Developing New Upsell Techniques for Front Desk Staff of a Hotel

Laura Vainio

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

Leading Business Transformation

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Abstract

Author(s)
Laura Vainio

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At the moment people are spending less money to services due to a number of reasons. Since people are spending less, they are even more aware of what they can get for the money. Consequently, they are also more aware and demanding when it comes to quality of services. Due to digitalisation and easier access to information today's customer is also more demanding, more critical and less loyal than before. Therefore, it is vital for the companies to concentrate on developing sales and customer experience.

After Covid-19 especially the service industry suffered from labour shortage. The labour shortage has also had an effect on the quality of service. More unexperienced work force has entered the industry and that can be seen in insufficient customer service skills. On the other hand, employees have become more aware of the companies they work for and concentrate more on what the employer can give to him or her. Therefore, it is important to focus on training the staff and to openly communicate the values and goals of the company. A common saying happy employees equal happy customers is in fact more true than ever.

The main objective of this research is to create a development programme for a hotel's front desk staff concentrated on sales and more closely upsell. The hotel's management wishes to make the customer experience better by improving the upsell skills of the front desk staff. The development plan is especially important for the staff members since many of them are experiencing lack of sales skills and feel uncomfortable to execute upsell at the moment. The development programme will be created in way that it will be simple to use and understand by the target organisation.

This constructive research was conducted by combining theoretical framework with the research results. The theoretical framework includes elements from sales management, employee experience and motivation, customer experience and upsell. Data was collected from the staff of the hotel's front desk by a questionnaire and face-to-face interviews.

The final outcome of the research is the development programme for improving sales and moreover upsell skills of the hotel's front desk staff members. Other outcomes of the research were that upsell is a service. Upsell brings additional value to a customer and introduces services or products of the company the customer did not know existed. Upsell can also be looked at as a service that offers the customer something additional on top of the already purchased service that can exceed the customer's expectations.

Keywords
Sales management, upsell, customer experience, employee experience, motivation

Contents

1 Introduction

At the moment people are spending less money to services due to a number of reasons. For instance, increased living expenses and high interests have had an impact on decreased expenditure. Since people are spending less, they are even more aware of what they can get for the money. Meaning they are also more aware and demanding when it comes to quality of services. Due to digitalisation and easier access to information today's customer is also more demanding, more critical and less loyal than before (Aarnikoivu 2005, 14). Therefore, it is important to provide the best possible experience to the customer in order to have the value for the money they expect. Consequently, it is vital for the companies to concentrate on developing sales and customer experience.

After Covid-19 especially the service industry suffered from labour shortage. Covid-19 had a great impact on the restaurant industry and according to Uusitalo (2022) the restaurant industry lost 10 000 employees for good. There had been some shortage already prior to Covid-19, but the effect was especially large after the global pandemic. Luckily, the situation has improved and more new employees are entering the service industry. For instance, compared to last year a lot more applications have been received to front desk positions in hotels.

The labour shortage has also had an effect on the quality of service. More unexperienced work force has entered the industry and that can be seen in insufficient customer service skills. On the other hand, employees have become more aware of the companies they work for and concentrate more on what the employer can give to him or her. Therefore, it is important to focus on training the staff and to openly communicate the values and goals of the company. A common saying happy employees equal happy customers is in fact more true than ever. According to Korkiakoski (2019, 9) to be able to provide the best possible customer experience by greeting every customer with excitement and exceeding the customer's expectations, employees need to have a strong employee experience themselves.

The focus will be on the staff working in the hotel reception. Their main task is to provide flawless customer service. Therefore, bringing them more knowledge of sales and teaching new ways to upsell, the staff will be able to improve their overall customer service skills and following bring more value to the customers. Part of a good customer experience is to provide value to the customer. There are several different ways and paths to do so, but for instance in the hospitality industry as a frequent guest one receives free upgrades, points for future stays and other perks that definitely

bring value to anyone. The interest of the target organisation is to educate the staff in upsell in order to make it a natural and easy part of the service situation. In fact, one of the key research questions is how to bring additional value to a customer by improving upsell.

1.1 The target organisation and the current situation in the hospitality industry

The target organisation is a large company operating in the hospitality industry. Within the past few years the organisation has also gone through a larger change in staff, due to Covid-19. One of the reasons was that during the layoffs due to reduced amount of customers, many staff members had to find new jobs. Some returned, but many did not. Since then there has been some difficulties with the quality of customer service and now the aim is to improve the customer experience in a way that it is always equal no matter which staff member is the serving the customer. The hotel is constantly training the staff in order to stay focused and to provide best possible customer service in the industry. At the moment they are concentrating in educating the staff in customer experience and in customer journey in order to make the customer experience the best possible.

Some of the staff members have indicated that they feel insecure in the selling situations, meaning they sometimes feel uncomfortable even when selling a free product, such as membership of the loyalty club. Some feel there is not enough time for upsell in the already informative check-in situations and some feel they do not have enough tools. They have also indicated that they would have an interest in additional commission salary based on sales results. Previously there have been competitions between the different shifts, e.g. morning and evening, but they have shown an interest also for individual competitions.

The hospitality industry is slowly recovering after the difficult years. Visit Finland (2023) predicts that tourism in Finland will return to the same level as before the different crises in 2025. The increased expenses and decreased consumers' buying power slows down the recovery. Domestic travel increased during COVID-19 and remained popular during 2022, even though travelling abroad was also allowed. Effects of COVID-19 are still visible in the industry and the Russia-Ukraine war brought new challenges, such as significant rise in energy prices. There is still a shortage of competent workforce. Ministry of Employment and Economy (2023) also states that today's customers treasure the environment and social well-being. Therefore, responsible services are most popular among customers. (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö 2023).

Hotel rooms are intangible products and therefore cannot be stored. Consequently, that service cannot be stored for later use and should be sold every day in order to make revenue. A tool for maximising revenue, occupancy level and the average daily rate in a hotel is upsell and therefore it is widely used in hotel receptions. Some customers and some employees may have a picture of it being forceful sales technique, but in fact it is also a tool for improving customer experience.

1.2   Research objectives and questions

The main objective of this research is to create a development programme for a hotel's front desk staff concentrated on sales and more closely upsell. The hotel's management wishes to make the customer experience better by improving the upsell skills of the front desk staff. The purpose is to look at upsell as a service that bring more value to the customer and moreover, the feeling of getting more value of the same service, for example a hotel room. The development plan is especially important for the staff members since many of them are experiencing lack of sales skills and feel uncomfortable to execute upsell at the moment. The development programme will be created in way that it will be simple to use and understand by the target organisation.

The end results are important and very useful for the target organisation since they can also be used for improving the customer experience and the journey of the customer. It also brings the skills for the conceptualised service they are looking for, not to forget the actual important tools for the staff that they will receive from the development programme. The results also give an understanding of how the customer receives additional value by improving the sales techniques and overall service of the staff. One important goal for the future is to create a set of functions in order to for the staff to recognise the common way of acting. The common rules also give a feeling of peer support to the staff members. All this together helps to improve and to build a strong sales culture to the organisation.

In order to be able to create a valuable and adequate development program the following research questions are to be answered:

Q1: How to motivate the staff to improve their sales and upselling skills. Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic motivation.

Q2: Which are the factors now that restrict the staff from selling or upselling more.

Q3: How can customer experience be enhanced by improving upsell.

Q4: How to present upsell as an exclusive service to the customer, making them feel special and valued.

The first and the second research question will be answered based on the questionnaire and interviews conducted to the hotel's front desk staff. The fourth and the fifth research questions will be covered with theoretical framework and with some elements from the questionnaire and interviews.

1.3   Limitations and key definitions

The focus of this thesis in on hotel business and therefore, the scope of the theoretical framework is concentrated in the service industry. The point of view is to develop new upsell techniques for a hotel's front desk staff. Consequently, the concept of upsell will be investigated based on being a sales technique at a hotel. Some examples of sales management are also suitable for business-to-business, but the main concentration is on business to customers sales. The questionnaire and the interviews are held to the staff working at the front desk, e.g. Guest Service Agents and Shift Supervisors in order to get most truthful picture of the situations and the author have chosen not to research the managerial level of the hotel.

The key definitions are *Sales management, employee experience and motivation, upsell, customer experience and service.* Usually in the hotel business customers are referred to as guests, but the author has chosen to use the word customer since the word customer is widely used in the theoretical framework.

2   Sales Management in the Service Industry

This chapter is the first part of the Thesis' theoretical framework. Second part of the theoretical framework is the next chapter Customer Experience in the Service Industry. This chapter introduces the main theories and models related to sales management and furthermore the concentration is on sales management in the service industry. The final development plan will be created for front desk staff of a hotel. It is still anyhow important to start from the beginning and to focus on sales management in general, why people and people's management have a great role in sales, and how sales processes and pricing are a great part of sales strategies. It is also an introduction into people management, and as it shows that is starts as early as from the recruitment.

In the mean while markets change, technology develops and customers buying behaviour needs to be understood to stay in business. Much is expected of a company's sales department and therefore, a company needs to maintain its sales-oriented perspective. People are the key in sales and therefore, the process of hiring, educating and motivating sales staff is important. In many companies the line between sales department and other departments can be small or no existent since almost everyone in contact with customers are also in contact with sales. Even if someone's job title has directly no connection to sales, many do include elements of sales. For example such as selling ones' own idea to others in a meeting is one method of sales. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä, Rehn 2023, 57).

If we start from the very beginning, a sale is a transaction between a buyer and a seller, in which a good or a service is exchanged usually for money. Following, in which the process itself is called sales. Often the staff member in sales is the first link between the company and the customer and in fact, often the only person they meet from the company. Therefore, the responsibility of a salesperson or a person conducting the sales is very important. Choosing the right people for the job is essential and requires a lot of knowledge and know-how also from the management. Some might think good salespeople are born to be salespeople and have inherited the skills, but in fact good sales skills comes with a lot of practice (Ojanperä et al. 2023, 25).

