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Front desk development in Hilton Hanoi Opera House

Trang Dinh Thu

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Laurea University of Applied Sciences

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Hotel activities are divided into two major activity systems including front office and back office. Dealing directly with customers, hotel staffs are interacting with guests in various manners, from receiving room reservation, check-in, check-out, to handling guest's complaints, public relations, and so on (Lewis Perry 2008, 6).

Front office staff is of great importance in caring about reservation-related issues and making good impression to guests from the first moment they enter the hotel lobby. In another word, front office adds value to hotel by interacting directly with customers that affect sales revenue of the hotel (Lewis Perry 2008, 27).

As a component of Front office, front-desk representative can be seen as the first impression of the hotel because front-desk employees bear the first touch with guests. Front-desk representative implements tasks including using equipment such as computer or printer, handling check-in and check-out procedure, serving guests during their stay. Those assignments require them sufficient qualifications to be able to accomplish such tasks. Therefore, qualifications of front-desk employee, in another word, influence their performance particularly, and quality of hotel in general, especially at high-class hotels which demand high qualifications from front-desk staffs.

During internship time at Hilton Hanoi Opera, there exist several phenomena at front-desk service that made bad impression on guests. To seek the answer for the main question about the necessary conditions for the development of front desk operations, the research approaches the perspectives of managers and staff from other departments via an in-depth interview, and at the same time, it surveys the opinions of customers about the quality of front desk service they perceived while staying in the hotel. To identify the gap between customer expectations and what are actually delivered by the front desk services, a gap analysis is conducted. It combines the results of the survey regarding customer expectation about the significant service areas that need improvements in a classification panel where customers are required to clarify whether their expectations are met by the service staffs. The undelivered values are considered the problems need to be worked on to enhance the performance of the front desk.

Research results reveals that while language proficiency and effective communication are significant factors that can leverage the satisfactions of the customers when working with the front desks in such a diverse business environment where customers are coming from all over the World, staffs of this department haven't completely perform these skills up to the expectations of the customers and co-workers from other departments. These problems lead to misunderstandings and mistakes during working process, prolong the time needed to perform the tasks, and therefore lower the effectiveness of the operations in general.

Keywords: Hilton Hanoi Opera House, Front desk development, front desk staff essential qualities, obstacles to front desk operations

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1 Introduction

With the motivation to accumulate adequate knowledge and skills to work in hospitality, I have been experienced an internship within 3 months at the Hilton Hanoi Opera House as a receptionist. The job has provided me with a lot of beneficial information not only about the organization and the job at Hilton in particular, but also the viewpoint towards the operations of a luxury hotel generally. The experience at Hilton Hanoi Opera House also helps me recognize the importance of the Front desk office as a bridge between guests and the back office. Front desk operations significantly contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the hotel management. Also, it is one of the most important part in four years of my studying that is the combination between practical training and theory courses. Therefore, I conduct this thesis report as a reflection of such experience with the purpose to evaluate the front office operations at the hotel where I work and come up with solutions to improve its performance.

1.1 Introduction to Hilton Hanoi Opera House

General information

Hilton Hanoi Opera is one of 560 properties of Hilton Hotel and Resort brand and more than 5,200 properties under the ownership of Hilton hospitality group. It is located in Hanoi French Quarter and considered an iconic landmark of Hanoi (Hilton, 2018). The property is one of the market leaders in global hospitality industry, offering luxurious full-service hotels, resorts, extended-stay suites and mid-priced hotels (Hilton Hanoi Opera House, 2018). The Hilton Hanoi Opera hotel operates 269 rooms, which are all well appointed and equipped with luxury furniture to deliver the best experience for the guests (Hilton Hanoi Opera House, 2018). The property also possesses 5 dining and entertainment outlets, offering guests with wide choice of international cuisine, Vietnamese cuisine, sports bar snacks and drinks, or lounge cocktails (Hilton Hanoi Opera House, 2018). The meeting and banquet facilities and a Business Center with dedicated team members working to ensure the success of all functions are also available (Hilton Hanoi Opera House, 2018). For nearly a century, Hilton has provided guests with the finest in accommodations, service, amenities and value. Hilton is dedicated to continuing its tradition of providing exceptional guest experiences (Hilton, 2018).

Vision

To fill the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality unites us as a team to create remarkable hospitality experiences around the world every day (Hilton, 2018)

Mission

To be the most hospitable company in the world - by creating heartfelt experiences for Guests, meaningful opportunities for Team Members, high value for Owners and a positive impact in our Communities (Hilton, 2018)

Core values

- Hospitality: delivering exceptional guest experiences
- Integrity: do the right thing, all the time
- Leadership: leading in the industry and in the communities
- Teamwork - Being a team player in all activities
- Ownership - Being the owners of all actions and decisions

(Hilton, 2018)

SWOT analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESS
Location Facilities People Service	

Sleep quality Value for money	Design
OPPORTUNITY Development of tourism in Vietnam The increasing of commercial channels	THREAT Increasing competitiveness

Table 1 *SWOT analysis of Hilton Hanoi Opera House service*

This analysis is based on the collection of almost 3000 reviews from guests via Agoda and Tripadvisor for their stays in Hilton Hanoi Opera House regarding the location, facilities, cleanliness, service, people, sleep quality, room comfort and quality and value for money.

Strengths

Basically, most of the reviews indicate good to excellent Hotel service quality (83% of TripAdvisor reviews). The strongest point that contributes to the customer satisfaction is the location of the property. It is located at the heart of Hanoi. From the hotel, guests can access everywhere. It is just a short walk away from Hanoi's central business district, Vietnam National Museum of History, Hoan Kiem Lake and Hanoi Old Quarter. The transportation is diverse and very convenient from the Hotel to such places. Besides, good facility is another plus for the Hotel. Facilities in the Hotel include pool, free Wi-Fi, fitness centre, restaurants, and sports pub. Most of the guests found these facilities useful and accessible during their stay. Supports from the staff, service quality, and sleep quality are also recognized as the values for money of the Hotel.

Weakness

Despite many good points realized by the customers, most customers find the design of the Hotel out-dated, particularly the interior design of the room. It is stated that the Room interiors are tired with not much changed since 2015. It is argued that room interiors were always ambitious, with some very strong color combinations of deep reds and greens. The space is looking distinctly vacant although the heavy 1990s TV cabinets have been removed

Opportunities

The development of tourism has brought back many opportunities for the hospitality industry in general, and for Hilton Hanoi Opera House in particular. With special advantages in terms of geographical location, economic and political, Vietnam has many advantages to develop tourism. Located in the center of Southeast Asia, the territory of Vietnam has just attached to the continent and has access to the ocean, has an international position in terms of sea, river, rail, road and air. This is a very important premise for the expansion and development of international tourism. Natural and human resources of Vietnam is also rich and diverse. The diversified features of sea and island topography, plains, hills, plateaus have made Vietnam's territory rich in landscapes and high value ecosystems for development. tourism, especially marine ecosystem, lake ecosystem, forest ecosystem, cave. In addition, with the history of thousands of years of building and defending the country, human resources of tourism in Vietnam is also very rich. Out of about 40,000 historical relics across the country, more than 2,500 relics have been recognized and ranked by the State. Apart from these advantages, Vietnam is also a stable political system with abundant human resources. The policy of renovation, opening up and integration of the State also creates favorable conditions for the external economy in which tourism is developed. (Bao Moi, 2017)

In addition to that, the emerging of various commercial channels for hospitality industry, especially online channels, also contributes to potential blooming of the business. Common online sales channels include the following.

