

Hoteliers' Perceptions of International Standards Organization (I.S.O) Certification's Applicability And Functionality In Zimbabwe: A Case of Selected Harare Hotels

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Abstract

Only 8 out of over 110 registered hotels in Zimbabwe are ISO certified. The main purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions that hoteliers in Zimbabwe have in relation to I.S.O certification. The specific objectives of the study were; to establish hotelier's perceptions of ISO certification in Zimbabwe, to establish reasons for the low uptake of I.S.O certification in Zimbabwe's hotel sector and to develop strategies for enhanced uptake of I.S.O certification in Zimbabwe's hotel sector. A largely qualitative research design was used and a judgmental sample of 54 respondents, comprising of hotel marketing managers, was incorporated in this study. Generally, the findings of the study seem to suggest that I.S.O certification is highly applicable and functional in Zimbabwe's hotel sector. The benefits of I.S.O certification in other economic sectors play a very crucial role in shaping the perceptions hoteliers have in relation with the scheme. As a result of the findings of the study, hoteliers are recommended to fully embrace I.S.O certification. However, there is further need to carry out studies to ascertain the impact of I.S.O certification on hotel businesses as most of the benefits seem to be adopted from other industrial sectors such as manufacturing.

Key words: ISO certification, functionality, applicability, hospitality sector, hoteliers.

1. Introduction

Gill and Gill (2011) assert that the hospitality sector is a major service oriented sector in the economy of a nation. In this regard, it is quite imperative for organisations that fall under this sector to highly prioritize the provision of goods and/or services of esteemed "quality" all the time so as to maximise profits. First impressions are critical in ensuring customer satisfaction. However, due to the heterogeneous nature of services, service delivery varies across people, time and place, making it very difficult to deliver good service consistency. Quality means something different to everyone (Pike, 2009) and can be viewed as either subjective or objective (Ferrel and Michael, 2011). Subjective quality is the customers' perceived conformity of the working result with the expected benefit. Objective quality is the concrete measurable conformity of the working result with a previously defined benefit. Kapiki (2012) believes that quality in the tourism and hospitality industry involves consistent delivery of products and guests service according to expected standards. Standards are defined, "as a level of quality or achievement, especially one that most people think is normal or acceptable" (Heinemann Macmillan English Dictionary, 2006, p711). These so called standards are mostly a result of agreements amongst various stakeholders whose aim is to ensure that products and/or services of equal characteristics are provided to different customers. The major aim of using standards in various service organisations is to do away with the heterogeneous nature of services. One organisation which helps in the standardisation of goods and services is the International Standards Organisation (I.S.O.).

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I.S.O international standards ensure that the products and services are safe, reliable and of good quality (I.S.O 2012). Since 1987 I.S.O. international standards have been adopted in virtually all industrial sectors in pursuit of excellence and competitive advantages (Al Madi, 2005). However, even though it has almost been three decades since the inception of these standards world over, the intensity of uptake across different nations and different industrial sectors has not been uniform.

Background of the Study

According to Ferrel and Michael (2011), quality management has an ever increasing importance in the business world today and standards are one of the most popular methods adopted by organizations in this regard. Due to the importance of quality in the hotel sector, Gregoire (2010) believes that subjects such as Total Quality Management (TQM), Quality Assurance and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) have been used and adopted in so many dimensions with a view of ensuring that the end user is provided with a good/service that meets his/her needs and wants. Many avenues have also been taken to ensure that quality service is being provided. These include use of process improvement tools such as benchmarking, which entails comparing one's performance with those believed to be the best in class, and flowcharts, which are graphical representation of steps in a process (Gregoire, 2010).

As more emphasis is being continuously placed on the issue of quality, more concrete and all encompassing routes have now been on an increase in terms of adoption and use. In this sense, the quality of services is now valued on the subjective level, expressed through initiatives such as the hotel certification systems, market recognition, endorsement and I.S.O standards (Briones-Juarez, et al. 2003). Of these, the I.S.O standards are believed to create opportunities for an organization to demonstrate to its partners the viability of its management, as it constitutes a means of penetrating into the structures of the company to achieve greater control (Salomone, 2008). For the fact that I.S.O standards are internationally recognised, many benefits are expected to be accrued from it. According to Park(2007), the ultimate aim of achieving the quality standard is to improve the quality of the products or services, and to make an improvement in the bottom line in relation to competitiveness, productivity, and market share, and in other words, an improvement in business results.

I.S.O. standards are closely related to Total Quality Management (T.Q.M.) that has its roots in Japan. Cotzamani and Tsiotras (2002) stated that ISO standards are originally driven by an external entity. Other scholars consider I.S.O 9000 standards as a possible first step toward a TQM system. In another dimension, the basis for TQM implementation is the establishment of a quality management system which involves the organizational structure, responsibilities, procedures and processes. One of the most frequently used guidelines for quality management systems are the I.S.O 9000 international standards which emphasize the establishment of a well- documented and standardized quality system.

For all the well documented positives that are expected to be derived from being I.S.O certified and its close relationship with the TQM principles, it is anticipated that all organisations should embrace it with ease. According to Yong and Wilkinson (2002), these benefits include helping organisations to enhance quality and efficiency, improve communications, achieve competitive advantage, gain an increase in market share, reduce costs and achieve a higher stock price. However, as if it is a norm, the same paths that TQM took in being adopted by nations and industrial sectors seem to be the one that the I.S.O Standards is also taking. According to Martinez-Lorente and Dale (2007) the route is first from the developed world then to the rest world and from the manufacturing sector to other sectors such as services.

Organisations in the first world countries make the bulk of those with certificates whilst the goods sector has the majority of those certificates. This is evidenced by I.S.O (2012) whose statistics show that the bulk of the top ten spots of countries with most I.S.O certified organisations are held by countries from the developed world. These countries are China, Italy, Japan, Spain, Germany, U.K., India, France, Brazil and Republic of Korea. By the end of 2011, 1 111 698 organizations world over have had been accredited. Of these organisations, 817 631 are being held by the top ten countries with only 93 certificates being held by organisations in Zimbabwe by the end of 2010. Of all the certificates worldwide, only 3 664 certificates are within hotels and restaurants sector. In Zimbabwe only 8 of the over 110 accommodation establishments are

I.S.O. certified (S.A.Z, 2012). These hotels are The Kingdom at Victoria Falls, The Victoria Falls Hotel, Elephant Hills Resort and Hotel, A'Zambezi River Lodge, Rainbow Hotel (Victoria Falls), The Rainbow Towers Hotel (Harare), New Ambassador Hotel (Harare) and Meikles Hotel (Harare). This study therefore sought to establish the reasons why there is such a low uptake of ISO certification in Zimbabwe's hospitality sector.

Statement Of The Problem

There is a low uptake of I.S.O certification in Zimbabwe's hotel sector (S.A.Z, 2012). I.S.O certification scheme is not uniform across different sectors and a few sectors such as construction and manufacturing are dominating (Franceschini et al, 2006). This low uptake of I.S.O certification by the hotel sector is depriving the sector the much publicised benefits that I.S.O certification has on business. These benefits include helping organisations to enhance quality and efficiency, improve communications, achieve competitive advantage, gain an increase in market share, reduce costs and achieve a higher stock price (Yong and Wilkinson, 2002). Using a qualitative research methodology, this study sought to explore hoteliers' perceptions on I.S.O certification. Results from the study are expected to improve the uptake of I.S.O certification scheme by Zimbabwe's hotel sector.

The research was guided by the following objectives:

Main Objective

This study sought to explore hoteliers' perceptions on I.S.O certification in Zimbabwe.

