



Quality Assurance in Athenian Luxury Hotels

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Abstract

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<p>The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how quality assurance is currently managed in five-star luxury hotels in Athens. The study explores how hotels design and structure their quality assurance systems (standards, procedures, audits, KPIs), how these systems are implemented in daily operations, and how managers perceive their effectiveness, challenges, and impact on consistency.</p> <p>The theoretical framework combines literature on luxury hospitality, quality assurance management, ISO 9001, PDCA, with additional concepts such as CAPA, Lean, and Six Sigma, used to situate hotel practices. The empirical part adopts a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with managers and employees from selected Athenian luxury hotels.</p> <p>The interviews were analyzed thematically and presented around key themes, including staff introduction to quality, overall standards, daily operations, performance indicators, audits, service failures, guest feedback, and competitive advantage.</p> <p>The findings suggest that Athenian luxury hotels use a mix of formal quality management systems, brand standards, and internal procedures, supported by training, KPIs, and audits, but face ongoing challenges related to human factors, change of management, and external pressures such as seasonal staffing, costs, and sustainability.</p> <p>Overall, the thesis argues that quality assurance in this context functions as a strategic, organisation-wide commitment that must be embedded in everyday work, continuously monitored and regularly adapted in order to sustain high service quality and differentiate luxury hotels in an increasingly competitive Athenian market.</p>
Key words Quality, Luxury, Hotels, Hospitality, Athens

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1 Introduction

Hospitality has been a global trend over the decades, from the smallest hotels to the biggest resorts and city hotels. One thing is certain: the competition and the continuous expectation of guests still remain. The luxury hospitality sector is characterized by increasingly sophisticated guest expectations regarding the quality of service. As it continues to evolve, luxury hotels are seeking to differentiate themselves from their competitors and retain market share while also enhancing guests' experience and satisfaction. Older studies have suggested that approximately 60% of luxury hotel guests considered quality assurance to be a critical factor in their overall experience, making quality management not only an operational concern but a fundamental business imperative (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

With Athens counting more than 42 five-star luxury hotels (Tripadvisor 2025), it is clear that the market is seeking luxury travel in the city of Athens. As it is also a major European tourism destination, it presents a unique context for examining quality assurance practices. With little to no research being done on how Athenian luxury hotels specifically implement quality assurance strategies and which theoretical frameworks could prove the most effective.

The primary objective of this thesis is to investigate how quality assurance is currently managed in luxury five-star hotels in Athens and to evaluate and compare the quality management models, frameworks, and practical approaches that are most effective and yield the most positive outcomes.

Usage of AI systems has been implemented in this Thesis. Mainly, Perplexity AI and Grammarly has been used for ideation and structure correction and grammar correction. Interviews were transcribed with Happy scribe and Maestra ai. When ai was used it was mentioned either at the top or at the bottom of the chapter/paragraph. The use of AI has been in accordance with the guidelines of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences.

1.1 Research Problem

This thesis focuses on the quality assurance of luxury Athenian hotels. The main research question is:

- How do Athenian luxury hotels currently design and structure their quality assurance systems (standards, procedures, audits, KPIs)?

The sub-questions of this thesis are:

1. How are these quality assurance systems implemented in everyday operations by managers and front-line employees?

2. How do managers and employees perceive the effectiveness and challenges of existing quality assurance practices?
3. How, Who and What is implemented, monitored, and to what extent do these methods actually ensure consistency?

This thesis has no commissioner. The following information may be useful to hoteliers and further to travelers. Hoteliers can self reflect and understand deeper the meaning and the importance of quality assurance and management and even try new methods. On the other hand, travellers have the opportunity to understand the background and essentially know how important quality is to the experience.

1.2 Scope and choice of the topic

The scope of this thesis is travelers who visit Athens and choose luxury hotels specifically for the quality of services. Nowadays, travelers have a plethora of hotels to choose from, still for many the first choice is luxury hotels. Travelers need to be assured and have confidence whenever they travel, and that is provided to them by luxury hotels, most importantly, the quality of services and the loyalty (usually from brand name companies) attracts their customers.

The author became interested in Quality Assurance after working in three different five star hotels in central Athens. Every day interactions with the guests and fellow employees of each hotel, made her realize that there is base line rules for all luxury hotels but each one has different operations and management of quality. The author was decisive about finding out more information regarding this under-researched topic.

2 Luxury Hotels

In the mid-2020s Luxury Hotels are not shaped by the traditional star rating but more by market performance, guest expectations and strategic investment (Allied Market Research 2025; Coherent Market Insights 2025). As of 2024 the global luxury hotel market was estimated to be around 113 billion USD and is projected to reach approximately 181.5 billion USD by 2034 (Allied Market Research 2025). As the number of high-income travelers has increased notably by 2030, there will be hundreds of millions of new luxury consumers, specifically from fast-growing economies such as Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Luxury Hotel School 2025; Statista 2024). Global hotel outlooks highlight that across Europe and Asia-Pacific there has been increase in luxury and upper-upscale assets that have resulted in rate increase, benefiting from the recovery of international travel and the willingness of affluent guests to pay premium prices for differentiated experiences. (CBRE 2025a; CBRE 2025b).

Guest expectations in luxury hospitality have shifted towards higher levels of personalization and authenticity. Luxury guests nowadays relate luxury to tailor-made, context-aware service rather than standardized luxury hotel experience (Mordor Intelligence 2025). Major international hotel groups such as Marriott, Hilton, Accor, Hyatt and Four Seasons are expanding with new properties across gateway cities and resort destinations making them sustainable (Luxury Hotel School 2025; Coherent Market Insights 2025). According to Bain & Company (2026, 6) the luxury hospitality market grew by 3% at current exchange rates to reach €251 billion.

The content for this chapter 2 was brainstormed using the Perplexity AI. The input used was: 'Generate a paragraph for a thesis about up-to-date facts on Luxury hotels.'

2.1 Definition of Luxury Hotels

Luxury is usually defined as superior quality and exclusivity that transcends the need for basic needs. Luxury is typically associated with high prices, rareness, fine craftsmanship, strong values and name. Luxury in hospitality and services is about designing very personalized and memorable experiences that offer customers comfort and beauty (Glion 2025; EHL 2023).

Hospitality can be defined in terms of the group of commercial organizations that provide accommodation, food & beverage, travel, leisure events and related services that create enjoyable and memorable experiences (César Ritz Colleges 2021; Fiveable 2025).

Luxury hospitality on the one hand has been very well supported as one would be, the accommodation, food, drink, and beverages. Luxury hospitality is said to include a good image and quality of service, premium pricing, luxuries, elegance, special and unique consumer experiences, real value

and close and personal relationships with the staff (Shahid and Paul 2022). Luxury hospitality is not just about “standard” service; it is about an emotionally rich, experiential stay that is price-sensitive and highly personalized (Ko et al. 2019; Correia et al. 2022; Shahid & Paul 2022).

