

**Component One: Student Journal
(learning log) 750 words +/- 10%**

**Contribution to Overall Module
Assessment: 25%**

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Module Title:	Hotel Administration & Front Office Operations
Module Code:	BMIH4004
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Learning Journal: A Week of Work Placement at Novotel Southampton Front Office

Considering the readership can be beneficial when composing a journal entry (Moon, 2006). In this learning journal, I will employ the Gibbs Reflective Model to delve into my week-long work placement experience at Novotel Southampton's front office. As a university student, this opportunity provided me with a firsthand glimpse into the intricacies of the hospitality industry, specifically in the realm of guest services. Throughout this reflective account, I will explore my thoughts, emotions, evaluations, analysis, conclusions, and action plans, aiming to gain valuable insights and identify areas of growth from this transformative experience.

Description

Bassot (2020) establishes a connection between various reflective models, including Gibbs', Kolb's, and Driscoll's, highlighting a shared focal point that these models converge upon, the description stage - recalling what occurred (Johns, 2013).

During my week-long work placement at Novotel Southampton's front office, I had the opportunity to observe and engage in various tasks and responsibilities. These included welcoming guests, managing check-ins and check-outs, handling inquiries, and assisting with administrative duties. The team consisted of receptionists, concierge staff, and supervisors who were dedicated to providing excellent customer service.

Feelings

Thompson & Thompson (2023) states that it is imperative for reflective practice to include an of introspection regarding the emotional underpinnings and ramifications of our work.

Throughout the week, I experienced a mix of nervousness and excitement. Initially, I felt uncertain about my ability to handle guest interactions and meet the demands of the fast-

paced environment as it was my first work interaction in the UK. However, as I familiarised myself with the team and gained hands-on experience, my confidence grew, and I started to feel more comfortable engaging with guests and addressing their needs.

Evaluation

In evaluation, according to Tate (2013), the aim is to compare performance against a known standard, whether implicit or explicit, in order to determine successes and areas for improvement.

Overall, the experience at Novotel Southampton's front office was immensely positive. The staff exhibited exceptional professionalism, teamwork, and efficiency in their roles. Witnessing their ability to handle challenging situations and maintain a friendly demeanour left a lasting impression on me, especially when seeing first hand the positive feedback they received from guests. However, one aspect that could be improved was the clarity of communication between team members during peak hours when the workload became overwhelming.

Analysis

Reflexivity necessitates an engaged analysis of experiences to identify the interconnected developmental aspects they entail according to Johns (2013).

Reflecting on the experience, I realised the importance of effective communication, both within the team and with guests. Clear and concise communication ensures a seamless guest experience and minimises potential misunderstandings. Additionally, observing how the team managed various tasks and prioritised responsibilities highlighted the significance of organisational skills and adaptability in a dynamic work environment.

Conclusion

The conclusion stage entails integrating the acquired insights from the preceding stages and deriving conclusions regarding the experience (Gibbs, 1988)

Looking back, I acknowledge that there were instances where I could have taken a more proactive approach in seeking learning opportunities. While I actively engaged in tasks assigned to me, I feel I could have asked more questions or expressed a desire to participate in additional aspects of the front office operations. This would have allowed me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the different roles within the team.

Action Plan

As explained by Adeani, Febriani, and Syafryadin (2020) in their study, the action plan phase involves expressing what has been learned, considering how one would respond if the events

in the story were to occur in their own life, and strategising on how to better prepare oneself for similar situations in the future.

If I were to encounter a similar work placement again, I would focus on expanding my knowledge of different front office processes by shadowing team members in various roles. Additionally, I would proactively seek feedback from supervisors and colleagues to identify areas for improvement and continue developing my customer service skills. Enhancing my communication and time management abilities would be a priority, as these skills are crucial for success in this industry.

In summary, my week at Novotel Southampton's front office has been a transformative experience, rich with valuable insights, personal growth, and a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the hospitality industry. I am grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of the team and will carry the lessons learned with me as I continue my journey in the world of hospitality. According to Kilgallon & Thompson (2012), the Gibbs reflective model provides a systematic and coherent framework for recounting personal experiences, placing particular importance on the learning aspect. This framework has provided a thorough structure that allowed me to evaluate my experiences and recognise areas that could be enhanced or developed.

