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STUDENT NAME: LAURA MIHAELA CIUBOTARIU

STUDENT ID: 2117512

LECTURER: CHRISTOPHER WILKINS

***INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF STAFF SHORTAGES ON
CUSTOMER SERVICE AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES: A
CASE STUDY OF YORK HOTEL BEST WESTERN, EASTBOURNE***

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1. [Grammarly](#) to enhance grammar, coherence, and clarity in the text.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report investigates the impact of staff shortages on customer service quality at York Hotel Best Western in Eastbourne, a mid-range hotel in the popular tourist destination of Eastbourne, UK. The primary aim is to assess how workforce limitations influence guest satisfaction and service standards, along with evaluating the crisis management strategies implemented by the hotel to address these challenges.

Through a case study approach, the research examines various aspects, including the operational, financial, and reputational impacts of staff shortages, the effectiveness of York Hotel's crisis management, and potential improvement areas. The methodology employs qualitative data collection techniques such as reflective writing and netnography, allowing for an in-depth understanding of customer experiences and internal responses to staffing issues.

Key findings reveal that staff shortages negatively affect service quality, operational efficiency, and employee morale, especially during peak tourist seasons. Insufficient staffing has led to increased workloads for remaining employees, resulting in delayed services and decreased guest satisfaction. Moreover, the analysis highlights that seasonal fluctuations in demand exacerbate these staffing challenges, while limited employee retention strategies contribute to the high turnover rates.

Strategic recommendations are offered to mitigate the impact of staff shortages, including cross-training staff to enhance workforce flexibility, adopting technology to streamline guest services, and implementing improved recruitment and retention strategies to maintain a stable workforce. Additionally, developing a contingency workforce plan and robust service recovery protocols is advised to ensure consistent service quality despite workforce limitations.

The findings emphasize that addressing these staffing challenges is essential for sustaining guest satisfaction, enhancing employee well-being, and maintaining York Hotel's reputation in a competitive hospitality market. By adopting these strategies, York Hotel Best Western can reinforce its service standards, improve operational resilience, and enhance customer loyalty.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, staff shortages in the hospitality sector have presented substantial challenges, especially in the realm of customer service. Staff shortages can detrimentally impact the service quality, guest satisfaction, and overall operational efficiency of hotels (Baum et al., 2020). The purpose of this research is to explore how staff shortages influence customer service in the context of a specific hotel brand, York Hotel Best Western, located in Eastbourne. This case study seeks to examine not only the effects of staff shortages on guest satisfaction but also the strategic responses implemented by the hotel to mitigate the impact of such shortages.

York Hotel Best Western, part of the globally recognized Best Western brand, serves as an ideal case study due to its emphasis on service quality and reputation for offering consistent guest experiences (Best Western, 2022). Located in Eastbourne, a popular tourist destination in the UK, the hotel faces seasonal fluctuations in visitor numbers, which further exacerbate the challenges related to staffing (British Hospitality Association, 2021). Against this backdrop, this research aims to provide insights into how the hotel has developed crisis management strategies to address staffing issues, ensuring the continuity of high service standards despite workforce limitations.

Aim

To investigate the influence of staff shortages on customer service quality at York Hotel Best Western in Eastbourne and to explore the strategies employed by the hotel to manage this crisis.

Objectives

- To assess the impact of staff shortages on customer service quality within the hotel.
- To identify the specific challenges faced by York Hotel Best Western due to workforce limitations.
- To analyse the crisis management strategies implemented by the hotel to address staffing issues.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in maintaining customer satisfaction.
- To offer recommendations for other hotels facing similar challenges.

The Impact of Staff Shortages on Customer Service Quality

Staff shortages are widely recognized as a barrier to high service standards in hospitality. Boella and Goss-Turner (2019) highlight that staffing issues can hinder a hotel's ability to consistently deliver quality service, essential for guest satisfaction and loyalty. Insufficient staffing increases employee strain, leading to longer wait times, reduced service quality, and burnout, especially during peak seasons when demand rises but workforce availability is limited (Berta, 2019).

In UK hotels, Baum et al. (2020) note that shortages contribute to high turnover and low morale, impacting service consistency. This turnover, often due to poor conditions and limited advancement, perpetuates staffing issues, further hindering consistent service delivery (Baum et al., 2020). However, while many studies link staff shortages to service quality, they often overlook specific customer feedback and satisfaction metrics.

Factors Contributing to Staff Shortages in the Hospitality Sector

Various factors contribute to the ongoing staff shortage crisis within the hospitality industry. One major factor identified by Robinson et al. (2019) is the sector's reliance on seasonal and part-time workers, who frequently leave for better opportunities or due to unsatisfactory working conditions. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated workforce instability, with many employees leaving the industry permanently in search of greater job security and more favourable working conditions in other sectors (Baum et al., 2020). The effects of these shifts have been particularly pronounced in tourist-dependent areas like Eastbourne, where demand for hospitality services fluctuates sharply between peak and off-peak seasons (British Hospitality Association, 2021).

Additionally, inadequate wages, limited career progression, and unsociable working hours are often cited as reasons why the hospitality sector struggles to attract and retain talent (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2019). These conditions are further compounded by the sector's heavy reliance on immigrant labour, which has faced considerable disruption due to recent changes in immigration policies and the post-Brexit labour

market (Deloitte, 2021). While existing literature comprehensively documents these factors, there remains a gap in the understanding of how specific hotels address such challenges through innovative recruitment and retention strategies.