2.2 History of Luxury Hotels

First ever luxury hotels were established in the late 19th century as grand inns and urban “grand hotels” that catered to aristocrats and wealthy travelers in Europe and North America. First brands that appeared were Tremont House in Boston, the Savoy in London and later the globally known Ritz Carlton hotels in Paris and London, these set the new standards for hospitality and the meaning of travel. From comfort to architecture and design, to service (Knoch 2017; Susini 2018) these were the transition points for the transition from the usual functions of a hotel to social hubs for the high class and the elites.

Moving on to the 20th century, luxury hospitality was also expanded worldwide. Firstly, with city grand hotels and resorts, and later through international chains combining high service expectations with modern luxuries such as elevators, air conditioners, private bathrooms and much more.

Moving to the late 20th century and onwards, traditional palace-looking luxury hotels were faced with a new competitor that changed the market, boutique and design hotels. These hotels were focusing on lifestyle, and keeping strong local identity while also technology, wellness and sustainability became the center of the modern luxury hotel experience.

2.3 The current state of Luxury Hotels in Athens

Currently Luxury hotels in Athens are operating strongly in a very competitive environment, characterized by high demand, rising prices and rapid expansion of luxury supply (GTP 2025, Naftemporiki 2025, GBR Consulting 2025). Recent data by GTP and Naftemporiki (2025) show that hotels located in Athens ended 2024 with an average occupancy of 78% (2.3 more than 2023), an ADR (Average Daily Rate is a key performance indicator that measures average room revenue earned per paid occupied room over a specific period. It gets calculated by dividing total rooms revenue by the number of rooms sold.) of 149.26€(+8.9%) and RevPAR(Revenue Per Available Room is another key performance indicator that measures the average rooms revenue generated for each available room over a given period and it is calculated either by dividing the total room revenue by the number of available rooms or by multiplying the hotels ADR by its occupancy) of 116.48€ (+11.4%). Clearly indicating that the main revenue gain is rate growth. In the first five months of 2025, there was evident improvement in performance, with average occupancy increasing by

2.2%, ADR reaching 155.25€ (+4.8%) and RevPAR 111.06€ (+7.1%), compared to the same period in 2024, suggesting that luxury properties in Athens are able to sustain premium (Money Tourism 2025).

The Greek five star segment expanded significantly between 2019 and 2024, with the number of properties being up by 37% and room capacity by 22%, with Athens being one of the most dynamic regions (GBR Consulting 2025).

At the same time according to GBR Consulting(2025), 11 international hotel chains entered the market, bringing the total to 23 chains representing 40 brands, 43% of hotels and 52% of rooms now operate under an international brand, reshaping the competitive set.

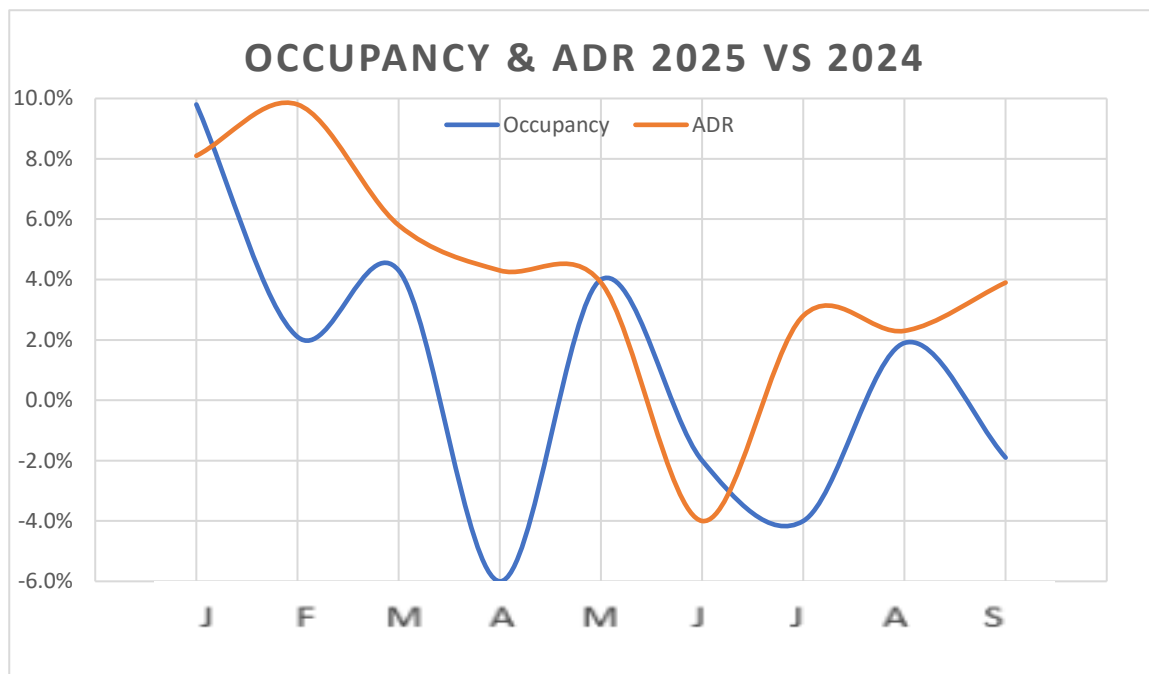


Figure 1. Graph of Occupancy and ADR of periods from 2024 to 2025 (adapted from GBR Consulting, 2025, 3)

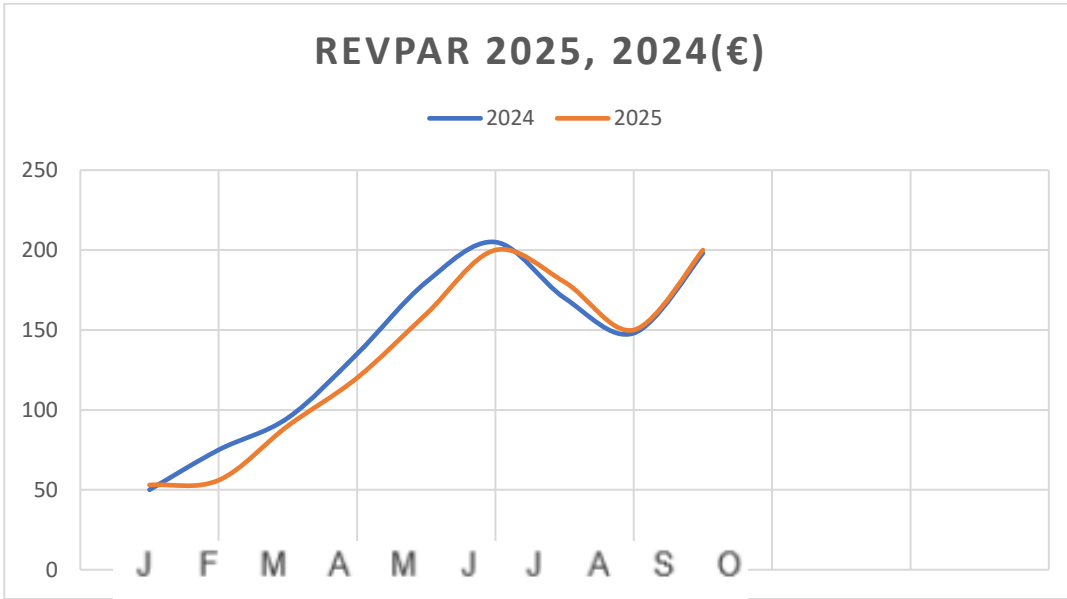


Figure 2. Graph of RevPAR of periods from 2024 to 2025(adapted from GBR Consulting , 2025, 3)

