Accommodation, Lodging and Facilities Management

See also: Design for hotels; Franchising; Front office management; Hotels, hospitality and sustainability; Hotels and security; Housekeeping management; Investing in hotels

Accommodation (in North America more typically 'lodging') management is regarded as one of the two core activities that lend the hospitality industry its distinctiveness as a sector, the other being food and beverage management. Facilities (or sometimes 'facility') management is an emergent discipline comprising a set of generic skills applicable to the management of the widest possible range of accommodation types, including such diverse facilities as offices, factories and retail outlets as well as various kinds of residential accommodation (Frapin-Beaugé et al., 2008). The term facilities management is useful in reminding us that even though the majority of businesses within the hospitality industry utilize some form of accommodation, the notion of accommodation management is typically associated with the hotel and related sectors, where some form of semi-private space is effectively rented from a vendor, by a guest/customer for a defined period.

ACCOMMODATION MANAGEMENT IN HOTELS: SCOPE AND ISSUES

Most of the skills required for effective accommodation management in hospitality organizations will also be required by any hotel of modest or greater size. These include:

- front office management (comprising reservations, night audit and, in high-end establishments, the bell captain's office and the concierge);
- housekeeping management (including the cleaning of all public and private spaces, although often an establishment's kitchens are excluded from the sphere of responsibility of the housekeeping department and are the sole responsibility of the head or executive head chef);
- engineering and maintenance (although in some instances this may be a separate department);
- revenue management (which may be a function of front office or, alternately, of a separate sales and marketing department); and
- safety and security management.

A number of enduring issues face the hotel accommodation sector. A *first* area of concern for even moderately sized hotels is that of the integration of the functions noted above, each of which may be discharged by a separate department or, in larger establishments, constitute sub-units of the room (or rooms) division whose

head will be a senior member of the hotel's management team. Even where functions are embodied in sub-units that are nominally part of an integrated rooms division department, there is a danger that each sub-unit will act more or less autonomously and with its own agenda often, though not always, inconsistent with the stated objectives of the wider rooms division department. There are four principal reasons why such a situation can arise, as follows.

a   Although all the functions described above share in the status of being accommodation-related, the tasks and skills associated with each are distinct. This can lead to the development of strong sub-unit/functional work cultures which are inwardly focused and resistant to integration and change – in plain English: creating a 'them and us' culture (Shamir, 1981).

b   The nature of work in functional sub-units of the rooms division is, as elsewhere in hospitality organizations, often highly pressured, creating tension between sub-units. One example is the case of the relationship between front office and housekeeping, where the latter have both limited staff and time each day to prepare rooms to the required standard and are placed under pressure to 'release' rooms to the front office for allocation to incoming guests (Verginis, 1999).

c   Variations in perception as to the value of particular types of work can also be a source of tension between sub-units of the rooms division. For example, work in housekeeping is physically demanding and dirty, and often contrasted with the perceived easiness of working in other functional sub-units, such as front office or security.

d   Finally, most hotel chains rely on standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the definition of required performance in establishing standards and performing work tasks. When SOPs are created and revised, the need for integration of processes and procedures is sometimes neglected and the requirement to meet such standards is often invoked by the managers of functional sub-units as an imperative even where they create conflict situations with other sub-units whose managers are attempting to meet the demands of *their* SOPs.

A *second* enduring issue for the hotel accommodation sector that arises at least partly from the various tensions attendant on functional integration is high labour turnover. There is substantial evidence to suggest that in certain countries and cultures, high labour turnover afflicts all sectors of the hospitality industry and all departments of a hotel (Wood, 1997). One potential consequence of this instability is the difficulty faced by management in maintaining coherent and high-performing work teams in the various functional sub-units, as well as the likelihood of increased costs resulting from recruitment and training.

Thirdly, an issue more relatively recent in origin concerns the extent to which certain hotel services, especially in the rooms division, can be outsourced – that is, performed by external companies ('contractors') in return for a fee (Rawstron, 1999). In many countries, hotels' laundry services are normally outsourced and there are numerous examples of other services being treated similarly, for example security, grounds and garden maintenance, pest control and guest room cleaning.

