

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2024.75.03.1>

How to Cite:

Plavcan, P., Asvanyi, G., Hrbek, P., Siekel, A., & Vodackova, Z. (2024). Application of the EFQM model in a travel agency. *Amazonia Investiga*, 13(75), 9-19. <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2024.75.03.1>


Application of the EFQM model in a travel agency

Uplatnenie modelu EFQM v cestovnej agentúre

Received: February 3, 2024

Accepted: March 27, 2024

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Abstract


The paper aims to evaluate the degree of excellence a selected travel agency achieves using the EFQM model. The methodology involves establishing desirable outcomes such as modernizing service offerings and increasing competitiveness. Questionnaires assess customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, societal impact, and critical organizational results. These questionnaires address service quality, environment, employee willingness, director rating, and financial and non-financial evaluations. The EFQM model provides a framework for the organization to respond effectively, emphasizing the need for thorough comparison with practical implementation and active involvement from management and employees. The model's introduction is acknowledged as a long-term endeavor, requiring sustained effort and understanding from management. In summary, the EFQM model evaluation of the travel agency reveals strengths in employee care and goal clarity but highlights areas for improvement. These include updating policies,


Abstrakt


Cieľom príspevku je zhodnotiť mieru excelentnosti, ktorú vybraná cestovná agentúra dosahuje s uplatnením modelu EFQM. Metodológia zahŕňa stanovenie žiaducich výsledkov, ako je modernizácia ponuky služieb a zvýšenie konkurencieschopnosti. Dotazníky hodnotia spokojnosť zákazníkov, zamestnancov, spoločenský dopad a kritické výsledky organizácie. Tieto dotazníky sa zaoberajú kvalitou služieb, prostredím, ochotou zamestnancov, ratingom riaditeľa a finančným a nefinančným ohodnotením. Model EFQM poskytuje organizácii rámec na efektívnu reakciu, pričom zdôrazňuje potrebu dôkladného porovnania s praktickou implementáciou a aktívneho zapojenia manažmentu a zamestnancov. Zavedenie modelu sa považuje za dlhodobé úsilie, ktoré si vyžaduje trvalé úsilie a pochopenie od manažmentu. Stručne povedané, hodnotenie modelu EFQM cestovnej agentúry odhaľuje silné stránky v starostlivosti o zamestnancov a jasnosť cieľov, ale zdôrazňuje oblasti na zlepšenie. Patrí medzi ne aktualizácia pravidiel, kontrola externých partnerstiev a prispôbenie

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reviewing external partnerships, and adapting processes to customer needs. Addressing employee satisfaction, financial planning, and strategic marketing are crucial for success. Embracing EFQM principles fosters continuous improvement, customer focus, and organizational resilience, positioning travel agencies as industry leaders. EFQM provides a valuable framework for enhancing performance and quality in a competitive landscape.

Keywords: EFQM model, Travel agency evaluation, Service modernization, Customer satisfaction, Organizational excellence.

Introduction

In today's dynamic and fiercely competitive business landscape, organizations across various industries continually strive to enhance their performance, efficiency, and overall effectiveness. This relentless pursuit of excellence is particularly evident in the travel and tourism sector, an industry characterized by rapid globalization, technological advancements, and evolving consumer preferences.

Within this context, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model has emerged as a widely recognized framework for organizational excellence. Initially developed in the 1980s by the European Foundation for Quality Management, the EFQM model provides a holistic approach to assessing and improving organizational performance, emphasizing the importance of leadership, strategy, people management, partnerships, processes, and results.

However, while the EFQM model has been extensively applied across various sectors, its utilization within travel agencies remains relatively underexplored. Travel agencies are pivotal in facilitating travel experiences for individuals and businesses, serving as intermediaries between travelers and service providers such as airlines, hotels, and tour operators. In an industry where customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and innovation are paramount, applying the EFQM model holds immense potential for driving sustainable growth and competitive advantage.

The justification for exploring the application of the EFQM model in travel agencies stems from several key considerations:

- **Increasing competition:** The travel industry is experiencing unprecedented competition, with traditional players facing challenges

procesov potrebám zákazníkov. Riešenie spokojnosti zamestnancov, finančné plánovanie a strategický marketing sú kľúčové pre úspech. Prijatie princípov EFQM podporuje neustále zlepšovanie, zameranie na zákazníka a organizačnú odolnosť, vďaka čomu sú cestovné agentúry lídrami v odvetví. Model EFQM poskytuje cenný rámec na zvýšenie výkonu a kvality v konkurenčnom prostredí.