3 Quality Assurance Management

Quality Assurance Management is a commonly known system through various industries, which, through different planned and systematic activities within the quality system, provides confidence that a product or service will fulfill specified quality requirements, prioritizing prevention and process control (ASQ 2025).

Quality management has branches, such as quality planning, quality control, and quality improvement, of the four core functions that ensure output consistently meets customer and regulatory requirements while supporting continuous improvement (SimplerQMS 2025, CollegeHive 2024). Starting with quality planning is the part that focuses on the definition of quality objectives and determining the necessary processes and resources in order to achieve them, so that the products or services meet specified quality requirements (EN ISO 9000:2015; Testify 2023). In reality, it involves deciding which quality standards are relevant, how they will be measured, and how the organization will design and control its operations to meet the expectations of those standards. (PMBOK 2000; QualityOne 2022; Productive 2025). Forward to quality control is the part of quality assurance management that fulfills quality requirements by monitoring and checking processes and outputs to detect flaws or nonconformities and verify that the standards are being met. (EN ISO 9000:2015; ASQ 2025) In practice, the main activities are inspections, tests, measurements, and review of products or services to identify deviations from specified criteria and to decide whether they should be accepted, corrected, or rejected (ETQ 2025; ASQ 2025).

Lastly, quality improvement is a systematic, data-driven effort to enhance the processes, services, or products, and as a result, they better meet customer needs and standards. This happens by identifying problems in current performance and designing, testing, and implementing changes to remove their causes (Simons 2023; Barr 2024; Veeva 2024). This branch does not just monitor the already set standards but always enhances the quality through methods such as Plan-Do-Study-Act-PDCA cycles which is a four-step, iterative method for testing and implementing changes, where teams plan a change, try it on a small scale, study the results and act on what has been learned to drive further improvement (Deming Institute 2023; ASQ 2025).

Lean which is a continuous-improvement philosophy and set of methods that seek to maximize value for customers by eliminating waste, streamlining process flow and engaging employees in constantly improving how work is done (ASQ 2025; PubMed 2022) or

Six Sigma is a disciplined, data-driven approach to quality improvement that uses statistical methods to reduce process variation and defects, with the goal of improving customer satisfaction and

achieving very low defect rates (ASQ 2025; Wikipedia 2026), using measurement and feedback to see whether changes actually lead to better outcomes (Barr 2024; CMS 2024; StatPearls 2023).

In hospitality, quality assurance is usually perceived as the proactive effort to ensure that hotels are consistently prepared to deliver and meet the high expectations they have set (SHMS 2021, NewGen Advisory 2023). These practices aim to meet the expectations and make them a reality.

3.1 Definition of Quality Assurance Management

Quality assurance management can be defined as the part of quality management that provides confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled through systematic, planned, and documented activities built into an organization's processes (ASQ 2025; SimplerQMS 2025). It comprises all the actions implemented within a quality system that can be demonstrated to ensure that products and services meet specified quality standards, emphasizing prevention and process control rather than detecting and correcting problems after the damage has occurred (ASQ 2025). Quality assurance, therefore, provides confidence both internally, to management and employees, and externally, to guests, owners, regulators, and other stakeholders, that operations are designed and executed in a way that consistently delivers the promised level of quality (ASQ 2025).

In practical terms, quality assurance management translates high-level quality objectives into documented procedures, training programs, audits, and monitoring activities that are embedded in day-to-day work (SimplerQMS 2025). It defines how processes should be performed, which records need to be maintained, and how nonconformities and risks are handled, linking assurance closely with improvement initiatives such as corrective and preventive actions (CAPA) and change control (SimplerQMS 2025). CAPA, or Corrective and Preventive Actions, is a key process in quality management systems such as ISO 9001. The definition would be a structured method for identifying root causes of problems and then implementing long-lasting fixes (ComplianceQuest 2023; ISO-certification 2014).

In a service context such as luxury hospitality, quality assurance management provides the structured framework that ensures service design, employee behaviour and back-of-house support processes are aligned with brand standards and guest expectations, so that quality is "built in" rather than inspected in at the end of the process when many mistakes or flaws would be evident.



Figure 3. Corrective Action and Preventive Action (CAPA) (dapted from SimplerQMS 2025)

3.2 How is Quality Assurance Management operated

Quality assurance management is operated through a structured and personalized cycle that transforms quality policies into day to day procedures and operations. First steps are usually planning where the organization defines their standards, procedures and KPI's (Key Performance Indicator is a critical measure that shows how much progress an establishment is making toward a specific strategic goal.), often documented in QMS (Quality Management System is a formalized system that documents an organisations processes and procedures for achieving its quality policies and objectives , helping it consistently meet customer and regulatory requirements and improve its effectiveness and efficiency over time, ASQ 2025; ISO 2024; SimplerQMS 2026) that makes the organization easier with specific roles, responsibilities and process flows (ProjectManager 2025, SimplerQMS 2025).

Afterwards comes the implementation phase which takes the standards that were clearly made and set and infuses them into the operations by training staff, integrating quality checkpoints into workflows and using standard operating procedures in order to be able to make change into day to day operations so that prevention and consistency can be embedded into the work routine (ProjectManagerTemplate 2025, Holistique Training 2025).

Moving on to monitoring and controlling, this phase is carried out through internal inspections, process measurement, quality audits and the systematic collection of customer and employee feedback, helping identify where the problem may occur or just verify that the standards are being met (SimplerQMS 2026; SimplerQMS 2026b).

Finally, quality assurance management is being monitored with tools such as PDCA is a four step method for continuous improvement in which organizations plan a change, implement it on a small scale and check the results against expectations and then act accordingly, root-cause analysis and benchmarking to turn audit findings and feedback into corrective and preventive actions, updating

procedures, retraining staff and refining standards so that service quality evolves in line with guest expectations and regulatory or brand requirements (ProjectManagerTemplate 2025; Holistique Training 2025).