Crisis Management in the Hospitality Industry

The hospitality sector's ability to adapt to staffing challenges hinges largely on effective crisis management strategies. Crisis management, broadly defined as the process of preparing for, responding to, and recovering from unforeseen disruptions, has been identified as crucial to sustaining operations during periods of staff shortage (Faulkner, 2001). Studies suggest that effective crisis management requires hotels to implement contingency planning, cross-training of employees, and strategic workforce scheduling to maintain service quality (Henderson, 2007).

Research by Kim and Lee (2018) highlights the importance of cross-functional training as a crisis management strategy, allowing hotels to deploy existing staff more flexibly during periods of high demand or labour shortage. Cross-training, particularly within smaller hotels, helps maintain service levels by equipping employees with the skills needed to perform various roles. Additionally, Vardarlier (2016) emphasizes the role of communication and morale-boosting activities in retaining staff during times of crisis. By promoting a supportive and adaptable work environment, hotels can reduce turnover and foster resilience among employees.

While the literature emphasizes the importance of crisis management, few studies have explored the effectiveness of these strategies on long-term customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Most research focuses on immediate operational benefits, with limited exploration of how these strategies contribute to building a resilient brand reputation over time.

The Role of Technology in Alleviating Staffing Challenges

Advances in technology have offered the hospitality industry various tools to mitigate the effects of staffing shortages. Self-service kiosks, mobile check-in, and automated customer service systems reduce the dependency on front-line staff and improve customer experience (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). Studies show that implementing such technologies can relieve some of the operational pressure caused by staff

shortages, allowing limited personnel to focus on more personalized customer interactions (Ivanov & Webster, 2017).

However, research also highlights potential drawbacks, as customers may perceive a lack of human interaction as impersonal, potentially diminishing their overall experience (Chiang & Trimi, 2020). This tension suggests that while technology can alleviate some operational burdens, it must be implemented carefully to preserve the customer-centric ethos of the hospitality industry. The existing literature provides limited insights into how individual hotels balance technological adoption with personalized service, leaving room for further investigation into how hotels like York Hotel Best Western can leverage technology without compromising customer experience.

Strategies for Enhancing Employee Retention in Hospitality

Employee retention strategies are essential for reducing the frequency and impact of staff shortages in the hospitality sector. As noted by Robinson et al. (2019), competitive compensation, career development opportunities, and a positive work environment are critical to employee retention. Studies suggest that career development initiatives, such as training programs and opportunities for advancement, play a key role in improving employee satisfaction and reducing turnover (Yen & Teng, 2013). Furthermore, fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace culture has been shown to increase employee loyalty, thereby reducing the likelihood of staff shortages (Wang et al., 2021).

While existing studies highlight the importance of these strategies, few examine the practical application within specific hotel brands, such as Best Western. Research that explores how individual hotels tailor these strategies to address unique challenges, including seasonality and location-specific labour market constraints, would provide valuable insights. This gap in the literature underscores the need for case studies like York Hotel Best Western to illustrate the effectiveness of employee retention strategies in specific hotel environments.

Gaps in the Literature

While extensive research exists on the effects of staff shortages, factors contributing to these shortages, and various crisis management strategies, there are notable gaps in the literature. Firstly, there is limited exploration of how customer satisfaction is directly impacted by specific crisis management initiatives, particularly within smaller or mid-sized hotels. Additionally, existing studies lack a focused examination of how individual hotels, especially those located in tourist-dependent areas like Eastbourne, implement targeted strategies to address seasonal fluctuations in staffing needs.

Furthermore, the impact of technological solutions on customer satisfaction in the context of staff shortages is underexplored. While technology is widely acknowledged as beneficial, there is a need for more research on the balance between automated services and the human element critical to hospitality. This gap highlights the importance of further study on how hotels like York Hotel Best Western employ technology to address staffing challenges without compromising customer satisfaction.

This research uses a case study methodology centered on York Hotel Best Western in Eastbourne, employing a qualitative approach to investigate real-world issues within a specific setting (Yin, 2018). Aiming to explore how staff shortages impact customer service and the strategies employed to manage these challenges, this method is ideal as it allows for an in-depth examination of the hotel's operations and crisis management. Complementing the case study, reflective writing and netnography are used to capture experiential insights and online customer sentiment, adding multiple qualitative perspectives.

Case Study Methodology: Benefits and Limitations

The case study approach offers distinct benefits, especially within the hospitality industry. One major advantage is its capacity to capture the complexity of real-life situations, making it well-suited to examine how hotels, such as York Hotel Best Western, manage staff shortages while maintaining service standards (Yin, 2018). This method allows a thorough examination of the strategies a single entity uses, aligning with the study's goal of understanding both the challenges of staffing shortages and the hotel's crisis management tactics.

Moreover, case studies generate insights valuable to broader industry practices. Stake (1995) notes that case studies provide contextual understanding, helping researchers link specific practices to wider trends. The findings from York Hotel Best Western may, for example, offer insights applicable to other tourist-dependent hotels facing similar issues.

Data Collection Techniques

This research employs qualitative techniques, including reflective writing and netnography, to provide a multi-faceted view of how staff shortages affect customer service.

Reflective Writing

Reflective writing allows researchers to document thoughts, observations, and experiences, offering an introspective view of the research process. Bolton (2010) states that reflective writing enables critical engagement with observations, uncovering deeper insights. Here, reflective writing captures firsthand experiences and interactions at York Hotel Best Western, spotlighting moments where staffing issues impacted service quality. This technique reveals how staff and management respond to challenges, providing insights often missed in more structured data collection methods.

Reflective writing also allows longitudinal observation, creating a timeline of how the hotel manages staffing issues across operational phases. This aligns with the exploratory nature of case study research, enabling ongoing assessment of how York Hotel Best Western adapts to staffing constraints.

