

INITIATING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN ORDER TO IMPROVE SERVICE QUALITY IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY ORGANIZATIONS AT THE BELGIUM COAST

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More and more hospitality and tourism organizations (whether in the commercial or non-commercial sectors) have recognized the importance of providing quality service as a competitive advantage.

In Belgium the Flemish government decided in 2006 to subsidize a project to develop a support program aimed at raising the service quality of hospitality and tourism businesses at the Belgian coast, the vacation destination par excellence in Belgium.

Designing quality into services, involves a planned approach to organizational change. In the literature about quality management, little attention is given to the planned approach to organizational change necessary when implementing a service improving strategy. **The focus of this paper is on this planned change aspect.**

At the University of Ghent we analyzed the literature on service quality management and the different national programs to support the hospitality business to improve their service quality. On the basis of these analyses and by putting the Lewin's three step model and the Gleicher Beckhard and Harris change model together, we arrived at a particularly powerful support program to help hospitality businesses to improve their service quality.

This support program consists of the following components: a service quality check, workshops about service quality, one-to-one business counseling, best practice visits and evaluation with a mystery guest.

The central question in many organizations is: **How do we get started on service-improvement?** It is our experience and that of others that **a service quality check (customer survey and benchmarking) is the most effective way to start** because it makes staff aware of what customers want and do not want and in particular, to highlight the organization's service failings. Moreover, the results of a survey and a benchmark confront all employees of a company with facts they did not know before, e.g. differences between the service expectations expressed by the customers and the supposed expectations of the employees.