

Improvement of Service Quality Related to Decent Appearance and Service Attitude through SSQM Program

Ji-Young Lee and Seong-Woo Choi

Abstract—In this research, we suggested a SSQM (Standard Service Quality Management) program, and by using the SSQM program, we conducted service training for all the staffs. And then, we evaluated the decent appearance and positive service attitude of employees as part of service quality management based on a suggested assessment checklist format. It was the first time that the assessment was introduced to staffs of either overseas airport service department of Asiana Airlines or its outsourcing companies. This study revealed significant results that the staffs of Manila station displayed obvious improvements in both appearance and attitude. In this paper, we aim to show the practical SSQM Program for service quality improvement executed in real airlines and its effectiveness assessed by their employees.

Index Terms—Airport ground service performance, SSQM, appearance, attitude.

I. INTRODUCTION

These days airlines industry is rapidly changing and transforming not only to transportation industry but also deeply related with customer service. It has been suggested that delivering superior service quality is one of essential factors for success and survival in today's competitive airline industry, threatened by appearing many low cost carriers with economic air fare. However, international competition arises not only in terms of price, but also of customer satisfaction. Airlines recognize that service quality is as vital a marketing tool as price, and they invest to research ways for better service quality and customer satisfaction. Therefore, Asiana Airlines has been reinforcing capacity of its overseas stations to perform standardized service specs for both cabin attendants and airport ground handling employee's services. This paper illustrates how the assessment was introduced to Manila airport station contracted ground handling company staffs providing the services such as ticketing, checking-in, baggage handling and boarding gate so on. This program had been conducted for 8 months, and the effectiveness was evaluated.

II. REVIEW ON PREVIOUS STUDIES

There are many researches tried to evaluate service quality from customer's perspective and airlines SSQM as follows.

1) The gap of passengers' service expectation and actual

service was examined then results revealed that these gaps did exist and especially, tangible service quality dimension was considered more important in-flight service compared to ground service [1].

- 2) Air passengers' decision making process involves testing a conceptual model that considers service expectation, service perception, service value, passenger satisfaction, airline image, and behavioral intentions. The result described that service value, passenger satisfaction, and airline image had a direct influence on air passengers' decision making [2].
- 3) Service quality could be assessed in an airline company applying interview and structural questionnaires with management, staff and passengers in a case study, an airline company, were carried out [3].
- 4) Research in two significant respects; first, it applies the model internationally in a general classification Second, it applies a portion to assess service quality by comparing the expectations and perceptions that European and US airline passengers have of both European and US airline groups [4].
- 5) This paper is to examine empirically the dimension of personal touch and its elements of individual attention, helpfulness, courtesy, and promptness as determinants of customer satisfaction for passenger airlines [5].
- 6) This study presented an evaluation method the well-established Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) for understanding airline passengers' satisfaction and the results served to improve service strategies. The application results indicate that the proposed IPA method can effectively identify critical airline service items to be improved, and serve as a valuable tool to assist airline managers in developing airline service improvement strategies [6].

III. SSQM PROGRAM PROCESS

Subjects of this study are ground handling staffs from an outsourcing company called Miascor, but the researcher tries to further confine one's scope to evaluate service performance quality of those employees who are only assigned for Asiana flight operations. Asiana airlines has its own service quality evaluation format which is only applicable to Asiana airlines agents from the head station of the Incheon international airport, but researcher try to evaluate outsourcing ground handling agents with the same assessment tool as the first time to apply contracted ground handling company . Even though Misacor ground handling company has an internal training program, its service training standard fails to reach the researcher's expectation and the

Manuscript received March 12, 2014; revised May 20, 2014.

