



Managing Interdepartmental Communications

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss the Role of communication in different hotel departments
- ✓ Explore The Role of Total Quality Management in Effective Communication

Managing Interdepartmental Communications

The front office plays a crucial part in dispensing hospitality to the visitors. The front office staff also communicates with all other departments of the establishment, inclusive of sales and marketing, housekeeping, food and beverage, controller, banquet, security, maintenance, and human resources. Every department sees the front office a liaison for making the best service possible available to the guests. The different departments have a unique communication pipeline with the staff of the front office.

Marketing and Sales Department

The Marketing and Sales Division depends on the front office to make **guest history** data available to them, specifics regarding the visit of each guest. Partial information is collected based on the zip code, corporate affiliation, visit frequency, special requirements, and reservations for the rooms. Additionally, it is the responsibility of the front office to make a good first impression with the visitors, to pass along messages, and to fulfill the guest's requests who use the hotel for seminars, meetings and banquets.

The past history of guests is a vital resource for sales and marketing, as it is used for target marketing campaigns, to develop promotions, get mailing labels ready and choose appropriate advertising media. The front office staff has to make every effort to maintain this database up to date and accurate.

Completing the bookings of special functions (like conventions, wedding receptions or seminars) is determined by the number of sleeping rooms available for the guests. The sales and marketing executives need to check room availability three, six, or even, twelve months in advance to ensure that the hotel can house the anticipated number of guests. The front office maintains a database of rooms available in the property management system.

The initial contact of the guest with the sales and marketing department is normally through the hotel switchboard. A switchboard operator who is capable and friendly as well as properly versed with hotel operations and personnel will make a good first impression. This reassures the potential client that the hotel is competent. Upon the arrival of the guests for the function, the front office staff usually makes the initial contact. The manager from the front office makes every effort to find out which banquet supervisor is in charge and pass the information to the desk clerk on duty thus showing that the hotel is fully committed to providing hospitality.

Information for the sales and marketing division has to be delivered accurately, completely and fast. The switchboard operator supplies the vital link in communication between potential client and the marketing and sales department salesperson. It is the duty of the front office manager to inform all new personnel in the front office regarding the staff in Sales and Marketing Division and the duty of each person.

Employees at the front office have to practice pronouncing the names of all marketing and sales employees. To ensure that the front office staff is familiar with all of those individuals, managers should show new employees photographs of directors and supervisors of the department. The front office also normally entertains most of the requests for service at meetings, banquets, and seminars. This is because the **banquet manager**, the individual whose job it is to fulfill the details of the banquet or the special event, or the **sales associate**, the employee who books the request of the guest for the banquet or other special events, may be engaged with a different function.

If the requirement of the guest arises for an extension cord or an electrical outlet malfunctions, the staff at the front desk has to be prepared to fulfill this need. The manager of the front office should set up standard operating procedures the front office employees should follow to get in touch with maintenance, housekeeping, marketing and sales or food and beverage division to fulfill the typical requests. Knowledge about where to locate a tool kit, adhesive materials, adapters, additional table covers, or window cleaner will save the time needed to look for a sales person in charge and help visitors.

Housekeeping Department

Housekeeping needs to talk to the front office constantly about **housekeeping room status**, the report related to room availability for immediate visitor occupancy. Housekeeping room status may be detailed in the following conversational terms:

- Available Clean or Ready—the room is ready to be occupied
- Occupied—guest or guests are already occupying a room
- Stay over—guest will not be checking out of a room on the current day
- Dirty or On-Change—guest has checked out of the room, but the housekeeping staff has not released the room for occupancy
- Out-of-Order—room is not available for occupancy because of a mechanical malfunction

Housekeeping also talks to the front office about details regarding potential house count (the report on the number of registered guests on premises), security, and amenity requests (toiletory items like toothpaste, shampoo, mouthwash, or electrical equipment for personal use). Such issues are of instant concern to the guest, as well as, the hotel supervisors.

For a hotel not using the Property Management System (PMS), the room status reporting is done on a face-to-face basis. Hourly or bihourly visits, made by the house-keeper to the front desk clerk, are a customary occurrence in these hotels. The **housekeeper's room report** is prepared at the end of the day and officially reports room status. It is prepared by the housekeeper and notes down the room occupancy status as being occupied, vacant, or out-of-order. At times even the systematic updates of room status are not adequate, since guests might be waiting eagerly to occupy a room. In such situations, the front desk clerk will need to telephone the floor supervisor to find out when a room's servicing will be finished.

The housekeeper depends on the **room sales projections** – a report prepared every week is distributed by the manager of front office that notes the number of departures, arrivals, walk-ins, over stays, and no-shows – so employees may be scheduled. In time distribution of projections of room sales helps the executive housekeeper when making plans for personal leaves and vacation days.

The front office desk also depends on housekeeping workers to inform them of any unusual situations that may hint a violation of security for the visitors. For instance, if a maid or houseman recognises guests on a floor, who are not registered, a forced open fire exit, or domestic disturbance sounds in a guest room, he or she has to bring these potential security violations to the attention of the front office. In turn, the front office staff, with contact the proper in-house or civil authority. The front office manager may wish to guide the front desk clerks and switchboard operators to make calls regularly to check the activity on the guest floors.