2.1 The people in sales

As in any other field of business, in sales the right people make the most profit. On the other hand, it is also people that are the costliest expense for a business. Great part of people management is hiring, that can be described as costly, time consuming and not always successful. According to Cespedes (2018, 20) the hiring process of a fully productive seller can take up to a year. The cost for an unsuccessful hire is even more than for a successful one.

Figure 1. Sales Management Functions (Chunawalla 2011, 9).

The above figure shows the most important functions of a Sales Manager. Zoltners in Chunawalla (2011, 3) state that in order to a company's salesforce to stay competitive it needs to be equally dynamic as the changes in the market as well as the changes in customers' wants, needs and expectations. Therefore, the selection, training, motivation and controlling of the salesforce in vital in order to stay in business. Following, a deeper look into sales management will be described below in this chapter.

According to Cespedes (2018, 20) interviews can be described as first impressions, where the first impression actually matters, but does not anyhow tell anything about the persons job performance. Interviews can also be about inconsistent judgements that are in fact very difficult to make in a short period of time, and about personality assessments that are made by people not trained for properly interpreting the results (Cespedes 2018, 20). Cespedes (2018, 21) underlines that sales managers should always stand behind the hire and in fact, give personal input to interviews to find the right sales talents. Tools to be used are for example to clarify the sales tasks, by simply describing the most important tasks. It is not necessary for a salesperson to do marketing tasks since there is another team for that. He also advices to hire for the task, meaning to have more emphasis on the work experience, rather than in educational backgrounds (Cespedes 2018, 23). Gerdt and Korkiakoski (2016, 109) underline that best way to build a customer centric culture is to hire the people with the right kind of attitude. After all, people are the ones creating the customer experience.

By using multiple perspectives gives the opportunity to involve more people in the interviewing process. Colleagues can give more insights and rate the candidates, which again helps when deciding who to hire. Since selling is not only about attitude, it is also good to involve behavioural assessments such as role play and other hands-on tasks in the interviewing process (Cespedes 2018, 23). One important factor Cespedes (2018, 24) is underlying, is to be clear about how previous work experience is looked at. It is essential to understand that having sales experience from a completely different company, a field of business and a customer segment, does not always mean the person in experienced in the field being hired for. Sales success depends on the company's strategy, sales tasks that are essential in that strategy and the customer segments. Before companies emphasised only competencies, whereas today the potential plays a great role when recruiting new employees. Potential means that someone has an ability to develop and change his or her behaviour in the ever-changing business environment. (Gerdt et al. 2016, 110)

According to Cespedes (2018, 25) sales hiring can be difficult, since it is basically people trying to judge other people's future performance in a changing market environment. Therefore, it is important to continually improve the company's recruitment of salespersons and to learn from previous mistakes. It is also good to keep in mind that it does not stop with the hire, people management is also about building and allocating talent (Cespedes 2018, 26).

Since it can be difficult to change the attitudes and to develop skills of a person that is not fit for the job, it is important to link the hiring and training processes of the company. Many companies tend to use the same old training methods and are not realising that sales training should be a process

not an event. For instance, there are studies showing that many forget almost all new information taught in a classroom style training within three months. (Cespedes 2018, 28). Sales representatives often have various number of different accounts at the same time performing different kinds of tasks, and therefore they need training that is specific for their unique needs and tasks (Cespedes 2018, 29).

Adaptive selling is a way of learning by doing. In adaptive selling the salesperson has an ability to alter behaviours according to the nature of the customer. A successful salesperson can use past experiences and to organise them into different situations that can be then used as tools with different customers. Adaptive selling is also learning and kind of personal training for the salesperson. It reshapes neural pathways over time (Cespedes 2018, 29). One key aspect in working in a hotel reception is to know your customer. An important factor is the relationship between motivation and the expectation of success. Meaning, people get bored if it is too easy and give up if it is too difficult. Also, feedback and reflection have an important role in training. In sales the final feedback comes from the customer, whether the sale went through or not. Self-reflection is something every learner should do in order to get better. (Cespedes 2018, 30).

According to Cespedes (2018, 31) the skills that matter the most are important to identify when training the salespeople. It is important to look at the company's segments, customers, and products and how they differ from others. There are for instance differences within the industry, within product categories, when the target buyer group changes and even differences within salespeople and selling tasks within the same company (Cespedes 2018, 32).

Furthermore, to focus on the core skills and to prepare the salespersons in encounters with their customers. Within these Cespedes (2018, 34) gives three areas to focus on when training the salespeople: customer discovery interviews, structuring and conducting sales conversations, and closing a sale. For example, customer discovery is about understanding what and to whom one is selling. According to Cespedes (2018, 36) this 'road map' in conducting the sales conversation is a great tool to be used:

- ✓ Context: How the call, the issues and desired outcomes are framed.
- ✓ Content: How the arguments, insights and point of views are supported.
- ✓ Contact: How the key decision makers and influencers are asked, told, and connected with.

These above dimensions can help the sales representatives to successfully carry out a sales conversation and furthermore close the deal. Frank Cespedes (2018, 37) underlines the importance of active listening, in within the shutting up at the right time is the key.

In people management after hiring and training comes coaching. According to Cespedes (2018, 46) coaching is about clarifying the relevant behaviours and recognising whether the issue is about motivation or ability. It is the managers duty to give feedback based on how the salespersons are performing and give tools and encourage them to succeed even better, aften realising if it is motivation they lack or ability to carry out the task. When working with customers speed is often the key. Customers are expecting fast replies in all the channels they can contact the company. At this point it would be desirable that management can empower the employees through culture, training and decision-making processes into making independent decisions when dealing with customers. (Gerdt et al. 2016, 112).

2.2   The process and pricing in sales

Process in sales is a sales model that a company chooses to use. According to Cespedes (2018, 57) sales model is a process of selling efforts, based on implicit and explicit choices. It is important that the sales model actually works with the target audience and as they tend to buy today, rather than yesterday. As markets change so should sales models change. Like Cespedes (2018, 57) is stating markets do not stand still and neither should the company's sales process. Ojanperä et al. (2023, 60) states that a strategy is also something that a company knows and chooses not to do. A company needs to choose what not to sell and to whom not to sell.

Cespedes (2018, 59) says that the core components and questions in a sales model are: Customer selection and qualification criteria, meaning who the customers are according to the business strategy and how can one find and reach the right target audience; Clarity about the buyers and the buying process at target customers, meaning is the model supporting the prospecting and selling actions with the appropriate buying persona; and The go-to-market economics, meaning the different costs involved such as customer acquisition costs and costs of serving different segments and accounts. The structure of a sales model's elements affects greatly the role of a salesperson and following also in many aspects of hiring, training, compensation, and performance management (Cespedes 2018, 60). It is also important to have the right kind of salesforce according to the segments the company is selling for. For instance, a luxury brand needs to have sales staff that really know the target group and what it takes to sell to them. (Ojanperä et al. 2023, 60).

Customer selection is a very important component of business strategy. In fact, customer selection is decisions about where to play in a market and opportunities that are relevant to the company's' value proposition. It is also important to understand the selection of customers and to be aware of that customers differ in preferences for products and services, and also in the way the respond to marketing and sales activities. Why it is crucial to understand, is that the customer selection has an effect on other factors of the sales model, from costs to core product and growth decisions. For example, some customers require more of the salesperson's time as sales calls or simply geographical reasons makes customers more or less expensive to serve. (Cespedes 2018, 61).

Next essential part of the process is to clarify to who the company is selling its' products to and how does the customer buy the products. A buyer persona is a type of a profile of typical customers based on a combination of findings from data analysis, customer interviews, and other research (Cespedes 2018, 65). The personas should be detailed information such as name, profession, types of interests, salary, and demographics (Cespedes 2018, 66). The reason for using personas is to help the sales force to understand the differences and to see the world as the customers do, and to see it more as a reality rather than an abstract situation. It is still however, good to keep in mind that personas used correctly are like an initial template for prospecting and messaging, not a recipe for a buyer (Cespedes 2018, 68).

A sales model is not an answer to everything. There might even be a need for developing a completely new model if the company's target customers, their buying journey or the company's products change. To know whether, when, and what to be changed, relevant customer conversion analytics are needed in order to reconstruct a sales model. (Cespedes 2018, 73). To be able to get the most out of conversion analytics is to increase selling time, reallocate account assignments, to monitor online and offline interactions, and to improve coordination between salespersons within and across the company (Cespedes 2018, 76). It is also important to look at the processes from a customer perspective. It can sometimes be difficult for a company to change its processes and to realise that the operational models may not please the customer as much. Therefore, it is important to carefully follow the changes in customers buying behaviour and environment. (Gerdt et al. 2023, 116).

Global competition and digitalisation have made it easy for the customer to have access to product and price comparisons from several different suppliers and thus, pricing the product correctly has become even more complicated. It has become clearer for all to show and use cost-based pricing. That way it is easier to explain since it is based on input costs and gives the salesperson actual data to justify the price to the customer. (Cespedes 2018, 100).

In pricing it is important to understand and take into consideration, the customer value. The factors affecting the pricing are customer benefits such as customer value and the driving force for customer to buy, and supplier profit such as cost and driving force for supplier to sell. Again, it is important to investigate the differences between value and price, and between price and cost in order to identify opportunities. It is also important to look at one's own market research and learn how to create more customer value, to increase customer's perception of value, and to cut costs without decreasing customer value. (Cespedes 2018, 104).

Cespedes (2018, 110) is giving a step-by step process into identifying and extracting value. First it is important to understand the value opportunities by analysing buying data. Secondly, to prioritise opportunities by value delivery and competitive requirements. Thirdly, to align value and price. Finally, to communicate total value. Within the process it is important to understand what actually causes the wins and losses. (Cespedes 2018, 113).

2.3   Employee experience

Whereas a strong employer brand is an asset when attracting and engaging new candidates, employee experience is the way of keeping the workforce happy and motivated. Like stated before, there has been a lack of employees in the hospitality industry and therefore employers should have a focus on making employee experience the best possible. All companies desire their employees to feel they want to work for the company rather than they feel that they need to work for them. Simply, with happy employees comes happy customers. In fact, Shaheen, Zeba and Mohanty (2017) write that happy customers are a result of positive, engaged and confident employees, who can wow the customers with open minds and efficient actions.