Kľúčové slová: Model EFQM, Hodnotenie cestovných agentúr, Modernizácia služieb, Spokojnosť zákazníkov, Dokonalosť organizácie.

from online travel agencies (OTAs), sharing economy platforms, and niche service providers. In such a hypercompetitive environment, differentiation through superior service delivery and operational excellence is critical for survival and success.

- **Customer expectations:** Today's travelers are more discerning and demanding than ever before. They expect personalized experiences, seamless booking processes, and exceptional customer service throughout their journey. Travel agencies must, therefore, prioritize continuous improvement initiatives to meet and exceed these evolving expectations.
- **Complex ecosystem:** Travel agencies operate within a complex ecosystem involving multiple stakeholders, including travelers, suppliers, technology providers, regulatory bodies, and industry associations. Effectively managing these diverse relationships and optimizing processes across the value chain are essential for enhancing overall performance and sustainability.
- **Digital disruption:** The advent of digital technologies has revolutionized the way travel services are marketed, sold, and consumed. From online booking platforms to mobile apps and artificial intelligence-powered chatbots, digital innovation is reshaping the industry landscape and redefining customer interactions. Travel agencies must embrace digital transformation strategies to remain competitive and relevant in this digital age.
- **Quality Management:** Quality management principles lie at the heart of the EFQM model, emphasizing the importance of continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, and organizational learning. By adopting the EFQM framework, travel

agencies can systematically assess their strengths and weaknesses, identify areas for improvement, and implement best practices to enhance overall quality and performance.

In light of these factors, applying the EFQM model in travel agencies presents a compelling opportunity to foster organizational excellence, drive operational efficiencies, and deliver superior value to customers. By embracing a culture of excellence and leveraging the principles of the EFQM model, travel agencies can position themselves for long-term success in an increasingly competitive and dynamic industry landscape.

The paper is organized as follows. The introduction highlights the significance of effective management amidst economic challenges and global competition. It introduces the EFQM model as a pivotal quality management tool developed by European industry leaders in response to international competition. The model emphasizes leadership, strategy, and continuous improvement across all organizational aspects. Through the EFQM Foundation, members gain access to cutting-edge information, benchmarking, and expertise, facilitating ongoing improvement and enhancing customer satisfaction. The Theoretical Framework delves into the EFQM model, emphasizing its effectiveness in strengthening organizational management. Originally derived from Total Quality Management (TQM), the EFQM model offers a comprehensive approach to self-evaluation, focusing on achieving desirable organizational goals and fostering continuous improvement. With seven main criteria, it evaluates various aspects of an organization's performance, aiming for excellence in customer and employee satisfaction while considering environmental impact. The model evolves, incorporating the "Design Thinking" methodology to facilitate organizational change and adaptation. Although implementation demands preparation and resources, the benefits include enhanced organizational dialogue, detailed self-assessment reports, and potential eligibility for quality awards. The RADAR evaluation tool complements the EFQM model, assessing organizational maturity and process effectiveness. Before application, clear goals and conditions must be set, with options for either incorporating the model into strategic management or tailoring it to specific organizational needs. Ensuring understanding, sufficient resources, and employee support are crucial for successful implementation. The

methodology involves establishing desirable outcomes such as modernizing service offerings and increasing competitiveness. Various questionnaires assess customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, and societal impact. Planning a comprehensive system of approaches and procedures is crucial, emphasizing objectivity and extensive information. Questionnaires for clients, employees, and random respondents gauge satisfaction and engagement. The EFQM model provides a framework for organizational improvement, requiring thorough self-evaluation and active participation from all levels of management. Implementing the model is a long-term endeavor, demanding a deep understanding and continuous commitment from the management team. The results and discussion section highlights the evaluation of a selected travel agency based on the EFQM model's criteria. Scores were assigned for each criterion, reflecting the agency's performance in areas such as purpose, vision, and strategy; organizational culture and leadership; engaging stakeholders; creating sustainable value; driving performance and transformation; stakeholder perceptions; and strategic and operational performance. The travel agency achieved a total rating of 696 out of 1000 points. While it excelled in certain aspects like leadership and stakeholder engagement, there were areas requiring improvement, such as updating policies, enhancing customer-centric processes, and ensuring financial sustainability. Recommendations include regular employee meetings, external expert involvement in leadership, policy innovation, and reevaluation of financial plans. Client satisfaction was noted as a strong point, yet there were concerns about employee compensation and working conditions.

