

THE APPLICATION OF ROOM ATTENDANT EMPATHY IN SERVICE AT ASTON BATAM HOTEL & RESIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to explore the application of room attendant empathy in services at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence. Empathy plays a crucial role in the hospitality industry, as it may enhance guest satisfaction and loyalty. However, limited research has been conducted on the specific application of empathy by room attendants in hotel settings. The study will employ a descriptive qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews and observations to gather data. The informants used to select a diverse group of housekeeping departments from Aston Batam Hotel & Residence. The participants will be chosen based on their experience, tenure, and willingness to participate in the study. The data collected will be analyzed, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and themes related to the application of empathy by room attendants. The analysis will center on understanding the application of empathy, the ways utilized by room attendants to illustrate empathy, and the affect of empathy on guest satisfaction. The research comes appear that the application of room attendant empathy in service at Aston Batam Hotel and Residences encompasses a positive affect on guests. In-depth understanding of room attendants in practicing and applying empathy in providing services, more sensitive to guest needs and room attendants trying to fulfill them as best as possible.

Keywords: Empathy; Service; Room Attendant; Hotel

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an economic sector that involves the travel and visits of individuals to locations outside their daily routine, with the intention of leisure, business dealings, cultural experiences, or learning. The tourism industry includes a wide extend of travel-related exercises and services, counting transportation, Accomodation, culinary delights, tourism attractions, and other facilities that support the tourist experience. The tourism industry is a field that has great potential and plays an important role in economic progress. Therefore, this sector is considered one of the main priorities worthy of development (Anisah & Riswandi,



2015). With growing tourism, demand for the accommodation industry will also increase.

Accommodation is an industry in tourism. The accommodation industry is a component of the tourism industry which consists of a number of rooms that can be rented to the public on a temporary basis, known as hotels. Apart from accommodation, the hotel also provides food and drink services for its visitors. According to (Hurdawaty & Parantika, 2018), in this context, Sulastiyono, quoted by (Maluto, 2014), explains that a hotel is a form of business run by its owner by offering food, drink and resting services in the form of rooms to individuals who are visiting, while traveling and able to pay according to the established service standards, without the need for a special agreement. Where tourists really need a comfortable and safe place to rest and stay during their trip. The accommodation industry provides various types of accommodation such as hotels, resorts, villas, inns, and so on, which can be tailored to the needs and preferences of tourists.

It is known that the accommodation industry is part of the service sector which provides services in the form of rooms, food and drink options, as well as various other services to the public on a commercial basis (Wiyasha, 2007). In the accommodation industry, high quality service to guests is one of the main factors in achieving guest satisfaction and maintaining a hotel's reputation. Good service does not only include functional aspects, but also requires an element of empathy in the interaction between hotel staff and room attendants and guests. As workers who most often have direct contact with guests, room attendants have an important role in providing a positive experience for guests during their stay at the hotel.

According to Goleman 2007 as quoted in (Ifdil, 2014) , empathy is an individual's skill in understanding the emotions and problems faced by other people, being able to think about other people's points of view, and recognizing differences in their views on various things. Empathy in the context of hotel services, refers to an individual's skill to wholeheartedly understand and feel the feelings and needs of guests. In the midst of increasingly fierce competition, high-quality hotels continually strive to differentiate themselves by providing services that are not only efficient, but also attentive to guests' expectations and needs. Therefore, a deep understanding of how room attendants practice and apply empathy in providing services, especially to guests, has an important impact on the management of hotel operations in general and housekeeping in particular, including at Aston Batam Hotel & Residences.

Aston Batam Hotel & Residences is a hotel located on Jl. Sriwijaya No.1, Kp. Pelita, District. Lubuk Baja, Batam City, Riau Islands 29444. The hotel's location is very strategic because it is only 11.15 km from Batam's Hang Nadim airport and only 8 minutes from the Harbor Bay Ferry Terminal, making it one of the hotels located in the most strategic trade center in Batam City. The motto of Aston Batam Hotel & Residences is "Always Great Service".

