

IMPROVING TOUR PROGRAM QUALITY: OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES AND MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS IN A VIETNAMESE TRAVEL COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

Tour program quality is a strategic concern for travel companies because a tour combines multiple services delivered by different providers and experienced by customers as one integrated product. This paper examines tour program quality at Kham Pha Viet Trading and Tourism Company Limited, a travel business operating in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam, and identifies practical priorities for quality improvement. The study uses a descriptive case-study approach based on the company information and business records reported in the underlying research project for 2022–2024, together with a structured review of the operational issues documented in that project. Company records indicate that total revenue increased from VND 5,320.830 million in 2022 to VND 22,969.482 million in 2024, while the number of recorded customers increased from 2,048 to 8,332. These figures indicate business expansion, but growth alone does not establish that service quality improved. The case analysis identifies several areas requiring attention: limited differentiation of tour products, uneven staff capabilities, constraints in facilities and information technology, supplier coordination during peak periods, customer-feedback management, and the need for more systematic tour-risk and quality monitoring. The paper proposes an integrated improvement framework combining customer segmentation, service standards, workforce development, supplier management, digital customer relationship processes, contingency planning, and post-tour evaluation. Because the underlying project does not report the sample size, questionnaire items, or numerical results of its customer survey, the paper does not present survey-based estimates or causal claims. The findings offer a practical diagnostic framework for small and medium-sized travel businesses seeking to align growth with more consistent customer experiences.

Keyword: *Tour program quality; Travel company; Service quality; Customer experience; Quality management; Vietnam*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism products are experienced as combinations of transport, accommodation, food and beverage, attractions, guiding, and supporting services. Customers generally evaluate the overall journey rather than each component in isolation. Consequently, a failure in one service encounter, such as a delayed transfer, an unsuitable meal, an inaccurate itinerary, or an ineffective response to a complaint, may influence perceptions of the entire tour. Service quality is therefore an important management concern, particularly in tourism businesses that depend on coordination among multiple service providers [1, 2].

These challenges are especially relevant to companies operating in competitive regional

markets. As customer expectations diversify, travel businesses must balance affordability with safety, reliability, comfort, responsiveness, and meaningful experiences. They must also manage variations arising from seasonal demand, supplier performance, weather, transport conditions, and differences among tour groups.

Kham Pha Viet Trading and Tourism Company Limited, based in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam, provides a case through which to examine these operational challenges. Company records reported in the underlying research project indicate substantial growth in revenue and recorded customer numbers between 2022 and 2024. At the same time, the case documentation identifies issues involving product differentiation, employee

training, information technology, supplier consistency, customer feedback, and tour operations. This combination raises an important management question: how can a growing travel company translate commercial expansion into a more consistent and dependable tour experience?

This paper has three objectives: (1) to describe the company's recent business development using available records; (2) to identify and organize the principal tour-quality issues documented in the case; and (3) to propose an integrated, practical framework for improving tour program quality. The study is an exploratory case analysis rather than a statistical investigation of causal relationships.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Tour programs as integrated service products

A tour program is a pre-arranged combination of travel services organized around an itinerary, specified inclusions, and an agreed price. Vietnam's Law on Tourism No. 09/2017/QH14 defines a tour program as a document specifying the itinerary, services, and price established in advance for a tourist trip from its point of departure to its endpoint [3]. This definition emphasizes the importance of communicating the itinerary and service commitments clearly before purchase.

Tour programs present particular quality-management challenges because they are largely intangible before consumption, are delivered through interactions during the trip, and depend on multiple providers. Consequently, quality is influenced by both tour design and the reliability of service delivery. A well-designed itinerary may still produce a poor experience if suppliers fail to meet commitments or employees cannot respond effectively to unexpected situations.

Research on travel agencies similarly demonstrates that service quality is multidimensional. Relevant dimensions include employee interactions, expertise, problem-solving capability, the physical environment, and the outcomes experienced by customers [4, 5]. These dimensions are particularly applicable to tour operators because customers encounter several interconnected services during a single journey.

2.2. Customer expectations and perceived quality

Service-quality research examines the relationship between customers' expectations and their perceptions of the service received [1]. SERVQUAL provides a widely recognized approach to evaluating perceived service quality across multiple dimensions [6]. Although these models offer useful conceptual guidance, their dimensions should not automatically be treated as validated measures for every tourism business.

For tour programs, quality management should examine whether promotional promises, itinerary details, service inclusions, and pre-trip communications match the experience delivered. Clear information is particularly important because ambiguous or exaggerated claims can create expectations that the actual tour cannot meet.