Food and Beverage Department

It is essential that the front office and the food and beverage department maintain communication. A portion of this communication is passed by relaying messages and delivering precise information on **transfers**, in the way of forms used to pass information regarding a charge to a guest's account.

Predicted house counts is another communication activity, this is an estimated number of guests expected to register determined by using prior occupancy activities, and processing requests for **paid-out**, forms used for recording amounts of monies paid from the cashier's drawer on behalf of a guest or an employee of the establishment. Such vital services aid the overworked food and beverage manager, restaurant manager or the banquet captain fulfill the public demands.

Messages coming for the food and beverage manager and executive chef from various vendors or other industry representatives are vital to the operation of the food and beverage division. If the switchboard operator is instructed to screen callers (at times, when the executive chef cannot be disturbed due to the workload or staff meetings or vendors that are of no interest to the chef), only the important messages get top priority.

In a hotel fitted with point-of-sales terminals, computerised cash registers interfaced with Property Management System, any data on guest charges is automatically posted on the guest's folio, the record reflects charges and payments. In hotels without point-of-sale terminals interfacing with the PMS Point-of-Sale terminals, it becomes the responsibility of the desk clerk to post accurate charges on the guest's folio and he depends on transfer slips. With transfer slips that are properly prepared and posted, the night auditor's job is made easier. The front office manager needs to work with the food and beverage director to develop standard operating measures and methods to carry out transfer of charges.

To be able to predict sales and schedule employees, the supervisors in the food and beverage division depend on the predicted house count put together by the front office manager. For instance, the restaurant supervisor in the breakfast shift will need to know about the number of guests to be able to finalize the number of servers that need to be scheduled for breakfast service. Precise and in time preparation of this information tool helps in staffing control and sales predictions.

Sanctioned food and beverage department members will at times request the front office for cash, in the form of a paid-out, to acquire some last-minute things for a banquet, the lounge, or the restaurant or to utilize other unforeseen opportunities to endorse hospitality. Detailed guidelines regarding cash limits, prior approval, turnaround time, authorize signatures, and the purchase receipts are put together by the general manager and front office manager. Paid-outs are kept in control with such guidelines.

Banquet Department

The banquet department frequently combining the functions of marketing and sales division and food and beverage division uses the front office to pass information to guests regarding events and bill payment.

The labor to get the **daily announcement board** ready is also provided by the front desk staff. The board is an internal listing of the daily goings-on of the hotel (group, time, room assignment), and marquee (the curbside message board including hotel logo and space for a message). The front office this practical communication center, because most of the guests at the banquet may not be registered at the hotel.

This daily posting of scheduled events on an electronic bulletin board or a felt board delivers information on group events to all guests and employees. To get the marquee ready, things like congratulatory, sales promotion, welcome, or other vital messages can be included. In some hotels a front office worker might contact the marketing and sales department for the message.

A guest at the banquet, who is not familiar with the hotel property, will request the front office for instructions. While this service may appear to be minor compared to the combined delivery of service, it vital to the lost or confused visitor. The front office not only has to be able to direct visitors to the specific meeting rooms or reception areas, he/she also has to know which function is being held where. Front office clerks have to be ready to offer this information for all departmental activities taking place in the hotel.

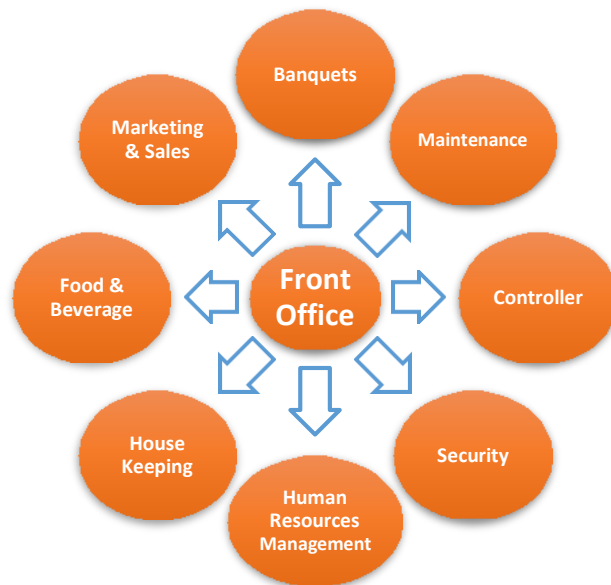


Fig: 1.1 The front office serves as a clearing house for communication activities.

The individual with the duty of paying bills of a special event will also end up at the front office to settle the city ledger accounts. If the banquet captain is unable to present the bill for the event, the front office desk clerk must be informed about the details of the food and beverage charges, rental charges, gratuities, payment method, and the like.

Controller

The controller depends on the front office staff to make the daily financial transaction summary available through a well-prepared night audit. The management's ability to meet budget targets is also based on this information. Considering that the front office makes available to the controller the financial data for billing and maintenance of credit-card ledgers, the two departments have to pass payments and charges through posting machine or property management system.