Netnography

Developed by Kozinets (2015), netnography is a form of online ethnography that examines digital interactions and social media content. This method is valuable for studying customer perceptions, allowing data collection from online platforms where guests share experiences. In this study, netnography analyses customer reviews on sites like TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and social media. It offers insights into customer perceptions of service quality, complementing internal insights from reflective writing.

Netnography also identifies patterns in guest feedback, highlighting themes related to service quality and satisfaction. Mkono and Markwell (2014) suggest that netnography accesses authentic guest perspectives often missing from surveys or interviews. By examining online reviews, this research assesses whether customers notice and respond to service issues related to staffing shortages, adding depth to understanding how these issues affect guest experience.

Use of Qualitative Data

Qualitative data is essential to this research, providing a detailed analysis of staff shortage effects on customer service within a single hotel setting. Qualitative methods—case studies, reflective writing, and netnography—capture nuanced insights that quantitative approaches may overlook (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). While qualitative data lacks broad generalizability, it enables a comprehensive exploration of staffing challenges in hospitality, with flexibility for adaptive data collection, enhancing the case study's capacity to observe real-time responses to staffing issues (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION: YORK HOTEL BEST WESTERN, EASTBOURNE

Hotel Background: York Hotel Best Western, Eastbourne

Brand Overview

Best Western is an international hotel brand with over 4,700 hotels in more than 100 countries (Best Western, 2022). Established in 1946, it has grown to become one of the most recognized names in the mid-range hospitality sector, offering a blend of quality service and affordability. The brand operates under a franchise model, allowing each hotel to maintain some degree of autonomy while benefiting from Best Western's global marketing, booking, and quality assurance systems. This structure enables hotels like York Hotel Best Western to maintain local character while adhering to the brand's standards.

York Hotel, Eastbourne

Located on the southeast coast of England, Eastbourne is a popular tourist destination known for its Victorian architecture, scenic coastal views, and proximity to attractions such as the South Downs National Park. York Hotel Best Western enjoys a prime location near Eastbourne Pier, making it an attractive option for tourists seeking comfortable accommodations near the seafront. The hotel operates with around 80 rooms, offering various amenities such as dining facilities, a lounge area, and free Wi-Fi.

In terms of staffing, York Hotel Best Western employs approximately 50 full-time and part-time staff members, with roles spanning front office, housekeeping, food and beverage, and maintenance. However, seasonal fluctuations in tourist demand lead to staffing challenges, particularly during peak summer months when guest volume increases significantly (British Hospitality Association, 2021). The hotel's annual turnover is estimated at £3 million, contributing significantly to the local economy through job creation and tourist spending.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- **Location:** The hotel's proximity to Eastbourne Pier and other attractions gives it a competitive advantage.
- **Brand Affiliation:** As part of Best Western, York Hotel benefits from global brand recognition, a robust booking network, and quality assurance programs.
- **Affordable Pricing:** Positioned in the mid-range segment, the hotel attracts budget-conscious tourists seeking quality service at reasonable rates.

Weaknesses

- **Staffing Issues:** Seasonal staffing shortages impact service quality and employee morale.
- **Aging Infrastructure:** Parts of the hotel require renovation to stay competitive with newer hotels in the area.
- **Limited Facilities:** Compared to luxury competitors, the hotel lacks extensive amenities like spa services or event spaces.

Opportunities

- **Increased Tourism:** Eastbourne's tourism is projected to grow, creating an opportunity to attract more guests.
- **Technological Enhancements:** Adopting self-service kiosks and online booking systems could improve customer experience.
- **Sustainability Initiatives:** Implementing eco-friendly practices could attract environmentally conscious travellers.

Threats

- **Economic Uncertainty:** Fluctuations in the UK economy, particularly post-Brexit, impact tourist spending.
- **High Competition:** The Eastbourne area has many hotels, leading to intense competition.
- **Labor Market Challenges:** Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have worsened labour shortages in the hospitality sector.

PEST Analysis

Political Factors

The political landscape significantly affects the hospitality industry, especially concerning labour policies and regulations. Since Brexit, the UK's new immigration policies have impacted the availability of EU workers, causing staff shortages in labour-reliant sectors like hospitality (Deloitte, 2021). This has been challenging for York Hotel Best Western, which relies on seasonal staff. The new restrictions have intensified these shortages, as a considerable share of the UK's hospitality workforce previously comprised EU nationals (Taylor & Lewis, 2020). Additionally, compliance with health and safety regulations requires extra resources and complicates operations, particularly with limited staffing (Madar & Negruța, 2021). Nonetheless, adherence is essential for York Hotel Best Western to maintain its reputation.

Economic Factors

The UK's economic climate, shaped by inflation and global uncertainties, influences consumer spending behaviour, directly impacting the hospitality sector. Rising costs have limited disposable income, causing cautious spending and a decrease in domestic tourism (Office for National Statistics, 2023). For mid-range hotels like York Hotel Best Western, this may shift guest demographics as customers prioritize budget-friendly options. Nevertheless, the popularity of "staycations" continues post-COVID-19, benefiting local tourism destinations like Eastbourne (British Hospitality Association, 2021). This trend provides York Hotel Best Western with a stable customer base. However, inflation also raises operational costs, necessitating strategic cost management to maintain quality services while preserving profitability (Baker et al., 2021).

Social Factors

Social factors heavily shape guest expectations and preferences within the hospitality industry. Modern travellers increasingly value sustainable and ethical business practices, with younger generations prioritizing environmentally responsible hotels (Kim & Han, 2021). York Hotel Best Western can attract eco-conscious guests by implementing sustainable initiatives like energy conservation and waste reduction. Additionally, evolving consumer preferences emphasize unique, authentic experiences over standardized services (Pizam, 2020). York Hotel Best Western can capitalize on Eastbourne's unique culture to offer personalized experiences, fostering guest loyalty. Social trends also influence workforce dynamics, with hospitality employees increasingly valuing work-life balance and job security. This presents retention challenges, but by enhancing benefits and work environments, York Hotel Best Western can potentially improve staff retention (Baum et al., 2020).