Specific Objectives

The study sought to establish hoteliers' perceptions of I.S.O certification in Zimbabwe's hotel sector, to establish reasons for the low uptake of I.S.O certification in Zimbabwe's hotel sector, and to develop strategies for enhanced adoption of I.S.O certification in Zimbabwe's hotel sector.

2. Literature Review

For purposes of this study, the following literature review puts some key terms and variables into context.

The Hotel and the Hotelier

Johns and Lockwood (2004) postulate that a hotel is an operation that provides accommodation and ancillary services to people away from home. However, Page (2009) believes that a hotel is not simply a premise with rooms, food and beverage services but a business oriented towards a constantly changing clientele. Therefore, in one perspective, a hotel is actually not just an entity that provides accommodation and food but rather a business that makes revenue from selling these to a wide range of customers. Johns and Lockwood (2004) define an hotelier as a person who either owns, runs or occupy a management position within a hotel.

Perceptions

Rao and Narayan (1998) emphasise that perception ranks among the "important cognitive factors of human behaviour" or psychological mechanism that enable people to understand their environment. The importance may be related to that perceptions play an anchoring role in one's attitude towards a given subject. As such, it is imperative for one to be aware of people's perceptions in order to be able to manipulate them to his/her advantage. According to Unumeri (2009) perception is defined as an act of being aware of one's environment through physical or mental sensation which denotes an individual's ability to understand. Unumeri (2009) posit that perceptions are a result of a process known as The Perceptual process. The process is made up of three elements which are input, process and output. Under input, it is believed that for one to develop perception there must be a source of data on a given subject that he/she must receive first. Elements covered under input include information, people, events and objects. Process is referred to as the conversion of inputs into outputs. Output is the end results of the processed input which then shapes the overall

perceptions on a given subject. The elements covered under outputs include behaviour, attitude, action, beliefs and feelings. Figure 2.1 presents these elements. Therefore, it is very critical that standards organisations manage hoteliers' perceptions through providing adequate information to hoteliers.

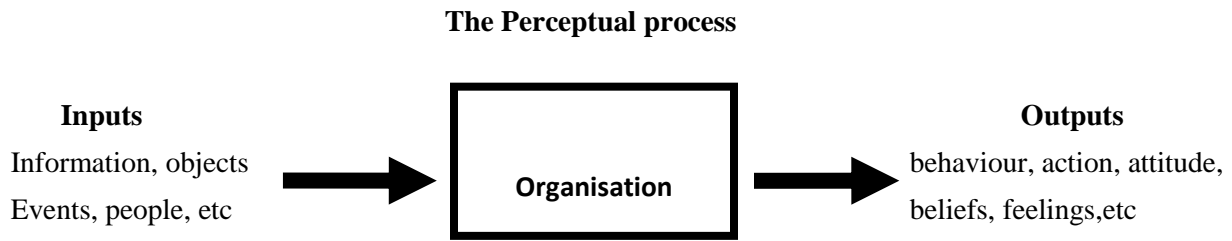


Figure 1: Model of the perceptual process, (Unumeri, 2009)

Quality: Contextual Definition

According to Mak (2010) the term “quality” is often confused with the terms “levels of service” and “standards” that people usually equate “quality” with more services or deluxe service. These sentiments show that people hold differing perceptions on the issue of quality. This is supported by Pike (2009) who propound that the definition of quality means something different to everyone. However, a more general definition of quality has been crafted by I.S.O (2011) through I.S.O 8402 which states that, “quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs”.

Various industrial sectors seem to have crafted definitions peculiar to their lines of operations. Kapiki (2012) articulates that quality in the hospitality industry is defined as the consistent delivery of products and guest services according to expected standards. Furthermore, “in manufacturing quality is a measure of excellence or a state of being free from defects, deficiencies and significant variations” (Bussinessdictionary.com).The actual meaning of quality is derived from the state of the finished product or service that is ready for consumption. However, for the hospitality sector, the manner in which quality is defined also seem to stem from the process in which the end product/service is delivered whilst for the manufacturing sector, the end product is the one on the spotlight.

Importance of Quality in the Hospitality sector

The study of the Strategic Planning Institute of USA (SPI, 1986) found that quality is important in all organisations, including hotels, in many ways. Firstly, product/service quality is believed to be an important determinant of business profitability. This may be attributed to the fact that products of high quality attract much demand from customers that the high sales figures inevitably results in favourable profits for organisations. Secondly, businesses offering premium quality products and services usually enjoy large market shares. This importance of quality lies in the fact that consumers tend to favour products of high quality. As a result, organisations focused on quality tend to attract more customers than their competitors. Quality is also positively and significantly related to a higher return on investment for almost all kinds of products and market situations. The Strategic Planning Institute of USA (SPI, 1986) also postulates that high quality producers can usually charge a premium price because once demand is improved due to improved quality; organisations are forced to raise the prices as a means of managing it.

Total Quality Management As A Traditional Tool For Formal Quality Management

Lopa and Marecki (1999) assert that it is of crucial importance for tourism businesses to implement formal quality management programs in order to provide customers with consistent products. In this regard, Total Quality Management (TQM) is one of the well-known quality management program world over. TQM can be defined as holistic management philosophy aimed at continuous improvement in all functions of an organization to deliver goods and services in line with customers' needs or requirements (Demirbaget al, 2006). This definition shows that TQM is aimed at ensuring totality in the features of the good and/or service

being produced by a given organisation for consumer satisfaction to be ensured. According to Srinivasuet al (2010),TQM takes into cognisance all stratum of an entity’s management, inclusive of human resources management, leadership, policy and strategy formation, management of processes and material resources management. It also reflects enterprise results and the satisfaction of interested parties such as employees, consumers and society.

Feigenbaum (1991) cited in Srinivasu (2010) illustrates that Total Quality Management is the consequent further development of Statistical Process Control and Total Quality Control. From this, it is evidenced that TQM is an end product of the evolution of other quality management programs over a century long period. Feigenbaum (1991) further defines TQM as both a philosophy and a set of guiding principles that represent the foundation of a continuously improving organization. Furthermore, the tool makes use of quantitative methods and participation of people to improve all the processes within an organization and to exceed customer needs.

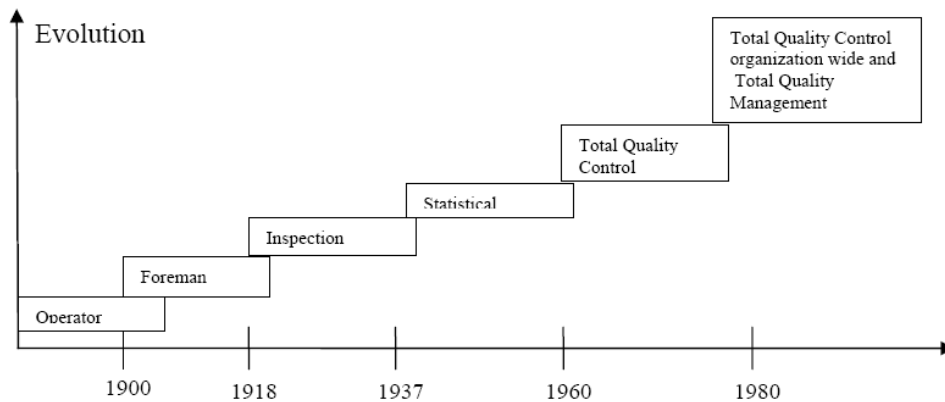


Figure 2: Historical evolution of quality methods (Feigenbaum, 1991)

According to Schuurman (1997) the advantages of TQM include that it is a viable way of cutting costs, increasing productivity and improving quality. Furthermore, TQM organizations develop a wide range of indicators to measure and improve their performance with regard to the above parameters. Standardized methodologies that define TQM evaluation criteria include regional or national schemes such as the Deming Award in Japan, Malcolm Baldrige Award in the United States and The I.S.O certification scheme world over. From this, it can be seen that the mentioned methodologies are tools that organisations adopt in their quest to become TQM organisations. According to Demirbag et al., (2006), the main objectives of TQM are linked to customer satisfaction and continuous improvement, pivotal elements for favourable organisational results. Customer satisfaction is important because in free market economies, customers are the prime reason why any productive processes by virtually all organisations exist. However, Schuurman (1997) believes that as the organization's environment changes continuously, consumer satisfaction and profitability can only be maintained if products, processes and human resources are continuously improved.