OTA (Online Travel Agency)

Online travel agency The Online Travel Agency (OTA) is the online ecommerce website that sells hotel rooms online on their website and receives commissions based on successful booking. OTA is a very popular distribution channel with the most popular names such as: Agoda, Expedia, Booking, Traveloka, Ivivu, Abay and so on. Currently, there are many visitors choose the form of reservations in this form because of the convenience, good price and can refer more objective information.

GDS (Global Distribution System)

Global Distribution System Sales through GDS is also known as B2B - Business to Business. When partnering with GDSs, travel agents on this system will retrieve hotel booking information for sale to their visitors.

Airlines

When selling through this channel, airlines will put their hotel booking information on its booking website. When booking an airplane ticket, guests can book hotel accommodation through the website suggestions.

Hotel website

If you know the name of the hotel, tourists will go straight to the hotel website to make reservations. This is the channel sales room should be promoted more strongly because when booking directly, the hotel will not have to pay a commission to third parties.

Threat

A report on the hotel service 2017 has just been published by Grant Thornton Vietnam. For three years from 2014 to 2016, the proportion of domestic visitors (usually merchants) staying at hotels and high-end resorts has continuously increased. In the first place, in 2016, the percentage of Vietnamese visitors accounted for 20.4% of total bookings at luxury hotels, up 3.4 percentage points from 2014. From 2010 to now, the number of hotels from 3 -5 stars across the country doubled in both the number of establishments and chambers. The increase of luxury hotels has contributed to the hotel system of Vietnam on a par with the development of tourism in the region. Traveling to Vietnam has been increasing, but occupancy rates have been rising, but luxury hotels have not risen as high-end hotels are struggling with rising prices for accommodations such as apartments for rent, homestay. Individual tourists, traders are the number of guests occupy a relatively high market share in the structure of high-end hotels. Recently, these two types of tourists tend to choose places with affordable accommodation. Grant Thornton Vietnam (2016) records that there are 6,500 B & B establishments in the country, which is a new type of residence in Vietnam in the last few years.

1.2 Content and purposes**Content**

As the hotel industry is becoming more and more competitive, delivering an outstanding service quality is surviving condition for all players. By doing so, hotels can develop and maintain a relationship with their guests through an effective communication between the guests and hotel. If the guests are satisfied with the hotel staff and its services, they are more likely to become loyal customers (Bardi, 2003).

The Front desk is the central part of a hotel and plays a significant role in maintaining and improving the quality of hotel service (Bardi, 2003). This is the first place customers visit and give them the first and most important impression about the hotel services (Dix & Baird, 2006).

Bardi (2003) believes that as Front Desk Office locates at the center of the Hotel, it can be the bridge between the guest and the back office. The hotel management practice indicates the interrelation work between the Front Office sand the Accounting, Housekeeping, Reservations, as well as other modules. The Front Office is responsible for handling requests from guests and coordinating with other departments and staff members to deliver committed service quality. More importantly, through the Front desk, complaints of the customers will be taken and delivered to related departments to be handled. Baker, Bradley and Huyton (2001) also claim that reconciliations, fulfilling reservations, and ensuring hotel operations are smooth even when the administration is closed are vital tasks of the Front desk office.

Despites its significant roles, there are many obstacles imposed to the development of front desk service in the hotel operation (Dix & Baird, 2006). This research will focus on investigating the obstacles to the development of front desk office and solutions to such problems will

be proposed for a more effective functioning of the front desk office by empirically evaluating the operations of front office department of Hilton Hanoi Opera House.

Purposes

Being a front desk manager has been always the career passion and objectives of the writer. Therefore, the internship at the front desk office of a 5 star Hotel at the position of the receptionist and operator provides the writer with the knowledge and vision about the operation of the front desk as well as how to run it properly. Besides, it also allows the writer to approach and evaluate different skills necessary for an employee to perform the front desk tasks.

Research objectives

The objective of the research is to identify the gap between customer expectations and what are actually delivered by the front desk services. Therefore, a gap analysis will be applied to realize such objective. It combines the results of the survey regarding customer expectation about the significant service areas that need improvements in a classification panel where customers are required to clarify whether their expectations are met by the service staffs. The undelivered values are considered the problems need to be worked on to enhance the performance of the front desk.

Scope of research

This research focuses on the functioning of the front desk service of the Hilton Hanoi Opera. The analysis regarding its operations, importance, unresolved problem and other research matters will deeply involve in the approach of hotel guests, the managers, and related department i.e., accounting and finance, human resource, marketing and sales, and so on.

Research structure

The research includes five main parts. The first part will introduce the motivation of study as well as address the problems that need to be solve within the scope of the study. The second part will review the theory related to the hotel management, particularly the front desk service Besides, the basic information about the Hilton Hanoi Opera will also be illustrated in this chapter. In this part, previous research outcomes regarding the definition, characteristics, and influencers of front desk service will be summarized. Chapter 3 is about the methodology used to serve the research objectives. This part also give out a comprehensive descriptive about the data, based on which chapter 4 will analyse and summarize all of the empirical findings during the implementation of the internship plan. In the final chapter, the research will sum up the revealed issues and propose appropriate solutions to such matters.

2 Literature review

2.1 Organization of the front desk office

Baker, Bradley and Huyton (2001) emphasized that the front office involves in a lot of different functions and operations, which requires any property to build up a well-defined organizational structure for smooth operations. Size of the Hotel, standard of the service, type of guests and type of Hotel are considered the key factors affecting the organizational structure of the front office (Baker, Bradley, & Huyton, 2001)

- Size of the Hotel: The bigger the hotel, the more specialized the staff is required to be. Whereas in the smaller hotels, the more multitasking the staff can be.
- Standard of Service: Greater specialization is expected for hotel of higher class as more personal services are required by the guests.
- Type of Guests: The needs of Guests usually differ on the basis of their purpose of visit, i.e., business client prefers less time to be spent on checking-in and checking-out, and it is quite possible they won't mind carrying their own luggage (Baker, Bradley, & Huyton, 2001).
- Type of Hotel: Different type of Hotel should expect to serve a specific group of guests. Baker, Bradley and Huyton (2001) took an example of a hotel in the airport area. They believed that such hotel should encounter that check-in or checkout process may take place at any time during the 24 hours of a day, which puts more emphasis on front desk to be on duty at all times.