Harrington (2018, 2) describes employee experience as the sum of the interactions and perceptions that employees have regarding their work, their relationships, and the opportunities for growth within the organisation. Factors affecting the employee experience are for instance the employees' perceptions of whether he or she feels valued and respected by co-workers, and is the manager interested in the employee's well-being. Employee experience also have a major impact on the company's culture and well-being at work. Anyhow, there is no point in building a happy workplace just for the sake of it. The meaning behind is to build a best possible workplace where the employees can concentrate on the fundamental task, bringing more value to the customers. (Korkiakoski 2019, 118).

Great employee experience is the key into having happy and healthy employees. However, it is also a key into successful and healthy business. When employees are more engaged with the work they are also usually more efficient. The benefits of good employee experience bring more revenue and people get to work with what they love. An employee experience is basically a perception of how an employee sees the employer. It is often created based on interaction, image and feelings. (Korkiakoski 2019, 21). Compared to customer experience employee experience has not been researched as much in the history, but today's companies are very interested in knowing how motivated their employees are (Korkiakoski 2019, 22).

To start with it is important for the employee to understand what the company's objectives are and what is expected of the employees. It is also important to know as much as possible about the customers. To be able to exceed the customer's expectations the employee should have all the tools and knowledge as possible from the company. One key aspect is then to understand the promises given to the customer and to know all the company procedures that helps to conduct them. (Korkiakoski 2019, 119). In order for the employee to be able to exceed the customer's expectations, he or she should be emotionally engaged to the company and to share the same values. Like stated in the figure below, it is important for the employees to have enough knowledge about the company and the customer. To share the same values, to be aware of the role that is expected of the employees and to feel trusted in what they are doing. When the employees have assimilated the knowledge and feelings, they will be able to perform the actions expected of them. (Korkiakoski 2019, 119).

Knowledge	Feelings	Actions
• Why	• Values	• Tools
• Results	• Role	• Recources
• Development	• Excitement	• Promises
• Customer	• Trust	• Procedures

Figure 2. Requirements for success. (Korkiakoski 2019, 119).

Buckingham (2022, 68) has conducted a survey at ADP Research Institute about people's work engagement among other things. Even though salary raises do bring financial security and there-

fore enhance the quality of life, it is not the main driver when it comes to work engagement. According to Buckingham (2022, 68) the most popular drivers for performance and engagement did not include salary nor work location, it was the fact of people loving what they are doing.

In order to succeed, or at least to improve, in making a company a place where all people love what they are doing, according to Buckingham (2022, 69) three principles apply:

- ✓ The people are the point → the employees are the company's most valuable stakeholders
- ✓ One size fits one → all people are not the same and all have their unique and distinct loves, interests and skills
- ✓ In trust we grow → the management should create trust in all practices and policies

The reason for making people love what they do is that brain releases certain chemicals when in love and then a person is more open to accept new thoughts and feelings and can broaden the self-perspective better. Work can this way be a source of energy and resilience, rather than a source for stress. It is however, important to remember that employee experience is not supposed to be only fun and games.

Korkiakoski (2019, 121) reminds that employee experience is a combination of company culture, technology and work environment. Company culture can be compared to the air that employees and customers breath (Korkiakoski 2019, 124). Elements of a successful company culture are for instance that every employee feels appreciated and valued, all employees feel they are part of one team, the company takes care of the employees' health and well-being and the company culture is open for and facilitates leaning more. Work environment is something that can be seen, touched, felt and smelled (Korkiakoski 2019, 127). Work environment is also about mental and physical safety where everyone can feel comfortable. When it comes to technology it is important for the employer to follow the trends and keep up with the newest technologies, since employees today might turn down a job opportunity, if the company is using older technical tools and programmes (Korkiakoski 2019, 128).

Buckingham (2022, 70) has very similar perspectives than Korkiakoski above. Companies should recruit humans, not workers and make sure that each person is seen as adding value to the organisation's mission. Companies should also focus on teams, says Buckingham (2022, 73). According to him each team member's unique personality should be seen as an asset and how team members can find different ways of helping one to do what she/he loves. Companies should also trust their humans with a certain freedom of expression and discard rituals that eat away trust (Buckingham 2022, 74).

It is important for human resource development professionals to see the connection between happy employees and customers and to take it into careful consideration when developing a conductive work environment with engaged employees (Shaheen et al. 2017,17). Another themes for developing the employee experience are for instance improving inhouse communication, celebrating smaller success in the everyday life, personal development plans and diversity when hiring new employees (Korkiakoski 2019, 146). Dachner, Ellingson and Noe (2019, 4) see the employee development in a very similar way, shown in the figure below.
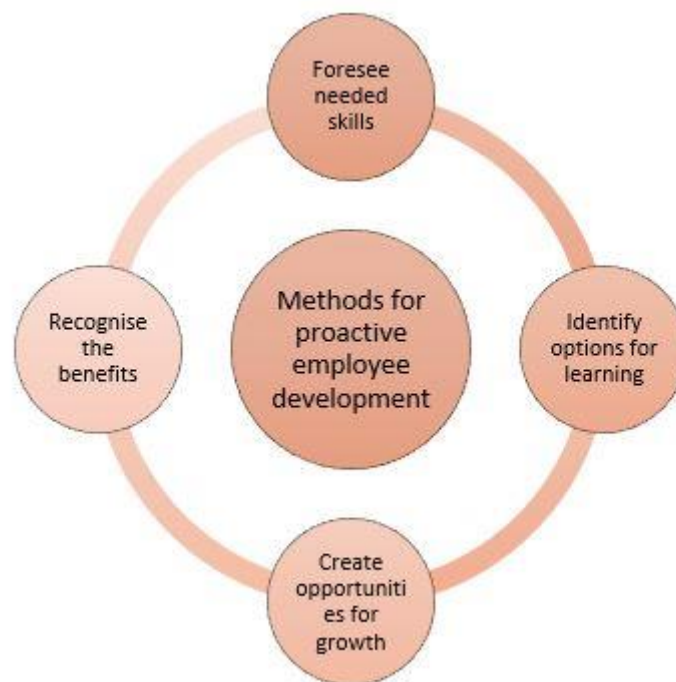
Figure 3. Methods for proactive employee development (Dachner et al. 2019, 4).

As in customer experience also in employee experience it is often so that the person only remembers the highlights and the end of the journey. Korkiakoski (2019, 159) suggests that the employees' journey should be followed more carefully on order to use the parts or steps of the journey as tools in the employee development. These parts of steps could include for instance the first day in the new job, anniversaries and also the negative moments, like negative feedback from a customer. This way the experience is more versatile and makes the everyday work life more meaningful (Korkiakoski 2019, 160).

Employee experience is an important part of an organisation and should constantly be improved. In fact, people that are happy and in love with what they do are proven to be more engaged and less

burned out. And above all that, they bring more revenue to the business. *"Take care of your employees, and they'll take care of your business. It's as simple as that."* - Richard Branson (Branson 2015).

2.4   Drivers of employee motivation

Turner (2017) adapted from Kanfer (1990) defines motivation as such: *"psychological forces that determine the direction of a person's level of effort and a person's level of persistence in the face of obstacles."*. People are driven by two different motivations, extrinsic or intrinsic motivations.

One could argue that leading people by only extrinsic motivation is old fashioned and in fact, companies should pay attention to encouraging the intrinsic motivation instead (Martela and Jarenko 2015, 25). For example, when looking into extrinsic motivation more carefully, the sources can for instance be external rewards or punishments. Those sources can make an employee feel reactive, scared, stressed and distressed. The outcome of a such source is often that the employee narrows down the perspective, only sees threats and feels drained. On the opposite, sources for intrinsic motivation can be for instance inner interest for carrying out tasks and looking at matters from the positive side. Those sources can make an employee feel proactive, encouraged, excited and happy. The outcome of intrinsic motivations is that an employee is able to broaden the perspective, sees opportunities and feels energetic. (Martela et al. 2015, 27).

It is anyhow important to understand that people are driven by both motivations, e.g. salary is extrinsic motivation and needed for survival. At the same time intrinsic motivation can be compared to feeling as an appreciated part of an organisation. (Martela et al. 2015, 28). Turner (2017) also underlines that it is important for companies to understand the drivers for motivation whether it is extrinsic or intrinsic, is there a difference between the two and how significant the difference is if there is one. It is anyhow also essential to strengthen the moments when employees feel motivated by intrinsic factors (Martela et al. 2015, 35).

Martela et al. (2015, 29) calls the state when someone is passionately motivated as the state of drive, in which intrinsic motivation is the key. The state can also be called as being pulled into work, in a positive manner. The state of drive is very optimal from both the employee's and employer's point of view. The well-being of a devoted employee is excellent and at the same he or she is the most productive. There are several reasons for people being more productive in drive. For instance when a person is excited about something they tend to put more energy to it. It has

been proven that people also learn faster and better when they are driven by intrinsic motivation. (Martela et al. 2015, 45)

An enthusiastic employee plays a great role in customer experience. For example, it has been proven that the state of drive can be connected into the service attitudes of front desk staff employees. Then again, the service attitude affects the service quality. An enthusiastic service minded employee makes customers feel appreciated and wanted as a customer. Following the overall customer experience improves. (Martela et al. 2015, 46).

2.5 Upsell as a sales technique

Upsell as a technique has been used for instance in fast food restaurants already for a longer period of time. It is not either a new technique to be used in hotel receptions. The word upsell is often thought as negative and therefore there is an interest to think of it as an additional service to the customer in order to make it positive. According to Sharma and Sharma (2015, 63) in hotels upselling is a method for improving revenue by offering additional services for a customer to improve their experience. It can for instance be an up-grade to a better room or a bottle of champagne and strawberries brought to the room. Upselling can also increase the average daily rate. Following, upsell brings a win-win situation for both and more over additional value to the customer.