I.S.O Certification

Background Information of I.S.O certification

Franceschini (2002) posit that I.S.O 9000 family standards specify organization requirements for giving a “formal evidence” of the capability to organize resources and processes with respect to regulation, prescriptions and customer requirements. In this regard, the aim of I.S.O certification is to ensure stakeholders’ satisfaction. These sentiments are supported by I.S.O (2005) who asserts that I.S.O 9000 is concerned with the steps taken by organizations to fulfil customers’ quality requirements, applicable regulatory requirements, while aiming to enhance customer satisfaction and to achieve continual improvement of its performance in pursuit of these objectives.

According to West et al (2000) The International Organization for Standardization (I.S.O) was created in Geneva in 1947 to provide standardization of technical specifications for products traded in the international marketplace. Boulter and Bendell (2002) posit that the I.S.O 9000 series originated from the military procurement standards developed during the Second World War, ultimately leading to the publication of the first commercial quality management standards, the BS 5750 by the British Standards Institute in 1979 which were later on converted to I.S.O standards.

According to Sousa-Poza et al. (2009), the first family of standards was issued in 1987 and they apply to Quality Management Systems in any organisation which is the I.S.O 9000 family. I.S.O 9000 and I.S.O 9004 are guidelines which pertain to the development of quality systems within the organization. I.S.O 9001, 9002, and 9003 are conformance standards for quality assurance systems that apply to supplier-customer relationships. These last three standards are generally referred to as contractual standards. The adoption of each standard heavily relies on the range of activities of the organization undertake. From another perspective, the 1987 standards were intended for quality assurance; that is, it was more a means of verifying conformance with procedures rather than the overall management process (Viadinet al 2006). However, it is worthwhile to note that the I.S.O 9000 standard certification is not there to assess the quality of the product or service of organisations but rather establish the need to procedurise and to formalize company tasks with the objective of producing products and/or services that meet customer specifications. This is according to Romano and Vinelli, (2001) who believe that I.S.O certification is not focused on the intrinsic product/service quality, but on the related processes, enlarging their action to the entire network of interactions in which the organization is acting.

Following considerable deliberations, the standards of 1987 were revised in 1994 and then in 2000. Since then, implementation of I.S.O 9000 has been associated with a certification process that includes both the third-party assessment and periodic audit to ensure compliance with actual practices together with documentation (Calisir, 2007). As a result, the certificate can now be regarded as an indication of a commitment to quality, and it is suggested to facilitate exchanges among different firms and countries (Benezech et al., 2001). This new family of standards brought new concepts such as: quality management system instead of quality assurance, focus on customer satisfaction through the application of a quality management system based on the process approach and the necessity of continuous improvement. This set of standards highlights the role and commitment of top management in the implementation of the standards.

The relationship between I.S.O certification and TQM

Sila and Ebrahimpour (2002) point out that research on the relationship between I.S.O 9000 and TQM is relatively new. As a result, there is a view that standards may offer a very good first step towards TQM. Gagnazzo et al (2010) propound that among all the methodologies, I.S.O 9000 certification is one of the most common and recognized approaches adopted by companies that decide to implement TQM. These sentiments are in line with Sun et al (2004) who postulate that recent researches characterize the I.S.O 9000 standards as a tool for facilitating and implementing the adoption of TQM, but not as a necessary precondition or as the signal of a natural migration towards its implementation. Therefore, it can be deduced that I.S.O certification is a step taken by organisation towards the ambition of becoming a TQM organisation. This assertion is based on the fact that I.S.O certification deals with the procedures taken to produce a product which is the underlying principle of TQM. This is supported by Al-Madi (2005) who propound that it is suggested that companies can achieve I.S.O 9000 first to create stability and consistency in the organisation's work; then they can implement TQM in order to enhance employee motivation and operational efficiency.

Cotzamani and Tsiotras(2001) assert that the relation between I.S.O 9000 certification to TQM can be easily found in many aspects of the new standards. Basic concepts such as customer centrality and satisfaction, continuous improvement, employee involvement, process- organization-results integration, customers-suppliers-competitors connection, which represent the basis of TQM, have been assimilated and emphasized in the new I.S.O 9000 architecture. From this, it can be evidenced that both TQM and I.S.O do not focus on a specific area but rather takes cognisance of all the people and processes involved in the act of coming up with a good and/or services from the inception of an idea up to the final product that is ready for

consumption. McAdam and Jackson (2002) suggest that I.S.O 9000 and TQM standards complement each other if properly implemented. The authors explained that TQM is considered to be best implemented within the controlled environment/quality assurance environment of I.S.O 9000.

Differing views on I.S.O certification in the hospitality industry

According to Tari' et al (2009), the debate in the literature on the effects of quality certification, the importance of quality for the hotel industry, and hemorescarce literature on this is sue in the hotel industry, suggest that it is necessary to analyse the relationship of quality certification on firm performance einthe hotel industry. Also, Lamportet al (2010) propound that despite the great evidence about the benefits of I.S.O 9000 it is still debatable as to whether or not the standards improve business performance and profitability. The debate seems to be emanating from the subjective nature of the scheme since the end results can not be generalised. This is due to a number of reasons chief among them the dynamic and different nature of operating environments that certified organisations fall in.

Tariet al (2009) and Lamportet al (2010) also mention that most studies have examined the impact of I.S.O standards based on self-rated measures such as customer satisfaction, productivity and product quality. Even though these examinations are ground breakers in establishing the impact the standards on organisations, generalising the results to suite all organisations is a biased exercise since the results are generic to a specific entity. Because of this, there is a perception that the I.S.O standard is not suitable for tourism businesses (Augustyn and Pheby, 2000). As a result, many organisations are increasingly questioning the positive relationship between I.S.O 9000 and performance of organization as there is no clear systematic evidence of benefits in terms of business performance and too heavy reliance on people's and assessors' interpretation of quality. However, some studies have foundthatI.S.O 9001 certification may have some positive impact on performance(Sharma,2005), while other studies have shown that I.S.O 9001certified firms did not out perform those without such a certification(Martínez-Costa and Martínez-Lorente,2007).Although these results are inconclusive, ingeneral,the literature has suggested that the I.S.O 9001 standard may have a positive impact on performance(Casadesús and Karapetrovic,2005).

According to Tari' et al (2009), one of the major reasons that has kindled such a greatdebate is that each country set sits own quality standards, which lead stoheterogeneity in tourism quality certifications worldwide.This is a source of confusion for tourists and hoteliersregarding the characteristics of such standards. However, these sentiments are subject to scrutiny since the I.S.O certification is made up of a number of member countries, Zimbabwe included, which are very vocal in crafting standards. These standards are then expected to be uniformly and voluntarily applied by organisations world over. Regardless of this, Park(2007) articulates that the impacts of and effects of I.S.O9001 :2000 certification appear to vary from country to country and from organization to organization.This could be dueto either the presence of factors which affect the implementation effectiveness of the standard or mediator effect in which the outcome of the certification system depends solely on the individual or group responsible for the process.Research done to study these factorsis veryl imited,and it is of significant value as the number of organization sreceiving certification is on the rise,according to the I.S.O survey results published in 2011.