It is also argued that even though the organizational structure of a hotel varies due to the differences in above stated factors, the typical organization of the front desk office includes desk clerk, cashier, reservations manager, concierge, night auditor, telephone operator, bell staff, room key clerk, and elevator operator. In some operations, the front desk clerk acts as desk clerk, cashier, telephone operator, and reservations clerk, as required by the volume of business while many large, full-service hotels employ the complete staff as listed. (Bardi, 2003)

The responsibilities of the front office staff are quite diverse including verifying guest reservations, registering guests, assigning rooms, distributing keys, communicating with the house-keeping staff, answering telephones, providing information about and directions to local attractions, accepting cash and giving change, and acting as liaison between the lodging establishment and the guest as well as the community (Baker, Bradley, & Huyton, 2001).

2.2 The roles of front - desk services

The front office staffs play the roles as the facilitator between the guest and other departments of the hotel. Besides, they also need to support and help in providing services to the guests. The number of interactions and transactions between the guest and the hotel during a guest stay determine the type and nature of front office operations (Baker, Bradley, & Huyton, 2001). Various transactions between the guest and the hotel, therefore, depend upon the stage of the guest stay including pre-arrival, arrival, occupancy, and departure. The transactions can be best understood by the illustration of the guest cycle.

Figure 1 describes transactions and exchange of services between a guest and the hotel. The transactions involve in reservations, check-in and registration, mail and information, uniformed service and baggage handling, telephone calls and messages, handling guest accounts, and checkout and bill settlement. The front office department handles all these services and transactions. The functions and services of the front office department can be differentiated depending upon the area where they are being performed. Some of the functions are performed by the reception desk as front-of-the-house operations and rest are performed as back-of-the-house operations (Baker, Bradley, & Huyton, 2001).

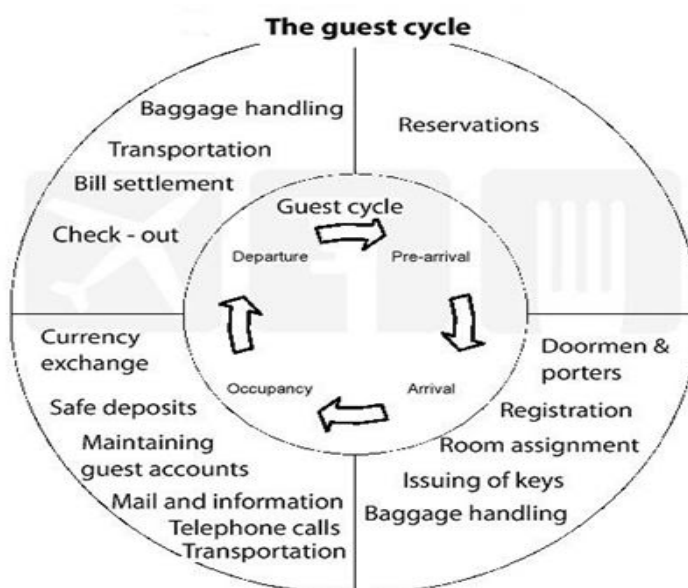


Figure 1 The guest circle

(Source: Baker, Bradley and Huyton, 2001)

2.3 Factors affecting the service quality

Maintaining a superb service quality is of the greatest importance for every company who wants to survive, compete and develop in the competitive market nowadays. Particularly for the well-known brand, service quality must go with the values it promise to customers. There is always the variance in the perspectives of the providers and service consumers about the quality (Gronroos, 1984). The service quality can only be achieved if the organization can capture the information about the needs and expectations of their customers as Gronroos (1984) has stated that service quality is the quality of service customers perceive it to be. He also emphasized that only when the customers admit the values of the service, its quality makes sense.

Bergman and Klefsjö (2003) argue that service quality is affected by different dimensions from those of product quality. Among those factors is communication. They emphasized that being able to communicate in a comprehensive and understandable way is critical to build up the service quality. Other dimensions are responsiveness and courtesy, with responsiveness referring to willingness to helping customers and courtesy referring to the serviceperson's behaviour and manners, for example good will and politeness. In addition, they stated that the ability to understanding customers, their situation and their needs is also an important dimension of service quality.

Services are defined as subjectively perceived processes where production and consumption occur simultaneously (Gronroos, 1984). Gronroos (1984) raised up two dimensions in the measurement of service quality including technical quality (what) and functional quality (how). The technical quality comprises of a hotel room, which the customer receives as a part of the process. Because the technical quality does not itself explain the total quality perceived by the customer, the functional quality must be research during the evaluation of the total quality (Gronroos, 1984). The functional quality perspective in the hotel is the way the service is delivered, how all the service encounters that occur during the stay are managed and how well the production (making a reservation, checking in) and consumption (staying at the hotel) process goes (Gronroos, 1984). For that, understanding service quality closely relates to

researching the first impressions of the customers about the technical part as well as the staff qualities that significantly affect their evaluation about the functional quality of the hotel.

In conclusion, according to Gronross (1984), the service quality is considered to be dependent on the customer expectations, first impressions about the technical parts and the staff qualities.

Customer expectations

Learning the customer's expectations is essential for the organization to know the area of the service that can be improved to obtain a higher level of performance, because what the customers expect from the service is closely related to the satisfactions they have while experiencing the service. The expectations and needs are often built up based on the customer's previous experience, the image of the company/service provider, what promises has been made and also to some degree, the price (Bergman, Klefsjö, 2003).

There is one fact that the customer always compare expectations and experiences, and each perceived service encounter the increasing of new criteria and new expectations. The customer's requirements can only get higher and higher once their previous expectations are met (Gronroos, 1984). Particularly, Gronroos (1984) describes that if the service quality experienced by the customer meets the expected quality, it is considered good or neutral. If the expectations on the services are unrealistic, the experienced quality will be perceived as bad, even when it was objectively good.

Qualified Personnel

An important factor of the service is obviously the service person. Chris Fill (2013) emphasized that it is particularly important in service environments that the staff plays the roles and the ambassadors of the organizations and represent the interface between an organization's internal and external environment. He believes that their actions can have a significant influence in creating brand images among the customers (Fill, 2013). Motivating the employees and getting them involved in the company is important for the companies particularly those in the hospitality industry to present a consistent message to the guests Fill (2013).