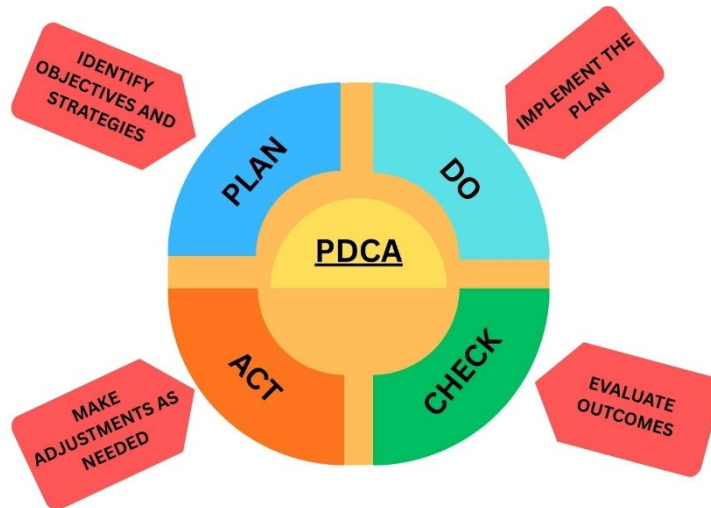


Figure 4. Plan-Do-Check-Act Diagram (adapted from ASQ 2025)

At The Ritz-Carlton, for example, quality policies are embedded in the “Gold Standards,” which define expected behaviors and service steps for every employee and are reinforced through daily briefings and continuous training, ensuring that preventive process control is part of the work routine rather than an occasional initiative (Ritz-Carlton in Orgevo 2024). The chain systematically collects and analyses performance data for hundreds of service indicators, such as check-in time or room cleanliness, enabling managers to compare outcomes with predefined targets and quickly trigger corrective and preventive actions when deviations are observed (Orgevo 2024).

Similar practices can be observed at other leading luxury chains. Four Seasons, for instance, translates its service philosophy into hundreds of detailed operating standards that are regularly evaluated through internal and external quality audits, while rigorous recruitment and training processes ensure that employee behavior consistently reflects the brand’s service expectations (Four Seasons 2025; Goodfellow 2020).

Likewise, Marriott’s luxury brands apply formal quality assurance programs that include periodic brand standard audits, comprehensive compliance checklists, and corrective action plans, with persistent non-conformance potentially leading to the withdrawal of brand affiliation, which creates a strong incentive for hotels to maintain agreed service and quality levels (Bankov 2018; Marriott 2025).

3.3 How is Quality Assurance Management operated in Athenian Luxury Hotels

Quality Assurance Management in Athenian luxury hotels is usually operated through a mix of quality management systems, brand standards, and external evaluation mechanisms that provide the organization with the confidence and the success of consistently delivering expectations. Most upscale and luxury properties in Athens have adopted certified quality management systems such as ISO 9001, which is an internationally recognized standard that specifies requirements for establishing, implementing, maintaining, and continually improving quality management systems, enabling organizations to provide products and services that meet those standards consistently. (ISO 2015; ISO 2024; ASQ 2025)., which consists of documenting procedures, setting measurable quality objectives, monitoring performance indicators, and reviewing the system regularly at the management level, combining staff training and systematic complaint reduction (Royalty Hotel Athens 2023). Following along international luxury hotel practices, many Athenian properties also rely on external benchmarking and mystery guest style quality audits, which assess compliance with brand standards and evaluate the guest journey from start to finish in order to identify the service gaps and training needs (GBR Consulting 2026; PMT Hotels 2024). Another significant system is HACCP, a management system where food safety is addressed through the analysis and control of biological, chemical, and physical hazards from raw material production, procurement and handling, to manufacturing, distribution and consumption of the finished product (FDA, 2022, para. 1). Practically, HACCP requires businesses to conduct hazard analysis and therefore determine critical control points where hazards can be prevented or the least reduced, establish the critical limits, monitor these points and maintain verification and record keeping procedures. (DNV, 2024; Food Standards Agency, 2024).

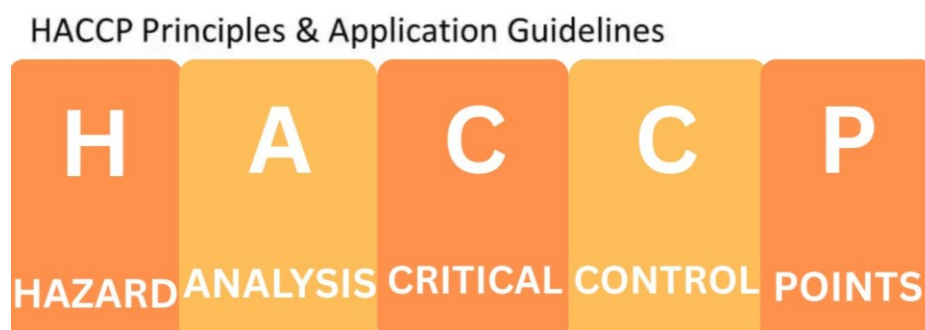


Figure 5. HACCP acronym definition (adapted from FAO 2024)

4 Data and Methods

Research approaches are often divided into quantitative and qualitative according to the type of data collected and the purpose of the study. Quantitative research focuses on numerical measurement, standardized instruments, and statistical analysis in order to test hypotheses and generalize findings from a sample to a wider population. (Bryman 2016; Creswell & Creswell 2018) By contrast, qualitative research relies on non-numerical data such as words, narratives, and observations to explore meanings, experiences, and processes in depth, usually with smaller, purposefully selected samples. (Creswell & Poth 2018; Jennings 2017)

In hospitality and tourism, quantitative methods such as surveys and experiments are often used to measure satisfaction levels, loyalty intentions, and the frequency of specific behaviors among large groups of guests. (Hospitality Institute 2024) Qualitative approaches, including interviews, focus groups, and case studies, are recommended when researchers aim to understand how managers and employees make sense of service quality, organizational practices, or destination development in their specific context. (Creswell & Poth 2018; Jennings 2017)

Because this thesis investigates how quality assurance is conceptualized and operated inside luxury hotels in Athens, with an emphasis on managers' perceptions, examples, and justifications rather than on statistical testing, a qualitative research approach is the most appropriate. It allows the author to obtain rich, contextualized accounts of quality systems, audits, KPIs, and improvement practices that are not visible in public documents or guest reviews. (Creswell & Poth 2018; Hospitality Institute 2024)

The approach of this thesis is qualitative, with emphasis placed on how quality assurance is defined and implemented in the luxury hotels of Athens. Qualitative research is primarily concerned with meanings, perceptions, and processes, which provide in-depth insights from limited but rich sources of data, rather than testing hypotheses from large samples of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hospitality Institute, 2024).