The process of getting I.S.O certified – TheSix step certification process

Watson Business Systems Limited (2012) propound that for any organisation to become I.S.O certified, it must go through the six step certification process. These steps are questionnaire, application, initial visit, assessmentprocess, certification award and the surveillance visit process. These steps are presented in the figure 3 below.According to Watson Business Systems Limited (2012), the steps are generic and may vary from Certification Body to Certification Body. Because of these sentiments, the following sections are to give a general overview of these steps basing on the works of the mentioned author.

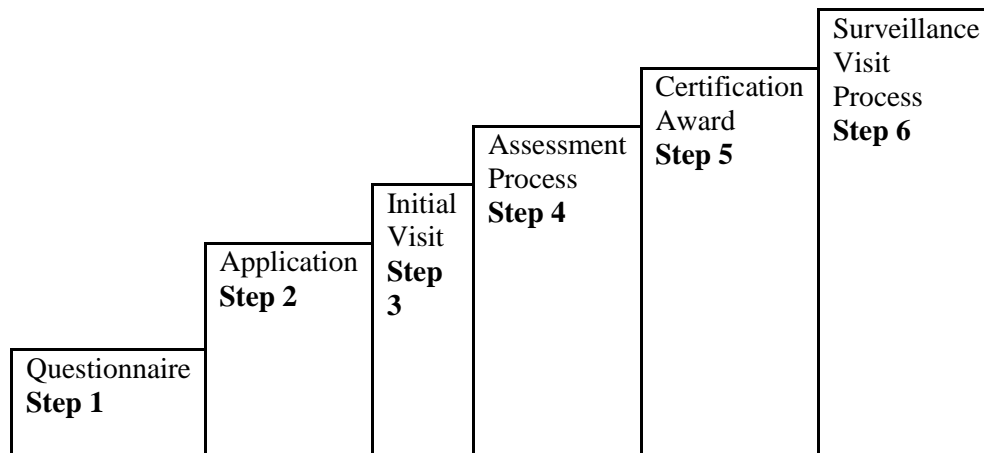


Figure 3: The process of ISO certification (Watson Business Systems Limited 2012)

Perceived benefits of I.S.O certification

In general, there are various reasons that “push” an organisation in the direction of quality certification, both exogenous and endogenous. Sometimes, certification is explicitly required by customers whilst in other cases it is necessary in order to concur as a contractor in national or international tenders (Franceschini et al, 2003). However, one of the main reasons why organisations have been seen to favour I.S.O certification is in internal and external benefits associated with it. According to Llachet et al (2010) internal benefits are related with the goal of achieving organisational improvement, while external ones are mainly related with promotional and marketing issues, customer pressures, and improvement of market share. External benefits of I.S.O certification include international trade, benefits from suppliers and benefits on customers. Internal benefits of I.S.O certification include improvements on the quality system, improvements on the quality of product or service, improved financial performances, and improved human resources/organizational climate.

Mak (2010) believes that the reasons why companies in service and the manufacturing sectors have sought I.S.O 9000 certification has been widely researched on and the findings show the driving force is within the benefits achieved after accreditation. While differences between manufacturing and service organisations are well recognised, the contingent issues related to the universal applicability of management innovations such as I.S.O 9000 certification remains significantly under-researched. Relating this to the issue of the aforementioned benefits, it becomes an area of interest to establish the benefits of I.S.O within the services sector in general and the hotels sector in particular since most of them were derived from the manufacturing sector. Tariet et al (2012) assert that no studies scrutinize the link between motives and performance and quality tools in the context of the hotel industry that the benefits of I.S.O certification are not clearly known. The same authors also state that the literature is unclear about the way in which internal and external drivers may impact differently on benefits and quality elements in the hotel industry. In another dimension, while many businesses have benefited both operational and business performance, many others have indicated that while implementing the I.S.O 9000 standards led to improved operational performance, it did not give rise to better business performance (Chikukuet et al, 2012). It is against this view that the study sought to study explore the applicability and functionality of I.S.O certification on hotel businesses in Zimbabwe.

Barriers of getting I.S.O certified

Al-Najjar and Jawad (2012) posit that I.S.O 9000 certification also has barriers that affect its smooth implementations in various organisations. There are three types of obstacles and these include lack of commitment by some certifying bodies, excessive competition between certifying bodies; and offering of a total packaged service from consultancy to certification by certifying bodies. These impediments seem to be exogenous in nature meaning that little can be done from the side of the company that needs to be I.S.O certified. However, Zeng et al (2007) believe that there are five main barriers that emanate from the

company's side. These include short-sighted goal for getting certified, over-expectation on I.S.O standard, mandatory requirement (not wholehearted commitment) in some industries, following others (the trend) in certification and lack of necessary guidance for certification

Cotzamani (2005) proposes that the major barrier to ISO certification is the need to change culture. This is when an organisation is required to change its traditional ways of doing things in order to meet the requirements of I.S.O. This change may be met with resistance by employees as they fear that the new system will result in them being retrenched resulting in the certification process not being smooth. The other barrier is the adaptation of "paper certificates". By this, it is implied that organisations will only get certified just to be recognised in the market without really "walking the talk" in matching I.S.O standards and requirements. Unrealistic requirements and ritualistic implementation is also one of the barriers unearthed. By unrealistic requirements, it is implied that some of the pre-requisites of I.S.O certification are hard to meet and this tend to detract organisations from getting certified. One such unrealistic requirement is documentation of all production processes of an organisation. According to Novak (2012), the greatest reason why companies fail their I.S.O audit is the document control problems. The other barrier of I.S.O certification propounded by Cotzamani (2005) is lack of necessary guidance for certification.

Strategies to improve uptake of I.S.O certification

Zeng et al (2007) carried out a survey with regards to strategies of how to improve the uptake of I.S.O certification. In the survey, companies were asked to propose measures for improving the audit effectiveness in I.S.O 9001 certification. The results indicated that 60 percent of respondents proposed "strengthening Government's supervision and control" as the major measure required. This can be very helpful in solving the quest at hand since Government has an upper hand when it comes to policy formulation since it possesses the power of enforcement.

Related to the above remedy is "establishing proper legal framework," which was chosen by 21 percent of the respondents in the study. This aspect is of paramount importance since it enforces organisations to embrace I.S.O certification failure of which results in punishment. From one perspective, this remedy is seen as an arm twist which gives the organisations no room to deliberate on whether to get certified or not but to just comply.

Schuurman (1997) propound that dissemination of information as well as enterprise support for I.S.O 9000 implementation and certification can be useful as strategies to bolster the uptake of I.S.O certification by organization. In information dissemination, it is hoped that once players get to know all the aspects surrounding I.S.O certification, their decision making on the scheme will be made easy. In enterprise support, focus will be on making sure that enough assistance, be it material or advisory, is availed to organizations seeking I.S.O certification. This then reduces the burden on the strained resources of organization hence make the certification process easy a task.