First impression

In order to provide the guests with the best service experience, the front office staffs have to take care of all three stage of guest stay including arrival, the service encounter itself and departure. However, the stage considered the most important is the arrival as the first few moments have a great impact on how the customer perceives the service (Gronroos, 1984). The first impression decides whether the more works need to be done to build up the foundation for customer experience (Gronroos, 1984). The first impression is created by the surroundings of the workplace as well as the gestures and profession of the employees (Hognas, 2015). It is obvious that employees who provide with positive attitude and act in an ethical and trustful way will be likely to be more impressive than those who fail to give an unappealing appearance (Hognas, 2015). Therefore, it is always recommended that the employees should wear appropriate clothing for the business, and should also be groomed to create a professional overall look (Hognas, 2015).

3 Methodology

The Front desk operations lie in the centre of the hotel operations. It directly deals with customers through reservations, check-in and register, phone and email operating and the like processes. Besides, it also involves in the interdependent work with other departments like accounting and finance, human resources, marketing and sales, and so on. Therefore, to seek the answer for the main question about the necessary conditions for the development of front desk operations, the research will approach the perspectives of managers and staff from other departments via an in-depth interview, and at the same time, it surveys the opinions of customers about the quality of front desk service they perceived while staying in the hotel.

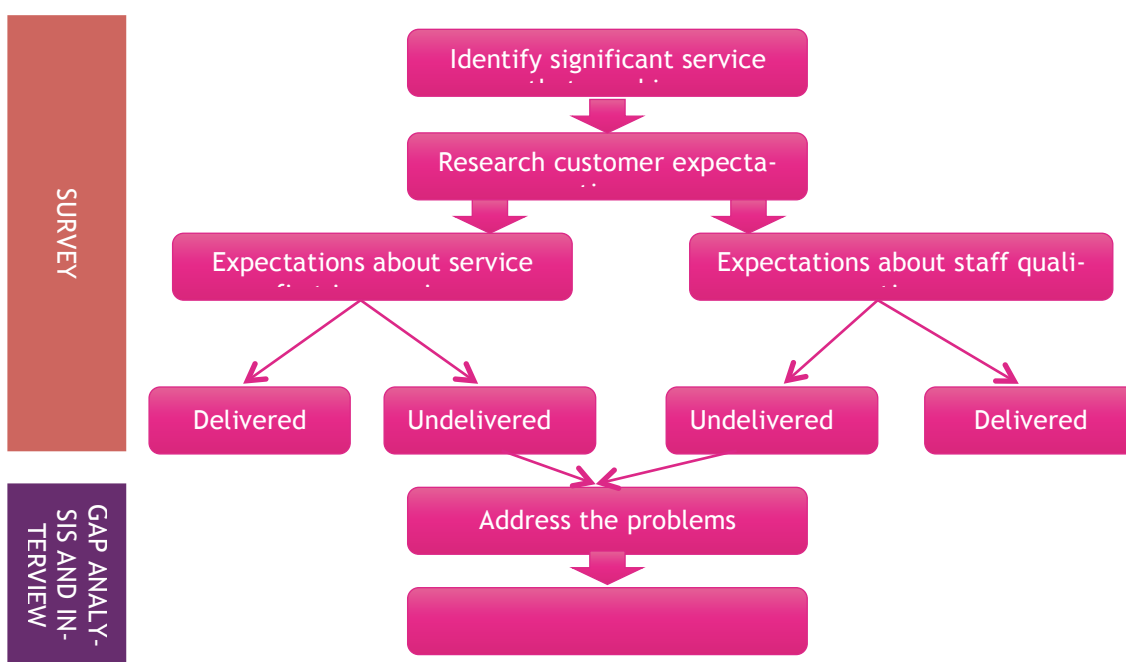


Figure 2 Research design

3.1. Survey

A panel of questions was given to more than 5000 guests and 223 responses were received during 3 months with the aims to investigate the underlying problems of the front desk operations from the perspectives of the customers. The survey was distributed to the guests during checkout process. After that, information was recorded and analysed by MS excel.

The initial objective of the survey is to address the areas of the service that need to be improved. Therefore, it includes the questions about the level of satisfaction customers have during their stay at Hilton Hanoi Opera House. It lists out all the functions of the department including reservation taking, check-in and registers, mail and information, uniformed service and baggage handling, telephone calls and messages, handling guest accounts, and checkout and bill settlement and get the customers to provide with a quick assessment by a ladder of satisfaction of 4 levels: excellent, good, fair and bad. Based on their responses, the area of the services that posses evaluations at bad level will be considered the weak part that need to be worked on.

To reveal the causes of poor performance of the front desk operations in the most objective way using the theory about factors of service quality, the survey also designs questions to dig

deeper into the causes of the negative feedbacks from customers. It urges the customers to clarify which one of the values they stated are delivered by the front desk services and which ones are still problems unresolved.

3.2. Gap analysis

The objective of this research is to uncover the necessary skills of staff working in the front desk that can ensure the smooth functioning of front desk service in luxury hotel, particularly the Hilton Hanoi Opera. The research will answer following questions.

Question 1: What is the structure of front desk office? What are the roles of front desk service to the operations of the hotel?

Question 2: What are the areas of the service that need improving?

Question 3: What are the problems related to such areas?

Question 4: What are the possible solutions that can be applied to handle such problems?

3.3. Interview

The roles of the front desk office do not only involve in direct work with customers but also link with the operations of other departments in the hotel. The development of front desk office, therefore, depends on the effectiveness of its interwork with other departments. For that reason, the research also includes an interview with managers and staff of other department including finance and accounting, human resource management, sales and marketing to investigate the inefficient part of the operations. The interview is communicated to respondents in various methods including face-to-face conversation, email, phone, and message. At first, the writer has to ask for permission from the management team. After receiving the approval, a contact list is prepared and priority is set. Interview with managers and key staff are conducted face-to-face while less prioritized interviews are performed via email, phone or message. Based on the perspectives of the respondents, the writer will discuss the problems related to the interdependent work of the front office department and other department as well as come up with possible solutions to handle them.

Writer asked questions to both employee and managers in front desk specifically, most of questions were given in order to get to know their point of views and expectations. There are two main questions and subs following situations “what is the issue consider you the most?” “Any solution you would like to suggest?”

3.4. Ethical considerations

This research is conducted under the following ethical considerations

Informed consent

The participants of this research are properly informed about the content being conducted. They are also made to be aware of the purpose of the research with the possible affected areas where the findings must be obtained as well as how the findings will be used. Additional information are provided in the event that the participants become distressed in any way during their participation

Voluntary participation

Participants are free to withdraw their participation at any time without negatively impacting on their involvement in future services or the current research and relationships with the researcher.

Do no harm

The research process does not in any way harm (unintended or otherwise) the participants of both their physical and/or their psychological conditions.

Confidentiality

Identifying information is excluded from any reports or published documents. There is no opportunity for people to be identified even though names are not used.

Only assess relevant components

The research is kept as simple as possible and remains focused on the objectives and what the data gathered would be used for.