For practical management, perceived tour quality can be organized into several connected areas: reliability of promised services; responsiveness to questions and disruptions; employee competence and courtesy; comfort and cleanliness; safety and risk communication; coordination among suppliers; and the overall coherence of the itinerary. In this paper, these areas serve as an analytical framework rather than a validated measurement scale for the company.

2.3. An integrated framework for tour-quality management

Drawing on the service-quality literature and the operational issues documented in the case, the analysis focuses on six connected management areas:

Customer and market understanding.

Tour design and service standards.

Employee capability and tour leadership.

Supplier coordination and physical and digital resources.

Customer communication and service recovery.

Quality monitoring and continuous improvement.

The framework assumes that tour quality depends on coordination across these areas. Improving marketing, facilities, or employee training in isolation may have limited effects if the company

lacks consistent operating procedures and mechanisms for monitoring customer feedback.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design and case selection

The study adopts a descriptive single-case design focused on Kham Pha Viet Trading and Tourism Company Limited in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam. A case-study approach is appropriate for examining an organizational issue within its real-world context, particularly when the issue cannot easily be separated from the conditions in which it occurs [7].

The case was selected because the underlying research project documents the company's business development, tour-related operations, customer groups, service practices, and operational limitations. The business-performance analysis covers 2022–2024, while the broader research project identifies 2021–2024 as its overall period of investigation.

3.2. Data sources and analysis

The principal quantitative evidence consists of company-reported revenue, costs, profit, and customer counts reproduced in the underlying research project and attributed to company records and the business department. Qualitative evidence consists of descriptions of customer segments, service standards, operating processes, and areas requiring improvement.

The analysis follows a descriptive document-analysis approach. Reported business indicators are compared across years, while recurring operational concerns are grouped thematically and mapped to potential management responses [8].

The underlying project refers to customer surveys and spreadsheet-based analysis. However, the available report does not provide the survey sample size, questionnaire, response rate, item-level results, or summary statistics. Accordingly, this article does not report survey estimates or claim that the documented issues represent the views of all customers.

3.3. Research limitations and data integrity

The study relies on one company and on figures reported in the underlying project rather than independently audited financial statements.

Recorded customer counts should not be interpreted as unique individual customers unless the company's recording procedures confirm this.

The source material also does not provide sufficient survey evidence to quantify customer satisfaction or rank service-quality dimensions. In addition, the cross-sectional descriptive analysis cannot establish that specific management practices caused changes in revenue, customer numbers, or perceived service quality. The findings are therefore interpreted as exploratory evidence for practical management improvement.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Business growth between 2022, 2023 and 2024

Company records reproduced in the underlying research project indicate substantial growth between 2022 and 2024. Total revenue increased from VND 5,320.830 million in 2022 to VND 22,969.482 million in 2024. Recorded customer numbers rose from 2,048 to 8,332 over the same period.

Table 1. Reported business performance, 2022, 2023, 2024

Indicator	2022	2023	2024
Total revenue (VND million)	5,320.830	10,740.420	22,969.482
Total costs (VND million)	4,730.210	9,539.362	19,998.585
Profit before tax (VND million)	590.620	1,201.058	2,970.897
Profit after tax (VND million)	446.896	960.846	2,376.718
Recorded customers (persons)	2,048	3,557	8,332
Domestic customers (persons)	2,048	3,533	8,216
International customers (persons)	0	24	116

Source: Company figures reproduced in the underlying research project. Monetary values are presented in VND million as reported.

The figures indicate considerable commercial expansion accompanied by an increase in

reported profit. Domestic customers accounted for most recorded customers throughout the period, although the number of international customers also increased.

These indicators describe business performance rather than service quality. Revenue and customer growth may reflect marketing activities, changes in demand, pricing, group bookings, or other factors. The available evidence does not isolate the contribution of quality-management practices or provide comparable customer-satisfaction measurements over time. The results therefore establish the context in which quality management becomes increasingly important, rather than demonstrating that service quality has improved.

4.2. Customer profile and existing service practices

The case documentation describes a strong focus on domestic group travel, including schools, companies, public organizations, and other organized groups. Such tours can support cost efficiency but require careful coordination of different ages, preferences, mobility needs, schedules, and service expectations.

International customers remained a small proportion of recorded customers in 2024. This may represent a development opportunity, provided that the company can support the relevant language requirements, destination information, service consistency, and customer communication.