Ji-Young Lee and Seong-Woo Choi are with the Service Management Special Graduate School and the Dept. of Business Administration respectively, Kyonggi University, Seoul, South Korea (e-mail: Leasy113@gmail.com, swchoi@kyonggi.ac.kr; corresponding author: S-W. Choi).

program equips its agents with concepts that are incompatible with what the researcher would deem desirable, due to cultural differences. The first step of this empirical study is to train agents to have professional service attitude and physical appearance standard including uniform maintenance, hair-do, make-up, cultural service attitudes, and basic Korean respect terminology for the customer. The second step is to evaluate the agents' progress after having been trained under Asiana airlines Program for 8 months. The evaluation will exploit a standard appraisal checklist format of SSQM. This research paper proposes to analyze and understand the Manila station's present condition regarding SSQM and eventually evaluate whether service performance of the agents has made substantial improvement.

Instrument of this study includes an appraisal checklist form that is to be distributed to our customer service manager who will check the entire working agents on a daily basis. The manager will then record his findings and collect them as inputs. The gathered data will be subject to analysis that will help us to detect potential area of weakness, so that we can devise plans to improve our airport service quality. As the study progresses near completion, overall evaluation result as an output will be shown to review how effective the SSQM is in raising performance of Asiana airline's agents from Manila airport service department. The description of the methodological procedures is used in this study. The study population would be agents who are working at Manila airport as a service team of Asiana Airlines flight. Agents' neat appearance is assessed everyday by a service manager before a counter opens, and their customer service attitudes after flight. The most important part is that the assessment form covers employee's service performance at Manila station. Researcher focused on the service quality as self-preparation before work and service achievement after work of our agents.

IV. RESULTS OF SSQM PROGRAM EXECUTED

This study proposes and tests a conceptual framework of the relationships among airline service quality, passenger satisfaction, airline image, value, and passengers' future behavioral intentions. The evaluation survey was self-administered and was composed of questions that define relative importance of the listed criteria, ranging from what they considered most important in achieving high service quality to the least. This research intended to test that the implemented assessment worked to positively affect service performance of Manila station agents.

The researcher had administered the data instruments by sample assessment format and observations, depending on the job classification, gender, age, civil status, and the period of experience on the field. Under this condition, assessment form was divided into two parts. First part was a pre-assessment of uniform, hair-do, make up and an overall appearance, while the second part was a post-assessment of service attitude like how to handle or to serve customer with standard service manual. Accumulated data were then calculated and their achievements were recorded on a daily basis. This study was conducted over an expanded time span to achieve a proper observation, because prior to evaluation,

agents needed to attend standard service training program. Training effects were not apparent within a short period of time. This study included basic service training and station consulting training. I compared initial data with the final data at the end of the assessment. The research posed the questions to discover answers to the statement of the problem. The formula used in the study is the following: $P = F/N \times 100$, where P , F and N are percentage, frequency and total number of respondents, respectively.

The total numbers of participants were 43. Surveys were conducted and agents were observed with an assessment checklist for 8 months.

TABLE I: POPULATION-PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Gender	Age (yrs old)	Civil Status	Career (yrs)	Official Position	
M	18 (42%)	20~25 29(68%)	M 7(16%)	1yr 19(44%)	Manager 4(9%)
F	25(58%)	26~30 7(16%)	S 36(84%)	1~3 12(28%)	Supervisor 7(16%)
		31~35 4(9%)		3~5 3(7%)	Agent 32(75%)
		35 UP 3(7%)		5up 9(21%)	

The profile of the respondents is looked upon in terms of gender, age, civil status, length of stay and official position. The first column of Table I shows that the dominated gender among the respondents is female with the percentage of 58 (58%). It can be gleaned from the second column of Table I the age range of the respondents. Sixty eight percent (68%) of them were 20-25 years old. In line with this figure, most of the respondents were single with the percentage of 84 (84%). The age had a linkage when it comes to the length of service of the respondents. Most of them were young adults, as a result, forty four percent (44%) of them have rendered their service for a year which has a strong correlation in the official position of the respondents as well. The figure shows that seventy five percent (75%) of the respondents were agents.

Table II shows assessment checklist which is divided into appearance and service attitude parts and applies to both male and female. All questions will check as score, and the score range is from 1 to 5 by the evaluator daily basis.

Within 8 months, all male and female agents, and as a result, all agents recorded increased scores. This indicates that there is a predominant increased in the scores and an improvement in terms of appearance. Assessments were taken into consideration and compared with the initial results. Positive results were noted.