Additionally, efforts to enhance the agency's visibility through marketing initiatives were suggested to address its relatively low local recognition. As a result, the EFQM model provides a valuable framework for travel agencies to improve performance and quality, fostering continuous improvement and positioning them for success in a competitive industry landscape. Embracing EFQM principles can lead to streamlined processes, optimized resource allocation, and superior service delivery, ultimately enhancing customer satisfaction and organizational resilience.

Theoretical Framework

When a company is prosperous, it does not necessarily mean it is well managed. It can be the initial popularity of a particular industry, the

mistakes of the competition or the overall positive economic growth of the country in which it operates. Despite its success, however, it may have even higher growth prospects (Hornikova, 2006). Companies are increasingly focusing on quality management in today's unfavorable economic conditions and with the sharpening of global economic competition. Improving the quality of management processes and introducing modern quality management systems is one of the possible ways for companies to achieve favorable economic growth (Madarova, 2007).

One of the most effective quality management methods is the EFQM model, which leads companies to pay attention to results and assumptions. The EFQM model was created in cooperation with the European Foundation for Quality Management founders in 1988. Fourteen of the most substantial European manufacturing companies, with the support of the European Commission, developed an initiative that led to the creation of the EFQM Foundation and its model (CAF Centre, 2023; Vartiak & Jankalova, 2017). The main motive was to restore and strengthen the competitiveness of European companies against American and Japanese companies in the global market. The EFQM model is a management tool intended to comprehensively assess a company and its performance. It focuses on both business and public sector organizations. Its main task is to show that the results correspond to the assumptions made by top management (Garbarova, 2017).

The model emphasizes the role of leadership in the enterprise, the policy and strategy used, and the impact on workers, resources, and partnerships used. The resulting indicators are customer relationships, workers, and the company. The main principle of this model is the principle of continuous improvement, which applies to all business activities which can be achieved using available modern management methods and proven practices and thus ensure the progress of the business (CAF centre, 2023; Vartiak & Jankalova, 2017).

Thanks to the EFQM foundation, its members have access to the latest information and trends in the field of quality management and improving the performance of the organization, to benchmarking of best practices of organizations applying for the European Quality Award, and also have the opportunity to use the know-how

acquired in this way directly in their implemented projects for customers and the chance to use the know-how acquired in this way for the permanent improvement of the quality of the services offered and the increase of customer satisfaction (Broska & Nurin, 2020).

The EFQM model has proven to be an effective tool for improving organizational management. The essence and purpose of the EFQM model of excellence is the development of driving forces and means for achieving previously desirable goals of the organization. For organizations that want to get an overall picture of their assumptions and make their results visible to themselves and those around them, the EFQM excellence model is an ideal practical tool for self-evaluation (Vartiak, 2015).

The EFQM model was created from the principles of TQM (Total Quality Management) and was initially designed to meet the needs of private sector organizations. Gradually, however, public administration organizations began to draw on the experience of organizations from the business sector and exchange these experiences with each other. Given that the model was created to obtain a general system capable of evaluating the state of the organization at a particular time, its strength is the ability to assess the organization from a relatively objective point of view and to repeat this evaluation regularly. The results of the assessments provide valuable indicators, documents and feedback for long-term and medium-term planning and management of the organization (Jintana et al., 2020).

The model has seven main criteria. The structure of the seven criteria identifies the main aspects that require attention in any business analysis. The criteria indicate the primary outputs that must be assessed in the company's evaluation. The model's logic assumes that excellent organizational results can only be achieved under conditions of maximum customer and employee satisfaction while respecting the environment (Garbarova, 2017).

The EFQM model (Figure 1) addresses the real problems facing today's modern organizations and offers them data-driven tools and analytics, the use of which provides meaningful insights, data and support to organizations and individuals and helps them feel be part of the process, learn and be part of the EFQM community (EFQM, 2023).



Figure 1. The EFQM Model.

The new model, created using the "Design Thinking" methodology, has changed from a simple self-assessment tool to an offering tool with the necessary framework and methodology to assist with daily change, transformation and disruption that individuals and organizations face. Simply put, the EFQM Model will help any organization achieve success by measuring where it is on its way to creating sustainable value for its key stakeholders and the organization. It will help it understand the gaps and possible solutions available and enable it to progress and significantly improve the organization's performance (EFQM, 2023).