Technological Factors

Technological advancements are transforming hospitality operations, enabling increased efficiency and enhanced guest experiences. Self-service solutions, including check-in kiosks and mobile booking systems, alleviate staffing pressures, benefiting York Hotel Best Western, especially during busy seasons (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). Additionally, the prevalence of online reviews impacts hotel reputations, making it essential for York Hotel Best Western to monitor and respond to feedback, thereby strengthening customer relationships (Leung, Law & Lee, 2019). Digital marketing strategies, such as targeted email campaigns and social media outreach, can increase the hotel's visibility and attract budget-conscious travellers (Kumar, 2020). While the costs of implementing advanced technologies may be significant, a strategic approach can help York Hotel Best Western optimize its technological investments (Ivanov & Webster, 2017).

Competitor Analysis: Price vs. Quality

Competitor analysis in the hospitality industry examines how similar hotels position themselves based on pricing strategies and service quality, which are crucial factors influencing customer choices (Porter, 1985). For York Hotel Best Western in Eastbourne, understanding its competitive landscape provides insights into how it can differentiate itself to attract and retain guests, particularly as it operates within a mid-range price segment that faces competition from both budget and upscale hotels. This section evaluates York Hotel Best Western's main competitors in Eastbourne in terms of pricing, quality, and amenities, using online ratings and comparative service offerings to identify strengths and potential areas for improvement.

Key competitors

HOTEL	PRICE RANGE	QUALITY (TRIPADVISOR RATING)	AMENITIES
YORK HOTEL BEST WESTERN	£80-£120/night	4.0/5	Free Wi-Fi, breakfast, lounge
THE GRAND HOTEL	£150-£300/night	4.5/5	Spa, pool, fine dining
EASTBOURNE RIVIERA HOTEL	£70-£100/night	3.8/5	Sea view, bar, room service
LANSDOWNE HOTEL	£90-£150/night	4.2/5	Pet-friendly, garden views, café

York Hotel Best Western competes within a highly competitive mid-range market segment. Positioned with rates typically between £80-£120 per night, York Hotel Best Western aims to offer quality service at an affordable rate, drawing budget-conscious travellers seeking a balance of cost and quality (Smith, 2021). This positioning is advantageous, as it aligns with growing demand from domestic travellers seeking value-driven options post-COVID-19, particularly with the staycation trend in the UK (British Hospitality Association, 2021).

While the Grand Hotel occupies the luxury tier with a high price reflecting its exclusive amenities, York Hotel Best Western offers competitive pricing without sacrificing core quality standards, making it a preferred choice for guests looking for comfort on a budget. According to Han et al. (2019), hotels that manage to balance affordability with quality are better positioned to attract repeat customers, as they cater to middle-income travellers who prioritize value.

However, the Eastbourne Riviera Hotel presents a competitive threat at the budget end of the spectrum, offering similar pricing but with fewer amenities and a slightly lower service quality rating. This positioning may appeal to younger or single travellers seeking minimal services at the lowest price (Lewis, 2020). York Hotel Best Western, therefore, has an opportunity to highlight its superior amenities, such as its lounge area and breakfast options, to set itself apart from more basic competitors.

The Lansdowne Hotel, on the other hand, competes closely with York Hotel Best Western by providing a similar quality standard and pricing. With pet-friendly policies and a family-oriented focus, the Lansdowne Hotel captures a specific demographic that may overlap with York's target audience. Research suggests that mid-range hotels can benefit by catering to specific traveller needs, such as pet-friendly accommodations, to create differentiation (Bowie et al., 2016).

Key Findings and Strategic Implications

The comparison of York Hotel Best Western with its competitors highlights several strategic insights:

1. **Emphasis on Value for Money:** York Hotel Best Western's mid-range pricing with a focus on quality positions it advantageously against both higher-priced luxury options and more basic budget hotels (Smith, 2021). By maintaining quality standards and delivering consistent service, York Hotel Best Western can appeal to guests seeking a balance of comfort and affordability.
2. **Potential for Selective Upgrades:** Given the competitive threat from hotels like The Grand and Lansdowne, York Hotel Best Western could benefit from targeted facility improvements. Studies show that guests in the mid-range segment increasingly value amenities such as modern decor and enhanced in-room facilities (Han et al., 2019). Upgrading select areas, such as room furnishings or communal spaces, could enhance guest experience and justify competitive pricing.
3. **Differentiation through Unique Experiences:** Offering locally inspired experiences or promoting sustainability initiatives can help differentiate York Hotel Best Western from competitors, particularly as guests increasingly prioritize eco-friendly practices and unique experiences (Jones, Hillier &

Comfort, 2016). Positioning itself as a sustainable, locally integrated option within the mid-range segment could strengthen its appeal among environmentally conscious travellers.

4. **Strengthening Digital Presence:** Online reviews and social media are critical in shaping hotel reputations and influencing booking decisions (Leung, Law & Lee, 2019). Actively managing online reviews, addressing guest feedback, and promoting positive experiences can enhance York Hotel Best Western's online visibility and attract customers seeking reliable, quality accommodations.

Netnography

Netnography involves analysing online customer reviews and social media comments to understand guest perceptions (Kozinets, 2015). For this study, reviews from platforms such as TripAdvisor and Google Reviews provide insights into customer satisfaction, identifying recurring themes in guest feedback.