Semi-structured interviews are the primary method of data collection for this thesis, which relies on common themes of predefined questions from the theoretical framework but still allows the interviewees, the managers of these luxury hotels, to provide their own experiences and perspectives.

4.1 Research approach

Within qualitative research, common data-collection methods include interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and document analysis. (Creswell & Poth, 2018) Semi-structured interviews are widely used in tourism and hospitality to investigate managerial practices, service

quality, and guest experience because they combine a predefined set of themes with flexibility in how questions are asked and followed up. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018; Jennings 2017) An interview guide ensures that all key topics linked to the research questions are covered, while open-ended questions and probing allow participants to raise issues that the researcher might not have anticipated. (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

This method was chosen for the present thesis for three main reasons. First, quality assurance systems involve internal standards, audits, and performance indicators that are complex and context-specific; semi-structured interviews enable managers to explain these processes in their own words and provide concrete examples of how they work in practice. Second, the format allows for comparability across hotels because all interviewees are asked about the same core themes, while still leaving room to explore hotel-specific practices or challenges in more depth. Third, semi-structured interviews are appropriate for potentially sensitive topics, such as difficulties in implementing standards or staff resistance, because the conversational style helps build rapport and trust. (Creswell & Poth 2018; Tabari 2020)

In this thesis, the interviewees are treated as expert informants on quality assurance in their hotels, as they hold managerial roles related to operations, quality, guest relations, or brand standards.

The interviews focus on four broad themes aligned with the research questions:

1. planning and documentation of quality (standards, KPIs),
2. Implementation in daily operations (training, supervision, empowerment),
3. monitoring and evaluation (audits, feedback), and
4. continuous improvement (PDCA, corrective and preventive actions, learning from incidents).

Each interview is planned to last approximately 20-25 minutes and will be conducted in person or online, depending on the participant's availability and preference.

4.2 Interview as a Method

Semi-structured interviews are commonly employed in hospitality studies to investigate managerial practices, quality of services, and guest experience, as they are structured and unstructured at the same time. An interview guide is used to ensure all major themes associated with the research questions are discussed, while at the same time allowing respondents to raise questions they

might have failed to consider in the first place. (Creswell & Poth, 2018) In this research, the interview respondents are considered experts in quality assurance at their respective hotels, as they hold managerial positions within the hotels.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews are considered suitable for investigating sensitive and strategic issues such as internal standards, audit results, and weaknesses in quality assurance systems since they are more likely to create a comfortable atmosphere for the respondents to express themselves as they are more relaxed in a conversation compared to a structured interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with the flexibility to ask in-depth questions based on the expertise of the respondent, for example, in-depth questions related to ISO 9001 audits, PDCA audits, and brand standard audits since they are more knowledgeable in those areas, it is more suitable for this research as luxury hotels in Athens vary in size and ownership and might vary in quality assurance as well

4.3 Planning of an interview

The interview guide was developed in several steps. First, the author reviewed the theoretical framework of the thesis on quality assurance management, ISO 9001, PDCA, TQM, and Lean Six Sigma in luxury hotels and derived preliminary topics that should be covered with all participants. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For each topic, open-ended questions and optional prompts were drafted, for example, asking managers to describe how quality standards are set, how staff are trained, how audits are organized, and how data from KPIs or guest feedback is used.

The guide was revised as follows:

- the introduction section was expanded to include warm-up questions about the hotel and the interviewee's responsibilities;
- some questions on KPIs and audits were merged and simplified;
- follow-up prompts were added to explicitly ask for examples (e.g., "Can you give a recent example of a quality issue and how it was handled?");
- The total number of main questions was reduced to keep the interview within 20-25 minutes.

4.4 Data Collection

Interviews will be scheduled all in March of 2026 at times convenient for participants. With consent, all interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed; if recording is not allowed, detailed notes will be taken during and immediately after the conversation. To protect anonymity, hotels and interviewees will be given codes (e.g., Hotel A, Participant 1) and any identifying details will be removed from transcripts.

4.4.1 Sampling and recruitment

The study uses purposeful sampling to identify information-rich cases that meet the criteria of the research: five-star luxury hotels located in Athens that explicitly emphasize quality in their positioning, for example, through international branding, quality certifications, or published service promises. Purposeful sampling is widely recommended in qualitative hospitality research because it focuses on cases that are most likely to illuminate the research questions rather than on statistical representativeness. (Hospitality Institute 2024; Jennings 2017)

Potential hotels are identified through online searches, industry reports, and professional networks. General managers, operations managers, quality managers, or employees are then contacted via email and LinkedIn with an invitation letter explaining the purpose of the thesis, expected time commitment, and confidentiality measures. The aim is to conduct 4 interviews across 3 different hotels, ensuring variation in brand affiliation (international vs independent) and location within Athens.

4.4.2 Data analysis and presentation of results

The interview material will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves moving from initial coding of meaningful segments to the development of broader themes. (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

After an initial familiarisation stage, the author will code each transcript line-by-line, assigning descriptive or interpretive codes such as “standardization vs flexibility”, “training and empowerment”, “audit frequency”, “ISO 9001 benefits”, or “resistance to change”. Related codes will then be clustered into themes corresponding to the research questions, for example, “design of quality assurance systems”, “implementation in daily operations”, “monitoring and KPIs”, and “continuous improvement and challenges”.

In the Results chapter, the findings will be presented thematically rather than hotel by hotel. Each subsection will start with a short synthesis of what was found across all interviews, followed by selected anonymized quotes that illustrate key points. (Tabari 2020) Simple tables may be used to summarise, for example, which quality tools are used in which hotels (e.g., ISO 9001, internal

brand audits, guest-feedback platforms, PDCA workshops) or to compare how different properties monitor key KPIs. Presenting qualitative findings in this structured way is recommended in methodological literature because it makes the link between data, analysis, and conclusions transparent for the reader. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

5 Results

In this chapter, the results from the interviews are presented and analyzed. The results from the interviews are compared with the research previously done on similar topics. This chapter is subdivided into nine parts that correspond to the interview results: Background information of participants, staff introduction to Quality Assurance, Overall Quality Assurance standards, Daily operations, Key performance indicators monitoring, Internal audits, Quality checks, Service failures, Guest feedback, Competitive edge in Athens luxury market.

The number of interviews were 4. The participants were chosen based on experience and career status, as well as their knowledge of the subject. Two of four interviews were conducted in person and in Athens, and the other two interviews were conducted via Viber and WhatsApp. The interviews were all carried out in March of 2026, and the duration was between 20 and 25 minutes in total.

5.1 Background details

All four participants have a very strong hospitality background. 1st Participant has over 35 years in both the Food & Beverage sector as well as Front Office operations in high luxury hotels such as Hilton, Leading Hotels of the World in Greece, and the United Kingdom. He has made significant operational and financial improvements to many of the hotels in which they have worked. In the present time, he works at the Front Office in a 5-star luxury hotel in central Athens.