As can be seen in the figure below a majority of business owners feel that upselling is either important or very important part of their growth strategy. They see that upsell has a direct influence in revenue and retention goals. Peterson and Riesterer (2020). They did however, also agree that it is not always as clear what to sell to which customer. It is easier to use upsell with existing customers, since they already know the company. It is also more expensive to acquire new customers rather than keeping the existing ones. Also attracting new customers can be challenging due to the multiple marketing distribution channels. Therefore, by keeping the existing customers satisfied by offering them targeted offers they value can give a company improved customer loyalty, differentiation to competitors and increased revenue. (Sharma et. al 2015, 67). Basically, upselling technique is a method of receiving more revenue per customer rather than acquiring new customer, which increases selling costs (Guillet 2020).
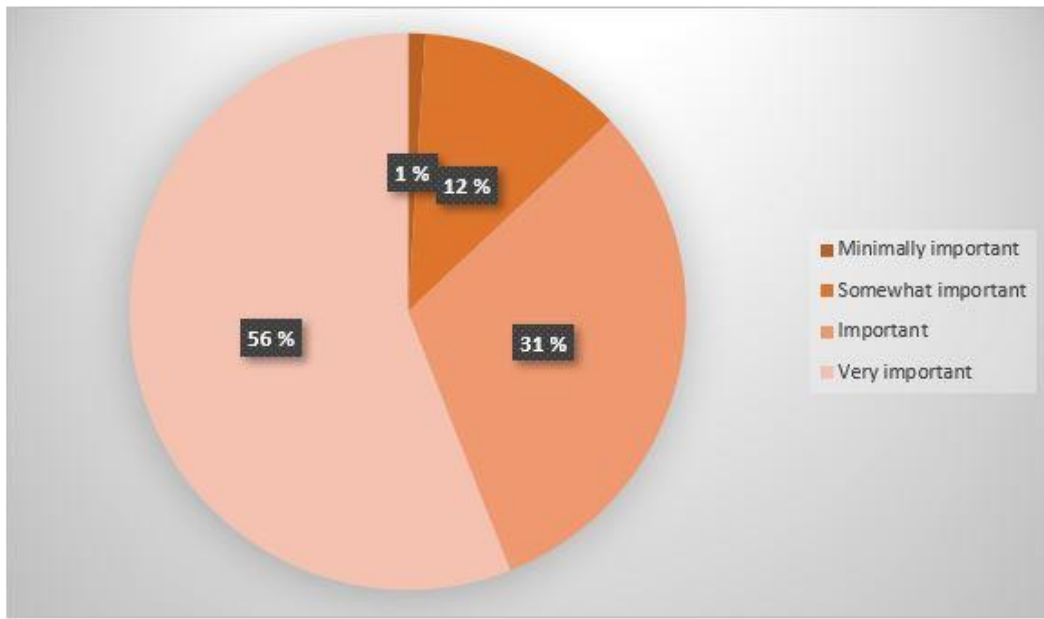
Figure 4. The importance of upsell to companies' revenue and retention strategies (Peterson et. al 2020).

It is not always clear what the customer wants, but there are different ways of figuring it out. Perhaps, it is not the best way to upsell just anything only to increase the revenue. A better way is to try to understand the customer's needs (Sharma et al. 2015, 64). Like stated before, nowadays people are even more aware of quality and the value they get for the money. Digitalisation has brought information easier to access and people spend more time on searching different options and comparing the prices. When booking a hotel room for instance, customers have already used a great amount of time for the decision making and most likely feel confident that it is the right choice. Therefore the front-line employee should understand the customer's effort behind the decision and to be able to emphasise the advantages of the upsell option compared to the original choice (Heidig, Wentzel, Tomczak, Wiecek and Faltl 2017, 557). Meaning, to be able to really proof that they actually get more value for the money by choosing the upsell option.

Based on the basic marketing mix, upsell is also most profitable when the right product is sold at the right time to the right customer. And of course at the right price, to be added also. In upselling situations the sales skills of the front desk staff have a great role. They can in fact use similar techniques as salespersons. Such as, offering discounts or incentives or giving free add-on products such as small room amenities to compliment the upsell product. (Sharma et al. 2015, 64).

One important factor in upsell among asking questions is listening to the customer. As in business-to-business contacts also in business to customer forming relationships is important. Obviously,

there is less time for a chat in the check-in situation at the hotel compared to a sales meeting. It is however as important to listen carefully and to ask the customer the right questions. This way the seller can build trust and encourage the customer to open up even more. Hence, give more information about his/hers needs. (Cherry 2017). There will be more information and discussion about the value of keeping the existing customers in Chapter 3 Customer experience.
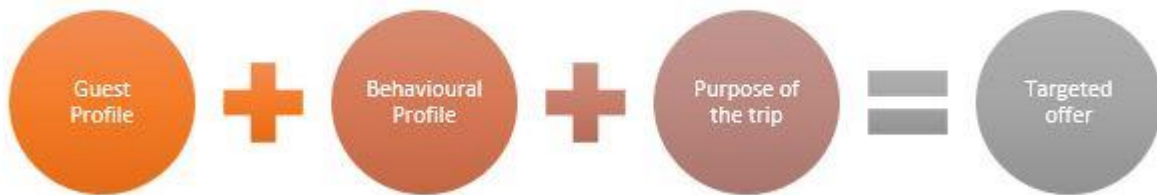
Figure 5. Understanding the guest (Sharma et al. 2015, 64).

The above figure demonstrates how the knowledge and the questions asked from the customer helps the staff member to decide what kind of upsell option to offer the customer. In fact, some information can already be seen from the guest's reservation profile from the hotel system, so a picture of the customer's background can partly be established before the actual encounter. It is even better when the customer is already a member of the loyalty programme. That usually provides even more information to form the picture of the customer's needs more easily. When it comes to the customer's purpose of the trip, it is important to acknowledge the differences in needs between leisure and business travellers.

3   Customer Experience in the Service Industry

Hotel business is a part of service industry. Service industry provides services to customers, but it does not manufacture goods. People serve a great role in the service industry since people are the ones providing the services to other people. The people working in the industry must have excellent customer service skills and know-how into producing high quality experiences. The most important factor is the interaction with the customers and following the great customer service the customers keep coming back to.

The importance of a customer has become more and more visible and present in business. The concentration has become towards serving the customer and exceeding the customer's needs, rather than just producing services. In fact, the motto for a customer service person should be do not only do what the customer asks for, always do more (Aarnikoivu 2005, 82). The thinking has changed even more towards customer comes first and relations with customers are highly valued. Jobber and Lancaster (2015, 295) write that "it is a fact that since the 1980s many bigger companies have recognised that the key to success is the need to evolve from a production- and cost-dominant stance towards one of serving a diverse range of customers through personal contact". One key aspect is in forming relationships.

Often companies concentrate on analysing the competition, which is of course also important. It is however, also very important to focus on the customer, since they have a large impact on the company's success. A company that has been able to create a strong and trustworthy customer relationship cannot be beaten by a competitor. (Gerdt et al. 2016, 13). Creating a trustworthy relationship with a customer does not require great actions. Simply by thinking from the customer's perspective, being innovative and confident with the right kind of service attitude, one can rather easily exceed the customer's expectations and build loyalty. (Aarnikoivu 2005, 83).

Recent studies have shown that keeping of existing customers is more cost-effective than finding new customers. In fact, it costs much more to find new customers, than it does to keep and take good care of old ones. In this marketing has a great role in developing and maintaining positive and long-lasting relationships between the customers and company's designers. It is important to make sure interaction stays good in order to take good care of the consumers. (Jobber et al. 2015, 297). Korkiakoski (2023, 29) also agrees that acquiring new customers is much more expensive than keeping the existing ones. The better the customer experience is, the more they will bring money to the company.

Maintaining relationships to customers is a part of successful customer experience. Successful B2B sales does not equal successful customer experience, since too often the sales company ends the relationship after the sale. For instance, often the sales representative is impossible to reach after the sale when questions occur (Hague and Hague 2018, 17). According to Hague et al. (2018, 18) good principles for a company to be successful with customers are for instance to be easy to work with, to communicate regularly, to be honest and trustworthy, and to show respect. Satisfied customers are also more likely to recommend the company and other customers believe what others have experienced. Customers that have found the company through others' recommendations usually buy more, stay longer and are more likely to recommend the company further. (Korkiakoski 2023, 31)

Emotions are a part of making business in both, consumer and business-to-business markets (Hague et al. 2018, 25). In fact, the above principles help the company to create an emotional relationship with the customer and furthermore to improve the customer experience. With loyal customers salespersons are hardly needed, states Hague et al. (2018, 35). The fact is that the customers will return to a company, they already have a great experience with, just like mentioned above.

3.1   The building blocks of customer experience

A positive customer experience is built from elements such as being noticed and listened to, being understood and treated equally, promises to the customers are kept and the quality of customer service is high (Fischer and Vainio 2015, 10). All very useful elements for making the best possible experience for the customer. The internal building blocks for successful customer experience according to Korkiakoski (2014) are shown below.
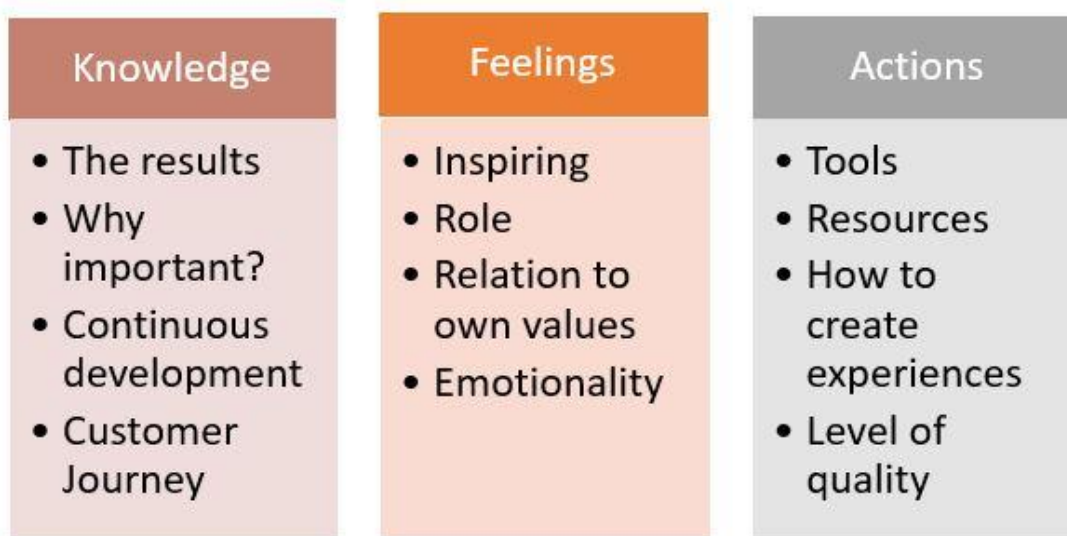
Figure 6. Internal building blocks of customer experience (Korkiakoski 2014).