There is a demand in the market for introducing a certified quality standard for service companies, especially in emerging markets. In many cases, businesses need a little help to move toward excellence. However, companies must implement certain basic concepts to ensure the effective use of the excellence model. The EFQM model is dynamic and focuses on the organization's growth, creates space for improvement, and integrates various management elements. The benefit of using the EFQM model is the performance of a comprehensive analysis, which also serves as a self-assessment. Another benefit is the opening of dialogue within the organization, which is focused on strategic management issues, the processes taking place in the organization, and its strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of customers' purchasing behavior (Garbarova et al., 2017). Thanks to the application of the model, there is time and space for discussion, which cannot be carried out during the ordinary course of the organization. By compiling a self-evaluation report, the organization gets a detailed picture of its activity, which helps solve

shortcomings. When applying the EFQM model, the organization also paves the way for obtaining a national or even European award for quality. (Rentkova & Vartiak, 2017; Shnyrkov et al., 2019; Zorkociova et al., 2019).

On the other hand, applying the EFQM model requires relatively demanding preparation, fact-finding, and documentation to prepare reports. The fact that the degree of critical view of the evaluator can also lead to more severe disputes in evaluating individual and sub-criteria is also not negligible. Suppose the organization decides to do an external consultation or wants to apply for a quality award. In that case, the costs associated with evaluating the self-assessment report must be considered (Andrieiev et al., 2023).

An essential part of the model of excellence is an evaluation tool called RADAR (Figure 2). It is a closed cycle consisting of five steps. The RADAR principle is simple: the company sets the expected or desired results and develops approaches to achieve them. He will then apply them in practice. Over time, it therefore evaluates (EFQM, 2023; Vartiak, 2015):

- achieving goals and trends (Results),
- suitability and reliability of the chosen approaches (Approach),
- degree of actual application and systematicity (Deployment),
- measurement and improvement (Assessment),
- reviewing lessons for the future and learning (Refinement).

These logical links then require the organization to determine the outcomes it aims for as part of its policy and strategy process. The results reflect

both the financial and operational activities of the organization, including the perception of stakeholders. Furthermore, it is essential now and in the future to plan and develop an integrated set of approaches to ensure results and scale up the approaches systematically to ensure their full implementation. Prioritize, plan and implement improvements where necessary based on evaluation and review of techniques based on

results achieved and learning activities (Garbarova, 2017).

RADAR is also an excellent tool for evaluating difficult areas, such as the organization's maturity and processes. Although the RADAR approach was developed with the EFQM model, it can also be successfully used outside the seven criteria of the EFQM model (EFQM, 2023; Hnatek, 2008).

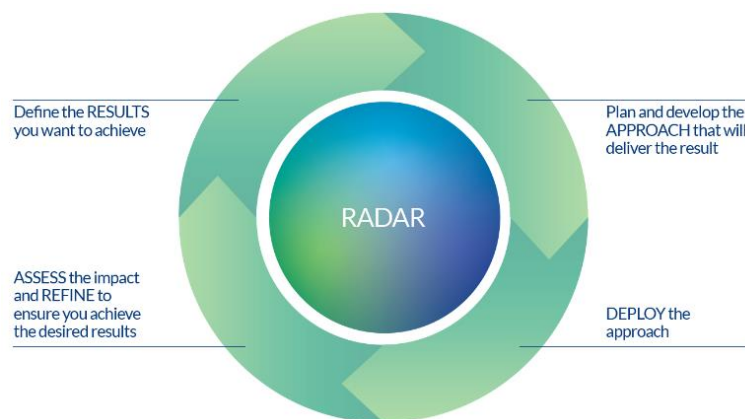


Figure 2. The RADAR logic.

