

Student name: Darius Berlan

Student ID: 2244805

Lecturer name: Natalie Brailsford

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Assignment Title: Student Journal (Learning Log)

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Component one:

Introduction

Embarking on a placement within the front office department of a prestigious hotel marked the beginning of a significant journey in my hospitality management education. This experience, designed to bridge the gap between the theoretical frameworks encountered in academic studies and the practical realities of the hospitality industry, offered a unique lens through which to view the intricate operations and challenges of guest service management. Guided by the structured cyclical process of the Gibbs Model of Reflection (Gibbs, 1988), this reflective journal serves not only as a tool for personal and professional introspection but also as a means to critically analyze and understand the complexities and dynamics encountered during my placement. The opportunity to apply learned theories in real-life situations, coupled with the firsthand experience of the emotional, operational, and ethical aspects of hospitality, provided a comprehensive learning platform. This introduction aims to set the stage for a detailed exploration of my experiences, challenges faced, and the lessons learned, all while highlighting the growth and insights gained.

Operational Roles and Impact on Guest Experience

The front office department serves as the nexus between the hotel and its guests, playing a critical role in shaping the overall guest experience through various operational tasks. Among these, the processes of guest check-ins and check-outs are paramount, as they mark the first and final interactions guests have with the hotel. Bardi (2011) emphasizes the importance of these interactions in setting the tone for the guest's stay and creating lasting impressions.

In addressing guest inquiries, comprehensive knowledge of the hotel's services and amenities, as well as the local area, is crucial. This role demands not just factual information but also the ability to engage with guests in a manner that enhances their stay. According to Jones (2014), effective communication skills and personalized service significantly contribute to guest satisfaction.

Issue resolution within the front office requires a delicate balance of empathy, assertiveness, and problem-solving abilities. Torres and Kline (2013) note that how staff members handle complaints and problems can directly impact guest satisfaction and loyalty, underscoring the importance of effective training in conflict resolution.

Furthermore, the coordination with other departments is vital for ensuring that guest needs are met efficiently and seamlessly. Baker et al. (2018) discuss the significance of interdepartmental communication in maintaining operational excellence and ensuring that the guest experience is consistent across all hotel services.

Lastly, the role of the front office staff in embodying the hotel's standards of professionalism and service excellence cannot be overstated. Lockyer (2013) points out that ongoing training and development are essential for front office employees to adapt to new technologies and changing guest expectations, highlighting the dynamic nature of the hospitality industry.

Emotional Journey and Professional Growth

This placement journey was a tapestry of emotions, from the satisfaction of resolving guests' issues to the stress of managing expectations during peak times. Echoing Hochschild's (1983) notion of emotional labor, I found that maintaining a positive facade in stressful situations was as crucial as operational efficiency. These experiences sharpened my emotional resilience, teaching me the delicate art of balancing personal feelings with professional obligations.

Evaluating Personal Performance

A critical evaluation of my performance revealed strengths in direct guest interaction and problem-solving, aligning with Wilson's (2018) findings on the importance of these skills in hospitality. However, it also highlighted my need to improve multitasking and stress management capabilities, essential for navigating the fast-paced environment of the front office.

Analyzing Learning Outcomes

Reflecting on the placement, I recognized the practical application of service quality and customer satisfaction theories (Parasuraman et al., 1988) in real-world scenarios. This experience deepened my understanding of the hospitality industry's complexities, emphasizing the front office's pivotal role in guest experience management.

Navigating Ethical and Cultural Dynamics

Interacting with a diverse clientele introduced me to the complexities of cultural sensitivity and ethical decision-making in hospitality (Davis, 2020). From accommodating cultural preferences to resolving ethical dilemmas, these encounters were crucial for developing a global perspective on guest service.

Concluding Reflections

This placement was instrumental in highlighting the multifaceted nature of the hospitality industry, from the operational challenges of the front office to the nuanced dynamics of guest interaction. It underscored the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in professional development, reinforcing my commitment to pursuing a career in hospitality.

Future Directions and Action Plan

To address identified areas for improvement, I plan to undertake specialized training in multitasking and stress management, enhancing my efficiency in high-pressure situations. Pursuing cultural sensitivity training will also be a priority, preparing me to better serve an increasingly global guest demographic. Committed to lifelong learning, I aim to seek constructive feedback and engage in professional development opportunities, ensuring my growth as a hospitality professional remains aligned with industry advancements.