Korkiakoski (2014) underlines that often employees do not have clear enough picture of the different touch points of the customer journey. Exceeding customer's expectations does not necessarily require actual tools, but understanding for the different touch points is anyhow needed. Therefore actual tools, resources and ways for creating quality experiences should be established by the management for the employees.

Julia Cupman in Hague et al. (2018, 35) introduces six pillars of customer excellence. They could also be called the foundations or building blocks of good customer experience.

- ✓ Commitment - being enthusiastic about satisfying customers and making them feel valued
- ✓ Fulfilment - understanding and delivering on customer needs
- ✓ Seamlessness - making life easier for the customer
- ✓ Responsiveness - timely response, delivery and resolution
- ✓ Proactivity - anticipating customer needs and desires and striving to resolve issues before the customer feels pain
- ✓ Evolution - continually seeking to improve the customer experience

All pillars are equally important, but in author's opinion commitment, responsiveness and proactivity are the most important and the key for excellent customer experience since those factors form the relationship with the customer and moreover loyalty and trust.

According to Hague et al. (2018, 38) commitment should start from the company's top. It can be difficult for the CEO for instance to see the importance of customer experience, since it cannot be

measured the same way as financial metrics. It does not anyhow, make it any less important. For a company to be customer centric it means to have customer experience part of all operations at all times, not only at times during projects (Gerdt et al. 2016, 98). Customer experience as its best can be costly, but it also requires the right kind of attitude. It can also be easier for a larger company to distance itself from its customers and even have a culture of dominance over its customers. Therefore, it is vital that support for the customer experience programme starts from the top. (Hague et al. 2018, 40).

Being fast is one the essentials in providing excellent customer experience. Today's world is getting busier, and people expect quick deliveries. In fact, they may even choose the company based on that. Also, quick responses are expected. Customer wants assurance of purchase immediately. Additionally, when something has gone wrong, it is important for the customer to be heard quickly and responded to accordingly. (Hague et al. 2018, 43). Being one step ahead of the customer, is the key in being proactive. To be proactive can be established by giving the customer a friendly call to ask how things are, to give information about new trends in the market, or simply to introduce new products or give updates of the old ones. To succeed in being productive requires the supplier to thoroughly know and understand the customer's fields of business, and to get closer to the customer. (Hague et al. 2018, 44).

Service is one of the key elements in customer experience. Service is something that awakes emotions and people like to talk about it even long after the situation. People tend to remember good service longer than a low price. Good service is often remembered by a feeling or an emotion. (Gerdt et al. 2016, 101). Most important factor in company's service culture is a genuine will for serving the customer. When each member of the staff is committed in making the customer experience best possible, the tools can easily be established and backed up by rewarding and the right kind of service culture. (Gerdt et al. 2016, 104).

3.2   Ways to measure customer experience

In order to improve the customer experience a company needs to have some metrics to be able to measure it. There are both internal and external ways to measure it. Internal metrics include for instance employee satisfaction. With happy employees comes happy customers. Whereas customers are receiving surveys, it is important to send them also to the employees. (Hague et al. 2018, 47). Other internal metrics are for instance voluntary work, product returns, increased sales, complaints, loyalty programme participation, and customer and employee referrals, just to name some

(Hague et al. 2018, 48). For example, customer and employee referrals decrease the cost of sales acquisition (Hague et al. 2018, 50).

The basic elements of measuring customer experience are:

- ✓ Whom to ask
- ✓ What to ask
- ✓ When to ask
- ✓ Which channel

In business to customer sales it is natural to directly ask the customer, but for instance in business-to-business it is smart to involve several persons. It is also important to think what is asked in which certain touch point and when the questions are asked. It is hardly beneficial to ask about experience that happened six months ago. The channel for asking also has a meaning. For instance, asking for feedback during a call may not be as profitable than asked in a text message after the call. (Gerdt et al. 2016, 162).

Figure 7. The steps of creating a measurement model (Gerdt et al. 2016, 162).

Gerdt et al. (2016, 162) describes the different steps for creating a measurement model as can been seen in the figure above. The starting point should always begin from the customers' perspective. Not from where the company thinks are the most important touch points. It is also important to recognise the essential points in the full picture. (Gerdt et al. 2016, 163). There are several options for choosing the right measurement model and several factors that affect them. A popular model for measuring customer experience is Net Promoter Score, later marked NPS.

External metrics can be used when measuring the customer experience and are in fact often needed to supplement the internal metrics. Example of external metrics is NPS, that is based on answers to a simple question about how likely someone is to recommend something (Hague et al 2018, 51). Gerdt et al. (2016, 166) explains that NPS is a great tool because the strength of the model is in its' controllability and linearity. Within the numbers it is rather easy to see the pros and

cons of the operations, but open questions are the ones revealing the real deal. Other ways of measuring are customer satisfaction score, customer effort score, and net value score. Customer satisfaction score can for instance be used for determining strength and weaknesses of a company on different aspects of its customer value proposition. (Hague et al. 2018, 54). The main target in choosing the right model is to follow the customer path and use the channels that are familiar to the customer. After all, the goal is to get as much answers as possible. (Gerdt et al. 2016, 175).

In customer workshops most common factor that companies are remembered by is a great customer experience. Things that people remember the most are for instance responsiveness, ability to listen and then learn, friendliness, good and well-designed products, great know-how, and trained staff. (Hague et al. 2018, 69). Like discussed earlier in the chapter making business is also about creating relationships. It also involves emotions and a strong emotional bond is an important factor in customer experience. Customer's feeling about the company builds up over time and for example, friendly staff is way of giving security and building trust in the way they are treating the customers. (Hague et al. 2018, 74).

3.3   Conclusion of the theoretical framework

This small chapter brings together the theoretical framework of the thesis. The meaning is to combine and briefly explain how sales management and customer experience are part of the service industry and moreover how these themes can be seen in the hotel business.

Service industry is basically about people. People serving other people. As a reason it is most important to choose the right people for the job. A Sales Manager's most essential tasks are selection of salesforce, training of salesforce, motivation of salesforce and controlling of salesforce. When thinking from a hotel point of view the Sales Manager would be a Front Office Manager and the tasks would be very similar. Perhaps, controlling of salesforce would be ideal to change to empowering front desk staff.

Sales processes and pricing are important factors in sales management in general and need to be established in order to stay in business. In a hotel's front desk processes concentrate more on the customer, but naturally the staff need to know what the product is, who is it sold to, when is it sold and at which price. Upselling is a sales technique that can be used in all sales situations as long as the salesperson can conduct the sell in a good manner.

With happy employees comes happy customers! In fact, positive, engaged and confident employees are the ones exceeding customers' expectations. Today it is important to pay attention to both employee and customer experience since they are closely related to one another and in fact dependant on one another. When employees are happy they also tend to be more productive. People are driven by extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Whereas extrinsic motivation is related for instance to salary, intrinsic motivation comes from within and is something a person feels valuable about, such as being an appreciated and important part of an organisation.

Customer experience is about relationships and interaction a customer faces at all stages of a customer journey. Customer experience consists of feelings and imaginations they form when in contact with any representative of a company. Maintaining strong customer relationships is vital and in fact, there are several studies that indicate how keeping of existing customers is more cost-effective than finding new customers. Service is one of the key elements in customer experience. Good service is remembered longer by feeling or an emotion.

Upsell is about selling something additional of top of an already purchased service. Upselling is a method for increasing revenue, but also a way of bringing additional value to a customer. Upsell should be seen as service, but some people see and feel it as force selling. When the staff is trained properly and given enough tools for conducting upsell, also the customer can see it as a service. Looking at upsell from the employee point of view it is a way of increasing the sales and producing special experiences to customers. Upsell is from the customer point of view new experiences and products or services they did not know that existed in beforehand. When conducting upsell the relationship with the customer is very important to be able to offer the customer personal and targeted offers. Being able to build trust between the customer and the company is a success factor in upsell.

4   Research Methods and Data Collection

This chapter introduces the chosen research approach and methodology of this thesis and the types on data collection used. This chapter also describes the use of questionnaire and interviews as a data collection methods. The methodology will be followed by an explanation of the research challenges.

4.1   Research approach

The research approach is constructive research. As mentioned earlier, the objective of the thesis is a development programme for the front desk staff of a hotel in which the author will create and present new tools to be used in selling and service situations. Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti (2015, 65) say that constructive research can be related to innovations and also to service design. On the other hand staff training is not an innovation nor service design, it is rather a structure created as a result of development work (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 65). Lukka (2003) on the other hand states that constructive research approach can indeed be used for solving problems faced in the real world.

The objective in constructive research is to give a solution that is new and theoretically explained. The solution should bring new knowledge to the target organisation. In constructive research it is important to bring together the original issue and the solution and base them with theoretical information. The research is built with literature as a base. (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 66). Some of the core features of constructive research approach are described by Lukka (2003) as follows:

- ✓ Focus is on real-world problems
- ✓ Clear linkage to prior theoretical knowledge
- ✓ Empirical findings carefully reflected back to theory

According to Lukka (2003) the best possible outcome of a constructive research project is when the problem is solved with an applied end product, that is combined with both theoretical and practical elements. The goal of the author is to produce a development programme that includes both theoretical background and practical examples of how to use upsell in the everyday tasks in the hotel's reception.