2nd Participant has also approximately 30 years in the Hospitality sector, having worked his way up to be a Director of operations & quality in a well-established hotel chain of Greece and a hotel advisor for strategy/pricing policy. Moreover, it has created a website for hospitality job listings.

3rd Participant, with more or less than 32 years of involvement in hospitality, started in Food & Beverage as a server, and moved to the purchasing department in five-star establishments. Moving on, in the present time, she is a General Manager in a luxury 5-star hotel in central Athens, of a famous Greek hotel chain.

4th Participant has been in the hospitality sector for 30 years. Started from the Front office, moved all around the world, and also moved her way up positions, being a Front office manager, to a Global brand ambassador, and now an Operational director in a globally known brand.

5.2 Staff introduction to Quality Assurance

1st Participant suggested that the training and onboarding come from SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures). Each department has set its standards, and through on-the-job training and daily

activities, the staff can adapt. Also, he mentioned that strong management plays a vital role, as they are the backbone of the whole team and set or monitor daily operations.

2nd Participant strongly believes in brand culture and SOP's as the means of introduction for new staff. New members have a grace period of 15-20 days during which the training and certifications take place before officially onboarding. Each department has its own SOP's in written form that align with the brand's culture. He also mentioned that staff have an evaluation every 6 months to identify weaknesses or to review the process.

3rd Participant uses an annual evaluation for all staff members in order to keep up the quality standards. Training is mostly through e-learning and a website made for the hotel specifically. There are three training categories. First, the mandatory set from the establishment, second, government-based trainings such as policy changes, pricing changes, third, the personalized trainings that are specifically picked for the staff member who, through monitoring or evaluation, has been noticed to lack in any part.

4th Participant takes the introduction into consideration before even hiring the candidate. This happens through a structured recruitment process, providing a clear definition of roles and the mandatory soft and hard skills. Every new season, they gather all staff members, old or new, and have a meeting, mixing members from all departments and not having them sit according to their departments, but supporting cross-departmental bonding. In that meeting, training occurs, and they are met with brand standards and procedure training.

5.3 Overall Quality Assurance standards

1st Participant suggests that, while the overall quality standards are high, they are challenged to maintain them due to turnover. As the location of his present work environment has a lot of turnover of visitors, meaning day to day, most rooms are empty and refilled, it becomes a major issue due to the high standards and keeping up. Then he mentioned that inconsistent staffing makes the operation difficult, as there are gaps between employees due to inadequate training, and, as a result, the quality is not always perfect.

2nd Participant describes an overall quality assurance based on a strong brand and culture. Also, the fact that quality assurance does not limit itself to what customers can see, but also extends to "backstage" areas, such as the back office or maintenance. With detailed handbooks and standards, staff members remain aligned with the brand's quality standards.

3rd Participant mentions that, for the last 4 years, the brand has welcomed a central quality department that monitors, reviews, and establishes procedures and operations across all the brand's hotels. As a result, the hotels have to align with the already established rules and procedures, making it easier to track and maintain good practices and quality standards.

4th Participant operates her hotel in accordance with formal quality systems. Firstly, protocols such as ISO and HACCP are used in all necessary procedures, and are monitored by a dedicated quality manager. Checks are carried out regularly across all departments. The participant has created SOPs and checklists for staff members to track their workloads and maintain standards.

5.4 Daily Operations

1st Participant: To maintain standards, he must follow the departmental guidelines and standardized procedures. Adding also that staff members should be compliant but also flexible with a balance in order to exceed guest expectations,

2nd Participant emphasizes the provision of service and that it should be customer-centered, with a focus on maintaining a relationship and respect. He also pointed out that departments such as Maintenance and Back Office should gain recognition as they work backstage.

3rd Participant made it clear that daily operations should remain up to standard without the staff member having to take extra steps, just by maintaining clear procedures. She provided an example from their Department of Supplies, stating that whenever they receive an order, they follow ISO9001, checking temperatures, ensuring everything is packaged, etc.

4th Participant, as mentioned, has created checklists that guide everyday operations. Apart from the written checklists, she plans frequent meetings that are strictly focused on those SOP's. With that, they ensure a consistent guest experience regardless of who is on duty, making it look effortless.

5.5 Key Performance Indicators Monitoring

1st Participant had no specifics due to his position as to which KPI the brand was mainly using, but from his point of view, managerial oversight of everyday activities and procedures was the first, then also mystery callers/guests is a very common way for outside organizations to check a hotel's usually luxury ones, for their standards and staff preparations and responsiveness.

2nd Participant provided the author with his most useful KPI: the Productivity indicator per staff member/department, which is a function of cost, turnover, and qualitative characteristics. The daily net profit monitoring and customer ratings. These are monitored frequently, and each shift has the opportunity to make corrections.

3rd Participant chose 2 KPIs: customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction, as she supported the idea that one cannot work without the other; they are directly proportional quantities. She also mentioned that she takes sustainability matters very seriously and monitors them with KPI's, such as productivity, waste, and biowaste indicators.

4th Participant emphasizes the importance of guest satisfaction indicators and the direct impact on service quality. Another important indicator for the participant would be the food and beverage costs relative to the price, to maintain a fair balance. Furthermore, team-related indicators, such as staff turnover and internal development, provide the participant with analytics on the stability and progress of the teams, a sign of success.

5.6 Internal audits/Quality checks

1st Participant, mentioned that checks and audits are mainly led and overseen by the dedicated Control department, with them overseeing operations, results in finances, and overall communication and monitoring.

2nd Participant said it starts with the work chain. First, the supervisor of each department monitors and oversees daily activities. Then the General manager, with HR, checks the supervisor, and, at the end, the head of the company verifies and identifies those control steps monthly and reviews them.

3rd Participant mentioned that the checks are multilevel, as they are conducted not only by staff within the establishment but also by outside businesses. She sets an example of energy, conducts health checks conducted by outside partners, and checks the buffet for quantity and temperature.

4th Participant combines brand evaluations with the hotel's own observations. Audits do happen regularly. An example given by the participant was that, before the restaurant opened, she would go and observe all the pre-opening preparations and see how the workflow was and whether everything was up to standard. Another example was that when there was a group reservation, she and the front office team would start preparations a week or more before their arrival to ensure they were prepared, organized, and up to expectations.

5.7 Service failures

1st Participant, while not mentioning a specific case, he does mention that housekeeping and the rapid rhythms of the workload do seem to bring issues. As a result, these issues are addressed by finding the root cause of them, and correcting them first by the supervisors, making any necessary changes, and if needed, taking it up to the General manager or HR. Also, he supports that improved interdepartmental communications, many issues can be resolved way faster if not avoided, which also maintains team psychology and teamwork.

