service Agent (GSA), Telephone Operator, Tour Desk and Bellman. The measure was used seven service attributes in Front Office Department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel. The result of the research is shown below in the form of circle diagram.

(Source: Data Processed)
Figure 2. The Percentage of Service Performance in Front Office

Based on the circle diagram on Figure 2, It can be concluded that the service performance of the front office department it was good with the average score all of the section is 4.74. %. The highest average score is taken by Guest Service Agent (GSA) with percentage 20.89% of the service performance. The benchmarking of this service performance in Front Office Department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel is Guest Service Agent because they implement all of the service attributes, hotel give the practice for the GSA staff in first time they are working to be multitasking person, most of the GSA staff are young people who has good knowledge about IT.

The lowest service performance is Telephone Operator it has average in percentage 18.69% it's just 2.2% different with the best one. The telephone operator not implementing the service attribute so well and more often break of the rule. Most people of telephone operator staff are people who not have enough knowledge about IT even though all information about guest is listed on the system. Because of that telephone operator staff should improve the IT education to support the job desk in front office department. Even they not meet with people directly but important this to know how to welcoming guest because of that telephone operator need more practice when meet with the guest. Always update with the local and international news by watch television, reading book or finding on the internet.

Conclusions

Based on the result of data analysis it can be concluded that the implementation of service attribute of five sections in Front Office Department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel are very good but some sections need improvement in each service attribute because they do not implement it so well. The benchmark of front office department is Guest Service Agent because They are always following the SOP, the hotel gives practice to the Guest Service Agent staff to be multitasking person and they have wide work scope so they have good service performance. Therefore, guest service agent should maintain their service performance to be a benchmark of front office department. The lowest section is telephone operator because most of the staff more often do not follow the SOP during working and not implement the service attributes so well, moreover most of the staffs have not enough on IT which is very important for their job.

It's suggested to improve the implementation of SOP and service attributes, practices how to use IT especially hotel system because all of the detail information will be listed in the system to hold and replace guest service agent as the benchmark of front office department. Therefore the guest service agent should be the benchmark or the service standard of the others section to improve their service to develop the service quality of the front office department at Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel.

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