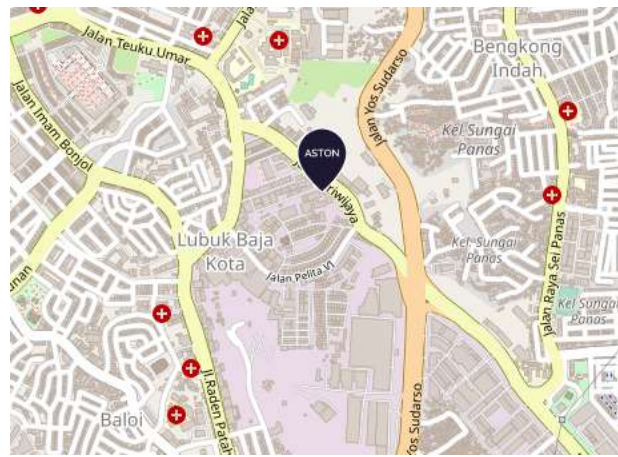


Figure 1 Location of Aston Batam Hotel & Residence
Resource: <https://www.astonhotelsinternational.com> 2023

The concentration in this research is on the Housekeeping Department where room attendants carry out their daily activities. In order to improve performance or performance in service, training and briefing programs are carried out every day, this is very necessary to find out deficiencies and understand the assigned sections (Hakim & Lapotulo, 2022), and this also applies to room attendants. This research will also provide a better understanding of the importance of applying empathy by room attendants in service. The results of this research can be used as a basis for improving the training and development of hotel staff in terms of empathy. Apart from that, this research can also provide insight to hotel management about the importance of paying attention to aspects of empathy in selecting and evaluating staff performance. Department that has duties and responsibilities for cleanliness quality is the housekeeping department (Lapotulo et al, 2023). Housekeeping itself is a central service that is mandatory in every hotel. Housekeeping is responsible for maintaining cleanliness, tidiness and comfort in various hotel areas such as rooms, public spaces, restaurants, bars and other facilities, both within the hotel building and in the surrounding environment. Below are the types of activities carried out by the Housekeeping Department at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence.



Figure 2 Housekeeping Activity
Resource: Aston Batam Hotel & Residence 2023

In carrying out this responsibility, skilled workers in the field of housekeeping are needed, and each team member will act empathetically towards guests according to their abilities. With the scope described above, the researcher explored issues related to this research with the theme of applying room attendant empathy in providing services at the Aston Batam Hotel & Residence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service quality is a measure or assessment of the extent to which a service meets or exceeds guest expectations. Service quality covers various aspects, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and direct evidence. Good service quality can increase guest satisfaction, build loyalty, and create positive experiences for guests.

In the context of service, empathy means being able to understand and feel what the customer or person being served or guest feels. By having empathy, someone can be more sensitive to guests' needs and expectations, so they can provide better and more satisfying service. Empathy can also help create better relationships between attendants and guests, thereby increasing guest satisfaction and building loyalty as well as the ability to understand and feel the feelings, needs and experiences of other people or guests.

Empathy

Empathy means giving special or personal attention to customers to meet consumer needs. Following communication also includes feelings, relationships and presence (ease of contact and accessibility) and knowing power needs (understanding the customer) (Lengkey J., 2015). Therefore, empathy refers to the capacity to understand and experience another individual's feelings, experiences, and points of view from their own perspective. This involves the skill of recognizing and sensing the emotions and experiences of other individuals without having to experience the same directly. By having empathy, a person can try to connect themselves to other people's situations or feelings, try to understand what they feel, and provide support or attention according to the existing circumstances.

According to Eisenberg, as mentioned in research conducted by (Panuntun, 2012), it is explained that in the process of individual empathy, affective and cognitive elements are involved. From a cognitive perspective, individuals tend to gain an understanding of other people's feelings through efforts to imagine and think about situations from other people's perspectives. Meanwhile, in the affective dimension, the focus is more on the individual's ability to unite with other people's feelings, connect them with personal feelings, and ultimately encourage acts of mutual help as a form of expression of empathy and concern for their feelings.