Theoretically, outsourcing can be beneficial because it: (a) allows organizations to focus on their core competencies by employing supposedly better equipped and experienced specialists to perform certain tasks deemed to be 'non-core'; and (b) reduces organizations' administrative costs. Potential disadvantages of outsourcing include: (a) difficulties in ensuring contractors deliver the required standard; (b) more complex supervision and monitoring needs to ensure standards; and (c) relative absence of control over human resource deployment.

Fourth, as with the hospitality industry more generally, there is great diversity in the global hotel sector and many international companies operate a number of brands in often different market segments. If there is not quite yet a hotel to suit the budget of every potential traveller then this is not far from the truth. Confusion can arise among customers as to both brand difference and comparability and can be complicated by variations 'within brand' between countries. For example, in some countries certain international hotel brands offer a full range of facilities and services that are not offered in hotels of the same brand in their countries of origin or elsewhere. The scope for guest confusion should, theoretically, be reduced, if not eliminated, by hotel grading schemes, historically presented in the form of 'star' ratings (see Wood, 2010). Unfortunately, most national (government sponsored) and independent (motoring and other transport related) schemes vary considerably in what and how they assess and classify hotels and there is, further, no international classification standard for hotels to aspire to. Increasingly, and not without controversy, internet-based travel sites such as TripAdvisor®, which carry hotel reviews contributed by travellers, are coming to serve as a preferred substitute for official or pseudo-official grading schemes. Hoteliers have complained both about the partiality of such internet-based review systems and the potential for abuse (for example 'false' negative reviews being posted on such sites by rivals seeking to damage the reputation of other establishments).

Finally here, the relationship between real estate and hospitality and the role of franchising and management contracts in the international hospitality industry is of growing importance, not least in the hotel sector, where a key means for a company to expand its brand overseas is via a management contract. Typically here, costs of construction are borne by the hotel/building owner and a hotel company 'sells' its brand standards and manages a hotel for a defined period according to mutually agreed legal and operational standards and a share of the financial returns. These methods of growth and development can reduce strategic and operational risk for a company but also generate tensions between owners and operators, not least in respect of the maintenance of brand standards. Knowledge and study of these arrangements is a growing requirement for managers in the industry.

HOSPITALITY ORGANIZATIONS WITHOUT ACCOMMODATION: THE CASE FOR A FACILITIES MANAGEMENT APPROACH?

Hospitality organizations without guest room accommodation still need to make provision for truncated services in housekeeping ('cleaning'), certain front office functions (notably reservations), maintenance and security. Again, one or more of

these functions may be outsourced – especially, in relatively small operations, maintenance and security. There is a danger that in hospitality organizations not offering guest room accommodation (notably food and beverage businesses), less importance is attached to these functions to the detriment of health and hygiene, customer experience and satisfaction, and operational efficiency. It is thus sensible for management to have both an overview of all housekeeping and cleaning-related functions and clear standard operating procedures for ensuring consistency of approach throughout the organization. The requirements of hospitality organizations (or organizations in which hospitality plays a major but not core role) without guest accommodation suggests the value of considering a 'facilities management' (FM) approach to the accommodation function. As noted earlier, FM is an emergent discipline embodying the idea that there exists a set of generic skills applicable to the management of all types of accommodation.

The FM concept has had only limited impact on the more traditional sectors of the hospitality industry (Jones, 2002; Ransley and Ingram, 2004) because for many large hospitality organizations, especially hotels, 'facilities management' has become overly-associated with the negative aspects of 'outsourcing', for example loss of control over core processes such as housekeeping and difficulties in maintaining brand standards when using external contractors. Also, while outsourcing can, cost-wise, be an attractive option, the negotiation and monitoring of contracts and contract compliance is a detailed process and many hospitality organizations have yet to develop the internal competencies required for the effective management of such relationships. Away from larger organizations, many hospitality companies are small and medium-sized businesses, often owner-operated, and this makes outsourcing uneconomic.

FM is not, however, only about outsourcing. It is concerned with generating models for the effective and integrated management of various types of accommodation: a developing subject but one where evident applications and benefits to the hospitality industry are yet to be fully developed and demonstrated. For this reason at least, hospitality managers should maintain an awareness of developments in the FM field.

FURTHER READING

Bardi, J A (2010) *Hotel Front Office Management*, 5th edn, New York: Wiley.
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Frapin-Beaugé, A J M, Verginis, C S and Wood, R C (2008) 'Accommodation and facilities management', in Brotherton, B and Wood, R C (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Hospitality Management*, London: Sage. pp. 383–99.