References:

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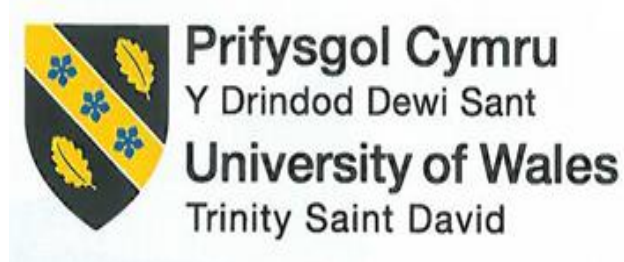
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Component Two

Contribution to Overall Module Assessment: 25%

Trip Advisor Review Response 150 words +/-10%

Thank you Sophie for taking the time to write this review and for your positive thoughts about your stay with Novotel Southampton! We highly appreciate any feedback as it gives us the opportunity to see ourselves through our guests eyes and improve the experience we offer, and we thank you for the chance to prove ourselves.

I will make sure to advise our colleague Angie about the impression she made on you. It is always encouraging for the front office team to receive good feedback as they represent the first contact our guests have with our hotel and dictate the course of the rest of their stay.

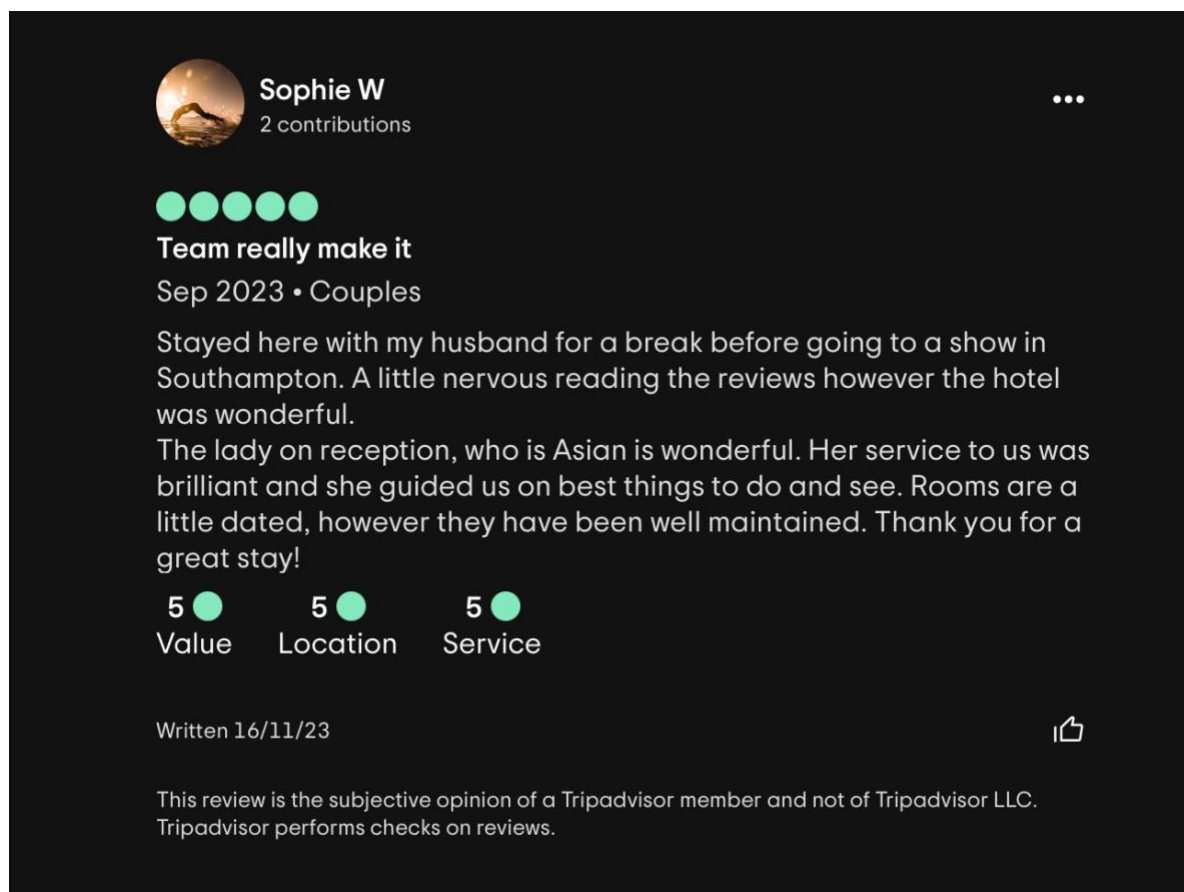
Your insight on the rooms is also very important for us. We do have plans on upgrading the appearance of our rooms slightly however we also try to keep the charm and authenticity that differentiate Novotel from other hotels.