Before applying the model in business practice, it is necessary to define a goal for this application. In general, it can be stated that the model is suitable for two different purposes:

1. To incorporate the EFQM methodology into management practice to obtain indicators for strategic management, it is necessary (Miknevicius, Jasinskis, Savitskyi, Sauliuk & Olefir, 2022):
 - the time horizon in which the evaluation will be carried out – after the implementation of the program, the self-evaluation will be carried out every two years,
 - responsible persons – director of the travel agency,
 - qualification of persons participating in the project – training of employees by the external company GOA-WorkBench,
 - essential automated support – SAETO software from the external company GOA-WorkBench,
 - cooperation with an external expert on the issue – the company GOA-WorkBench.
2. To apply the model in line with the current need of the company in the principle of creating a model tailored to the given purpose, it is necessary:

- commission an external expert to carry out the assessment,
- carry out a self-assessment before and after the start of the project,
- compare the results of input and output control,
- evaluate the contribution of the project.

For the perfect functioning of the model of excellence, it is necessary to ensure that the following conditions are met (EFQM, 2023):

- understanding how to apply EFQM – training conducted by GOA-WorkBench,
- setting a clear goal – modernization of the service offer and subsequent increase in competitiveness and market share,
- allocation of sufficient funds for project implementation - use of funds from the created fund,
- error-free administration – controlled by SAETO software from GOA-WorkBench,
- support from employees – employee participation in the process,
- suitable system – SAETO software from GOA-WorkBench,
- complexity,
- adapting the organization's standards – creating an internal directive.

Methodology

The paper aims to apply the EFQM model to evaluate the degree of excellence achieved by the selected travel agency. To ensure the rigor and validity of the paper, several measures were taken:

- **Data triangulation:** Employing multiple data sources can enhance the study's credibility and reliability. This includes qualitative data (interviews, focus groups, participant observation). Triangulating data from various sources provided a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and helped validate findings.
- **Verification by multiple researchers:** Involving five researchers or a research team in the study mitigated individual biases and enhanced the robustness of the research process. Collaborative data analysis, interpretation, and peer debriefing ensured the perspectives or assumptions of a single researcher did not influence findings.
- **Peer review:** Subjecting the research design, methodology, findings, and interpretations to peer review by the Danubius University experts in the field provided valuable feedback and validation.
- **Transparent reporting:** Maintaining transparency in reporting the research process, including methods, data collection procedures, analysis techniques, and limitations, enhanced the study's trustworthiness. Transparent reporting allows readers to assess the validity and reliability of the findings and draw their conclusions.

By incorporating these rigorous methodological approaches, researchers could strengthen their study's validity, credibility, and trustworthiness. These measures helped ensure that the findings accurately reflect the reality of the phenomenon under investigation and contribute to advancing knowledge in the field.

The data collection process involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews with travel agency employees and the distribution and analysis of questionnaires. Here's a detailed description of each stage:

- **Preparation phase:** Develop a research plan outlining the objectives, research questions, and methodology. Obtaining necessary approvals and permissions from the travel

agency's management and relevant ethics review boards, designing interview protocols and questionnaires tailored to capture pertinent information.

- **Interviews with travel agency employees:** Conducting semi-structured interviews with employees and use open-ended questions to explore employees' perceptions, experiences, and practices related to EFQM model principles and their application within the travel agency. Recording interviews with participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture and transcription for later analysis.
- **Questionnaire distribution and evaluation:**
- **Developing a questionnaire based on the EFQM model criteria and dimensions,** incorporating both closed-ended (quantitative) questions. Ensuring the questionnaire is clear, concise, and relevant to the research objectives, with appropriate response options and scales. Collecting completed questionnaires through paper-based methods, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of respondents. Conducting a thorough analysis of the questionnaire responses.
- **Integration of findings:**
- **Integrating findings from interviews and questionnaires to provide a comprehensive understanding of the application of the EFQM model within the selected travel agency.**

Procedure for applying the EFQM model in the selected travel agency:

3. **Establishing desirable outcomes – Modernization of the service offer and subsequent increase in competitiveness and market share. It is evaluated:**
 - customer satisfaction in the form of a questionnaire (Questionnaire for clients),
 - employee satisfaction in the form of a questionnaire (Questionnaire for employees),
 - impacts on society in the form of a questionnaire (Questionnaire for random respondents – general public),
 - key results of the organization.
4. **Planning a comprehensive system of approaches and procedures – To achieve desirable results now and in the future, the Ibis travel agency must establish a system of approaches and procedures. The primary element of the system is objectivity, without which this system cannot function properly. Furthermore, the information must be**

comprehensive and known to all interested parties.

The questionnaire for the clients of the given travel agency contained six questions:

1. How do you rate the services provided by the given travel agency?
2. How do you rate the environment of the given travel agency?
3. How do you rate the willingness of the employees of the given travel agency?
4. How do you rate the quality of the information provided by the given travel agency?
5. How do you rate the time spent at the given travel agency?
6. Would you return to that travel agency?