4.2   Data collection methods

This qualitative research consists of both primary and secondary data. Primary data collection methods used in this thesis are questionnaire and interviews. The used secondary data is literature from different publications, books and articles. Primary data is collected for a certain research problem whereas secondary data is reused from a previously made research for a different research problem (Hox and Boeije 2005).

Maison (2019, 185) describes the difference between qualitative and quantitative research as such: "*the difference is like the disparity between analysing numbers and analysing the meaning of words.*" Whereas numbers can only be interpreted in one way, two persons can understand same meaning of words in two different ways. Moilanen, Ojasalo and Ritalahti (2020) explain the difference between qualitative and quantitative research so that with qualitative research the findings are more in depth but challenging to generalise. Whereas quantitative methods are superficial but yet more reliable. The purpose of this research was not to receive a vast amount of replies. The aim was to receive detailed and in-depth information helping to resolve the issue.

This research was conducted with qualitative research. Moilanen et al. (2020, 99) state that a general model of qualitative research (figure 8) can help in determining the different steps in document analysis. Those steps include data collection and preparation, reducing material, identifying patterns and themes, interpretation and conclusions, and critical analysis that should be carried out during all the above steps.
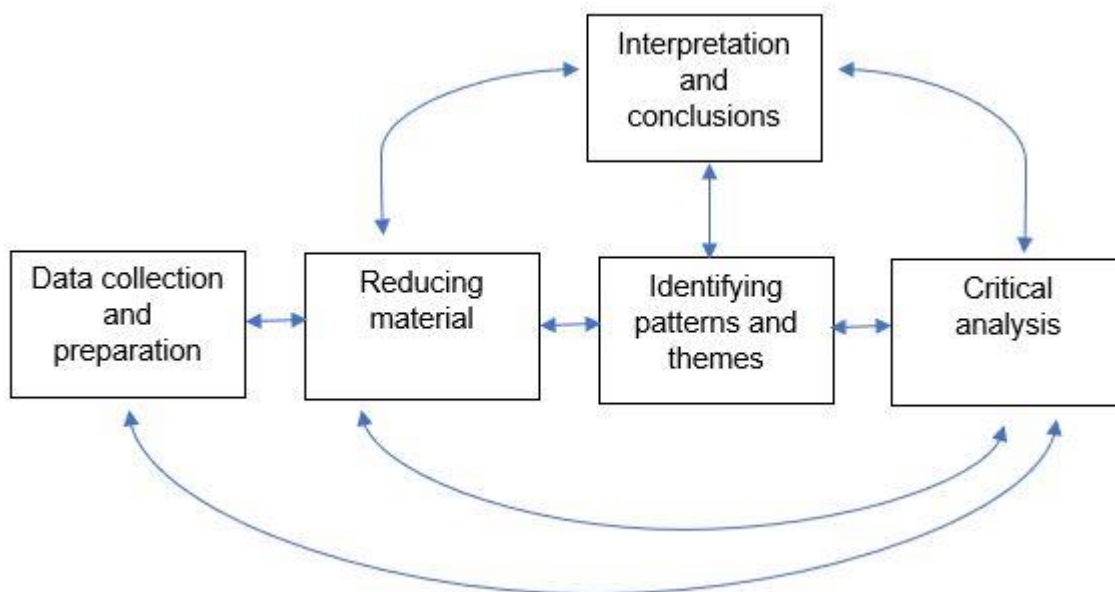

Figure 8. General model of qualitative research (Moilanen et al. 2020, 101).

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016, 567) compare qualitative data analysis to a jigsaw puzzle. The process of analysis can be thought as of completing the puzzle, where the pieces of the puzzle are data. The little pieces of data and the relationships between the pieces can be compared to creating a picture of the data analysis and what does it tell as a whole. Usually people look at the picture of the cover box while completing the puzzle. Without the picture completing the puzzle in much more challenging. What can be discovered from this comparison, is that the analysis of the data is easier when it can be compared to existing data that can help to form the results of the research.

The author decided to use questionnaire with open ended questions, that was send to all front desk employees of the hotel. Additionally, the plan was to use face-to-face group interviews, but in the end the interviews were held individually due to challenges in the schedule. Below the use of questionnaire and interviews will be explained more deeply. The questions used for the questionnaire and interviews can be found in Appendix 1.

4.2.1 Questionnaire as a data collection method

Questionnaire or a survey is one of the most popular data collection methods used. They are especially useful when information needs to be collected from a larger group of people. Questionnaires can also collect an extensive amount of data and they can be carried out rather quickly. Like stated above one of the weaknesses in using questionnaires is that the collected data can be considered rather superficial. It can also be difficult to tell how well the respondent know the subject and how seriously they take answering the research. Questionnaires can anyhow produce fast and superficial yet reliable data. (Moilanen et al. 2020, 91).

There are different types of questions to be used in questionnaires. Quantity questions are used when the information needed is stated in numbers. For example, a question like how many years have you worked in the industry. Closed questions are questions that have given multiple choice for answers and the respondent can choose the best option from those. Open ended questions are questions that are replied with non-limited words. Open ended questions are to be used when the researcher is looking for narrative and qualitative information. (Marshall 2004). The reason that the author decided to use open ended questions was to give freedom for the respondents to provide as much information as possible in their own words.

The language used in the questionnaire should be words from the everyday use and as simple as possible. It is also important to think whether the language used is too professional and in specialist language. (Marshall 2004). When these factors are taken into consideration replying to the questions should be easier. The author decided to use a couple of warm-up questions in the beginning in order to familiarise the respondents with the background of the topic of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to the respondents by email using every one's work email address.

4.2.2 Questionnaire respondents

The questionnaires were sent out to the respondents in the beginning of April 2023 by email. In the email the author carefully explained that the research is made for the employees in order to facilitate the upselling procedures in their work. They were given two weeks' time for responding. The questionnaire was sent to 27 persons working in the hotel's front desk. Only five responses were received, even though the author extended the period of time for replying. The background of the respondents is as following:

- ✓ All respondents were female
- ✓ Their positions in the front desk are Guest Service Agent or Shift Supervisor
- ✓ All respondents had been working for the company minimum one year.

4.2.3 Interviews as a data collection method

When comparing interviews as a data collection method to questionnaire, one could argue that the purpose of the interview is to get deeper into the matter. Compared to questionnaire the list of questions is possibly the same, but interviews are dialogues extending into conversations between two people (Hague et al. 2016, 81). Interviews as research methods can give in-depth answers rather quickly. It is also a good method to be used when the interest is in gaining information from an

individual. An individual can bring thoughtful insights to the matter since they can rather freely influence in the answers and furthermore bring new perspective into the matter. (Moilanen et al. 2020, 79).

As in any research in order to get the best possible outcome it is vital to choose the right people for the interview. According to Maison (2019, 111) the respondents should be chosen in a way that they can give as much information as possible in order to receive the most meaningful and valuable data as possible. The persons chosen for interview were front desk members from the hotel. Some Guest service agents and one Duty manager. The reason for choosing these persons for the interview is that these persons are the ones in the everyday customer service and the development programme is made directly for their use. They are still however, presenting only a small part of the full sample. Since there are 27 persons working in the front desk it was not possible to interview them all, due to lack of time. It was obviously not possible to know the outcome of the interviews in beforehand and preparing for possible failure in data collection is also smart. Even though one could think it would be important to have as wide selection of respondents as possible, in qualitative research the outtake is still small and cannot represent a suitable representation of the population nonetheless (Maison 2019, 112).

Open-ended questions are the most suitable for in-depth interviews since they encourage to elaborate longer and deeper replies. Whereas yes- and no-answers often stop the conversation before it even started. By using open-ended questions the respondent is able to decide him- or herself what is important to share and what he or she would like to talk about. (Maison 2019, 147). By conducting the interviews in the environment connected to the situation are called contextual interviews and they often provide better and deeper thoughts from the respondents, than ones conducted out of context. It is also suitable for the interviewer to use a recorder in order to be free form constantly taking notes during the interview. A consent should anyhow be always asked from the interviewee. The recording also helps with remembering the answers and interpreting then even further. (Moilanen et al. 2020, 79). The author recorded all interviews and definitely benefited from it, since it was easy to get back to the recordings when some issue needed more in-depth information.

As there has been discussion earlier in the thesis how customer relationships are based on trust and how trust should be earned in order to be able to conduct upsell. Also in interviewing situations trust is important between the participants. The interviewer has responsibility of taking into consideration how the other person is dressed and talked to. It is also rather crucial that the participants

are able to understand each other and the interviewee's educational and cultural backgrounds are taken into account. (Moilanen et al. 2020, 81).

There are different types of interviews. Structured interviews consist of ready formulated questions that are presented in earlier decided order. The questions also in semi structured interviews have been decided in beforehand, but the order of the questions can be changed by the interviewer. The interviewer can also decide to leave some of the questions out and even come up with new ones. (Moilanen et al. 2020, 81).

4.2.4   Interview respondents

The interviews were held at the hotel during one day. All respondents were interviewed separately. The author decided to use the same questions as in the questionnaire, since the response rate had been so low and figured it would be better to get more data based on the same questions. Anyhow, there was a possibility to elaborate with the questions during the interview, for instance to change the order or go deeper into the matter with follow up questions. The authors attention was to make the situation as relaxed as possible in order for the respondents to be at ease. Of course, the attention was also to receive good answers and information as much as possible. As mentioned earlier the author recorded all the interviews. Below can be seen the background of the respondents.