Key Findings

- **Positive Feedback:** Guests consistently praise the hotel's location, affordability, and friendly staff, highlighting these as major strengths.
- **Areas for Improvement:** Common complaints include delayed service due to understaffing, outdated room decor, and limited amenities.
- **Service Quality:** Guests note that service quality can vary depending on the time of year, with noticeable declines during peak tourist season, likely due to staffing shortages.

By examining these reviews, netnography reveals specific areas where the hotel can improve to better meet customer expectations. Enhancing staff training, updating decor, and implementing customer feedback processes may help improve guest satisfaction.

The detailed analysis of York Hotel Best Western highlights the hotel's strategic position in Eastbourne's hospitality market, emphasizing both strengths and areas for improvement. The SWOT analysis reveals the hotel's advantages in terms of location and brand affiliation but also points to challenges related to staffing and infrastructure. The PEST analysis underscores the external pressures impacting the hotel, while

competitor analysis situates York Hotel within the mid-range segment, revealing opportunities for differentiation. Finally, netnography provides valuable insights into customer perspectives, underscoring the importance of addressing staffing issues and service quality to enhance guest satisfaction.

These insights collectively suggest that York Hotel Best Western could benefit from selective facility upgrades, technological innovations, and enhanced crisis management strategies to maintain and improve customer service despite staffing challenges. These strategies could not only improve the hotel's competitive position but also align with evolving industry trends, setting a foundation for sustained success in Eastbourne's competitive hospitality market.

THEME EXPLORATION: IMPACT OF STAFF SHORTAGES ON CUSTOMER SERVICE IN YORK HOTEL BEST WESTERN

The Hospitality Industry and Staff Shortages

The hospitality industry depends heavily on human resources, making it vulnerable to staffing issues. Staff shortages, driven by low wages, limited career growth, and challenging conditions, are common, leading to high turnover as many employees view these jobs as temporary (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). Operating with insufficient staff lowers service quality, impacting guest satisfaction and loyalty with delayed service, reduced attention, and employee burnout (Hinkin & Tracey, 2010).

For mid-range hotels like York Hotel Best Western, budget constraints make it challenging to offer competitive wages and benefits, further aggravating staffing issues (Kim et al., 2015). Seasonal demand fluctuations also create cyclical hiring and training challenges, adding stress to existing staff and diminishing morale (Taylor & Finley, 2018).

Impact of Staff Shortages on York Hotel Best Western

Staff shortages significantly affect York Hotel Best Western's daily operations, customer satisfaction, employee morale, and reputation. Reduced workforce leads to slower service, overworked employees, and inconsistent guest experiences, which are crucial in the hospitality industry.

Service Delivery and Efficiency

Staff shortages impact key areas in service delivery:

- **Front Desk Operations:** As the first contact point, understaffed front desks can cause long wait times for guests, affecting their experience and satisfaction (Wang & Mattila, 2010).

- **Housekeeping:** Insufficient housekeeping staff delays room cleaning, leading to inconsistency in cleanliness standards, a major factor in guest satisfaction (Lockyer, 2005).
- **Food and Beverage Service:** Limited kitchen and waitstaff result in slower service times, leading to dissatisfaction, as timely food and beverage service significantly influence guests' perceptions of value (Min & Min, 2013).

Customer Satisfaction and Experience

Staff shortages at York Hotel Best Western have led to fluctuating service quality, which erodes trust among repeat guests who expect consistency (Oliver, 2010). Key issues include:

- **Delayed Guest Requests:** Insufficient staff reduces promptness in addressing guest needs, impacting satisfaction as delays can feel inattentive (Johnston, 2004).
- **Negative Online Reviews:** Service lapses due to staffing issues frequently result in negative online feedback, damaging the hotel's reputation and potentially discouraging future bookings (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008).

Employee Morale and Burnout

Staff shortages increase workloads and extended hours for remaining staff, leading to burnout and reducing productivity and morale (Karatepe & Uludag, 2007). Key points include:

- **Increased Stress:** Employees at York Hotel Best Western, particularly those in guest-facing roles, report feeling overworked during peak seasons. The high demands, coupled with limited breaks and extended shifts, contribute to stress and fatigue, diminishing their ability to provide attentive and personalized service. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), employee burnout is associated with reduced engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction, which can translate into a decline in service quality.
- **High Turnover:** Frequent turnover due to burnout necessitates ongoing recruitment and training, which can be costly and time-consuming. Training new

staff to meet Best Western's service standards is essential but also challenging given the fast-paced nature of the industry. Baum et al. (2020) indicate that high turnover exacerbates staff shortages, creating a cycle where reduced workforce availability continually impacts service quality and operational efficiency. For York Hotel Best Western, finding and retaining skilled workers is especially challenging in a competitive labour market, where alternative sectors may offer better compensation and working conditions.

Operational and Financial Impacts

Staff shortages also result in increased operational costs and affect the hotel's financial health:

- **Temporary Staffing and Overtime Costs:** To compensate for staff shortages, York Hotel Best Western occasionally resorts to hiring temporary staff or paying overtime to current employees. However, temporary staff often lack the training and experience required to maintain the hotel's service standards, and their presence can lead to inconsistencies in guest experience. Additionally, overtime costs contribute to increased labour expenses, which can impact the hotel's overall profitability, especially in a mid-range segment where margins are often slim (Davidson, McPhail & Barry, 2011).
- **Loss of Repeat Business:** Inconsistent service and negative guest experiences can drive guests to competitors, affecting York Hotel Best Western's occupancy rates and long-term revenue. Research by Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) shows that customer loyalty is closely tied to service quality, especially in hospitality. When hotels fail to deliver consistent service, guests are less likely to return, leading to a loss in repeat business, which is critical for sustaining occupancy rates and revenue. This effect is particularly concerning in Eastbourne, where competition is high, and guests have multiple lodging options.