3. Research Methodology

An interpretive philosophy was adopted for this study to explore the perceptions that hoteliers have in relation to I.S.O certification. A qualitative research design, which is defined by Rajendar (2008) as a research methodology that has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as participants feel it or love it, was adopted. A self-administered questionnaire was adopted as the main technique for data collection. A judgemental sample (from non-probability sampling) was selected for the study as quality experts were needed for this study. The sample was from a population made up of all individuals who occupy management positions in the twelve 2 to 5-star rated hotels in the C.B.D of Harare. Six hotels were conveniently chosen to be part of the sample. Nine people were part of the population at each hotel. The departments were this population came from are front office, food and beverage, maintenance, Quality Control, Sales and Marketing, Housekeeping and Guest relations with the other two being the General Manager and his/her deputy. A judgemental sample of 54 cases was subsequently chosen. The total was made up of nine managers from each of the six hotels at which the study was carried out. Data for the

research was collected from the 12th to the 19th of April 2013 in Harare at the six hotels. Thematic/deductive data analysis was chosen for this study as the researchers had to group various responses according to their meaning to come up with themes. Data was presented in the form of tables and graphs.

4. Analysis, Presentation and Discussion of Findings

A 66.6% response rate was achieved for this study. Of the total respondents, 52.8% were male whilst 47.2% were female. Of these, 22.2% were from the front office departments, 33.3% from food and beverage, 13.9% from guest relations, 11.1% from quality management, 11.1% from sales and marketing, and 8.4% were from management. 50% respondents had University Degrees, 47.2% have diplomas with only 2.8% of the respondents having Ordinary level as their highest level of education. 41.7% of the respondents had been at their hotels for 5-9 years with 27.8% having been there for 0-4 years. 16.7% of the respondents had been at their hotels for over 15 years whilst 13.9% had 10-14 years experience. 5.6% of the respondents were in the age range of 18-24, 29.1% in 25-29, 27.2% in 30-34, 23.2% in 40-44 and 14.9% in 45+.

Hoteliers’ Perceptions of I.S.O Certification

All the respondents were able to define quality in their own way as represented in figure 4 below. The understanding of quality as portrayed by the respondents seem to agree with Kapiki’s (2012) definition of quality in the hospitality industry which is the consistent delivery of products and guest services according to expected standards. The findings seem to suggest that there is widespread understanding of the aspect of quality in the hotel sector in Zimbabwe. With this understanding of quality, different hoteliers expressed different ways in which they ensure that quality is delivered. 28% of the respondents stated that they use standard operating procedures (SOPs), 25.6% of the respondents stated they make use of guest feedback whilst 16.3% said that they have adopted two way communications to aide in the provision of quality services. 14% of the respondents highlighted that employee training ensures quality service is delivered whilst 9.2% of the respondents stated that they use internal quality audits to aide in the provision of quality products. 2.3% of the respondent raised the issue of customers’ involvement whilst 4.6% respondents stated that continuous improvement is another tool to ensure quality service is delivered to customers.

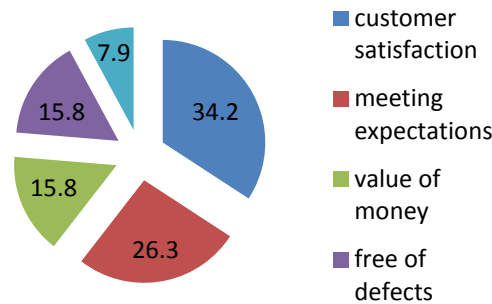


Figure 4: Hoteliers understanding of quality

These responses seem to agree with Gregoire (2010) who posit that quality can be delivered through a wide range of quality assurance programs. These programs include TQM, continuous improvement, and S.O.Ps and customer feedback. They are believed to have been adopted in so many dimensions with a view of ensuring that the end user is provided with a good and service that meet his/her needs and wants. The dominance of using S.O.Ps in ensuring quality service delivery seems to agree with Levintual and March’s (1995) sentiments as cited in De Trevilet al (2012) that in some business and service environs, the values of S.O.Ps are highly acknowledged because it is claimed to have the role of minimizing errors that may occur.

94.4% of the study participants were of the view that I.S.O certification is applicable to the Zimbabwe’s hotel sector. Five main themes are derived from the various responses that were given. These include the

issue that the tool has been successfully used in other industrial sectors implying that it can also be easily adopted in the services sector (27.8% of the participants), the fact that I.S.O certification is a tool for internationalizing the hotel business (8.3% of the participants) and that standards are universal thus they apply equally in each and every country (36.1% of the participants). The other two areas of concern are that I.S.O certification promotes the provision of quality products all time round which is a basic necessity of the hospitality sector (19.4% of the respondents) and that the scheme is a voluntary one (2.8% of the respondents). On the other hand, 5.6% of the respondents felt that I.S.O certification is not applicable in Zimbabwe's hospitality sector. The reason for this proposition was that I.S.O certification is perceived to be only applicable to huge establishments. The responses to this question seem to disagree with Augustyn and Pheby (2000) who posit that there is a perception that the I.S.O standard is not suitable for tourism businesses. Generally, respondents felt that I.S.O standards are good as stated by one respondent who said that the standards are very as they "look at operational procedures that are in place and encourage quality audits of such hence standards are upheld."

75% of the participants agree with the notion that I.S.O certification is functional in Zimbabwe's hotel sector. The areas raised in relation to this issue include that of improved business for organisations that are already certified (27.7% of the respondents) and that standards help in the improvement of service delivery (13.9% of the respondents). Some of the points also highlighted are that the standards are generalized to meet the needs of the end user thus making them functional whenever and wherever they are applied (5.6% of the respondents) and that standards are a stepping stone towards T.Q.M which is believed to be an aim of many organisations, hotels included (13.9% of the respondents). The other 13.9% respondents did not support why they think I.S.O certification is functional in Zimbabwe. In another dimension, 25% respondents do not think that I.S.O certification is functional in Zimbabwe's hotel sector. Lack of information on the scheme (11.1% respondents) technological and economical problems (5.6% respondent) and the fact that standards can not be uniformly applied to different organisations (8.3% respondents) are some of the issues contributing towards the fact that I.S.O certification is not functional in Zimbabwe's hotel sector.

The findings show that the functionality of the certification scheme is highly acknowledged in Zimbabwean hotels. This supports the view that I.S.O certification is widely accepted as a minimum standard for a quality system for organizations across the globe (Tsimet al, 2001). The basis behind this assertion is in the notion that even respondents from uncertified (25%) hotels felt that the scheme is functional in Zimbabwe. This seem to suggest that it is not a matter of being certified that individuals support the functionality of I.S.O in Zimbabwe, but rather it can be attributed to a number of factors. These factors include that some of the respondents from the uncertified hotels judge the functionality of I.S.O by the perception that competitor hotels that are certified enjoy brisk business.

Benefits of I.S.O Certification

The study discovered that benefits of I.S.O certification include:

Increased customer satisfaction and retention

The majority of the respondents believe that being an I.S.O certified organisation is a huge step towards customer certification and retention. 38.9% of the respondents agreed with the notion whilst 44.4% strongly agreed. The results are shown in the diagram below.