4 Findings

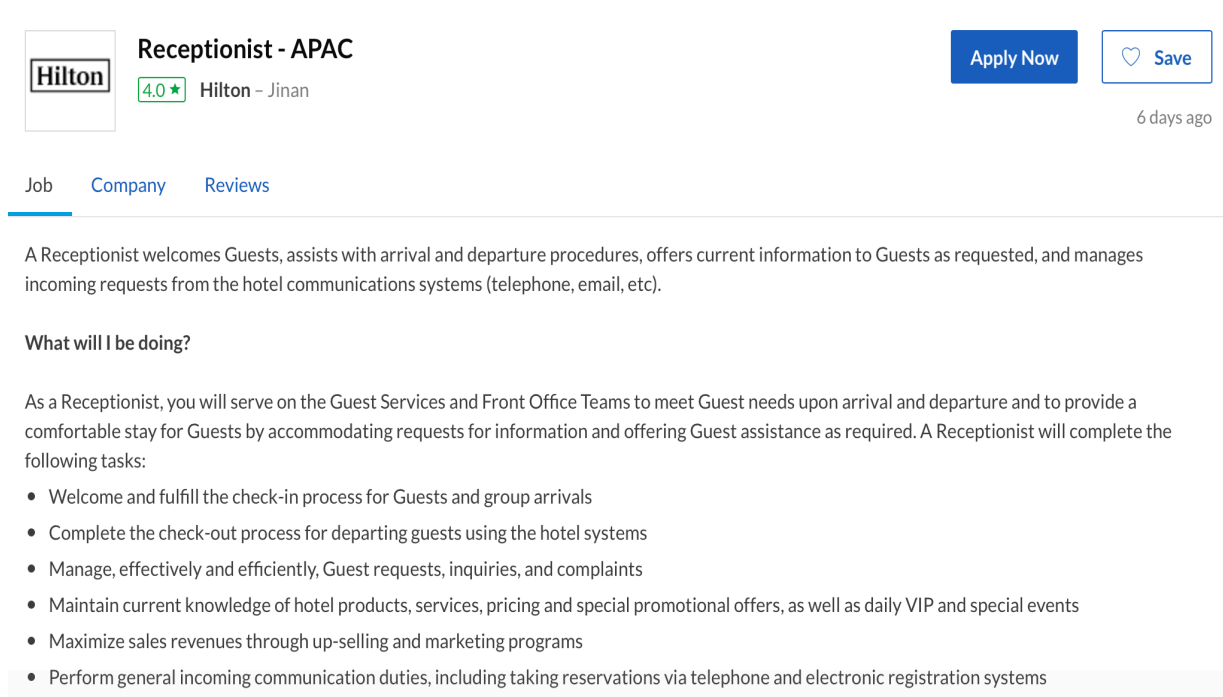
4.1 Organization and task description of Front desk office in Hilton Hanoi Opera House

Front office manager

A Front Office Manager is responsible for managing the first impressions of Guests coming to the Hotel. The jobs of a front office manager in Hilton Hanoi Opera House include different tasks that require them to interact with customers, team members and other departments. To perform the job properly, front office manager must possess competent professional knowledge and skills and perform the best leadership practice. Besides, communication skills and language competency are also dramatically important to the management of front desk department.

Receptionist

The job of a Receptionist involves in the welcoming of Guests, assisting with arrival and departure procedures, offers current information to Guests as requested, and manages incoming requests from the hotel communications systems (telephone, email, and so on) (Hilton Hanoi Opera House, 2018). A Receptionist will serve on the Guest Services and Front Office Teams to meet Guest needs upon arrival and departure and to provide a comfortable stay for Guests by accommodating requests for information and offering Guest assistance as required (Hilton Hanoi Opera House, 2018). Figure 4 illustrates a job advertisement for the Receptionist position by Hilton, in which it clearly identifies the tasks that receptionist should encounter in their profession.



Receptionist - APAC Apply Now Save

Hilton 4.0 ★ Hilton - Jinan 6 days ago

[Job](#) [Company](#) [Reviews](#)

A Receptionist welcomes Guests, assists with arrival and departure procedures, offers current information to Guests as requested, and manages incoming requests from the hotel communications systems (telephone, email, etc).

What will I be doing?

As a Receptionist, you will serve on the Guest Services and Front Office Teams to meet Guest needs upon arrival and departure and to provide a comfortable stay for Guests by accommodating requests for information and offering Guest assistance as required. A Receptionist will complete the following tasks:

- Welcome and fulfill the check-in process for Guests and group arrivals
- Complete the check-out process for departing guests using the hotel systems
- Manage, effectively and efficiently, Guest requests, inquiries, and complaints
- Maintain current knowledge of hotel products, services, pricing and special promotional offers, as well as daily VIP and special events
- Maximize sales revenues through up-selling and marketing programs
- Perform general incoming communication duties, including taking reservations via telephone and electronic registration systems

Figure 3 Job description of Receptionist by Hilton Hanoi Opera House

Source: Hilton Hanoi Opera House (2018)

Reservations supervisor

The job of a reservation supervisor mostly integrates the tasks to ensure revenue maximization and Guest satisfaction. The supervisor has to work with the Reservations Team to develop future and repeat business opportunities. Specifically, the reservation supervisor will be responsible for performing the tasks to the highest standards (Hilton Hanoi Opera House, 2018). Appendix 2 demonstrates a job description that a reservation supervisor should take care while working in Hilton Hanoi Opera House.

Concierge

The concierge working in Hilton Hanoi Opera House is a front office professional who coordinates guests' entertainments, travel and other activities. Any time guests have a question, such as directions to local attractions; the concierge finds the answer as quickly as possible. In addition, concierges make restaurant reservations, orders car service and may even arrange personal shopping for the guests (Hilton Hanoi Opera House, 2018). Specifically, in Hilton Hanoi Opera House, the concierge would be performing the following tasks to the highest standards (Hilton Hanoi Opera House, 2018).

- Provide information, recommendations and booking services for a variety of guest inquiries, including, but not limited to, directions, hours of outlet operation, hotel services, transportation and travel arrangements, tour and event tickets, restaurant reservations, and medical care
- Process and deliver messages for guests
- Retrieve mail, small packages and facsimiles for guests as requested
- Arrange and confirm recreational, business and dining activities both inside and outside the hotel for guests
- Respond to special requests for services including, but not limited to, dentists, doctors, childcare, florists, etc.
- Respond to guest inquiries and requests and resolve issues in a timely, friendly and efficient manner
- Register VIP guests, as needed
- Promote Company marketing programs and distribute printed materials, as needed.

4.2 The areas of front desk operations that need improvements

Theory about front desk management has shown that the operations of this department closely involves in the handling of reservations, processing check-in and registers, handling mail and information requests, providing with uniformed service and baggage, operating phone calls and messages, handling guest accounts and processing checkout as well as settling bills for customers. Therefore, in order to address the areas of the service that customers considered need to be improved, the survey required them to rate the above-mentioned work from excellent to bad performance. The survey was handled to the guest during checkout process with the support of Hilton staffs. Following table summarized the answers of the customers.