Long-term Brand Reputation

In the hospitality industry, brand reputation is built on the consistency of the guest experience, with even minor lapses potentially causing long-term damage to the brand image (Hem & Iversen, 2004). For York Hotel Best Western, staff shortages can contribute to a reputation of unreliability, especially if service issues become a recurring theme in guest feedback. As part of the Best Western brand, the hotel has access to a network of resources and brand recognition; however, failure to uphold brand standards can dilute brand equity and negatively impact customer perceptions of the Best Western brand.

Brand Perception and Loyalty: Research indicates that brand loyalty is influenced by perceived consistency in service quality (Oliver, 2010). When guests receive varied service levels due to staffing inconsistencies, it can reduce their trust in the brand's ability to deliver a reliable experience. This is particularly concerning for mid-range hotels like York Hotel Best Western, where repeat customers often expect a standardized experience across different locations within the brand.

Areas for Development and Improvement

Addressing staff shortages at York Hotel Best Western requires strategic improvements in several areas:

1. Enhanced Cross-Training and Workforce Flexibility

Cross-training is a common strategy in crisis management, enabling hotels to deploy staff across different functions based on demand fluctuations (Kim & Lee, 2018). For instance, employees trained in both housekeeping and front desk operations can help cover essential tasks during peak periods. By implementing cross-training programs, York Hotel Best Western can better utilize its existing workforce to cover critical areas during staffing shortages. Cross-trained employees also tend to feel more engaged, as they develop a wider skill set and are better prepared to handle varied guest needs. However, cross-training has limitations. It requires initial investment in training resources and may not fully address staffing shortages if demand is too high or persistent (Solnet et al., 2013). Additionally, employees may experience role fatigue if they are frequently required to switch between tasks. Nevertheless, with careful

planning and adequate scheduling, cross-training can improve workforce flexibility and reduce service bottlenecks, particularly in high-demand areas like housekeeping and front desk services.

2. Increased Use of Technology for Efficiency

Technological solutions, such as self-service kiosks and mobile check-in options, can alleviate some of the pressure on front-line staff, enabling the hotel to operate efficiently with fewer personnel (Ivanov & Webster, 2017). Self-service kiosks, for example, allow guests to complete check-in procedures independently, reducing wait times at the front desk. Mobile check-in technology also enables guests to check in using their smartphones, which could streamline the process during peak hours and enhance guest convenience. At York Hotel Best Western, implementing these technologies could significantly improve operational efficiency. Although the initial investment may be considerable, the long-term benefits include reduced reliance on front-desk staff, faster check-in processes, and higher guest satisfaction due to improved convenience. However, it is essential to balance the use of technology with the personal touch expected in hospitality. Research indicates that while many guests appreciate technological conveniences, some perceive fully automated processes as impersonal, which may detract from the overall experience (Chiang & Trimi, 2020).

3. Recruitment and Retention Strategies

To address staff shortages effectively, York Hotel Best Western could benefit from a strategic focus on recruitment and retention. Offering competitive wages, flexible work schedules, and opportunities for career development can make the hotel more attractive to potential employees (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2019). For instance, introducing an employee reward program or providing additional training opportunities can increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover. According to Baum et al. (2020), hotels that invest in employee development tend to have higher retention rates, as workers feel more valued and connected to their roles. Retention strategies could also include enhanced benefits, such as providing discounted lodging or meal vouchers for employees and their families. Small but meaningful gestures can improve morale and foster loyalty among staff. Additionally, building a positive work environment that recognizes employee efforts and provides support during busy periods can contribute to higher employee satisfaction and, consequently, a lower turnover rate.

4. Implementing a Contingency Workforce Plan

Seasonal fluctuations require a proactive approach to workforce management. Implementing a contingency plan, such as a pool of part-time or on-call employees, could help York Hotel Best Western address peak season demands without overburdening its regular staff. Temporary staff could be hired on flexible contracts during peak tourist seasons, allowing the hotel to scale its workforce according to demand. Although temporary staffing has limitations, such as the need for continuous training, it provides a feasible solution for managing staffing needs in a tourist-dependent location like Eastbourne (Enz & Siguaw, 2000). Developing partnerships with local staffing agencies or establishing a seasonal recruitment program can also ensure a reliable source of temporary workers when needed. According to Brown et al. (2019), seasonal hiring strategies can be highly effective in the hospitality industry, particularly for hotels that experience predictable high-demand periods. York Hotel Best Western could benefit from a structured approach to seasonal recruitment, improving preparedness for peak times without compromising service quality.

5. Emphasis on Service Recovery Programs

Given the potential for occasional lapses in service quality due to staff shortages, a robust service recovery program can help manage guest expectations and mitigate dissatisfaction. Service recovery involves resolving guest complaints efficiently, offering compensations when necessary, and ensuring that negative experiences are followed by positive interactions (Lewis & McCann, 2004). Training front-line employees to handle complaints professionally and empowering them to make quick decisions can enhance the effectiveness of service recovery. York Hotel Best Western could establish clear service recovery protocols, ensuring that employees have the tools and authority to respond to guest complaints effectively. For example, providing staff with vouchers for discounted meals or future stays could help turn a dissatisfied guest into a loyal customer. Research shows that effective service recovery not only resolves immediate issues but can also strengthen customer loyalty (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). Staff shortages are a significant challenge for York Hotel Best Western, affecting various aspects of customer service, from housekeeping to front desk operations. This analysis highlights several strategies that can help mitigate the effects of staffing limitations, including cross-training, technology adoption, targeted recruitment, contingency workforce planning, and service recovery programs. By adopting these approaches, York Hotel Best Western can enhance its operational

resilience, improve service consistency, and maintain customer satisfaction despite workforce constraints. Implementing these recommendations will require investment, time, and an adaptive management approach. However, these strategies align with the broader industry trends toward flexible staffing, technology-driven service, and enhanced employee engagement. As York Hotel Best Western navigates the challenges of staff shortages, a proactive focus on these areas can support the hotel's long-term success, reinforcing its position in Eastbourne's competitive hospitality market.