The project identifies several existing practices that provide a foundation for quality improvement. These include telephone and online inquiry channels, attention to accommodation and meal arrangements, travel insurance under tour contracts, destination-safety considerations, and basic supplier-selection requirements. The company also identifies convenience, comfort, courtesy, safety, and hygiene as service priorities.

The practical challenge is ensuring consistent implementation. Communication channels need to be linked to clear responsibility for customer requests, while safety procedures should include standardized briefings, emergency contacts, and incident records. Similarly, supplier-selection criteria need to be supported by regular performance checks rather than relying solely on initial assessments.

4.3. Main quality-management issues identified in the case

Product differentiation and employee capability. The project describes a tour portfolio that relies substantially on traditional itineraries, with limited development of distinctive or personalized products. When tour products are easily imitated, competition may focus heavily on price. Product development should therefore be guided by customer research, destination characteristics, and the company's ability to deliver distinctive experiences.

The case also describes employees as generally enthusiastic and helpful while identifying gaps in experience, customer-care skills, and the handling of unexpected situations. These observations are compatible: positive service attitudes provide a foundation, but reliable performance also requires technical knowledge, communication skills, practical training, and clear decision-making authority.

Resources, supplier coordination, and contingency planning. The project identifies limitations in some facilities and equipment, alongside a need for more integrated information technology. The company does not necessarily need to own every service facility, but it should establish clear standards for contracted providers and verify compliance.

The case also identifies difficulties in finding equivalent suppliers during busy periods and responding flexibly to itinerary disruptions. These concerns make written service specifications, supplier evaluation, advance confirmation, backup arrangements, and escalation procedures important elements of tour-quality management.

Customer feedback, service recovery, and quality measurement. The company uses telephone, email, and social media to receive inquiries and feedback. However, the project identifies a need for more systematic complaint handling and stronger relationships with repeat customers.

A reported average response time of approximately 35 minutes appears in the source project, but the measurement method and observation period are unspecified. It should therefore be treated as an internal reported figure, not a verified service-level indicator. Moreover, the project refers to a customer survey without

providing the methodological details or numerical results needed to assess customer satisfaction.

A consistent feedback system should distinguish the time taken to acknowledge a complaint from the time required to resolve it. It should also record the type of issue, responsible employee, corrective action, and final outcome. Without such records, management may recognize general concerns but remain unable to identify recurring problems or evaluate whether corrective measures are effective.

5. DISCUSSION

The central management issue emerging from the case is the need to align business expansion with operational capability. As a travel company serves more customers and coordinates more tours, informal practices and individual experience may become insufficient to maintain consistent delivery. Quality management should therefore be treated as an operating system rather than a collection of isolated service initiatives.

The first implication concerns standardization without eliminating flexibility. Tour programs need clear specifications for inclusions, schedules, supplier commitments, safety requirements, and customer communications. However, standardized procedures should not prevent employees from responding appropriately to different customer needs or unexpected situations. The objective is to standardize essential service commitments while preserving flexibility in service recovery.

The second implication concerns accountability across the service chain. Tour quality depends on both internal employees and external suppliers. Assigning responsibilities, documenting commitments, confirming arrangements, and reviewing supplier performance can reduce the risk that service failures go unnoticed until customers are affected. This approach is consistent with research that treats travel-agency service quality as multidimensional, involving employee interactions, problem-solving, and service outcomes [4, 5].

The third implication concerns evidence-based management. Revenue and customer counts provide useful information about business activity, but they cannot substitute for customer feedback and operational records. Research on tourism quality and visitor outcomes highlights

the importance of evaluating service experiences alongside broader performance indicators [2, 9]. For this company, management should begin by establishing reliable baseline measures, including complaints per tour, complaint-resolution time, supplier-related incidents, checklist completion, and post-tour feedback.

The fourth implication concerns **investment priorities**. Quality improvement does not necessarily require immediate large-scale expenditure. Standardized checklists, supplier confirmation forms, safety briefings, complaint logs, and short training sessions can be introduced using existing resources. More substantial investment in facilities or digital systems should follow an assessment of recurring service failures, operational risks, and the likely benefits of proposed changes.

The contribution of this case is practical rather than theoretical. It organizes the operational concerns documented in one regional travel company into a coordinated improvement framework. The framework remains a proposal that requires implementation and evaluation; the current evidence does not establish that any particular intervention will produce a specific increase in customer satisfaction, loyalty, or profitability.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Redesign tour products and establish service standards

The company should identify a small number of priority customer segments and document their travel purposes, budget ranges, preferred itineraries, service expectations, and key risks. Each priority tour should have a written specification identifying the target customer, core experience, inclusions and exclusions, expected group size, service level, and contingency options.