Service area	Excellent	Good	Fair	Bad
<i>Reservations</i>	20%	50%	30%	0%
<i>Check -in and register</i>	10%	30%	50%	10%
<i>Mail and information</i>	15%	35%	45%	5%
<i>Uniformed service and baggage</i>	0%	25%	70%	5%
<i>Telephone calls and messages</i>	10%	20%	60%	10%

Handling guest accounts	10%	45%	45%	0%
Checkout and bill settlement	15%	60%	20%	5%

Table 2 Customer's evaluations of Hilton Hanoi Opera House front office operations

It can be seen that the majority of the customers involved in the survey found that their reservations were well handled by the front desk staff with 100% of the evaluation from fair level to excellent level. Guest accounts are also assessed as a fault free service area with no negative feedback from customers. However, the other processes including check-in and registers, mail and information handling, uniform service and baggage, telephone calls and messages as well as checkout and bill settlement underwent a certain proportion of negative feedbacks from customers involved in the survey. The drawbacks in these processes are significant obstacles to the development of the front desk office. This means the next steps of the research should focus on investigating the underlying reasons that prevent these processes from a more effective operation.

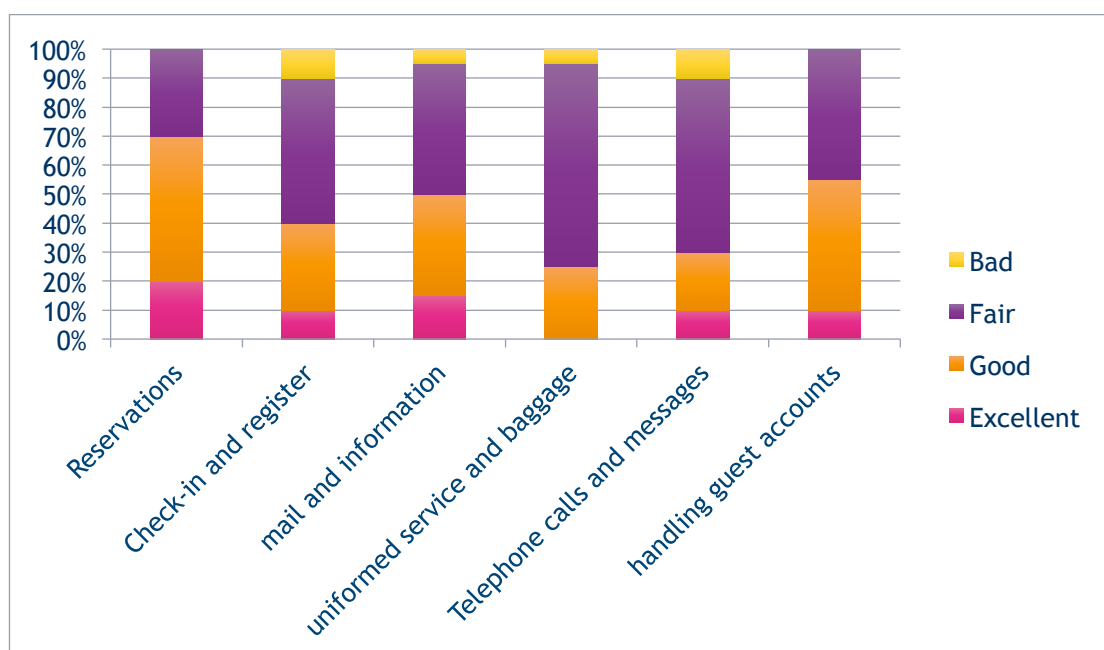


Figure 4 Evaluation of service areas

4.3 Customers' expectations

As review in the previous chapter, the quality of the service significantly depends on the customers' expectations about the other factors of the service particularly the first impression as well as the quality of the staff. Therefore, to properly and objectively evaluate the service quality, it is critical that the research clarifies what customers expect from the front desk service of the hotel. For that reason, the survey includes questions about the expectations of customers regarding the first impressions and staff quality of service areas of front desk office where improvements are needed.

Regarding the first impressions while working with the front desk office, the survey results reveal that most customers are impressed by the welcoming attitude of the staff before any other factor. A well-organized front desk with facilities to ensure a quick process also impressed the customers, making them feel more reliable and having a better image about the

property. According the survey, customers don't think making them spending time on questions that they already answered while making reservations is professional. While dealing with phone, message, mail and other information requests, customers prefer that the messages are organized and presented in a formal way, as it will make them feel more valuable and respected by the staff and the hotel. Other opinions emphasize on the importance of image of the staff and speed of the process.

Concerning the staff quality, most customers think that it is important that front desk officers possess a high level of communication skills. They are the information bridge between the customers and other departments of the hotel. Effective communication skills helps the to ensure the information flow and avoid the problems due to information variance. When the staff can present the information from and to customers effectively, they can improve the speed of the work process and increase the customer satisfaction after all. Besides, communication skills, the staffs also need to be excellent in language use. Staffs with linguistic problems often need more time to interpret the customer information. For many of the guests, they will find it very irritating and unprofessional. Language problems also lead to higher possibilities of mistakes caused by misunderstanding between the staff and the customers. This prevents the operations of the front desk operations from functioning effectively. In additions to communication and language requirements, the customers also stated that the front desk staffs must be detail - oriented and able to deal with problems in the mean time.

Service areas	First impressions	Staff quality
Check-in and register	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming attitude from the staff • Cleanliness and well-organized front desk counter • Quick and professional process • No questions asked about the information already provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm, efficient, and organized with great attention to detail • Excellent personal presentation and communication skills • A passion for delivering exceptional levels of Guest service • Computer literate and able to navigate through Company systems • Professional manner with an emphasis on hospitality and guest service • Problem solving skills • Language proficiency
Mail and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal in both words and presentation of responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional writing skills • Excellent personal and presentation skills • Informative and detail oriented • Problem solving skills
Uniform service and baggage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly, caring and reliable look • Wearing professional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick and professional work process • Good communication skills • Detail oriented • Problem solving skills

Telephone calls and message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal response • Quick process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent personal presentation and communication skills • Informative and detail oriented • Problem solving skills
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Table 3 Summary of customer expectations about the first impressions and employee qualities

4.4 Obstacles to the front desk development

The obstacles to the front desk operations are investigated through a comprehensive gap analysis. It is believed that the factors that prevent the front desk service from obtaining the highest level of customer satisfaction are the expectations of the customers that are undelivered during the process. By the survey, the customers are asked to clarify the values that they want to receive but haven't been delivered by front desk staff. Results of the questions are provided in the following table.