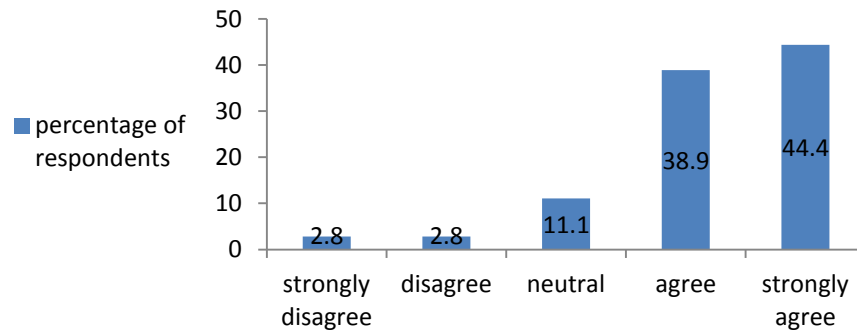


Figure 5: Customer satisfaction and retention through I.S.O certification

Raisinghaniet al (2005) believe that implementation of the I.S.O 9000, defined as a set of quality standards that are determined as being necessary for manufacturers and service organizations to be effective competitors, can be used by management of the companies to improve performance and higher quality output thus ensuring customer satisfaction. The findings of this research seem to agree with this author. In this regard, it can be ascertained that there is a strong belief that I.S.O certification leads to customer satisfaction by hoteliers in Zimbabwe. This view can be attributed to the fact that hoteliers are very much acquainted of S.O.Ps' role in ensuring quality service delivery that the international stature of I.S.O certification is expected to have a great influence in customer satisfaction and retention. However, the findings seem to disagree with Corbett et al (2002) who say that I.S.O 9000 certification is likely to have a relatively minimal effect on end consumers because the standard is more concerned with consistency of output than with the quality of an individual unit of product. This is because some respondents from certified hotels, in answering some of the questions, implored that since they had their organisations certified; complaints from guests have been greatly reduced whilst customer feedback has been favourable. These sentiments are in sync with the findings of this question where 38.9% of the guests agreed and 44.4% strongly agreed that I.S.O certification has a positive impact customer satisfaction and retention.

Efficient and effective operations

58.3% of the respondents agree with the assertion that once a hotel becomes I.S.O certified, their operation becomes efficient and effective. Still on the same issue, 33.3% respondents strongly agree. However, 5.6% and 2.8% of the respondents, respectively, strongly disagreed and disagreed with this aspect whilst 2.8% chose to be neutral. These findings validates the sentiments by Llachet al (2010) that I.S.O 9000 certification and audits give companies a chance to periodically update and control their quality systems thereby making their day to day business proficient and successful.

Enhanced marketing

The issue of enhanced marketing was also included as a part of this question. No participant strongly disagreed with this benefit even though 8.3% disagreed. On the other hand, 44.4% of the respondents agreed with the perception that that being I.S.O certified acts as an added advantage in as far as marketing is concerned whilst 33.3% strongly agreed. However, 13.8% of the respondents chose to be neutral on the issue. According to Singelset al (2001), I.S.O registration does not necessarily indicate good or improved product quality, or even comparable levels of product quality among registered companies, and it does not guarantee better quality than other companies and that no upper hand is guaranteed in marketing of the products.

Increased profits

The impact of I.S.O certification on financial matters was also looked at with the emphasis on the issue of increased profits. 33.3% decided to be neutral on the issue whilst 33.3% also agreed that indeed being I.S.O certified has a positive impact on the profit margins. 19.5% strongly agree with this benefit whilst

13.9% disagreed with no participant strongly disagreeing. These statistics are highlighted in the diagram below.

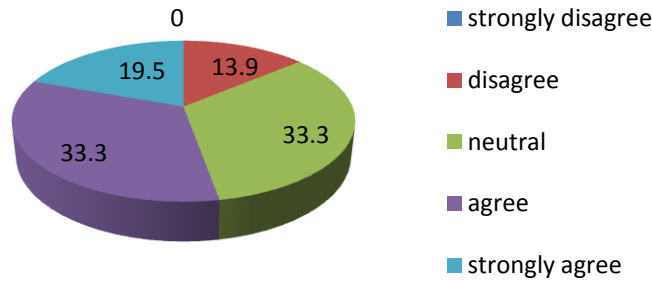


Figure 6: Effect of I.S.O certification on Profits

Casadeus and Jimenez (2000) assert that it is thought that the I.S.O standard allows considerable increase in market share, as well as an increase in the trend of sales of the company. All these impacts on the organisation directly translate into increased profits of an organisation.

Reduced waste

11.1% participants strongly disagreed whilst 16.7% disagreed that I.S.O certification results in reduced waste with 25% deciding to be neutral. On the other hand, 30.6% agreed and 19.4% strongly agreed with the perceived benefit. The finding that 50% of the respondents were for the idea that I.S.O certification results in reduced waste seem to disagree with Terziovski’s (1997) report that certified companies have not experienced lower waste. However, as 25% respondents chose to be neutral on the fact with 26.8% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, it can be deduced that the issue is a debatable one. From one angle, the issue that I.S.O certification is believed to deal with the procedures taken to produce a product and not the product itself implies that it is concerned with coming up with standardized products only without taking consideration of the waste generated. Therefore, the perception that I.S.O certification results in reduced waste generation can be said not to be absolutely in sync with the beliefs of hoteliers.

Increased productivity

Respondents were also given the chance to evaluate the notion that I.S.O certification bears a benefit of increased productivity. 22.2% respondents strongly agree with this perception whilst 27.8% agree. On the other end, 8.3% and 22.2% of the respondents strongly disagree and disagree respectively with the view that being I.S.O certified results in increased productivity. Of the total respondents, 19.5% chose to be neutral. These findings are highlighted in figure 7 below.

These findings seem to disagree with Lamportet al (2010) who propound that despite the great evidence about the benefits of I.S.O 9000 it is still debatable as to whether or not the standards improve business performance and profitability. The reason behind the assertion that I.S.O certification results in increased productivity may be because of the fact that I.S.O fosters for the use of standardized procedures. These provide the employees with detailed outlines of doing their jobs thus doing away with errors. This view is supported by one respondent who said that, “the concept of I.S.O encourages consistency and systematic quality audit programs which in turn is a pillar of increased productivity.

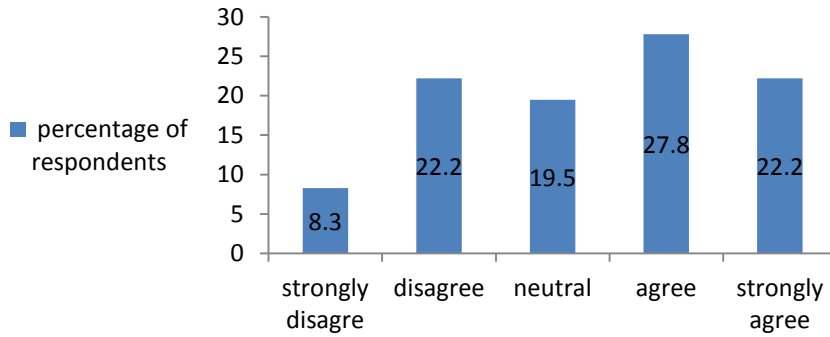


Figure 7: I.S.O certification and productivity

Improved employee motivation

38.9% of the respondents chose neutral as their response to this perceived benefit. 8.3% of the respondents strongly agreed whilst 38.9% agreed. In another dimension, 13.9% respondents disagreed with no one strongly disagreeing. These findings may be because of the views by Santos and Escaliamo (2002) who say that I.S.O certification results in clearer job responsibility and trainings. This implies that motivation will be guaranteed since training of employees makes them feel that they are important to the organisation.