2nd Participant suggests that when staff productivity is reduced then issues arise. Setting an example of housekeeping team, being over worked, or the conditions of the work environment are not proper or even the work relationships are challenged. These are all issues that are avoided with correct training, hiring enough staff and having also certain roles assigned.

3rd Participant mentioned an real life example, of a regular customer, that one time mentioned that after dinner at the rooftop restaurant they had health issues. While at first glance the participant thought it could not be anything, she moved the food samples for analysis, and the results showed that there was actually an issue with some of the food. Afterward, she decided collaborative with the quality department to change the supplier. She also mentioned that, due to the fast-paced environment and quality checks, food does not have a chance to deteriorate.

4th Participant did not mention any specific examples of service failure. She strongly supported that was due to her focus on prevention and detailed planning. What was mentioned was that, sales department often would do false advertising such as the number of restaurants in the hotel. As a result guest would have false expectations and nothing could be done by the hotel's side.

5.8 Guest feedback

1st Participant mentions that he takes guest feedback seriously. He either collects it from in-house guests or from Booking, Tripadvisor, or Expedia. They are processed and monitored by the Guest Relations department, which takes any issues to the general manager. From there, if any action is needed, they proceed. The participant realized they actually use PDCA (PLAN-DO-CHECK-ACT) informally, as it is a cycle of actions they follow.

2nd Participant: he schedules a 15-minute meeting every morning with the team to analyze reviews. At the meeting, they focus first on the negative reviews and find solutions, then move on to positive reviews and encourage good practices.

3rd Participant, while the question about the usage of feedback was not directly answered. What can be said is that she takes feedback very seriously, as evidenced by the example given earlier about the regular guest. Also, it is known that the guest relations department handles feedback, but nothing is passed on.

4th Participant takes guest feedback seriously, as she understands how important it is for customers to be heard. Her experience enables her to distinguish honest, grounded reviews from exaggerated ones. She considers the reviews, tries to resolve any issues, and takes any advice.

5.9 Competitive edge in Athens luxury market

1st Participant suggested that the competitive edge in the Athens luxury market comes from adaptive service. His main focus is Greek hospitality, or, as it was phrased, *Philoxenia*, an ancient Greek concept extending beyond commercial hospitality to represent a “state of mind and a way of life” in which hosts offer warmth without strings attached (Greece Is, 2020). The most important thing for the participant is exceeding expectations and building a trust and professional relationship with the guests, and moreover, making them repeaters.

2nd Participant believes that it is important to be aware of the competition in order not to fall back. Integration of sustainability and ecological awareness into the business model while maintaining net profit. Furthermore, the continuous training and providing incentives for the staff members. And a principle the participant follows is to never implement cuts that compromise quality, because quality drives occupancy levels and guest satisfaction.

3rd Participant mentioned the importance of tracking staff members, their needs, and the processes they must follow. She is always open to new opportunities to upgrade their services and to keep track of the SOPs, changing them whenever needed. She has a competitive advantage through measurable results and effective communication with management and CEOs.

4th Participant perspective, effective quality assurance enhances a luxury hotel's competitive position. That happens by transforming basic, transactional services into five-star experiences driven by the people. Moreover, careful staff selection, clear identity of the establishment as well as any outlets they have, and detailed personal preparation on memorable guest experiences.

6 Discussion

This chapter discusses the research findings of the study with regards to the research questions and the earlier chapter of the thesis. It also describes how quality assurance is currently being implemented in Athenian luxury hotel management in Greece, how managers and employees perceive the effectiveness and challenges and how well these practices are consistent. From all the finding, quality assurance is no longer seen as a technical system, but rather strategic, people-centered and therefore is a strategic way to promote the guest experience, the brand positioning and to be competitive in the long run.

As shown by the empirical results, most of the quality assurance systems in Athenian luxury hotels are built on a combination of ISO 9001, HACCP and international or just brand standards were the basis for documenting processes, defining KPI's and structuring internal audits, which is consistent with definitions and models in Chapter 3 on quality assurance management. In addition to those formal systems participants also described internally developed manuals, departmental guidelines and training platforms that make quality a tool for the property. Moreover, the use of a quality department/control department, projects that quality assurance design is structured at multiple organizational levels.

This balance between standardization and flexibility is the duality that quality assurance is aspired to have and is mentioned in Chapter 3. Clearly to provide consistency and risk control, for hotels to tailor the guest experience to their market segment. Checklists, continuous trainings, meetings and memos were particularly important in the interviews to explain how abstract quality policies translate into daily operations, and how quality systems are described in Chapter 3 as "build in" quality rather than inspecting it at the end and comparing it to how it should be while flaws appear.

In addition to formal systems, the interviews also revealed that quality assurance design is very much part of the hotel's overall strategy and positioning in the Athenian luxury market. Participants mentioned how the selection of standards to prioritize, KPI's to follow and personalization of services is driven by the hotel's category and target clientele. Therefore, quality assurance is structured in Athenian luxury hotels as an example of the strategic significance we discussed in Chapter 2 regarding quality as a driver of differentiation, reputation and long-term profitability.

The thesis consisted of one main question and three sub-questions. The main research question was How do Athenian luxury hotels currently design and structure their quality assurance systems (standards, procedures, audits, KPIs)? The sub-questions of this thesis were:

1. How are these quality assurance systems implemented in everyday operations by managers and front-line employees?

2. How do managers and employees perceive the effectiveness and challenges of existing quality assurance practices?
3. How, Who and What is implemented, monitored, and to what extent do these methods actually ensure consistency?

The first sub question is about how quality assurance is used in daily operations. Participants mentioned they have been particularly fond of specific ways of implementation. Driven by recruitment processes, regular trainings and on going supervising are the main points, recruitment process takes a lot more effort into making sure the candidate is understanding the position and process. In addition, training takes place with multiple ways and each participant had a different way but all supported that it is regular and with the monitoring supervised and re-freshed, reflecting to chapter 2 where it mentions the importance of staff selection and training on luxury hotels and service quality.

In chapter 3 it was mentioned that quality assurance is process-oriented and through the interviews that was highlighted with the participants saying that the processes and pro-activeness are important on quality management. The continuous trainings allow quality systems to evolve with staff performance and business needs. This supports the idea that quality assurance in practice is an ongoing cycle of planning, doing, checking and acting rather than an one time certification exercise.

In relation to the second sub question, participants perceive their quality assurance systems effective when they generate visible, measurable improvements in guest satisfaction but also operational performance. Additionally, they mentioned some very insightful KPI's, guest and staff satisfaction indicators, productivity per employee and/or department, metrics related to waste and resources. They correspond to chapter 3 about the role of performance indicators, where financial, operational and experiential dimensions of quality are all seen as relevant.