There has been a significant rise of improvement when it comes to grooming their appearance of male agents. Shaving neatly has soared to 1.22 points from 3.53 to 4.75 points. The proper way of wearing the neck-tie has a slight increase of 0.44 points. Fixing the front hair with hair products and wearing clean uniform and shoes have shown a slight surge of 0.40 points while the proper way of wearing the belt and tie-pin has noted a marginal rise of 0.37 points from the month of April up to November.

The grooming appearance for female agents is sophisticated compared to male agents. There has been a dramatic surge of 0.79 points when it comes to wearing clean uniform and shoes from 3.85 to 4.64 points. Asiana airline has a strict policy of hairstyle for long and short hair. Those who have short hair must make sure that their front hair does

not cover their eyes and their ears must be visible. This has shown a sharp increase of 0.66 points. For those who have long hair, the agents use special hair accessories to maintain the bun or upswept hairstyle. Tucking the hair back in neat bun has indicated a rise of 0.40 points. In contrast, having neat hair dye has displayed a very slight increase of 0.2 points in spite of consistent remainder. Lastly, tidy makeup and clean nails have a significant increase of 0.58 points from 3.94 to 4.52 points within 8 months.

TABLE II: MALE AND FEMALE APPRAISAL CHECKLIST RESULTS

Question (For Male)	Month										
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11			
Are shoes and uniform clean without wrinkles?	4.42	4.21	4.30	4.73	4.78	4.69	4.71	4.82			
Does he fix his front hair with hair products?	4.13	4.22	4.14	4.60	4.54	4.58	4.56	4.53			
Does he wear neck-tie properly?	4.38	4.20	4.28	4.75	4.79	4.71	4.70	4.82			
Does he wear belt and tie-pin properly?	4.30	4.20	4.43	4.71	4.82	4.66	4.67	4.67			
Does he shave neatly?	4.17	4.06	4.48	4.60	4.66	4.50	4.51	4.75			
Does he stand and bow at a 30 degrees angle when welcoming customers?	3.53	3.60	4.20	4.51	4.39	4.44	4.63	4.75			
Does he do welcoming and closing greetings to customers?	3.52	3.67	4.48	4.41	4.33	4.45	4.58	4.73			
Does he make an eye contact with smile to customers?	3.52	3.60	4.43	4.44	4.34	4.49	4.56	4.74			
Does he use both hands when handing and taking things from customers?	3.3	3.50	3.80	4.21	4.30	4.41	4.49	4.64			
Does he use respectable and modest terms correctly?	3.14	3.34	4.14	4.07	3.81	4.32	4.37	4.64			
Question (For Female)	Month										
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11			
Are shoes and uniform clean without wrinkle?	3.85	4.12	4.30	4.35	4.60	4.78	4.67	4.64			
For long hair - Does she tuck her hair back in neat bun?	4.03	4.11	4.45	4.11	4.30	4.59	4.35	4.43			
For short hair - Doesn't her front hair cover her eyes and are her ears shown?	3.59	2.40	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.8	4.1	4.25			
Is her dyed hair neat?	4.11	4.05	3.38	4.18	4.29	4.59	4.35	4.43			
Are her make-up and nails clean and tidy?	3.94	4.16	3.27	4.23	4.50	4.62	4.47	4.65			
Does she stand and bow at 30 degrees angle when welcoming customers?	3.80	3.69	4.45	4.06	4.35	4.50	4.47	4.65			
Does she do welcoming and closing greetings to customers?	3.91	3.80	4.55	4.19	4.33	4.56	4.47	4.71			
Does she make an eye contact with a smile to customers?	3.92	3.86	4.30	4.26	4.24	4.52	4.49	4.66			
Does she use both hands when giving and taking things from customers?	3.85	3.80	4.40	3.97	4.16	4.52	4.52	4.70			
Does she use respectable and modest terms correctly?	3.71	3.73	4.25	4.00	4.20	4.38	4.41	4.58			