Maintenance or Engineering Department

The front office and maintenance or the Engineering Division communicate regularly regarding room status and maintenance service requests. Maintenance workers have to know the status of occupancy before scheduling repairs, such as, plumbing, air-conditioning, or heating. If the room is booked, a time frame will be worked out by the two departments so visitor can use the room or be allotted another room. The sometimes impossible appearing situations can be sorted out through cooperative efforts. Figure 9.1 shows the vital planning and communication strategy managers of departments have follow to make time available for guest services in a way that will not hinder delivering of hospitality.

Similarly, guests make requests for fixing any problems like heating, air-conditioning, ventilating, television, plumbing or other room furnishings are to the front desk. These requests are forwarded to the maintenance division. It is the duty of the front desk clerk to keep track of the repair schedule, as guests want to know of when the problem will be fixed.

Security Department

The exchange of information between the security divisions and the front office is crucial when providing hospitality to the guest. Both divisions work in close collaboration to uphold guest security. Things, such as, emergency communication systems and fire safety procedures in addition to the system of routine investigation of guest security issues necessitate cooperation between these divisions.

Human Resources Management Department

The Human Resources Management Division also frequently depends on the staff of the front office as the first point of contact for prospective employees of all departments. They might even request the front office workers to screen prospective candidates. If this is the case, then, trainings of screening methods have to be provided. Some Human Resources Management Directors rely on the front office to pass out application forms and other job-related material to applicants for the job. The prospective

employee might request directions to the personnel office at the front desk. Guidelines may also be developed by the human resources management division which the front office desk clerk may to initially screen candidates. For instance, the guidelines can include things like personal hygiene, application form completion, educational requirements, citizenship standing, and experience. The Human Resources Management Executives can use the information to help them when interviewing prospective candidates.

The Role of Total Quality Management in Effective Communication

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management technique used by managers to critically review processes employed to deliver products and services. Managers are required to ask frontline employees and supervisors to interrogate every step in the techniques employed to provide hospitality to the guests. Examples would include “why do guests say out table service is rushed?” Managers along with employees have to seek answers for such questions.

W. Edwards Deming, a Management Theorist, developed Total Quality Management in the early 1950s. His determination was to provide a new way for American manufacturers to provide better quality products by cutting down defects through worker engagement in the planning process. Initially the American manufacturers were reluctant to adapt the total quality management tool, but Japanese manufacturers embraced its principles of streamlining techniques to manufacture goods, such as, cars quickly. He supplied managers with flowcharts so production may be analysed by dividing the manufacturing procedure into individual components and then, pinpointing attention to the portions of the process that yield the final product.

The most critical facet of Total Quality Management, resulting in improved products and services for the guests in the hotel industry, is the interaction taking place between frontline employees and their respective supervisors. The employee interaction in a group and/or one-on-one basis to determine “what is the root of the problem” and Total Quality Management practices would ensure that the front office checks with housekeeping to determine availability of a room in this situation. The basis is that communication between departments is promoted every time a team made up of members of the different divisions, meet to analyse a challenge to delivering hospitality.

An Example of Total Quality Management in a Hotel

Total Quality Management may apply, as follows, in a hotel: The general gets many complaints about the messy look of the lobby – furniture and pillows out of place, overflowing ashtrays, wilted flowers, and overflowing trash receptacles. The front office manager calls in the Total Quality Management team is made up of a front office clerk, a waiter, a maid, a cashier, and the Director of Sales and Marketing. The team discusses how the area can be better maintained in a meeting. The maid claims that the workers are overburdened and only given 15 minutes to clean out the public areas during the day shift. The front office clerk states that while he would like to take some minutes to straighten the furniture and pillows, he does not have permission to leave the front desk unattended. The marketing

and sales director says it is embarrassing when prospective clients enter the hotel are greeted in a messy area.

When she calls housekeeping to clean up, she is told, "It's not in the budget to have the lobby cleaned several times a day." All the members of the team realise that the messy lobby gives a bad image of the hotel and the situation needs to be resolved.

The team focuses on each element in the situation. The furniture has wheels for moving ease when housekeeping is cleaning. While the pillows are an additional decoration, they tend to get scattered giving a messy appearance.

As a joke, the waiter said, "let's sew them to the back and arms of the sofa!"

Perhaps, the ashtrays should be taken away and replaced with additional receptacles to use as cigarette extinguishers. Will a larger waste with swinging lid help in avoiding misplaced garbage?

"The fresh flowers are very nice," one member stated, "but many hotels use silk flowers and plants. This must save money in the long run."

The discussion brings out the issues each person has, why the maid can't clean the lobby more times and why the desk clerk can't leave his post to take care of the problem. The comments made by employees' regarding appointments and furniture create an environment of understanding. Team members see each other with greater empathy and are not as quick to criticize on different matters. Did the messy lobby issue get resolved? Yes, but more importantly, the members of the developed a method of looking at the challenge in a more constructive way.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Michael J. O'Fallon, Denney G. Rutherford, (2011), Hotel Management and Operations*
- ✓ *James A. Bardi, (2010), Hotel Front Office Management, 5th Edition*