The questionnaire for the employees of the given travel agency contained six questions:

1. How do you rate the director of the given travel agency?
2. How do you rate the work team at the given travel agency?
3. How do you rate the working environment in the given travel agency?
4. How satisfied are you with the financial evaluation at the given travel agency?
5. How satisfied are you with the non-financial evaluation at the given travel agency?
6. How satisfied are you with the working hours at the given travel agency?

The questionnaire for random respondents (general public) contained six questions:

1. Do you use the services of travel agencies?
2. Do you know the travel agency in question?
3. Have you ever used the services of a given travel agency?
4. Were you satisfied with the services of the given travel agency?
5. Do you still plan to use the services of the given travel agency in the future?
6. Would you recommend that your friends use the travel agency services?

The EFQM model does not determine the organization's approaches but defines the framework requirements to which the organization should respond in its practice. That is why comparison with practice is essential for using the model. As part of the self-evaluation, it is not enough for the organization to state that the implemented approach is suitable but to explain why it is ideal. Therefore, the support and participation of top management team members

and other employees are priorities. It is also necessary to appoint a project manager and establish the powers and responsibilities of each team member (Michek, 2006).

When applying the model, it is necessary to realize that its introduction is long-term, so the results will not appear immediately. The essence of the model is simple, but its application is quite tricky. Management must understand its laws and work with them permanently and long-term (Jaeger, 2018).

Results and Discussion

Based on the answers of employees, clients, and the general public, it was possible to evaluate the seven individual criteria of the EFQM model verbally and point-wise concerning the given travel agency.

Evaluation for the Purpose, Vision & Strategy criterion: 70 points out of 100

The policy is articulated, supported by ongoing processes, and prioritizes stakeholders' interests. Thus, the policy is based on stakeholders' current and future needs. However, the policy is not based on survey information and has not been updated for long.

Evaluation for the criterion Organizational Culture & Leadership: 80 points out of 100

The leader of the team is the director of the travel agency, who, as the founder, sets the goals of the travel agency and oversees that they are achieved. The director of the travel agency, as a model of corporate culture, is interested in the process and makes sure that it is constantly improved. In addition to leading and motivating travel agency workers, he is also involved in relations with clients and partners. As the leader of the implementation team, the travel agency's director knows the company and its processes, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Still, his judgment may be distorted and not objective.

Rating for the Engaging Stakeholders criterion: 60 points out of 100

Both external partnerships and internal resources are managed to support the policy. In contrast, financial resources are considered, and attention is paid to the care of assets and knowledge inside the travel agency. However, the assets of the travel agency are not valued, and external partner relations are not re-evaluated due to the non-innovated policy.

Rating for the Creating Sustainable Value criterion: 160 points out of 200

Processes in a travel agency are systematically designed and managed to achieve increased value for clients. However, they are not updated according to needs, which can lead to deterioration of relations with clients and within the company.

Rating for the Driving Performance & Transformation criterion: 90 points out of 100

Workers are appropriately planned, managed and their potential is developed so that their knowledge and competencies are identifiable. Workers have the necessary competencies; they conduct dialogues with each other during the process and are rewarded depending on their results. However, there are no regular meetings between the employees and the director of the travel agency to evaluate the company's processes.

Rating for the Stakeholder Perceptions criterion: 120 points out of 200

Evaluation of what the travel agency has achieved concerning its employees, including employee satisfaction and motivation, and evaluation of their performance. The assessment was a questionnaire filled out by six travel agency employees.

Evaluation of what the travel agency has achieved in relation to the local public. The involvement of the travel agency in public projects and the awareness of members of the local public about the travel agency are evaluated. The evaluation took the form of a questionnaire filled out by 60 random respondents in the given city.

Evaluation of what the travel agency has achieved concerning planned performance. The results of critical financial indicators are evaluated in terms of processes, external partners, internal resources, information, and knowledge. The evaluation compares the planned volume of sales and revenues with the achieved results. The travel agency did not fulfil its plan 100%, so the revenues did not reach the expected value. However, it is not at a loss despite this.