On behalf of Novotel Southampton team, I hope you will visit us again soon and thank you for trusting us with your recent stay!

Kindest regards,

Daniela Zota, Front Desk Team Member

Screen shot of referenced Trip Advisor review used:



Reference:

S. W. (2023) "Team really make it". Novotel Southampton Hotel. Available at: https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g186299-d193833-r926105503-Novotel_Southampton_Hotel-Southampton_Hampshire_England.html (Accessed: 9 February 2024)

Letter of complaint response 500 words +/- 1-%

Dear Ms. Blake,

I would like to begin by acknowledging your recent complaint regarding your stay in room 330 at our hotel, Novotel Southampton. I sincerely apologise for the disappointment and dissatisfaction you experienced during your time with us. Your concerns are of utmost importance to us, and we appreciate you bringing them to our attention, as our guests' opinion is our chance to improve and tailor our services as best as possible.

I understand your frustration with the cleanliness of your room and how disappointing must have felt to arrive in a room that was not fit for its purpose of offering comfort. We strive to provide a clean and comfortable environment

for all our guests, and it is disheartening to hear that we fell short of your expectations. Rest assured, we take this matter seriously, and we will take immediate action to ensure that our housekeeping team pays closer attention to detail to maintain a higher standard of cleanliness in all our rooms.

Regarding the Wi-Fi service, I apologise for the inconvenience caused by the unreliable and slow connection. We understand the importance of a reliable internet connection, especially for business travellers like yourself. We will investigate the issue and work towards improving the Wi-Fi service to provide faster and more stable connectivity for our guests.

I honestly regret hearing about the excessive noise levels you experienced during your stay. We understand the importance of a restful night's sleep, and it is regrettable that you were disturbed by the noise from neighbouring rooms. We will address this issue with our staff and implement measures to ensure a quieter and more peaceful environment for our guests. We usually try our best to plan room allocation in advance and distribute our guests in accordance to the purpose of their stay, to avoid this sort of situation, and rest assured that I will investigate the reason why this strategy failed on this occasion.

I am also truly sorry for the poor customer service you encountered during your stay. Our team is trained to provide excellent service, and it is disappointing to hear that we failed to meet your expectations. I assure you that we will investigate the matter and provide retraining as necessary to ensure that all our staff members are responsive and helpful to our guests' requests and inquiries.

Please be assured that your feedback has been taken seriously, and we are committed to addressing these concerns promptly. Our management team will review your complaint thoroughly and take the necessary steps to prevent such issues from occurring in the future.

As a gesture of our commitment to your satisfaction, we would like to offer you compensation for the inconveniences you experienced during your stay. We will contact you directly to discuss the details and ensure that you are adequately compensated for the shortcomings in our service.

Once again, please accept my apologies for the negative experience you had at Novotel Southampton. We value your feedback and appreciate your patience

as we work towards resolving these issues. Should you have any further concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Thank you once more for bringing these matters to our attention.

Sincerely,

Daniela Zota

Front Office Department

Component Three:

Contribution to Overall Module Assessment: 50% (1000 words +/- 10%)

Writing in essay format

To work within a hotel's front office operation, several key skills are required. These skills include customer service, communication, organisational, and problem-solving skills. This essay has as a purpose the exploration of each of these skills in detail sustained by real industry examples.

Key Skill 1 – Customer Service Skills

Front office staff must possess essential customer service skills as they are the initial point of contact for guests. These skills encompass efficiently and effectively understanding and fulfilling customer needs. According to a study conducted by Harris and Mongiello (2020), interpersonal skills, empathy, and a friendly attitude play a crucial role in creating a positive guest experience. For instance, going above and beyond to accommodate guest requests or promptly addressing any concerns. The success and profitability of any business heavily rely on attaining customer and guest satisfaction.

Failing to provide a satisfactory level of customer service can lead to detrimental consequences such as negative word-of-mouth, unfavourable online feedback, a decline in customer retention, decreased profits, and even the possibility of business closure (Foskett et al., 2021). Sparks et al. (2020) also emphasised, in a study they conducted, that possessing proficient customer service skills significantly enhances guest satisfaction and loyalty. The research underscores the significance of traits such as amicability, attentiveness, and promptness in providing exceptional customer service. Accordingly, front office staff should actively engage in active listening, anticipate guest needs, and promptly address any requests or concerns that may arise. The exceptional customer service model of Ritz-Carlton distinguishes it from other luxury hotels. Their philosophy, "Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen," prioritises treating both employees and customers with respect, establishing a culture of exceptional service.