The cognitive aspect of the experience of empathy is based on the ability to understand by imagining and reflecting on a situation from another person's perspective. The focus of this cognitive component is on the knowledge acquisition process to accurately understand the views of others and acknowledge their perspectives. For example, it involves the ability to imagine how other people feel when they are angry, disappointed, or happy, and also to recognize situations and be sensitive to other people's issues and needs, as reflected in their speech, facial

expressions, and approach. their communication. If we relate this concept of empathy to a humanistic perspective, it is very important to have an understanding of what other people feel, because this is the basis for forming an effective therapeutic relationship and ensuring the success of therapy (Howe, 2015).

Empathy indicators consisting of special services, service initiatives, and services regardless of social status can be used to measure the level of empathy of service experts in providing services that are inclusive and responsive to individual needs, regardless of their social status (Parasuraman, 2001).

Service

According to (Dewi, 2019), service is defined as an action or series of actions that takes place through direct interaction between individuals and other individuals or physical machines, which aims to provide satisfaction to customers. Meanwhile, an alternative definition states that service is a benefit offered by an organization or individual to consumers, which is abstract and intangible, as explained by Davidow and Uttal in the same work. On the other hand, in the perspective of (Dewi, 2019), consumers (customers) refer to people who benefit from activities carried out by organizations or service agents. The concept of superior service (service excellent) or superior service (prime service) is also discussed. According to Suwithi, as stated in research by (Wulansari & Hakim, 2019), superior service refers to a person's ability to serve other people in an optimal way, so that service recipients feel that their hopes and desires are fulfilled.

Describing the information above, it can be concluded that service is an activity or action carried out by a person or an organization to fulfill the needs or desires of other people. This service can take the form of providing information, assistance, or experience that provides added value for consumers. Service can also be a product provided along with good customer service.

Room Attendant

According to the views expressed by Rumecko in research by (Kurniawan & Yulianto, 2017) housekeeping officers have responsibilities as service officers who are responsible for maintaining the cleanliness, comfort, aesthetics and completeness of the room. In research conducted by (Pratiwi, 2016) Rumecko stated that the last task of the room attendant was to check the results of the work that had been done and spray air freshener to freshen the air. According to Iskandar, 2019 in (Simatupang et al., 2022) , Room Attendant is described as a position responsible for the cleanliness, aesthetics and comfort of guests during their stay at the hotel. Room Attendant is described as a position that is responsible for the cleanliness, aesthetics and comfort of guests during their stay at the hotel. Room attendants are also required to check and coordinate regularly in carrying out hotel service tasks (Sinaga & Lapotulo, 2022).

As hoteliers, the success of room attendants in creating a positive impression on guests, providing excellent service, and maintaining their personal image has great significance. In carrying out their duties, room attendants interact directly with staying guests. Therefore, as a room attendant you must be aware of the positive first impression on guests who stay overnight. This not only impacts their perception of themselves, but also reflects on the overall image of the hotel where

they work. Making an unfavorable initial impression can result in losing guests, and possibly even future guests. So, it's not just important to make a good impression at first, but also to keep it up. Room attendants must always behave honestly, and they should be kind and friendly when talking to hotel guests who are following the hotel's rules and procedures (SOP).

A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is a document that tells the exact steps room attendant need to follow to get a job done right every time. SOPs are important in hotels because its make sure that everyone on the team knows and follows the rules and steps that have been set up. SOPs have step-by-step instructions and rules that help to do tasks or processes correctly and consistently. It's make sure that the work is done well. This is to make sure that people who clean rooms do their jobs consistently, quickly, and according to the hotel's standards of cleanliness and service. According to (Sailendra, 2015), SOP is a set of rules that helps make sure that different tasks in a company are done well and without problems. To make sure guests are happy with the rooms, there are certain things the rooms must have. These things can be described as follows: (1) Being clean is super important and the person in charge of the guest room needs to take it seriously. The cleanliness of the room and items directly used by guests must be maintained properly. (2) Comfort makes the room feel nice and cozy. This can be done by making sure that the things in the room, like the furniture and bedding, are in the same good shape as the room itself. (3) Attractiveness is related to the harmony of room decoration, for example the suitability of the color of a picture or painting to the layout of the room. The goal is to create an impression of harmony in the interior decoration of the room. (4) Safety is very important. Guests should feel secure and free from any accidents in the room. This includes things like getting shocked by electricity, slipping on the bathroom floor, or falling down. Security also means keeping guests' personal things safe from being lost or stolen.