Improved international business

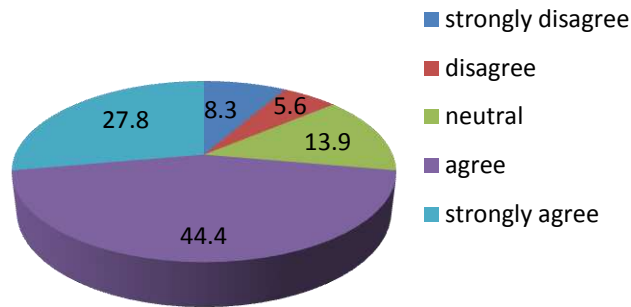


Figure 8: I.S.O certification and improved International Business

Figure 8 above highlights the statistics of how various participants view the assertion that I.S.O certification has a benefit of improving international business. 27.8% strongly agree whilst 44.4% agree with the notion that I.S.O certification results in increased international business. On the other hand, 8.3 % strongly disagree and 5.6% disagree. The findings show that hoteliers in Zimbabwe perceive I.S.O certification as being an important tool when it comes to infiltrating international markets. This view is supported by one respondent who said that, “that I.S.O certification helps in improving international business because our hotel has won tenders by International Non-Governmental Organisations (N.G.Os) to provide accommodation and food services on the basis that we are certified.”

Reasons for Low Uptake of I.S.O Certification in Zimbabwean Hotels

The study discovered the following as reasons for low up-take of I.S.O certification in Zimbabwean hotels:

Challenges faced by certified hotels during the process of certification.

Financial constraints (42.9%), lack of adequate human resources (23.8%), general staff resentment of the certification scheme (9.5%) and the process of being registered being cumbersome (23.8%) are some of the reasons cited as being challenges faced by the by hotels when had their respective hotels certified.

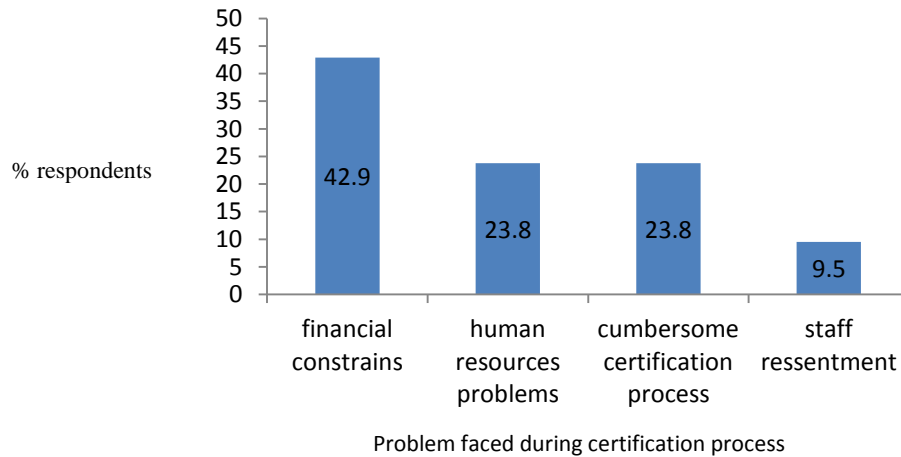


Figure 9: Challenges faced by hotels during the certification process

Factors hindering hotels from getting I.S.O certified

Areas of interest raised in this section include use of generic quality management systems (26.3%), operating procedures not internationally streamlined (15.8%) and lack of knowledge pertaining to the certification scheme (21.1%) as factors hindering hotels from getting I.S.O certified. In another dimension, lack of persuasion by the certifying bodies (5.3%), time consuming (10.5%) and high financial costs (10.5%) are some of the issues raised. The chart below presents the findings. The other 10.5% of the respondents did not provide any response.

The findings support views by Bhat and Rajashekhar (2009) that the potential barriers to quality programs implementation mainly emanate from deep rooted organisational culture that resistance to change is inevitable. This is because of the finding that 31.3% of the respondents, which represents the most significant portion, felt that the quality management systems they are currently using are the ones deterring them from certifying their hotels. This shows that these hoteliers have so much trust in their internal S.O.Ps that shifting to I.S.O is seen to be a breach of organisational culture.

In another dimension, the findings seem to contradict with Souza-Poza et al (2009) who propound that inadequate technical knowledge on quality management is a main area of concern when it comes to issues with I.S.O certification. This is because generic quality management system occupies the pole position of impediments put forth by hoteliers in uncertified hotels with lack of knowledge coming in second. To add on, the assertion can be attributed to various issues. Firstly, all the respondents have managerial posts in departments that have direct contact with the guest such as front office and food and beverage were knowledge in the area of quality of products is a pre-requisite for customer satisfaction and retention. This is according to Akbaba (2005) who says that most hotel managers must be acquainted with an inherent instinct of the understanding of the issues of quality to ensure profitability. Therefore, the issue of inadequate technical knowledge on quality management as a “main” barrier of I.S.O certification is questionable as the managers who are also responsible for policy formulation and decision making actually have the knowledge. Secondly, 50% of the respondents have degrees and 47% have diplomas as academic qualification implying that they, in one way or another, have the knowledge on quality management that it cannot be pointed as a barrier to I.S.O certification.

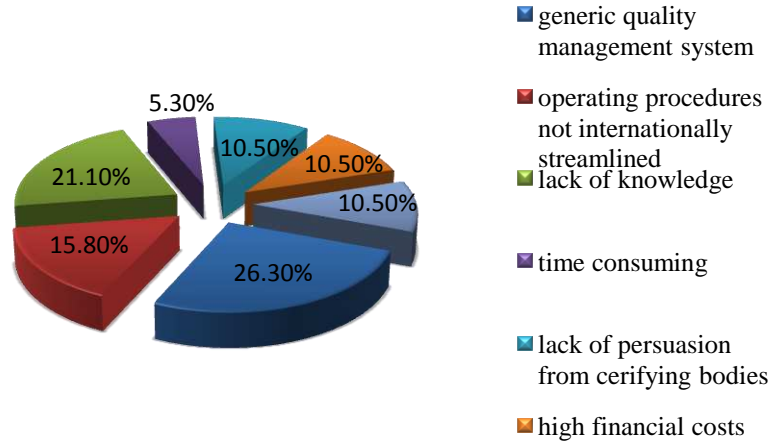


Figure 10: Factors hindering hotels from getting I.S.O certified

Strategies For Enhanced Uptake Of I.S.O Certification

Tax incentives for registered organisations

38.9% of the respondents strongly agree that tax incentives can help increase the adoption of I.S.O certification whilst 36.1% agree. On the other hand, only 2.8% disagree with no respondent strongly disagreeing. However, 22.2% respondents chose to be neutral on the issue. The diagram below presents these findings. The findings seem to contradict with Darnall (2006) who said that economic incentives has little impact on coercing organisations towards embracing quality programs. This is because 75% of the respondents concurred with the assertion that tax incentives for registered organisation can be adopted as a strategy to enhance the uptake of I.S.O certification. From one perspective, the high articulation that tax incentives can be adopted as a strategy for enhanced uptake of I.S.O certification can be linked to the issue of financial constraints looked at in the earlier sections. This may be because hoteliers will now be seeing I.S.O certification not only as a tool for quality management but also as a cost cutting tool as their tax burden will be greatly reduced due to accreditation.