Table II illustrates not just the appearance but also the service attitude of the agents. Service attitude towards the clients is strictly observed to maintain the standard of customer satisfaction. The points for standing and bowing at the angle of 30 degrees when welcoming the passengers has risen significantly in 1.22 points for male agents while for female agents, there has been a slight increase of 0.85 points for 8 months. When it comes to welcoming and giving closing greeting to the passengers, there has been a tremendous increase of 1.20 points for male agents but for

female agents, there has been a marginal gain of 0.79 points. Having an eye contact and smiling to the passengers have gone up to 1.22 points for male agents, on the other hand, there has been a slight growth of 0.74 points for female agents. Assessments regarding with giving and taking things to the passengers have shown a dominant acceleration of 1.34 points for male agents, however, there has been a bit increase of 0.85 points for female agents. Lastly, in using honorifics and service terms correctly for male agents, the score has taken a leap of 1.50 points and 0.87 points for female agents from April to November.

Based on the salient findings, both male and female agents have shown prominent improvements in appearance and service attitude. It can be gleaned from the table that both male and female agents have demonstrated a remarkable progress in grooming from 0.37 points to 1.22 points. It can also be found in the result of service attitude evaluation that male agents have displayed a tremendous development compared with the female agents. It can be deduced that male agents have taken the assessment positively, hence, their improvements in terms of service attitude have clearly reflected on the table data.

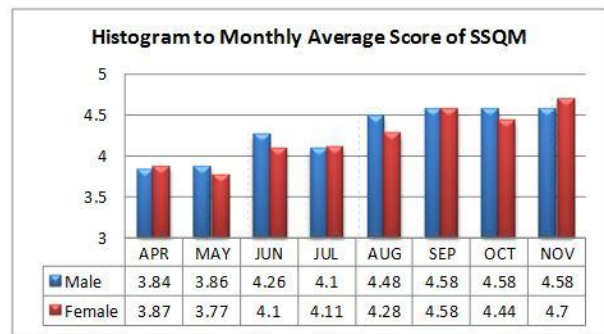


Fig. 1. Monthly average score of SSQM regard to sex.

Fig. 1 shows that service quality score continuously increased every month and welcoming positive results for the Airline and new developments came in terms of quality service to the customers. The result has been brought up to the company. Consequently, training and appraisal are taken into consideration for further improvement of services not only to Asiana airline employees but also to contractual ground handling company employees.

Interpretation of this graph signals that service quality can indeed be measured and improved with proper training and dissemination of helpful information.

The figure shows that the total average score of SSQM has positively increased of 0.74 points for all male agents from 3.84 to 4.58 points. In addition, the result has also incremented of 0.83 points from 3.87 to 4.7 points for all female agents within 8 months.

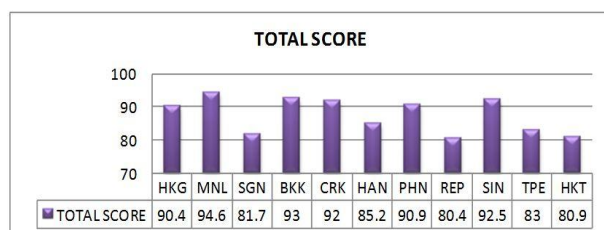


Fig. 2. Evaluation results for south east Asia stations.

In real case, The Fig. 2 of South East Asia Station evaluation results from Korea headquarter was clearly show manila station had achieved the best result among the 11 stations.

The headquarter has annual assessment for stations abroad which includes the head quarter's evaluation about the standard service quality such as on-time aircraft performance, ground handling company management, cost cutting and standard service quality management.

This graph shows the great success on service quality management section after executing SSQM in Manila station.

V. CONCLUSION

This research has found out that the ground handling company of male and female agents who were assessed using this evaluation about the appearance and service attitude has shown a remarkable development. In the initial data, female agents got higher points than male agents. It can be inferred that female agents got accustomed easily during the training and was able to apply their knowledge effectively. However, it is easy for the female agents to become complaisant to the nature of their job. That is the reason that the figure has shown a slight improvement especially in service attitude. In comparison with the male agents, the male agents have demonstrated consistent progress from the initial assessment up to the last. The study is basically based on our current positions of SSQM. We have tried to find out more improvements on service quality in meeting the customers' high-end demands and being competitive in airline industry. Based on the result of the findings, the following conclusions have been drawn:

First, According to the result of the evaluation, there have been significant effects on the service quality performance appraisal of Manila Station employees compared with other Asiana Airlines stations abroad.