	Male/Female	Work title	Date	Length of interview
Respondent 1	Female	Shift Supervisor	3rd of May	25 min
Respondent 2	Female	Guest Service Agent	3rd of May	30 min
Respondent 3	Female	Guest Service Agent	3rd of May	24 min
Respondent 4	Female	Guest Service Agent	3rd of May	34 min

4.3   Research challenges

Since the background of the thesis and one of the problems is that some members of the front desk staff of the hotel feel uncomfortable in upselling situations, it was natural to ask the staff directly about the problem. Since there are 27 employees in the reception it was not possible time-wise to interview all, the plan was to send a questionnaire to everyone and then go deeper into the matter with some respondents. The original meaning was to choose four to five respondents to a face-to-face group interview. The author felt that group interview would enable even deeper insights into the matter.

Unfortunately the response rate of the questionnaire was very low. Only five responses were received. The author then decided that due to the low response rate to use individual face-to-face interviews in order to get more replies to the original questions. If there has been more time the group interview could have been organised following the individual interviews. The author speculated over whether the questionnaire should have been conducted via Google Forms for example, but at the time felt that since the questions are open ended question, it would be same to answer via email. Naturally full anonymity was granted to the respondents. The author received some unofficial feedback of the questionnaire. The author was told that the questions were so in-depth that they were difficult to answer and it would have taken a lot of time to answer them all.

5 Research Results and Analysis

In this chapter the research results will be introduced and carefully analysed. The results have been collected from both the questionnaire and the interviews. The questionnaire and the interviews were held for the front desk staff of the hotel. The questions in the questionnaire and the interviews are same and can be seen in Appendix 1. All questions were carefully formulated based on the theoretical framework that can be found in chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis.

5.1 Analysis of the collected data

The author has analysed the data in a way that the results can be divided under the main themes sales, upsell and customer experience. Customer service will be analysed within customer experience. Also employee experience and the driver of motivation is one of the larger themes in the thesis. The author used the same questions both in the questionnaire and the interviews and therefore further in the analysis the division between questionnaire and interview in not necessary and will be handled as one source of data. The author gathered the received data under each question and started comparing the results. Overall the respondents gave really good insights into the matter and were able to give useful examples from the industry. The respondents present about a third of the entire staff of the hotel's front desk.

Sales

When talking about sales in general, the main topics that arose from the answers was that sales is revenue, sales is a service and sales in a hotel can be anything from hotel rooms to restaurant and meeting services. One of the respondents stated that sales is firstly economics and about making revenue.

> Sales is something when money is exchanged for a service or a product. At the hotel a customer pays for a hotel room. Someone has a need for a room and the hotel can offer one.

Furthermore, sales bring revenue and enables a company to grow further, that results in expanding the product range and being able to produce more services to customers. When this answer

started from further away another one had a very similar point of view of sales being services produced to customers. Services being either material needed by customers or experiences to be fulfilled.

> Sales is a service produced to customers helping customers to fulfil their needs for service or an experience. Sales is a part of my job because we produce nice hotel experiences for the customers by selling them lovely rooms where they can enjoy a bit of luxury before or after travelling.

Upsell

All respondents shared the opinion that upsell is a service. Upsell was also seen as something additional on top of the hotel room. Upsell was also mentioned as bringing additional value and special experiences to customers.

> Upsell is extra service. Service on top of service for the customer and at the same time bringing more euros to the hotel.

All respondents agreed that upsell should be and actually is one of the work tasks at the reception and an important factor in customer service.

The products or services in upsell could basically be anything that can be sold in a hotel. For instance, room upgrades, rooms with sauna, breakfast to rates that are excluding breakfast, restaurant services, bottle of sparking brought to the room or meeting services. Just to name a few. Many of the respondents mentioned that upsell is about exceeding customer expectations by offering something the customers do not know that is available. Another point is that upsell is also about making tailored personal offers to customers, that can make them feel special.

> How I see upsell, is that it is about selling services to customers that are not the standard products. For example, a seasonal drink or a specific food portion in season. Basically upselling a product that is not directly linked to our own department. During check-in the receptionist can recommend to a customer about a tasteful dessert at the restaurant.

One excellent comment among the answers was that a benefit of upsell is that customers get additional value of a service they already have purchased and even when paying a little more of the upsell the benefits like additional value have a larger meaning than the used money.

> I feel the benefit of upsell from the customer point of view is that the customer can get a personal and unique offer. Perhaps, that increases the value of the service since the hotel has something special to offer the customer.

When the additional amount is small, the value of the additional service is bigger. Another important point was that at the hotel the main product is a hotel room and everything else is connected to it and therefore there are multiple options to choose from to make an upsell.

> The benefit really is that the customer gets something on top of the already purchased product. Whether the upsell option is room upgrade or a bottle of sparkling brought to the room. As an example my own personal favourite is a room upgrade where customers can enjoy for instance a better view, bigger room or even services of the executive lounge. Some room rates are not including breakfast and for those upselling a rate with breakfast is upselling with benefits and pure savings for the customer.

Employee experience and motivation

Question number 5 of the questionnaire asked which factors and situations motivates to conduct upsell (Appendix 1). Many of the respondents replied that the customer is the best motivator. Of course, also almost all replied that money motivates. The responses showed that monetary motivators could be individual rewards or competitions within teams.

> I'm motivated when I have an interest and resources to conduct upsell. It also helps to have given tools and training for how upsell in conducted well. A little competition makes me more sales oriented and peer pressure from staff members motivate me even more. Of course also monetary rewards are a source of motivation for me.

Individual competition was seen so that it could create unnecessary tension within the shift. Then again, another respondent felt that individual competition would be better, since competitions might have an effect on the team spirit. Competitive atmosphere could also create tensions between the employees, was a concern of one respondent. Another point of view was that successful selling situations bring confidence and the respondent would rather do upsell from the aspect that it brings additional value to the customer, rather than a couple of euros to the company.

> Good customer feedback is a motivator for me. It is wonderful to please a customer and make them feel good and genuinely pleased. Of course, monetary rewards increase motivation, but it does not have to be money. Upsell is a part of work duties and that is what we get paid for. I feel team competition is better than individual competition. I upsell every day at work.

> Successful selling experiences bring me more confidence. I rather do upsell from the point of view that it brings more value to the customer rather than a couple of euros to the hotel. Team competition is better than individual, since there are many staff members serving the same

customer. Customer's pure joy is the biggest motivator, but of course money brings extra mo-tivation.

A little over half of the respondents felt that upsell is easy and natural part of their work. Factors that make upsell easier are for instance knowledge, motivation, clear guidelines, support from su-pervisors, knowing the customer's needs.

I partly feel upselling is easy, but there is always a need for improvement. I could be more ac-tive and guide and encourage other colleagues. All competitions are motivators for me, espe-cially when there is a reward involved. I also like team competitions.

For the ones that feel upselling difficult the factors that have an effect are for instance busy shifts that leave no time for upselling, the feeling of it being force selling to the customer, some are miss-ing tools, techniques and actual concrete examples for how to execute upsell.

Selling is not my favourite thing in the world. I don' like force selling the customer. Additional services really need to be something that actually benefits the customer. Many are happy with a bed and a shower.

A couple also mentioned that upselling is unnatural for a Finn and one needs to have a certain per-sonality trait in order to be successful in upselling.

I feel upselling a little uncomfortable. Finnish mentality about it being force selling disturbs me. For some people it comes naturally. It is easy when it's known what the customers wants.

All respondents agreed that upsell is an important part of customer service and should be included in the everyday tasks in the front desk. Some mentioned busy evening shifts as a factor effecting whether there is time for upsell at all. They feel that when lines are long and customers waiting just to get into the rooms, the upsell is easily forgotten and left out.

Rush is a negative factor and it feels like there is no time for upsell when there are many check-ins in one evening. It is important that there are enough staff members in one shift. Es-pecially when there are a lot of arrivals.

Customer Experience

A successful customer experience was described by the respondents in following words:

✓ Customer thanks and returns later

- ✓ Is when customer mentions good service and smiles back
- ✓ When supply and demand meet, everyone is happy with the end results
- ✓ Customer feels they are welcome
- ✓ Staff is friendly and caring
- ✓ Never use a word "NO"
- ✓ Always trying to find a solution to every problem
- ✓ Facing the customer with empathy
- ✓ Being one step ahead of the customer
- ✓ Customer feels special and unique
- ✓ Satisfied and genuinely happy customer
- ✓ Smile speaks a thousand words

These above-mentioned factors are indeed the makers of a successful customer experience. It was positive to receive such answers that really describe customer experience pleasantly.

> The customer really feels welcome to the hotel. Staff is always friendly and caring for the customers. Service exceeds customer expectations. Often small things can make the Wow-effect for instance when helping a customer with carrying their bags. Never use the word no to a customer. If problems occur, we always try to find a solution. We show we take every problem seriously even though they cannot always be solved.

Another good point of view was given by a respondent, stating that without upsell and good customer service the hotel would not have any customers. The respondent continued that competition is rough in the industry and service plays a great role. If service is bad once, customer chooses another hotel next time. A few of the respondents also indicated that more staff are needed in shifts in order to have enough time for upsell and good customer service.

> Even though the attitude is good, in order to make good customer experiences enough time is needed (also enough staff is needed) that one can concentrate on the actual service. Rather than just checking customers in and out and all other duties waiting to be done. For sales and upsell it is important for the management and supervisors to be present in order to lead and motivate the staff. Since after all, it all comes down to how much the company wants to make more revenue by upselling and furthermore make the staff more motivated in the matter.

Some of the respondents believe that different customer types affect their way of conducting upsell. For instance if the customer seems very busy, the respondent does not upsell. Otherwise a difference between leisure and business customers was not meaningful according to the respondents. Some mentioned that it is easier to find out the needs of the customer when they spend more

time in chatting with them. Sometimes not finding a common language can prevent the respondent from conducting upsell.

> Different customer types definitely have an effect. Some people seem extra busy and then I feel upselling is not a good idea. The more relaxed and extrovert the customer is, the easier it is to chat longer with him/her.

> No, I think all are equal. I feel, I can see what the customer wants. I like to chat more with those that don't seem busy.