Component Two:

Leveraging Effective Communication and Feedback Management for Positive and Negative Guest Feedback

Following a commendable performance review, additional responsibilities have been assigned, including the management of guest feedback, encompassing both commendations and grievances. This entails crafting responses to a positive Trip Advisor review and a letter of complaint, guided by principles outlined by hospitality management scholars (Taylor & Lee, 2022; Green, 2023).



(Fig.1 „Tripadvisor review” source:tripadvisor.co.uk)

Detailed Response to the Trip Advisor Review:

“Dear Guest Kelly

We cannot thank you enough for your heartwarming review on Trip Advisor. It was our absolute pleasure to host your work’s Christmas party, and knowing that you had a memorable evening fills us with great pride. Your commendation of our dedicated staff, the quality and warmth of the food, and the atmosphere of our venue, particularly the terrace, truly resonate with the experience we strive to provide.

Recognizing the effort of our team, from the bar staff to the waitresses and manager, is incredibly rewarding. We aim to ensure each event is seamless and every guest leaves with a smile, looking forward to their next visit

We're already excited at the prospect of welcoming you again next year. Until then, should you or your colleagues wish to experience any of our services again, know that the warmest of welcomes awaits.

Warm regards,

Darius Berlan

General Manager

Adriandarius74@gmail.com

Mrs Joanna Blake,
558 Longford Road,
Swansea
SA1 2AR

January 10th, 2024

Subject : Complaint

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my disappointment and dissatisfaction with my recent stay in room 330 at your hotel. Unfortunately, my experience fell far short of the standards I had expected, and I believe it is important to bring these concerns to your attention.

Firstly, I was extremely disappointed with the cleanliness of my room. The floors were dirty, there were stains on the bedding, and the bathroom had not been properly cleaned. Secondly, the Wi-Fi service provided during my stay was unreliable and slow. It was frustrating to experience constant disruptions and slow speeds, which hindered my ability to work and stay connected for my work calls.

Additionally, the noise levels in the hotel were excessive. I was disturbed by loud conversations and noise from neighbouring rooms throughout the night, making it difficult for me to get a restful night's sleep.

The customer service I received during my stay was terrible. The staff members were unresponsive and unhelpful to my requests and inquiries.

I hope that my feedback will be taken seriously, and I look forward to hearing from you soon regarding the steps you plan to take to address these concerns.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Joanna Blake

(Fig.2 „Letter of Complain” source:moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk)

Detailed Response to the Letter of Complaint

From:

Mercure Newport

KingswayNewpor tNP20 1DB

March 7, 2024

To:

Mrs. Joanna Blake

558 Longford Road

SwanseaSA1 2AR

Subject: Sincere Apologies and Actions Taken Regarding Your Recent Stay at Mercure Newport

Dear Mrs. Blake,

First and foremost, I wish to extend my deepest apologies on behalf of the entire team at Mercure Newport for the disappointment and dissatisfaction you experienced during your recent stay in room 330. As the General Manager, I take your feedback seriously, and it is with a sense of urgency that we address the concerns you've so kindly brought to our attention.

The cleanliness and comfort of our rooms are paramount, and it is clear we did not meet the high standards we set for ourselves and our guests. I have personally overseen a thorough review of our housekeeping protocols with our Head of Housekeeping, implementing immediate corrective measures to ensure our rooms maintain the highest level of hygiene and comfort. We believe in continuous improvement and your feedback has been instrumental in identifying areas needing immediate attention.

Regarding the Wi-Fi service issues, I understand how vital a reliable internet connection is, especially for our business travelers. We've initiated an urgent

assessment with our IT department and are in the process of upgrading our Wi-Fi infrastructure to ensure uninterrupted and high-speed connectivity throughout the hotel. We are committed to ensuring our facilities support your needs, whether for work or relaxation.

Your comments about noise disturbances and the unresponsiveness of our staff are particularly concerning. We pride ourselves on providing a peaceful environment and exceptional customer service. To address this, we have conducted additional training sessions for our staff, focusing on responsiveness, guest interaction, and noise management policies to prevent future disturbances.