Staff shortages pose significant challenges for York Hotel Best Western, affecting customer service, employee well-being, and financial health. Implementing strategic improvements in cross-training, technology adoption, recruitment, contingency planning, and service recovery can help mitigate the impacts of staffing limitations. These strategies align with industry trends toward flexible staffing, technology-driven service, and enhanced employee engagement. A proactive approach will support York Hotel Best Western's long-term success, bolstering its competitive position in Eastbourne's hospitality market.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions

- **Staff Shortages Impact:** Staff shortages at York Hotel Best Western significantly impact customer service quality, employee morale, and operational efficiency, especially during peak tourist seasons. These shortages result in inconsistent service, guest dissatisfaction, and delayed response times, affecting the hotel's reputation.
- **Operational Efficiency and Service Quality:** Workforce limitations lead to delays in housekeeping, front-desk operations, and food and beverage services, reducing overall service quality. During high-demand periods, understaffing creates bottlenecks, limiting the hotel's capacity to meet guest expectations.
- **Employee Burnout and Turnover:** High workloads and long hours contribute to employee burnout, reducing morale and productivity. This, combined with seasonal demand fluctuations, results in high turnover rates, increasing the hotel's reliance on frequent recruitment and training.
- **Customer Dissatisfaction and Online Reviews:** Guests frequently cite delays and service issues, especially during peak periods, in online reviews. Negative feedback on platforms such as TripAdvisor affects York Hotel's online reputation and deters potential guests.
- **Crisis Management Strategies:** Current crisis management strategies include cross-training and strategic scheduling, but these efforts are insufficient to address prolonged or peak-period shortages. Additional resources and improved strategies are needed to ensure continuous service quality.
- **Role of Technology:** Technology, such as self-service kiosks and mobile check-ins, can alleviate staffing burdens by streamlining guest services. However, the balance between automation and maintaining a personal touch is crucial to avoid compromising the guest experience.
- **Competitive Positioning and Market Challenges:** In a competitive market like Eastbourne, York Hotel Best Western must address its staffing challenges to maintain its mid-range positioning. High competition requires a focus on service consistency and customer satisfaction to retain a loyal customer base.

Recommendations

1. Enhanced Cross-Training Programs

- Implement comprehensive cross-training for employees, enabling staff to take on multiple roles during high-demand periods.
- Focus cross-training on critical functions like front desk and housekeeping to improve flexibility and maintain service quality.

2. Recruitment and Retention Strategies

- Develop targeted recruitment initiatives to attract qualified candidates, focusing on offering competitive wages and benefits.
- Improve retention by implementing employee recognition programs, career development opportunities, and work-life balance initiatives.
- Explore partnerships with local employment agencies or educational institutions for consistent access to part-time or seasonal workers.

3. Adoption of Technology for Operational Efficiency

- Introduce self-service kiosks and mobile check-in options to reduce front desk workload and improve guest convenience.
- Utilize customer relationship management (CRM) software to streamline guest interactions and enhance personalized service.
- Balance technological solutions with personalized guest interactions to ensure a human element remains in service delivery.

4. Establish a Contingency Workforce Plan

- Develop a pool of on-call or part-time employees to respond to seasonal or unexpected staff shortages.
- Consider offering flexible contracts for temporary staff during peak seasons to handle increased demand without overwhelming regular staff.
- Create partnerships with staffing agencies to ensure a quick response to workforce demands, especially during peak tourist seasons.

5. Implement Robust Service Recovery Programs

- Establish service recovery protocols to handle complaints effectively and empower employees to resolve issues promptly.
- Train staff to address guest dissatisfaction proactively, providing compensation or vouchers where appropriate to enhance guest satisfaction.

- Monitor online reviews actively, addressing feedback to improve the hotel's reputation and responsiveness to guest concerns.

6. Selective Facility Upgrades for Improved Guest Experience

- Invest in targeted facility upgrades, such as room furnishings and common areas, to enhance the guest experience and competitive positioning.
- Focus on affordable upgrades that align with guest preferences, particularly modernized room decor and improved in-room amenities.

7. Focus on Brand Reputation and Customer Loyalty

- Strengthen York Hotel's online presence by responding to reviews and promoting positive guest experiences through digital channels.
- Promote sustainable and locally inspired experiences to attract eco-conscious travellers, aligning with modern guest expectations and values.
- Enhance digital marketing efforts, such as email campaigns and social media engagement, to increase visibility and attract a loyal customer base.

8. Sustainable Practices to Attract Conscious Consumers

- Implement sustainable practices such as energy-saving measures and waste reduction to appeal to environmentally conscious guests.
- Promote these initiatives through marketing materials and online platforms to differentiate York Hotel in a competitive market.

9. Enhanced Crisis Management and Flexibility

- Regularly review and update crisis management strategies, adapting plans to address evolving challenges, including staff shortages and seasonal demand.
- Foster an adaptable work culture where staff feel prepared to take on multiple roles as needed, improving operational resilience during crises.

REFLECTIVE ACCOUNT – OBSERVATIONS FROM MY PLACEMENT

During my placement at York Hotel Best Western in Eastbourne, I gained invaluable firsthand experience in understanding the challenges and intricacies of the hospitality industry, particularly in relation to the impact of staff shortages on customer service and crisis management. Through daily interactions with staff, management, and guests, I observed the hotel's operational dynamics, the toll that staffing limitations took on service quality, and the strategies employed to manage these challenges. This reflective account summarizes my observations and personal insights on these themes, offering a deeper understanding of the hotel's approach to service excellence amidst workforce constraints.