Secondly, the results of the evaluation were very effective to the employees regarding with their service performance. The researchers had used the SSQM which showed that the employees of Manila Airport Service Department of Asiana Airlines were willing to improve their performance and the quality of service to the customers.

Based on the derived conclusions, SSQM is very effective for the improvement of the employees' performance in Manila Airport Service Station. SSQM is highly recommended to be used to other stations abroad specifically in South East Asian countries. In addition, it is suggested that there are some revisions that has to be made for the improvement of SSQM assessment checklist for rigid evaluation.

In this research, the following recommendations have been made.

It is highly suggested that it is meaningful to apply it for the first time in ground handling company employees in all stations abroad. This study has been proven that Manila Station successfully achieved their annual goal using the SSQM. The other stations should also set their own standard service manual for training and maintaining the quality service performance.

Some revisions must be made specifically on the service

performance quality checklist to fit local culture and environment. This assessment must be presented with training programs with well defined instructions ahead of evaluation.

At the same time, this assessment should obtain proper evaluation tools which are tangible, measurable and transparent. And also, reward and compensation program must be implemented to encourage the agents to work effectively and efficiently. In addition, the managers who control and maintain the service quality should have strong service mind set as well.

As a matter of fact, the result showed in SSQM was a significant measurement for sustaining the quality service. It is unveiled that SSQM is applicable to other stations as well to improve their standard service quality and decent appearance consistently. Obviously, the frontline plays an essential role in rendering quality service; therefore, it is highly recommended that SSQM must be applied to other stations widely to narrow the gap between domestic and overseas airports stemming from the cultural differences.

In addition, a continuous amendment must be devised for SSQM assessment form so that it can be widely compatible to the dynamic needs of respective time and culture.

REFERENCES

- [1] F. Y. Chen and Y. H. Chang, "Examining airline service quality from a process perspective," *Journal of Air Transportation Management*, vol. 11, pp. 79-87, March 2005.
- [2] J. W. Park, R. Robeertson, and C. L. Wu, "The effect of airline service quality on passengers' behavioural intentions: a Korean case study," *Journal of Air Transportation Management*, vol. 10, pp.435-439, Nov. 2004.
- [3] T. Iatchaoenpol and T. Laosirihongthong, "Innovations in service strategy: An evaluation of quality in airline service operations by using servqual model," *Management of Innovation and Technology*, vol. 2, pp. 748-752, June 2006.
- [4] F. Sultan and C. Simpson, "International service variants: airline passenger expectations and perceptions of service quality," *Journal of Services Marketing*, vol. 14, pp. 188-216, 2000.
- [5] S. Babbar and X. Koufteros, "The human element in airline service quality: contact personnel and the customer," *International Journal of Operation and Production Management*, vol. 28, pp. 804-830, 2008.
- [6] C. M. Feng and K. Y. Jeng, "Anaalyzing airlines service improvement and performance analysis," *Journal of the Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies*, vol. 6, pp. 782-797, 2005.



Ji-Young Lee is currently a Ph.D student in the Service Management Special Graduate School, Kyonggi University, Seoul, South Korea. Her current research interests include design and operation of airport ground service systems and cabin attendant service management.



Seong-Woo Choi received the B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in industrial engineering from the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, Daejeon, Korea. He is currently an assistant professor with the Department of Business and Administration, Kyonggi University, Seoul, Korea. Before joining as a Faculty Member at Kyonggi University, he was a senior engineer with the Semiconductor Business Division, Systems Technology Group, Samsung Electronics Company, Kyonggi-Do, Korea, and was also with Hoseo University, Chungcheongnam-do, Korea. His current research interests include design and operation of manufacturing systems, operations scheduling and service management.