These specifications should be translated into a tour-quality checklist covering pre-trip communication, booking confirmation, transport, accommodation, meals, itinerary timing, guide performance, safety, hygiene, and complaint handling. Each standard should identify the responsible person, the point at which compliance is checked, and the evidence to be retained.

New or substantially revised tour products should be piloted before wider promotion. Customer and

employee feedback from pilot tours should be used to revise the itinerary, service specifications, and operating procedures.

6.2. Strengthen employee capability, supplier coordination, and safety management

Training should be practical, recurring, and related to actual operating conditions. Priority topics include customer communication, itinerary management, cultural sensitivity, complaint handling, emergency procedures, and supplier coordination.

Scenario-based exercises should prepare employees to respond to delays, illness, lost property, weather disruption, and customer dissatisfaction. The company should also maintain a supplier register recording service category, price, capacity, quality history, safety requirements, responsiveness, and complaints.

Core suppliers should be assessed against written criteria. Availability and service commitments should be confirmed before departure, and backup providers should be identified for services with high operational risk or limited peak-period availability.

Each tour should have a documented risk check, emergency contacts, relevant insurance information, alternatives for disrupted activities, and a concise safety briefing. Significant incidents and near misses should be recorded and reviewed so that corrective action can be incorporated into subsequent tours.

6.3. Integrate customer communication, digital records, and continuous improvement

Rather than beginning with an expensive platform, the company can establish a centralized, access-controlled record for customer requests, booking status, supplier confirmations, special requirements, emergency contacts, complaints, and follow-up actions.

Within a short period after each tour, customers should be invited to complete a concise survey covering itinerary accuracy, transport and accommodation, guide performance, safety and comfort, responsiveness, value for money, and overall experience.

Management should review feedback by tour type and customer segment, discuss complaints and compliments monthly, assign corrective actions, and verify completion. Customer information should be protected, and access should be restricted to employees who need it for their work.

These measures are proposed interventions rather than existing performance results. The company should establish baseline values before setting numerical targets and should review whether each intervention produces observable operational improvements.

6.4. Phased implementation plan

Table 2. Proposed implementation plan for tour-quality improvement

Timeframe	Priority actions	Monitoring indicators
First 3 months	Introduce tour checklists, standardize supplier confirmations, establish a complaint log and post-tour feedback process, and deliver short safety and service training.	Checklist completion; initial response and resolution times; survey response rate; recorded incidents.
3–6 months	Identify priority customer segments, pilot differentiated tour products, evaluate core suppliers, and review employee training needs.	Repeat-customer rate; supplier-issue frequency; tour-level feedback; pilot-tour conversion.
6–12 months	Review facility and digital-investment needs, expand successful products, and conduct quarterly quality reviews.	Complaints per tour; proportion of issues resolved; customer recommendation and intention-to-return indicators; cost of service failures.

Source: Authors' proposed management framework based on the case analysis.

Implementation should proceed in stages. The initial phase should focus on low-cost procedures

and reliable recordkeeping. The second phase should use the resulting evidence to improve customer segmentation, supplier management, and product differentiation. Larger investments

should be considered only after management has identified recurring problems and assessed the likely operational benefits.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper examined tour program quality at Kham Pha Viet Trading and Tourism Company Limited using company-level information reported for 2022–2024 and operational issues documented in the underlying research project. The available records indicate substantial growth in revenue, profit, and recorded customer numbers. However, these indicators alone cannot demonstrate that service quality improved.

The case identifies practical challenges in product differentiation, employee capability, facilities and digital support, supplier coordination, customer recovery, contingency planning, and systematic quality measurement. To address these challenges, the paper proposes an integrated management approach connecting customer research, product design, service standards, employee training, supplier controls, safety procedures, customer feedback, and continuous improvement.

Several measures can be introduced through checklists, clearly assigned responsibilities, practical training, structured feedback, and routine performance reviews. Larger investments should be guided by evidence about recurring service problems rather than by growth in customer numbers alone.

The study has two principal limitations: it examines a single company, and the underlying project does not provide sufficient information to evaluate the customer survey or quantify perceived service quality. Future research should collect transparent customer-level data across different tour types and seasons and examine how specific quality-management practices relate to perceived service quality, satisfaction, repeat purchase, and recommendations.

Overall, the case highlights a practical management principle: commercial growth should be accompanied by systems that make service delivery reliable, measurable, and responsive. For a regional travel company, consistent execution across the entire tour journey is an important complement to product development and promotional activity.

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