Furthermore, consistency is maintained with internal audits and quality checks. With informal walk throughs and observations by managers in combination with checks by control/quality departments and in some cases external partners. Participants provided some examples such as mystery callers/guests, ISO related food and safety checks, are incorporated to daily routines. These audits are embedded to the operational tasks rather than an one time event, from these audits they get the opportunities to detect and prevent problems mirroring the PDCA logic and preventive process control presented in chapter 3.

The third sub question addressed the method, the consistency and the department or who is responsible for controlling quality assurance. Throughout all the interviews there was a common

agreement that quality assurance tools, KPI's and audits do reduce variability and flexibility in service. However, they also mentioned that complete consistency is difficult to achieve. Human factor plays a significant role to that, such as issues resistance to change, staff turnover and internal conflicts. As a solution, frequent scheduled meetings, daily reviews of guest comments, corrective training and reinforcement of company culture, support the staff members and reduce loss of consistency.

Participants also highlighted another part that can affect quality assurance, such as inflation, sustainability requirements and regulatory changes that result in adjustments of the standards. Moreover, they also suggested that consistent quality depends on the combination of the systems mentioned before (manuals, KPI's) and active leadership. Clear communications with ownership and strong service culture, encourages employees to apply standards make them part of their routine and be able to perform them under pressure.

Taking all this into consideration, the researcher is of the strong opinion that quality assurance should be treated as a strategic commitment that is or gets integrated into every day operations. Those operations would need to be supported by all staff members, everyone have clear incentives and understanding of the culture, also trainings are a very important part of the process.

6.1 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are factors that can be questioned in almost any research. This thesis research also faces such limitations, as it is based on a small number of semi-structured interviews in selected Athenian luxury hotels and therefore cannot claim statistical representativeness of the whole luxury hotel sector in Athens. To enhance reliability, the author used a common interview guide derived from the theoretical framework, asked all participants about the same core themes and recorded and transcribed the interviews as accurately as possible using the assistance of Hapypscribe Ai. Validity was supported by treating participants as expert informants, grounding interpretations in multiple interviews and linking the findings transparently to established concepts in quality assurance and luxury hospitality. Nevertheless, the small, purposefully selected sample, the time-bound nature of the data and the author's own background in luxury hotels mean that the results should be seen as context-specific insights rather than universal conclusions. The industry's experts could conduct further research in the future in regards to Quality Assurance in Athenian luxury hotels. There are many benefits, and there is plenty of useful information that could also benefit hoteliers.

6.2 Further Research

Additionally, standards are always changing, that also means people's perspectives, global trends, issues and impacts are changing rapidly. The participants who took part in the interviews of this thesis could be faced with a change in policies, hotel chains standards or just political-cultural issues tomorrow, next month or even a year. In the future, people could be more conscious about ways of travelling, their environmental impact and their hotel choices, however they could pay no attention to any of those concerns. The only proper way to know is by conducting another qualitative research in the future and seeing how much the results have changed in that time frame.

6.3 Self-evaluation

This thesis has been a challenge for the author, for three different reasons. The first reason was the plethora of information that could be found and therefore be included in the thesis. While that was difficult to manage and narrow down the most fitting information for the theme, it was also helpful as it gave the author a chance to review many articles, books and overall information.

The second reason would be the length and the timeline for the chapters. While the time for the thesis was approximately six months, the author had difficulty constantly writing and covering the length that each chapter should. On the other side, it was a great challenge that tested the authors skills and discipline.

The third and last reason was the interview as a method. Due to it being last chapter, it was left for last minute and the author had very little time to complete it. Interviews took a lot of planning and after work in order to be ready and appropriate for the thesis. Overall, the author managed and learned to overcome anxiety and use interpersonal skills better.

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References list was organized in alphabetical order with Perplexity ai using the prompt: Put in alphabetical order according to Haaga-helia guidelines this reference list.

Appendix

Interview Questions

ENGLISH:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your occupation?
3. What is your career background?

6. How are staff introduced and trained in quality requirements when they join the hotel?
4. How would you describe the overall quality assurance system in your hotel?
5. What internal standards, procedures or manuals guide daily operations in your department?

7. Which key performance indicators (KPIs) do you monitor regularly in relation to service quality?
8. Can you describe how your hotel conducts internal audits or quality checks?
9. Could you give a recent example of a quality problem or service failure and explain how it was handled?
10. In what ways does your hotel use guest feedback and online reviews in quality assurance?
11. What are the main challenges you face in implementing quality standards consistently across the hotel?
12. How, if at all, do you apply continuous-improvement tools such (as PDCA, Lean or Six Sigma) in your operations?
13. From your perspective, how does effective quality assurance influence your hotel's competitive position in Athens' luxury market?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add?

GREEK:

1. Πώς ονομάζεστε;
2. Ποιο είναι το επάγγελμά σας;
3. Ποιο είναι το επαγγελματικό σας υπόβαθρο / πορεία μέχρι σήμερα;

6. Πώς γίνεται η εισαγωγή και εκπαίδευση του προσωπικού στις απαιτήσεις quality assurance όταν προσλαμβάνεται στο ξενοδοχείο;
4. Πώς θα περιγράφατε συνολικά το σύστημα quality assurance στο ξενοδοχείο σας;
5. Ποια εσωτερικά πρότυπα, διαδικασίες ή εγχειρίδια καθοδηγούν την καθημερινή λειτουργία στο τμήμά σας;

7. Ποιους βασικούς δείκτες απόδοσης (KPIs) παρακολουθείτε συστηματικά σε σχέση με την ποιότητα υπηρεσιών;
8. Μπορείτε να περιγράψετε πώς πραγματοποιούνται οι εσωτερικοί έλεγχοι ή οι ποιοτικοί έλεγχοι στο ξενοδοχείο σας;
9. Θα μπορούσατε να δώσετε ένα πρόσφατο παράδειγμα προβλήματος ποιότητας ή αστοχίας στην υπηρεσία και να εξηγήσετε πώς αντιμετωπίστηκε;
10. Με ποιους τρόπους αξιοποιεί το ξενοδοχείο σας τα σχόλια των πελατών και τις online κριτικές στο πλαίσιο του quality assurance;
11. Ποιες είναι τις κυριότερες προκλήσεις που αντιμετωπίζετε στην συνεπή εφαρμογή των προτύπων ποιότητας σε όλο το ξενοδοχείο;
12. Σε ποιο βαθμό και με ποιον τρόπο εφαρμόζετε εργαλεία συνεχούς βελτίωσης, (όπως ο κύκλος PDCA, το Lean ή το Six Sigma), στις λειτουργίες σας;
13. Από τη δική σας οπτική, πώς επηρεάζει το αποτελεσματικό quality assurance τη θέση του ξενοδοχείου σας στην ανταγωνιστική αγορά πολυτελών ξενοδοχείων της Αθήνας;
14. Υπάρχει κάτι ακόμη που θα θέλατε να προσθέσετε;