6   The Plan for the Upsell Techniques Development Programme

In this chapter the author will present the plan for the development programme and explain which factors are essential to include. The plan is a result of combining both theory and results from the data collection. The purpose of the development programme is to make upsell procedures easier for the staff of the front desk and consequently, the programme will include both theory for understanding the need for upsell better and actual tools for using upsell in the everyday work environment.

The development programme has been planned to include a training or a workshop, in which the author will guide trough the staff with the findings from theory and collected data. The interest of the author is to use as much as possible information from the answers received from the respondents in order for the development programme to be really useful for them. Since many of the respondents shared that monetary rewards and perks would motivate them better, the management have promised to add them.

The training or the workshop will be held most likely in two sessions, so that everyone from the reception can attend. Since the hotel is open 24 hours a day, some staff members always need to be on duty. The session will last approximately an hour. The procession of the training or workshop will be as following. Firstly, the author will introduce the subject to everyone and explain theory behind upsell, including some real-life examples showing how upsell brings revenue to the company and additional value to the customer. Secondly, there will be some discussion with the participants about the handled theory and other subjects. At this point the participants can also ask questions if needed. Thirdly, the author will present the actual tools and techniques for upsell. These tools and techniques are only for advice and does not mean all members of the staff need to use them as such. The meaning is that everyone can find the suitable way for upsell that suits them best and adapt and combine theory with practice. Lastly, the session will be ended with open discussion and a plan for the common rules and ways of action. The session will be held in a relaxed manner, where everyone can contribute to the final result. Nevertheless, the main points will the results of this research.

The author is including at least the following points and topics:

- ✓ _Starting with basics_: Listen to the customer → ask questions → Look for tips from his/her customer loyalty profile and background info → what is the purpose of the trip → conversation is the key!

✓ *Underline to the customer:*

→ What are the benefits of the upsell and why is it better than the original option

→ Always be clear about the price and the cost of the upsell

→Celebrate the successful sell with the customer and remember to mention the benefits again later in the check-in situation

✓ *When shifts are busy:*

→Send upsell emails prior to visit → leaving more time for service in the check-in situations

→motivation and support from supervisors and colleagues encourage and give energy!

7   Discussion and Reflections

This chapter finalises and brings together the theoretical framework and research data. Each research question will be answered with the combination of theory and empirical findings. In the end of this chapter the author will go through the process of the thesis and some reflections of one's learning.

The main objective of the thesis was to create a development programme for the front desk staff of the hotel. The concentration of the development programme is in sales techniques and more over upsell techniques carried out in the hotel reception. With the combination of theoretical framework and the collected data the author was able to plan a development programme for the staff. The author does believe that the tools and advice will help the staff to carry out the process of upsell. The plan includes the theory behind to proof why upsell should be conducted is such way in order to make the staff understand the process better. The plan also includes some real-life examples that they can practice with.

The main results of the research are as following. The author was able to conclude that upsell is a service, since it can bring additional value to a customer and introduce services or products of the company the customer did not know existed. Also from the service point of view upsell should always be executed with the customer's interest in mind in order for in to be successful and valuable for the customer. Upsell can also be looked at as a service that offers a customer something additional on top of the already purchased service that can exceed the customer's expectations. In upsell it is important to be able to make tailored and personalised offers for the customer. This can make the customer feel special and valued and consequently, it increases the customer experience. In upsell the most important factor is about building a relationship with the customer. As in any other business trust is the key factor. By taking care of existing customers the front desk staff will be able to build long lasting relationships, that bring more revenue to the company and simultaneously improves the overall customer experience.

The main conclusions based on the results are shown under each research question:

Q1: How to motivate the staff to improve their sales and upselling skills? Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic motivation. Based on the results the staff can be motivated with both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. In fact, almost all mentioned that monetary rewards either individual or team rewards would be appreciated. That is understandable since it is know that the salaries of front desk personnel are rather low compared to the average wages in Finland. However, many of

the respondents also mentioned that most important motivator is customer satisfaction and simply being able to please the customer. That was predictable, since by being able to provide excellent customer service that exceeds the customer's expectations, the employee needs to be fit for the job. Service minded people seek for jobs in hotel receptions and are also carefully chosen for the job. It requires a lot of effort and certain kind of personality to be a professional in sales and customer service in hotel business.

Q2: Which are the factors now that restrict the staff from selling or upselling more? The staff feels that busy shifts leave no time for upselling. They also feel that when a customer seems busy, they do not want to make the process of check-in even slower by asking more questions and making upsell offers. The staff also feel that upselling in some situations feels like force selling and customers are not responsive to the offers. Some feel more tools would be needed and some simply agree that tools cannot help since those kind of selling skills are connected to personality traits. It has anyhow been proven and shown that everyone can learn. Sales skills are not something that someone is born with. Based on the results it was anyhow a majority that felt upselling is not difficult for them and the busy shifts are the reason for not conducting upsell.

Q3: How can customer experience be enhanced by improving upsell? Q4: How to present upsell as an exclusive service to the customer, making them feel special and valued? Based on the results and theory upsell is about offering something additional to an already existing customer. Since there are many customers that are not fully aware of all the service and products the hotel can offer upsell is the way of bringing them into the customer's knowledge. When presenting carefully chosen individual upsell offer that is suitable for the customer can make the customer feel special and unique. When the staff is able to please a customer in such a way the customer keeps coming back. Upsell is also a way to differentiate from competitors. Especially today when customers are more aware of costs and quality of service, providing excellent customer experience is most important.

In the research the author successfully brought theory together with practice and was able to create actual techniques for upselling at the front desk. The author was also able to clarify how the front desk staff feel about upselling at the moment and why do they feel it is difficult or easy for them. It certainly gives the needed information about whether more training is required, what kind of rewards the staff want and also a good picture of the situation concerning upsell at the front desk. The staff wished that the upsell procedures would be closely followed up and encouraged by the management. Unfortunately, the sampling size for the data collection was rather small, only 30 % of the full staff of the front desk. Therefore, the author needed to make the conclusions based on these results, but it does not represent the full picture of the situation. It would have been smart to

start the research earlier in order to be able to collect more data. Regrettably, there was not enough time in this research for a more comprehensive research.

As managerial implications this research is a good base for further development. It would be smart to think of different ways for conducting upsell at the front desk. Since many respondents felt that shifts can be busy and there is already a lot of information to tell in the check-in situation an alternative way for upsell could be to send upsell offers by email to the customers prior to arrival. It is valuable for the company to see that many of the respondents are driven by intrinsic motivation and really want to please the customers and feel it is an important part of their jobs. They did anyhow, also indicate that monetary perks would be much appreciated. This is a good chance for the management to enhance the overall employee experience also.

7.1   Reflections of one's learning

My studies towards Master of Business Administration degree started in January 2020. It was not long until COVID-19 shut down everything, the hotel I worked at and the school of Haaga Helia Applied Sciences. I studied remotely basically all the courses, with the exception of two face-to-face lectures in Pasila. Honestly, I suffered and struggled in Zoom. I learn best by active participation and sharing thoughts with peer students. Anyhow, the situation was as it was and I just had to cope.

I came up with the first thesis plan in the spring of 2020. Well, life happened and I became a mom during the studies and concentrated on my daughter for a semester or two. The plan was wakened again in the end of January 2023. Also because my studies needed to be accomplished by July 2023. I talked with the head of our studies and with my management team from work. Together we came up with the idea about developing the upsell sales skills of the staff at the front desk. Also, because they had showed concern for the lack of skills themselves.

Since the time for completing the thesis was already short before the process even had started, it was smart to plan the process carefully. I did however face some challenges in writing the theoretical framework since it has been a while since the last completed course. I set personal deadlines and planned the contents carefully. During the spring I realised that writing a thesis does not always go as planned and even carefully planned surprises and other delays can pop-up unexpectedly.

What I have personally learned from the thesis process and also from the Master studies, is to never give up and to trust yourself that you will get through. I would say that I'm proud for finishing

my studies even of the challenges and delays I have faced. I must say that I still have not leaned to start a process in good time. I guess I just work the best under pressure and always create those situations for myself. I'm grateful for Haaga Helia for being able to complete my studies and learn so much more about leading sales and customer service. I can definitely utilise what I have learned in the future. I would like to enclose a quote that perfectly describes my thesis writing process:

"It always seems impossible until it's done" – Nelson Mandela.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Questions for the questionnaire and interviews

1. Mitä myynti sinusta on ja miten se liittyy työhösi hotellin vastaanotossa?
2. Mitä lisämyynti sinusta on?
3. Mitkä ovat mielestäsi lisämyynnin hyödyt asiakkaan näkökulmasta?
   a. a. Olisiko sinulla antaa esimerkkiä tilanteesta, missä lisämyynti on tuonut lisäarvoa asiakkaalle?
4. Onko lisämyynti mielestäsi osa asiakaspalvelua ja miksi?
   a. Onko sinusta oleellista, että lisämyyntituote tai -palvelu on sidoksissa päätuotteeseen ja miksi?
5. Mitkä tekijät ja tilanteet motivoivat sinua lisämyyntiin?
   a. Olisiko sinulla antaa esimerkkiä sellaisesta tilanteesta ja miksi olit motivoitunut?
6. Koetko lisämyynnin helpoksi ja luonnolliseksi osaksi työtäsi?

   a. Jos kyllä → Mitkä asiat siihen vaikuttavat?

   b. Jos ei → Koetko sen epämukavaksi?
      i. Puuttuuko sinulta siihen työkaluja?
      ii. Koetko, että et tiedä mitä asiakas haluaa?
      iii. Onko lisämyynti sinusta tarpeetonta eikä kuulu asiakaspalveluun?

7. Vaikuttavatko eri asiakastyypit tapaasi tehdä lisämyyntiä? Jos näin on, niin millä tavalla?
8. Mikä sinusta tekee asiakaspalvelusta laadukasta?
9. Millainen sinusta on onnistunut asiakaskokemus?
10. Mitä muuta haluaisit vielä tuoda esiin myyntiin, lisämyyntiin, asiakkaan kokemukseen tai omaan motivaatioon liittyen?