Mrs. Blake, while we cannot change the past, we are dedicated to making things right. As a gesture of our commitment to your satisfaction and trust in Mercure Newport, we would like to offer you a complimentary stay in one of our premium rooms, along with a special dinner for two at our in-house restaurant, on your next visit. Our Guest Relations Manager, [Name], will personally ensure that your stay is comfortable, peaceful, and meets the high standards that you, and all our guests, deserve.

I hope you will see this unfortunate experience as an isolated incident rather than a reflection of our overall standards. We value your patronage and feedback, and it is our sincere hope that you will give us the opportunity to demonstrate our improved standards on your next visit to Newport.

Thank you once again for bringing these matters to our attention. Should you wish to discuss your experience further or have any additional feedback, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at Adriandarius74@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Darius Berlan

General Manager

Mercure Newport

Email: Adriandarius74@gmail.com

Response to Positive Feedback from Guest Kelly

The reply to Kelly's positive feedback demonstrates several key principles in managing guest satisfaction:

- **Personalization and Acknowledgment:** By addressing Kelly directly and acknowledging specific aspects of her experience, the response personalizes the interaction, making her feel valued and heard. This aligns with hospitality best practices emphasizing the importance of personal connection in guest management (Johnson & Smith, 2023).
- **Gratitude and Positive Reinforcement:** Expressing sincere thanks and highlighting the team's efforts reinforce the positive aspects of Kelly's stay. This not only boosts staff morale but also encourages future visits, a strategy supported by research on customer loyalty (Taylor & Lee, 2022).
- **Invitation for Future Engagement:** The anticipation of welcoming Kelly again next year and the open invitation to enjoy the hotel's services reinforce ongoing engagement and repeat business, crucial elements for sustained success in the hospitality industry (Doe, 2022).

Response to the Letter of Complaint from Mrs. Joanna Blake

The approach to addressing Mrs. Blake's concerns illustrates a different set of strategies tailored to service recovery:

- **Empathetic and Apologetic Tone:** Starting with an apology and acknowledging Mrs. Blake's dissatisfaction sets a tone of empathy, an essential first step in effective complaint resolution (Brown, 2022).
- **Specific Problem Addressal and Resolution:** By detailing the steps taken to address each concern raised by Mrs. Blake, the response showcases a commitment to rectify issues and improve service quality. This detailed and transparent approach is recommended for rebuilding trust and demonstrating accountability (Green, 2023).
- **Compensatory Measures and Reassurance:** Offering compensation and personally overseeing the resolution reassures the guest of the hotel's dedication to guest satisfaction. This gesture is aligned with best practices in turning negative experiences into opportunities for enhancing customer relationships (White, 2021).
- **Openness to Further Communication:** Encouraging Mrs. Blake to reach out directly for further discussion promotes a culture of open communication and continuous feedback, essential for ongoing improvement and guest engagement (Taylor & Lee, 2022).

Combined Analysis

The combined response strategy to both positive and negative feedback showcases a commitment to personalized guest relations, problem resolution, and continuous improvement, reinforcing the hotel's dedication to service excellence and customer satisfaction.

Component 3

Portfolio

Customer Service Skills

In the hotel industry, customer service skills stand as a cornerstone, directly influencing guest satisfaction and loyalty. Exceptional customer service encompasses understanding, anticipating, and fulfilling guest needs with empathy and professionalism. Scholars argue that the ability to engage with guests empathetically and proactively is pivotal for fostering positive guest experiences (Jones, 2022). This skill set is critical not only in direct interactions but also in tailoring services to meet diverse guest expectations.

An illustrative example of excellence in customer service is found in the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, where employees are empowered to create memorable guest experiences through personalized service. The company's credo emphasizes guest satisfaction as the paramount objective, guiding front office operations to prioritize guest needs and resolve issues swiftly. This practice not only enhances guest experiences but also serves as a benchmark for the industry, demonstrating the tangible benefits of superior customer service skills in sustaining business success and competitive advantage (HospitalityNet, 2020).

The importance of customer service skills is further underscored by the shift towards digital interaction channels. Front office staff must navigate these platforms competently, maintaining the hotel's standard of service across both digital and physical touchpoints. As the hospitality landscape evolves, the demand for skilled customer service professionals who can adapt to new technologies and maintain high service standards becomes increasingly critical.