Reynolds and Beatty (2017) conducted a study outlining three key pillars of Ritz-Carlton's customer service model: employee empowerment, personalised service, and continuous improvement. The company firmly believes that empowered employees are better equipped to deliver exceptional service to customers.

Key Skill 2 – Communication Skills

Communication involves the transmission of information from one or more individuals to one or more other individuals (Mullins & Dossor, 2013). The front office serves as the central communication hub within a hotel, responsible for transmitting information throughout the organisation. To ensure effective communication between customers, the front office, and all departments, it is crucial to establish processes and standards that facilitate this exchange of information (Foskett et al., 2021).

Foskett et al. (2021) also stresses that both verbally and in written form communication is crucial when interacting with customers, both verbally and in written form. Face-to-face communication should be clear, maintaining an appropriate volume and avoiding condescension or invading personal space, while, when communicating in writing it is important to consider tone, grammar, and spelling.

Listening is, according to Sturman et al. (2011), a form of communication that enable the establishment of strong relationships with colleagues, understanding and prioritising supervisors' objectives to acquire resources for important initiatives, and

most importantly, comprehending guests' expectations and surpassing them to provide exceptional service.

Vallen & Vallen (2013) sum up by stating that receptionists should understand that price is not the sole consideration for guests when choosing their accommodations. Alongside the price, patiently addressing inquiries, adeptly handling objections, and establishing a personal connection with the guests are equally crucial in influencing their decision-making process.

The Langham Hotels and Resorts offers an innovative program called the “Ask me” program, which aims to enhance guest experiences by providing personalised service and tailored recommendations. This program empowers the hotel staff to proactively engage with guests, actively listening to their needs and preferences (Langham Hotels and Resorts, n.d.).

Key Skill 3 – Organisational Skills

In the field of hospitality, individuals frequently encounter dynamic and high-speed settings that demand their ability to swiftly acclimate to evolving conditions. This encompasses effectively managing unforeseen circumstances, accommodating guest requirements, and displaying flexibility in work arrangements (Berry, Wilkins & Lusch, 2020).

Organisational skills play a crucial role in enabling employees to systematically handle their workload instead of engaging in haphazard task switching without completing any. A prime example of an organisational skill that enhances performance is the prompt completion of paperwork, avoiding the accumulation of a daunting pile (Bardi, 2011).

Bardi (2011) also advises that the acquisition of effective time management skills is vital for employees to successfully carry out their assigned tasks within specified timeframes. For instance, in the hotel industry, various departments rely on front office personnel to promptly convey messages to guests and other departments. Failure to fulfil this responsibility can lead to substantial confusion for all parties involved.

An example that demonstrates the importance of this skill would be the position that the lower-end Accor Hotels use instead of front office receptionist. Ibis or Ibis Budget hotels employ team members that must operate the front office, at the same time as working the bar, serving in the restaurant, or acting as a concierge. In this situation, the team member has to demonstrate strong organisational skills in order to be able to manage the situations timely and prioritise effectively.

Key Skill 4 – Problem Solving Skills

In a study conducted by Adera, Gultom & Lakip (2019), it was found that front desk personnel need to possess essential problem-solving skills in order to effectively assess the situation, offer clear instructions, and promptly involve the necessary resources. The statement "Anyone who receives a guest problem owns it" (Rutherford and O'Fallon, 2011, pp. 116) implies that regardless of their specific role or position, any individual who becomes aware of a guest problem or issue is responsible for taking ownership of the situation. This means that they are accountable for addressing and resolving the problem to the best of their abilities, rather than passing it off to someone else or ignoring it.

Addressing customer complaints and promptly resolving them is a crucial aspect of problem-solving for hotel receptionists. Choi and Chu (2001) highlight in their study that customer complaints are prevalent in the hospitality industry and the effectiveness of their resolution has a significant impact on guest satisfaction and future business. Receptionists who possess strong problem-solving skills can analyze the situation, demonstrate empathy towards the guest, and take appropriate actions to promptly resolve the issue. This not only enhances the guest experience but also plays a vital role in generating positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

An industry example would be the situation in which the front office staff must promptly address the issue and find a suitable solution if a guest encounters a problem during their stay, such as a malfunctioning air conditioning unit. They may need to coordinate with maintenance staff to resolve the problem and ensure guest satisfaction.

In conclusion, continuously developing and honing these key skills, front office staff can excel in their roles and provide exceptional service to hotel guests.

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