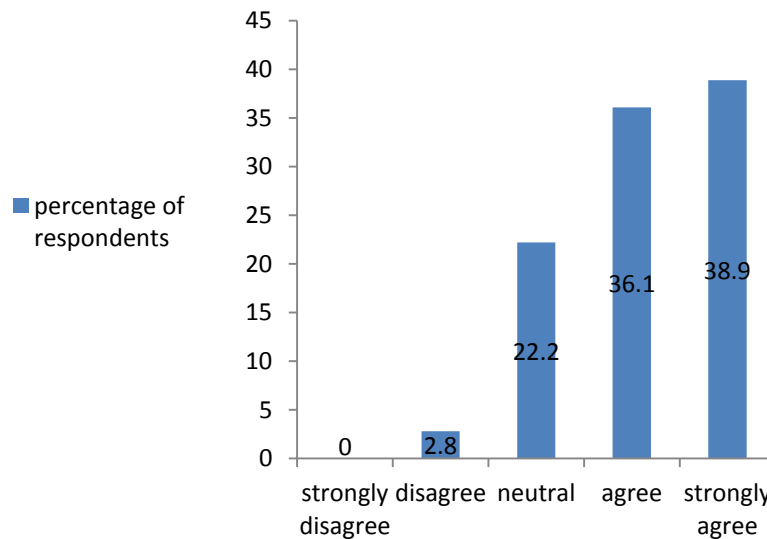


Figure 11: Tax incentive as a strategy to enhance adoption of I.S.O certification

Increased promotions and awareness campaigns by certifying bodies

61.1% of the respondents strongly agreed and 22.2 % agreed that increased promotions and awareness campaigns can be adopted as a strategy for enhanced adoption of I.S.O certification. 11.1% decided to be neutral on the issue whilst 2.8% disagreed and 2.8% strongly disagreed. The dissemination of information has helped to create awareness on I.S.O 9000 and in the process assisting in its implementation (Schuurman 1997). From this assertion, it can be seen that awareness is believed to have a positive impact on the adoption of I.S.O certification. In this regard, the findings of the study concur with the sentiments by Schuurman (1997) as 83.3 % of the respondents believe that I.S.O certification adoption can be increased by enhanced promotion and awareness.

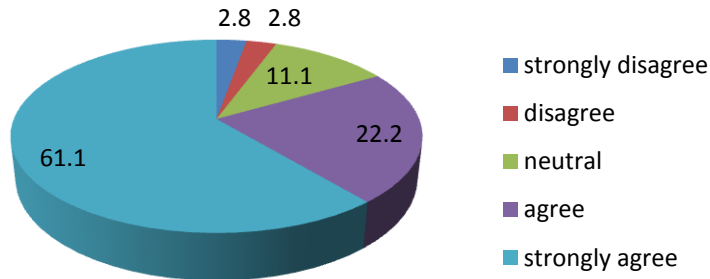


Figure 12: Increased promotion and awareness as a strategy for improved adoption of I.S.O certification.

Government legislation

13.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that Government legislation can be adopted as a strategy for enhanced adoption of I.S.O certification in Zimbabwe whilst 11.1% of the respondents disagreed. On the other hand, 16.7% of the respondents agree whilst 41.7%strongly agreed with the strategy. However, 16.7% chose to be neutral on the issue.

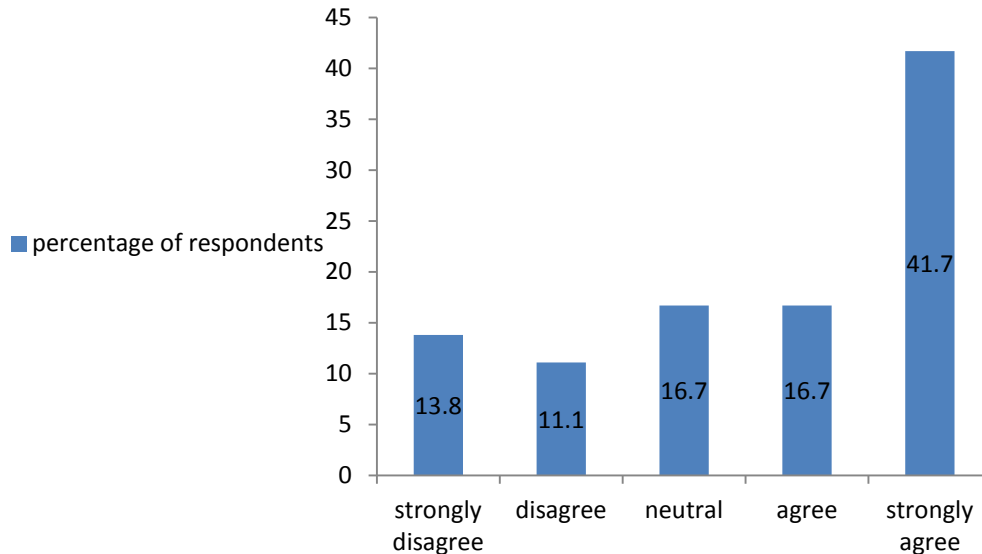


Figure 13: Government legislation as a strategy for enhanced uptake of I.S.O certification

The findings of this study supports views by Darnall (2006) that fear of legal sanction is considered a primary reason why organisations adopt proactive quality or environmental strategies. This is because the majority of the respondents (41.7%) highlighted on the issue that Government legislation can enhance the uptake of I.S.O certification in hotels. The reason behind respondents' affirmation that Government Legislation is a good strategy for enhanced adoption of I.S.O certification may be that inability to adhere to regulatory pressures may result in serious penalties including legal sanctions and costly court proceedings. As a result of this, hotels will be forced to adopt certification as a means of avoiding those penalties.

5. Conclusions

The results of this study seem to suggest that the functionality and applicability of I.S.O certification is highly acknowledged in Zimbabwean hotels. This is because as much as 85% of the respondents acknowledge that the scheme is both applicable and functional. Also, these findings seem to suggest that benefits of I.S.O certification play a very important role in the formation of hoteliers' perceptions towards the certification scheme as hoteliers alluded that they chose to have their establishments certified for reasons such as tapping into the international markets and improving the service delivery process. Moreover, barriers of I.S.O certification seem to vary from hotel to hotel. This is in accordance to the findings which highlight that respondents from both certified and uncertified hotels raised many differing points on this matter chief among them financial constrains, human resource problems and lack of persuasion from certifying bodies. Also, strategies for enhanced uptake of I.S.O certification seem to emanate much three separate entities, that is, the Government, the certifying bodies' themselves and the hotels, who are the consumers of the scheme. For example, the Government is urged to draft legislation, certifying bodies are advised to aggressively market the scheme whilst skills development is believed to be the route for the hotels.

6. Recommendations

Hotels in Zimbabwe should fully embrace I.S.O certification. This is because the findings of the study suggest that I.S.O certification has both internal and external benefits to the business. These benefits include increased market share and improvement in international business since the certification scheme is internationally recognised. Moreover, the study showed that hoteliers believe that tax incentives and government legislation can be adopted as strategies to bolster the uptake of I.S.O certification in the hotel sector. This calls for certifying bodies, such as S.A.Z, to consult the Government for assistance since it is the one that passes legislation through the Parliament.

Furthermore, certifying bodies are advised to engage in aggressive marketing campaigns of I.S.O certification in the hotel sector in Zimbabwe. This is because respondents blamed the lack of information as the reason why they are not having their hotels certified. In these marketing campaigns, success stories for certified organisations should be included since these have been realised to be positively influencing hoteliers' perceptions. Due to the findings that barriers of I.S.O certification are varied, certifying bodies are advised to treat cases individually in order to entertain chances of increasing the uptake rates. Also, for all strategies to work effectively and efficiently towards an increased uptake of I.S.O certification, effective communication should be implemented and a consensus be reached between the hotels, the certifying bodies and the Government.

Lack of human resources, poor commitment by top level management and lack of technical knowledge are some of the problems that hoteliers faced or are facing in having their establishments certified. Because of this, it is recommended that certifying bodies should have annual all-stakeholder meetings on the issue of I.S.O certification. These conferences will be aimed at creating awareness in the participants as well as clarifying on issues to do with the certification scheme.

Areas of Future Research

The study recommends that further research be carried out to establish the role of I.S.O certification on guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry. This is because the main reason behind being certified is to improve service delivery to please guests that it is important to ascertain the role I.S.O certification plays in this regard. Further research can also be conducted on I.S.O certification and competitive advantage.

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