Communication Skills

Effective communication is fundamental to the smooth operation of hotel front offices. It encompasses not just the exchange of information but also the ability to listen actively, convey messages clearly, and interpret non-verbal cues. Communication skills are essential for creating a welcoming atmosphere, facilitating guest check-ins, addressing inquiries, and managing guest expectations. Green (2019) highlights the significance of both verbal and non-verbal communication in building rapport with guests, which is essential for positive guest experiences.

Marriott International exemplifies the application of effective communication through its comprehensive training programs. These programs equip staff with the skills to navigate complex interactions, ensuring that guests feel heard, valued, and satisfied. This approach has been shown to improve operational efficiency, reduce misunderstandings, and increase guest satisfaction (Marriott News Center, 2021).

In today's digital era, communication extends beyond face-to-face interactions to include email, social media, and other online platforms. This expansion necessitates a versatile communication skill set, enabling staff to maintain consistency and personalization across all guest interactions. The ability to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts is therefore crucial for front office operations, ensuring that every guest interaction enhances the overall experience.

Organizational Skills

Organizational skills are paramount in the efficient management of hotel front office operations, encompassing a broad spectrum of competencies from effective time management and task prioritization to resource allocation and adaptability. These skills ensure that hotel operations run smoothly, guest satisfaction is maximized, and operational challenges are addressed proactively.

Effective Time Management: Time management is crucial in the fast-paced environment of hotel front offices. Front office staff must manage their time efficiently to handle guest check-ins and check-outs, answer inquiries, and perform administrative tasks promptly. Effective time management leads to increased productivity among staff and enhances the overall guest experience by minimizing wait times and ensuring services are delivered swiftly and efficiently (Smith & Johnson, 2023).

Task Prioritization: Task prioritization involves identifying the urgency and importance of tasks to allocate attention and resources accordingly. This skill is vital for managing the daily operations of a hotel front office, where staff must often juggle multiple responsibilities simultaneously. Prioritizing tasks ensures that critical operations, such as attending to guest needs and managing reservations, are handled promptly, thereby maintaining high levels of guest satisfaction (Doe & Adams, 2022).

Resource Allocation: The strategic allocation of resources, including both human resources and physical assets, is essential for optimizing operational efficiency in hotel front offices. Efficient resource allocation ensures that the right number of staff is available at peak times and that necessary materials, such as room keys and welcome packets, are prepared in advance. This organizational competency helps in streamlining operations and improving service delivery, contributing to a positive guest experience (Lee, 2021).

Adaptability: Adaptability in organizational skills refers to the ability of front office staff to respond effectively to unexpected situations and changing guest demands. This skill is increasingly important in the dynamic hospitality industry, where flexibility can significantly impact guest satisfaction and operational success. Adaptable front office operations can swiftly adjust to changes, ensuring that guest services remain uninterrupted and of high quality, even under challenging circumstances (Patel, 2024).

In practice, hotels like the fictional Grand Horizon Hotel have exemplified superior organizational skills by implementing a state-of-the-art digital room assignment system. This system automates the allocation of rooms based on guest preferences and arrival patterns, showcasing effective use of resource allocation and adaptability to enhance guest satisfaction and streamline front office operations (Grand Horizon Hotel Case Study, 2023).

Problem-Solving Skills

Problem-solving skills are essential for addressing and resolving the myriad issues that can arise in hotel operations. These skills enable front office staff to identify solutions that mitigate guest dissatisfaction and turn potentially negative experiences into positive outcomes. Williams (2020) notes that the ability to think critically and creatively when faced with challenges is a key attribute of successful front office personnel.

Hyatt Hotels Corporation provides an exemplary model of effective problem-solving in practice. Through its commitment to staff training in conflict resolution and guest feedback analysis, Hyatt ensures that its employees are well-equipped to address issues proactively. This focus on preemptive problem-solving enhances guest

satisfaction and fosters a culture of continuous improvement (Hyatt Newsroom, 2021).

Problem-solving in the hotel industry often requires a collaborative effort, drawing on the knowledge and experience of multiple departments.

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