Service areas	Customer expectations	Delivered	Undelivered
Check-in and register	Welcoming attitude from the staff	X	
	Cleanliness and well-organized front desk counter	X	
	Quick and professional process	X	
	No questions asked about the information already provided	X	
	Calm, efficient, and organized with great attention to detail	X	
	Excellent personal presentation and communication skills		X
	A passion for delivering exceptional levels of Guest service	X	
	Computer literate and able to navigate through Company systems	X	
	Professional manner with an emphasis on hospitality and guest service	X	
	Problem solving skills	X	
	Language proficiency		X
Mail and information	Formal in both words and presentation of responses	X	
	Professional writing skills	X	
	Excellent personal and presentation skills		X
	Informative and detail oriented	X	

	Problem solving skills	X	
Uniform service and baggage	Friendly, caring and reliable look	X	
	Wearing professional	X	
	Quick and professional work process	X	
	Good communication skills		X
	Detail oriented	X	
Telephone calls and messages	Problem solving skills	X	
	Formal response	X	
	Quick process		X
	Excellent personal presentation and communication skills		X
	Informative and detail oriented	X	
	Problem solving skills	X	

Table 4 Problems investigation in critical service areas

It can be seen from the summary table that almost every area including check-in and register, mail and information, uniform and baggage as well as telephone calls and messages of the service require the staff to be fluent and effective in language use and communication skills. Working in a 5 star hotel means the staffs have to deal with customers from all over the World. Language competence and communication becomes very important in such diverse business environment. During the check-in and register process, a staff with language proficiency and good communication skills will be more likely to impress the customers and give them an image of profession. This also helps them to better understand the customer's requirements and response to them more effectively. Good at communicating allows employees to better handle the emails, phone calls, messages and other information requests from guests. It helps them to present exactly what are expected from the customers and speed up the work process. However, negative feedbacks of the customers in the critically weak service area have been found to originate from language and communication issues of the front desk staff.

The result of the interview with co-department staff and managers also confirm the situation. According to them, while interdepartmental communication ensures the flow of information and gets the work done effectively, there is a fact that the front desk staffs haven't performed it properly causing a lot of troubles for the operations of the hotel.

Language issues

Employees who work in an environment with diversity of languages like those of hospitality industry in general and Hilton Hanoi Opera House in particular tend to face with obstacles and tensions that have significant consequences on teamwork and relationship. The difficulties caused by language are often caused in the situations when team members of a team or an organization speak different languages from their native languages but have to work in another

er official language as a second language. It is found in the practice of front desk operations of Hilton Hanoi Opera House that language incompetence has led to communication breakdowns and prevent the operations of the team from running smoothly and effectively.

Interview results indicate that employees with sociolinguistic problem often misinterpret of the messages of the guests and co-workers. In most cases, they think they understand the contents but they don't because they just listen to what they expect. This leads to a lot of ambiguity and misunderstandings among members of the team and customers.

The language incompetence observed by team members and co-workers often relates to the unfamiliar vocabulary, wrong speed of speech, accents, and grammar mistakes, which make it hard for people to understand one another. Therefore, it negatively affects the inter-departmental communication as well as the communication between front desk staffs and guests. Individuals with difficulties in language expression and communication may confront the obstacles in understanding the strategic and operational objectives of the group, gaining trusts and building relationship with other people to work to a unified commitment.

Besides, poor communication also leads to poor negotiating skills and leadership. The employees with those troubles are less likely to successfully exploit the support from both internal and external forces. Consequently, the performance of the whole team and organization are negatively affected.

Communication issues

Methods of communication greatly depend on the background of individuals, which means that they can be effective for one person but turn out to be ineffective or inappropriate for other ones. These issues can be frequently met in such an environment of the hotel where guests are coming from all over the World. For example, Americans are more informal compared to people from other cultures like Europe or Japan and can come across as excessively friendly to someone, particularly an older person. A person from a culture where loud voices and interrupting are not intended to be aggressive may intimidate someone from a culture that teaches a more reserved manner of expression.

Besides, the management of communication issues in a diverse workplace like the hospitality environment often encounters the problems stemming from the conflicts between direct and indirect communication. This not only affects the effectiveness in the way front desk staffs work with the customers but also reduce the performance of inter-departmental work.

Direct communicators maintain the communication style where verbal messages deliver exactly the speaker's communicating intentions. They always address their needs and desires so straightforward and tend to take other's words in the same way. For them, effectiveness in communication means being short and direct and honesty as well as frankness are of the most important factors in communication.

On the other hand, there are members of the team who prefer the indirect communication, by which they tend to avoid going straight to the intention of the messages and requires the receiver to analyze what are implied. For them, this is to keep polite and avoid the inconvenience when they have to communicate unpleasant information. As a consequence of communicating this way, indirect communicators are more likely to take time figuring out the others' implications, even when they don't exist.

The differences in the way staffs deliver messages and interpret them often leads to misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts. This requires a lot of efforts from the organizations to handle, or else, it may reduce the effectiveness of the team and organization generally.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

It is undeniable that front desk service plays a very important role in the hospitality service. Through its operations including handling reservations, check-in and register, mail and information request handling, uniform service and baggage, telephone and message handling, guest account handling, the front desk office is considered as the image of the hotel and the facilitator between guests and other functional departments.

The internship at Hilton Hanoi Opera House has provided the writer with the opportunities to observe the operations of the department and approach the guests as well as involved them in the research to identify the service areas that can be improved to develop the front desk operations effectively. The research points out the gaps between customer expectations about the service impressions and quality of front desk staff in certain areas of the front desk operations that need improvements and the actual values delivered to the customers to identify the unresolved problems. The results of this step are then incorporated in a deep interview with managers and staffs from other departments whose professions are closely related to the front desk operations to conclude about the obstacles that prevent the effective functioning of this department in both perspectives of customers and co-departments.

The results were shown that while language proficiency and effective communication are significant factors that can leverage the satisfactions of the customers while working with the front desks in such a diverse business environment where customers are coming from all over the World, staffs of this department haven't completely perform these skills up to the expectations of the customers and co-workers from other departments. These problems lead to misunderstandings and mistakes during working process, prolong the time needed to perform the tasks, and therefore lower the effectiveness of the operations in general.

Therefore, in the next part of the chapter, some solutions will be proposed with the aim to tackle with the problems and increase the effectiveness of the department.

5.2 Recommendations

Improving the language skill of front desk staffs

Creating a motivating learning culture

Creating an effective language environment plays an important role in improving the languages of the employees particularly the **listening** comprehension skills. The ideal environment for foreign language learners is that involved in native speakers. When living in an environment where people around speak fluently the language they are learning, employees have the opportunity to interact with the language more or less, understand what native speakers say. In such an environment, they are forced to identify clear learning motives, to learn to be able to communicate and to meet the communication requirement. They also have the opportunity to use the language they are learning, to test and evaluate their ability and progress. In addition, they are constantly receiving the help of native speakers living around, mimicking their speech and sometimes being corrected by native speakers if they use incorrect language. Creating such environment can simply begins from building up language office hours which uses all foreign languages.