Understanding the Impact of Staff Shortages on Service Quality

One of the most significant observations during my placement was the direct effect of staff shortages on service quality. With limited personnel, staff were often required to multitask across roles, particularly during peak tourist seasons when guest numbers surged. The strain on employees was evident as they managed front desk responsibilities, housekeeping, and even food and beverage services simultaneously. This multitasking, while necessary, often resulted in extended wait times for guests, delayed responses to requests, and occasional lapses in service quality.

The experience highlighted the complexities of balancing staff well-being with guest expectations. I observed how employees struggled to maintain a high standard of service due to increased workloads, which often led to visible exhaustion by the end of their shifts. For example, housekeeping staff were frequently asked to complete more rooms than usual, which impacted both the speed and quality of their work. This experience underscored the need for adequate staffing levels in delivering consistent and high-quality guest experiences. It also made me reflect on the impact of such workloads on employee morale and the long-term risks of burnout and turnover in the hospitality industry.

Crisis Management Strategies and Limitations

In response to these staffing challenges, I observed York Hotel Best Western's crisis management strategies, including cross-training and strategic scheduling. Cross-training allowed employees to perform multiple roles, providing the hotel with some flexibility to manage critical functions during peak periods. However, I noticed that while this approach offered temporary relief, it did not fully resolve the underlying issue of workforce shortages. Cross-trained employees still faced overwhelming workloads, which made it difficult for them to excel in all assigned tasks. For example, front desk staff who were also trained in housekeeping struggled to balance check-in responsibilities with room preparation duties, ultimately affecting service quality.

Through this experience, I came to appreciate the importance of comprehensive crisis management plans that go beyond immediate solutions. While cross-training can be beneficial, it should be coupled with other strategies, such as contingency workforce plans and flexible staffing solutions, to provide more sustainable support during high-demand periods. Observing these limitations firsthand has given me a clearer understanding of the need for balanced crisis management that considers both short-term adaptability and long-term sustainability.

Employee Morale and Workplace Culture

During my placement, I noticed the effects of staff shortages on employee morale and the hotel's workplace culture. High turnover and seasonal fluctuations in staffing meant that many employees were relatively new or working part-time, which impacted team cohesion and made it challenging to maintain a consistent service ethos. There was a sense of frustration among the staff due to the high demands placed on them, particularly as they were often expected to work extended hours during peak times. This atmosphere, I observed, occasionally translated into interactions with guests, as overworked staff were sometimes less attentive or personable.

Through these observations, I gained a deeper appreciation for the significance of a supportive workplace culture in the hospitality industry. Employee engagement and morale are critical to maintaining service quality, and I realized that high turnover and frequent staffing shortages can weaken a hotel's service culture. This experience has reinforced my understanding of the importance of employee satisfaction and

motivation, not only in improving service quality but also in creating a positive work environment that promotes resilience and loyalty among staff.

Leveraging Technology for Operational Efficiency

One of the hotel's strategies to alleviate staffing pressures was the use of technology, such as self-service kiosks and mobile check-in options. These tools allowed guests to perform tasks independently, reducing the burden on front-desk staff. However, while the technology provided some relief, I observed that some guests preferred human interaction, particularly older guests or those unfamiliar with digital processes. This led to a tension between efficiency and personalization, as guests valued the personal touch in their hospitality experience.

This observation offered me insights into the importance of balancing technology with human interaction in the service industry. While technological solutions can improve efficiency and reduce dependence on staff, they should complement rather than replace personalized service. Through this experience, I developed a nuanced perspective on the role of technology in hospitality; it can enhance service delivery, but it must be integrated thoughtfully to ensure that it does not detract from the guest experience.

Customer Expectations and Feedback

During my placement, I had the opportunity to observe guest feedback both in person and through online reviews. Many guests expressed appreciation for the friendly service they received despite the delays, while others voiced frustration with the wait times and occasional lapses in service. Negative feedback, particularly on public platforms like TripAdvisor, posed a significant challenge for the hotel, as it impacted its online reputation and could potentially deter future bookings. I observed how the management team responded to these reviews, often reaching out to dissatisfied guests to offer apologies or compensatory gestures.

This experience highlighted the importance of managing guest expectations and actively addressing feedback. I realized that while staff shortages were often beyond the control of frontline employees, the way the hotel handled guest complaints could significantly influence perceptions. This understanding has deepened my awareness

of the role of service recovery and responsiveness in shaping customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Personal Growth and Learning

Reflecting on my placement experience, I recognize how much I have grown professionally. I have developed a stronger understanding of the operational challenges faced by hotels and the importance of adaptability and resourcefulness in the face of workforce limitations. My observations have instilled a deeper respect for the resilience required to maintain service quality under challenging conditions, as well as the critical role that leadership and effective management play in fostering a supportive work environment.

This placement has also given me a clearer perspective on my own career aspirations. Experiencing the impact of staff shortages and the importance of crisis management firsthand has strengthened my interest in pursuing roles that address operational efficiency and employee engagement within the hospitality industry. I am motivated to explore ways to contribute to the development of innovative solutions that support both staff well-being and customer satisfaction.

In conclusion, my placement at York Hotel Best Western has been an enriching experience that has broadened my understanding of the hospitality industry and deepened my appreciation for the dedication required to deliver exceptional service. The insights gained from observing the challenges of staff shortages, crisis management, and customer interactions will undoubtedly shape my approach to future roles in the industry, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have learned so much from this experience.

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