Evaluation for the Strategic & Operational Performance criterion: 116 points out of 200

To achieve its new strategy, the travel agency pays attention to the consistent and consistent application of the adopted system, which is regularly checked by the director of the travel agency and subsequently recorded in the reports. The travel agency should evaluate the applied system based on monitoring processes and parties involved in the system. When considering the system, it is necessary to consider four criteria of results: relationship with clients, relationship with employees, relationship with the company, and results of critical activities. An evaluation of what the travel agency has achieved concerning its clients, including overall image, character of services, sales and loyalty. The assessment was a questionnaire completed by 130 travel agency clients.

According to the criteria of the EFQM model, the given travel agency achieved a rating of 696 out of 1000 points. The criteria of direction were evaluated with 150 points out of 200, the criteria of execution with 310 points out of 400 and the criteria of results with 236 points out of 400.

Based on these results, the travel agency must continue caring for its employees as it has been. However, it would be appropriate to hold regular meetings that would benefit the employees and the management of the travel agency.

The selection of the leader of the implementation team, who was the director of the travel agency, was well-evaluated, but even so, his objectivity cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, an external expert on the issue who is familiar with the operation of the travel agency would be a better choice. The given travel agency stands out for its precise formulation of goals, but the negative is that the policy has not been updated for a long time. It is therefore necessary to regularly adjust and innovate the policy of the travel agency so that the company can respond flexibly to the market situation. It must be emphasized that external partnerships are managed based on policy, but since the policy is not updated, partnerships are not reviewed. It is not sure whether they are all beneficial for the company. Therefore, it would be appropriate for the innovation of the travel agency's policy to be accompanied by a review of external partnerships. Although the processes are designed and managed in the interest of the travel agency's clients, they are not modified and innovated according to the customers' changing requirements. It would, therefore, be suitable for the travel agency to conduct regular surveys of client satisfaction with services and adjust processes based on their results.

Furthermore, the positive management of the given travel agency is evaluated as a big plus. However, the plan of the travel agency was not fulfilled 100%, which can be attributed to the deteriorated economic situation and, thus, the weakened purchasing power of the population. The recommendation for the travel agency is to establish more realistic financial plans that also consider the deterioration of the market situation. The clients of the given travel agency positively evaluated the workers, the quality of information, the environment, and the services of the travel agency. They said they would return to the travel agency again, which expresses their loyalty. All employees of the given travel agency positively evaluate the director, the work environment, and the non-financial compensation offered by the travel agency. Still, on the other hand, they are only moderately satisfied with the financial compensation. Therefore, it would be good for the travel agency's management to re-evaluate the employees' salaries and possibly invite them to discuss and make suggestions, which could lead to the satisfaction of both parties.

Furthermore, one of the employees is not satisfied with the work team and with the working hours in the travel agency. It would be necessary to conduct a dialogue with the employee in question, which would reveal the reason for his dissatisfaction and subsequently take steps to strengthen the collective and integrate him. However, changes in working hours in the travel agency are not possible, because employees work 9 hours, during which they are entitled to a one-hour lunch break. On the other hand, based on the general public assessment, the given travel agency is relatively little known in its city. The travel agency should, therefore, develop more marketing activities, such as advertising, sponsoring, and participating in public and charity events, which would improve awareness of the travel agency.

Conclusions

The paper aimed to apply the EFQM model to evaluate the degree of excellence achieved by the selected travel agency. In summary, considering the travel agency's performance through the EFQM model has provided valuable insights into areas of strength and areas needing improvement. While the agency has excelled in employee care and goal clarity, there are notable areas for enhancement. These include updating policies, regularly reviewing external partnerships, adapting processes to evolving customer demands, and establishing more realistic financial plans. Moreover, addressing employee

satisfaction concerns, particularly regarding financial compensation and working hours, is crucial for maintaining a positive work environment. Additionally, efforts to increase the agency's visibility through strategic marketing initiatives are essential for expanding its reach and customer base. By implementing these recommendations and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, the travel agency can further enhance its performance position as a leader in the industry and reach the maximum points in the subsequent evaluation.

In conclusion, the EFQM model serves as a valuable framework for enhancing performance and quality within the operations of a travel agency. The model encourages continuous improvement, customer focus, and employee engagement through its holistic approach to organizational excellence. By applying EFQM principles, travel agencies can streamline processes, optimize resource allocation, and ultimately deliver superior service experiences to customers. Embracing the EFQM model fosters organizational resilience and positions travel agencies to thrive in an ever-evolving industry landscape.

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