A satisfactory service from the hotel management will make guests feel happy and tend to choose to stay again in the hotel room or use the public facilities at the hotel. This view was expressed by (Agusnawar, 2002).

METHOD

By using qualitative research methods in this study, researcher gained an understanding of the application of room attendant empathy in services at the Aston Batam Hotel & Residence. This type of research uses a qualitative descriptive research method, according to (Sugiyono, 2016) that qualitative descriptive research is a research method that aims to describe and understand phenomena or events in depth and detail. This method focuses more on collecting and analyzing descriptive data, such as words, images, or sounds, to produce a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Main data was collected through observation, interviews and documentation. This is achieved by conducting in-depth interviews with related parties, such as managers, supervisors, room attendants and hotel guests.

In this research, information was collected using various methods, including interviews, observation, and data recording. By applying primary data collection techniques, information is obtained directly from research subjects as the main

source of information (Azwar, 2012). The main data in this research was obtained through direct observation and through an interview process. The analysis approach commonly used in this interaction context involves steps such as reducing data, presenting data, and reaching conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aston Batam Hotel & Residences, under the management of Archipelago International, is a combined hotel and apartment complex. This 4-star hotel officially opened on September 9 2017. It has a 10-story hotel building, a 22-story apartment building, 3 lifts and 2 escalators. In total Aston Batam Hotel & Residence offers 277 rooms, with details of 232 rooms in the hotel building and 45 rooms in the apartment building. The hotel provides comfortable and clean accommodation, including executive, luxury family rooms and suites in the hotel building, as well as several rooms in the apartment building. All rooms are equipped with international standard facilities, such as Hollywood-style double beds, as well as bathrooms equipped with bathtubs or showers. With the hope "can make your stay an enjoyable one with a pleasant feeling".



Figure 3 Aston Batam Hotel & Residences

Resource: <https://www.astonhotelsinternational.com/2023>

At Aston Batam Hotel & Residences, housekeeping department takes care of cleaning and organizing the guest rooms after guests leave. The person who does this job is called a room attendant. The people who take care of the rooms collect dirty laundry, replace towels, clean bathrooms, sweep and mop the floors, and move furniture and equipment in the room. Room attendants are in charge of giving guests things they need in their hotel room, like towels, soap, shampoo, and other bathroom products. They make sure that all things in the room are there and working well. Room attendants contribute to providing a comfortable and satisfying stay experience for hotel guests.

Currently Aston Batam Hotel & Residences has five room attendants on duty in 3 shifts. They have a friendly and polite attitude towards hotel guests. They are also able to provide good service and make guests feel comfortable while staying at the hotel. They have the ability to work in different situations and are ready to work flexible hours, especially when the hotel is busy or there are guests who need emergency assistance and can communicate well with hotel guests and other team members to ensure that all guest needs are met well.

The following is the organizational structure of the Housekeeping Department at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence.



Figure 3 Housekeeping Department Structure
Resource: Aston Batam Hotel & Residence 2023

Based on the results of interviews and observations carried out by researcher with informants who served in the housekeeping department of Aston Batam Hotel & Residence, the data obtained through a series of interviews were:

Table 1. The Application of Room Attendant Empathy in service at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence

No	Source	Empathy Indicator		
		Focused service	Service initiatives	Service regardless of social status
1	Rano Priyatno	✓	✓	✓
2	M. Afif Hamdani	✓	✓	✓
3	Wengky Fernando	✓	✓	✓
4	Roni Putra	✓	✓	✓
5	Azmi	✓	✓	✓
6	Yosi D	✓	✓	✓

Resource: Author's Process 2023

Note:

Already Optimal = ✓

Not Optimal = -

Base in the empathy indicators in the table above, it can be concluded that: (1) Special Service Indicators: a) Room attendants show a high level of care and attention to the special needs of guests, such as guests with disabilities or special dietary needs. b) Room attendants provide friendly and polite service to guests, always prioritizing guest satisfaction and comfort. c) Room attendants are able to provide appropriate solutions or alternatives when guests face problems or complaints during their stay. (2) Service Initiatives: a) Room attendants show initiative in providing services that are more than expected, such as providing additional information about hotel facilities or providing recommendations for

tourist attractions around the hotel. b) Room attendants actively find out guest needs and try to fulfill them before guests ask for them, for example by providing additional drinking water or providing assistance with carrying guest luggage. c) Room attendants provide personal and individual service to guests, keeping in mind the guest preferences that have been given previously. (3) Services Regardless of Social Status: a) Room attendants provide the same good service to all guests, regardless of the guest's social status or background. b) Room attendants do not differentiate their treatment of guests based on social status and skin colour, such as providing better service to guests who look rich or famous. c) Room attendants are able to deal with guests with various cultural or religious backgrounds, while still respecting and appreciating these differences.

In application empathy, room attendants need to have the ability to understand and feel what guests feel. They must be able to see the situation from the guest's perspective and try to provide services that suit the guest's needs and expectations. By application special service indicators, service initiatives, and service regardless of social status, room attendants can create a positive and satisfying stay experience for hotel guests.

Meanwhile, the results of interviews with two hotel guests who refused to be named stated that when they stayed at the Aston Batam Hotel & Residence, the room attendants did not pay attention to their needs, but still showed empathy in service, the room attendants were friendly when interacting with them. Although responding to guest requests takes a while, it provides adequate solutions when problems arise. Then they also added that a good room attendant must be able to listen well, understand guest needs, and provide quick solutions. According to them, good supervision of room attendants needs to be carried out to ensure consistent application of empathy in service in hotel rooms.

Based on the author's observations, the application of empathy in service by room attendants at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence can be said to be quite good. Room attendants are staff who are responsible for cleaning and tidying guest rooms in hotels. Room attendants are always friendly and polite to guests. They always greet guests with a smile and greetings. They are also always ready to answer guest questions in a friendly and patient manner. Overall, the application of empathy in service by room attendants at Aston Batam Hotel & Residences seems to be very understanding in depth. They pay attention to guest needs, respect guest privacy, are friendly and polite, responsive to guest complaints, and maintain room cleanliness and tidiness. This is very important in creating a pleasant stay for hotel guests.

CONCLUSIONS

Good and satisfying service is an important factor in the hotel industry. One very important element in providing good service is empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and feel the feelings and needs of other people. In the context of service at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence, the application of empathy by room attendants is very important to create a pleasant stay experience for guests.

First of all, room attendants at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence must be able to understand and feel the feelings of guests. They must be sensitive to guests' needs and preferences, and be able to read guests' facial expressions and body language to

determine whether they are satisfied or not with the service provided. For example, if a guest looks tired and stressed after a long journey, the room attendant must be able to provide friendly service and help the guest feel comfortable and relaxed.

Apart from that, room attendants must also be able to recognize the special needs of guests. Every guest has different preferences and needs. Room attendants at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence must be able to identify special guest needs, such as food allergies or accessibility needs, and provide appropriate service. For example, if a guest has a food allergy, the room attendant must ensure that the food and drinks in the minibar are served according to the guest's needs.

Furthermore, room attendants must also be able to provide appropriate solutions when guests face problems or complaints. In situations like this, empathy is very important. Room attendants at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence must be able to listen well, understand guest complaints, and provide satisfactory solutions. They must be able to put themselves in the guest's shoes and attempt to solve problems quickly and effectively.

Lastly, room attendants must also be able to create good relationships with guests. They must be able to communicate well, be friendly and polite. Room attendants at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence must be able to face guests with a smile and a positive attitude. They must be able to maintain professionalism and provide personal service to each guest. By creating good relationships, room attendants can create an unforgettable stay experience for guests.

Overall, the application of empathy by room attendants at Aston Batam Hotel & Residence is very important in providing good service to guests. By understanding and feeling the feelings and needs of guests, room attendants can provide appropriate and satisfying service. Through empathy, room attendants can create a pleasant and unforgettable stay experience for guests.

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