Organizing language training courses for employees

To improve the language skills of the front desk staff, another recommendation that the organization may consider is to organize training courses for their employees.

It is important that the classes are delivered totally in foreign language. This gives learners the opportunity to express themselves in an encouraging language environment. Of course,

the learner may encounter some difficulties in the knowledge acquisition, but language learning is more about communicating and practicing rather than knowledge.

Second, teachers need to strengthen communication by providing with communication activities in the classroom. Examples include discussion activities, presentations, and group dialogues. Communication enables the learners to truly place themselves in the language environment, reduce the pressure on learning, and use the language they have learned to successfully practice communication. As a result, the employees may feel more confident to express themselves and show more interest in learning.

Thirdly, the content of classroom teaching should focus on communicative meaning rather than the language particularly. That means teachers should not overly correct grammatical errors but should pay attention to the specific language expressions of the employees. Besides, effective language class should integrate different means of audio-visual media, mass media and the Internet to leverage the outcome of teaching and studying. With traditional teaching materials, learners can be exposed to foreign languages through videotapes, VCDs, cassette tapes, CDs, and so on. For more advanced classes, learners can watch radio programs broadcast in languages that people study or access the internet to read newspapers, watch news and learn foreign languages.

Finally, to build up a formal communication environment, teachers can build up a communication environment during class time using the content of the lessons simulating situations that happen in the practice of their profession. This can help the employees more effectively improve their language uses while working.

Motivating self-learning among front desk staff

The success of language learning enormously depends on motivations of individuals trying to obtain their learning objectives. The motivation has significant impacts on the determination of the learner and their attitude towards difficulties of learning. Therefore, enabling employees to learn by themselves is critical to solve the language problems among the workplace. Once they determine to overcome their language obstacles, they will find the most appropriate ways to cope with their own problems at work and in class.

In order to encourage the employees to learn language by themselves, it is important for the company to communicate the significance of language proficiency in job functioning to the employees. They should relate the company values generating by staffs with higher linguistic level to the individual benefits. Applying language achievement as a key performance indicator can be an effective way to motivate employees to be more active in learning. Based on such indicator, rewards and incentives will be granted for individuals.

Improving communication skill of employees

Although communication skills are particularly important for the effectiveness of front desk operations in dealing with customers and other departments, research has shown the fact that the communication skills of front desk staff in the Hilton Hanoi Opera House need improving to help the organization to function more effectively and enhance their competitiveness in the market.

In order to improve the communication skills of front desk staff, the Hotel should provide with the employees with training program, educate new employees the fundamentals of good communication, including listening skills, the concept of encoding and online communication challenges. Besides, the company should also motivate the social learning theory by making public appraisals on the excellent communicators in practice.

Promoting employees with effective communication skills is also a good way to set a standard to the company communication. Besides, performance appraisals for good communicators also contribute to motivate employees to learn to communicate better. The organization should

take it seriously about setting personal goals for improving communication skills for each employee, and giving incentive awards to employees who meet these goals.

Finally, in order to improve the communication among employees, the company should create opportunities for them to develop team-building skills and strengthen the internal communication between individuals. Engaging in exciting activities will not only benefit the team-building practice itself, but also allow the members of organization to work together, learn the best ways to communicate via such activities.

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Appendix 1: Customer survey

Question 1: How do you evaluate the front desk assignment delivered to you during your time in Hilton Hanoi Opera House?

(Please check the response box where you find the most appropriately describe your answer)

Service area	Excellent	Good	Fair	Bad
<i>Reservations</i>				
<i>Check -in and register</i>				
<i>Mail and information</i>				
<i>Uniformed service and baggage</i>				
<i>Telephone calls and messages</i>				
<i>Handling guest accounts</i>				
<i>Checkout and bill settlement</i>				

Question 2: Please provide with the information about your expectations regarding the first impressions and front desk staff qualities in terms of mentioned service areas

Service areas	First impressions	Staff quality
Check-in and register		
Mail and information		
Uniform service and baggage		
Telephone calls and message		

Question 3: To your own experience and opinion, what are not delivered by our front desk operations?

Appendix 2: Interview question panel

Question 1: To your opinion, what are the factors relating to the front desk performance preventing the interdepartmental jobs?

Question 2: What are the possible solutions for such problems?

Appendix 3: Job description of reservation supervisor by Hilton Hanoi Opera House

- Assist in the day-to-day operations of the Reservations Department
- Manage telephone, fax and email enquiries in a prompt and professional manner and in accordance with company standards ensuring accuracy and attention to detail at all times
- Understand seasonal and historical trends and work within them to ensure maximum occupancy and average room rates
- Identify new contacts, develop sales leads, and respond to sales opportunities in order to maximise revenue
- Produce quotations and written confirmation to all clients
- Monitor customer satisfaction regularly and resolve any outstanding issues to ensure future business
- Ensure Team Members are developed effectively, maintain a thorough understanding of hotel facilities and processes, and generate a culture of high quality standards for relationship building, customer service, selling techniques, and billing and processing contracts
- Ensure bookings are guaranteed and no show charges/late cancellation charges are applied where appropriate; and Reservations policies and procedures are followed to ensure Guest satisfaction
- Monitor the appearance, standards and performance of the Reservations Team with an emphasis on training and teamwork
- Assist in the recruiting, managing, training and developing of the Reservation team

Appendix 4: Job description of Front Office manager by Hilton Hanoi Opera House

As Front Office Manager, you will oversee the Front Office Team which is the main connection between the Guest, the hotel, and the various hotel departments. A Front Office Manager is responsible for managing the first impressions of our Guests and, therefore, must perform the following tasks to the highest standards:

- Oversee the entire Front Office operation to maintain high standards
- Evaluate levels of Guest satisfaction and monitor trends, with a focus on continuous improvement
- Ensure regular and VIP Guests are recognised and that the Front Office department operates with a sales attitude and promotes the hotel brand's loyalty scheme
- Maximise room occupancy at best rates and use up-selling techniques to promote hotel services and facilities
 - Set departmental objectives, work schedules, budgets, policies, and procedures
- Monitor the appearance, standards, and performance of the Front Office Team Members with an emphasis on training and teamwork
- Ensure Team Members have current knowledge of hotel products, services, pricing and policies, as well as knowledge of the local area, and are continuously trained to learn and understand policies and practices
- Maintain good communication and working relationships with all hotel departments
- Monitor staffing levels to meet cover business demands
- Conduct monthly communication meetings and produce minutes
- Manage staff performance issues in compliance with company policies and procedures
- Recruit, manage, train and develop the Front Office team
- Comply with hotel security, fire regulations and all health and safety legislation
- Act in accordance with policies and procedures when working with front of house equipment and property management systems
- Assist with other departments, as necessary