



## The Effect of Communication Problems on Productivity in Hotel Operations: A Qualitative Application

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**Abstract:** Front office department in hotel businesses generally consists of reception, reservation, switchboard operator and concierge departments in hotels. Communication with guests starts at reservation phase, it goes on with guest check in processes and ends with accommodation, check out and process after checking out briefly front office department is very important since it is the department which the guests are welcomed, hosted and sent off. Front office department also provides the communication within all the departments in the business. Realizing the processes in front office properly, enhancing the quality of services, raising the guest satisfaction and the increasing of the productivity of the staff all depends on the features of the communication. For that reason, an efficient communication with the other departments and the communication within the department for the productivity of the business is compulsory. Shortly, communication with other departments and the communication within the department in front office in hospitality businesses has a great importance.

The sample for the study consists of 35 five-star hotel managers in Alanya, where tourism is very intense. Structure interview method is used in the study. Front office managers were asked to answer the questions, the answers were classified, their explanation about what means of communication was used with other departments and within front office, the reasons for the communication problems and its effects on the productivity was evaluated. Consequently, it was found out that all the front office manager know that the communication problems affect the productivity negatively. The fact that the problems of the communication do not only have a negative effect on front office activities but also on the all hotel activities was much obtained.

**Keywords:** communication; front office; hospitality businesses; hotels; productivity

**JEL classification:** D83, J53, L83

### Vpliv komunikacijskih problemov na produktivnost v hotelirstvu

**Povzetek:** Oddelek za odnose s strankami v hotelskih podjetjih običajno obsega recepcijo, rezervacije, upravljavca stikalnih naprav in konciere. Komuniciranje z gosti se začne v fazi rezervacije, nadaljuje s postopki

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How to cite this paper = Kako citirati ta članek: Sayin, K. (2019). The Effect of Communication Problems on Productivity in Hotel Operations: A Qualitative Application. *Mednarodno inovativno poslovanje = Journal of Innovative Business and Management*, 11(2), 51-58. DOI: 10.32015/JIBM/2019-11-2-6

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*Mednarodno inovativno poslovanje = Journal of Innovative Business and Management*  
ISSN: 1855-6175

preverjanja gostov in se konča z nastanitvijo, odhodom in obdelavo po odhodu gosta, in vse te faze upravlja oddelek za odnose s strankami. Ta zagotavlja tudi komuniciranje med vsemi hotelskimi oddelki. Ustrezno izvajanje procesov, izboljšanje kakovosti storitev, dvig zadovoljstva gostov in povečanje produktivnosti osebja - vse to je odvisno od značilnosti komuniciranja. Zato je učinkovito komuniciranje z drugimi oddelki in komuniciranje znotraj tega oddelka nujno za produktivnost poslovanja.

Vzorec študije je sestavljen iz 35 upravljalcev hotelov s petimi zvezdicami v Alanyi, kjer je turizem zelo intenziven. V empiričnem delu smo uporabili metodo strukturiranega intervjuja. Vodje oddelkov za odnose s strankami smo prosili, da odgovorijo na vprašanja, odgovore so razvrstili in razložili, kakšna komunikacijska orodja uporabljajo v okviru oddelka za odnose s strankami in pri drugih oddelkih, razloge za komunikacijske probleme in učinke tega na produktivnost. Posledično smo ugotovili, da vsi vodje oddelkov za odnose s strankami vedo, da komunikacijski problemi negativno vplivajo na produktivnost. Ugotovili smo, da komunikacijski problemi nimajo le negativnega vpliva na dejavnosti oddelka za odnose s strankami, ampak tudi na vse hotelske dejavnosti.

*Ključne besede:* komuniciranje; oddelki za odnose s strankami; hotelirstvo; produktivnost

*JEL klasifikacija:* D83, J53, L83

## 1 Introduction

Tourism is the total of all the activities people do when they travel to a different place from where they actually live generally for a period less than one year involving short time accommodations for the purposes like enjoyment, entertainment, business, meeting, sports, health, education, etc. during these activities hospitality services are given by hospitality businesses (Karaman, 2005, 159).

Hospitality businesses can be defined as economic, social, profit making facilities whose relations to its guests are complied with rules and standards and which accept fulfilling the needs of people far from their homes like their temporary accommodation and eating, drinking and entertainment needs as they wish during their stay for a particular cost as their job with elements like its comfort, architecture, service quality of the staff. The types and qualities of services by hotels may vary with respect to their sizes, locations and what type of guests they are working for. (Barutçugil, 1982, 38; Davis and Lockwood, 1994, 4; Olali and Korzay, 1989, 10-25; Çakıcı and Kozak, 2002, 2).

Productivity is the effort of reaching the better for the benefit of man by using the sources in hand. There is the personal integrity, effective communication, togetherness with a team, product quality, life and administration quality in the core of productivity. Productivity is doing the right works at the right time for the good of the people in the direction of people's expectations (Toprak, 2005, 75-78).

The most important factor in businesses in the production of goods and services is human. For that reason, human is the most precious being of the businesses. Basic aims businesses share is producing higher quality products and services than other businesses in the market, increasing profitability constantly, preventing wastage by reducing expenses, and empowering the image of the businesses. These stated aims can only be defined as "making workforce productive". Organizational aims can only be reached with the efforts of people, how productive and effective an organization can become depends on the workers' productivity. Communication is the process of information, message exchange and meaning transfer between source and target. Communication, an indispensable element of human relations, is a must to maintain organizational activities. Administrators encounter the existence of an effective communication in a business as a basic obligation in reaching organizational targets and increasing productivity. Administrators take necessary decisions for organizational activities thanks to feedback they get. Highly cooperation between organizational elements and setting up good relationship among staff depends on communication. Organizational harmony increases organizational effectiveness thanks to communication and ensures productivity to increase by setting up a strong bond between production and service elements (Mısırlı, 2004, 1; Tutar and Yılmaz, 2005, 15-16; Yumuşak, 2008, 245)

Front office in hospitality businesses is the place where the first communication starts. At the same time, it is a very important department because it is in communication with all departments in hotel businesses. For this reason, in this study what means of communication is used to communicate within the department and with other departments, the

reasons for the communication problems arise within the department and with other departments and the effects of problems on the productivity in front office was tried to determine by making face to face interviews with front office managers in four and five star hospitality businesses.

This study was applied on front office staff in charge of 5 five-star hotels in Alanya, Turkey where tourism activities take place intensely. Firstly, literature related to the topic was reviewed. Structured interview method was used in the study. Front office managers were asked to answer the questions in the face to face interviews, and their answers were noted. What means of communication used between the other departments and within front office department and what the communication problems are and how communication problems in front office affect the productivity was tried to be determined. For this reason, first of all questions about the means of communication with other departments, communication problems and the effects of communication problems on productivity was asked. Later questions about the means of communication within front office units, communication problems and the effects of communication problems on productivity was asked and important results were stated in the conclusion part.

## **2 Front Office Department in Hotel Businesses Communication and Productivity Relation**

Front Office Department is the first contact point between hospitality facility and guests. First Impression of the guests occurs in front office. It is the first department people see when coming in and going out of the business. It is located in lobby near the elevators and stairs at the main entrance of the hotel in order to be seen and reached. First impression is important in the entrance and the lobby of the hotel where the most activities are done, and work traffic takes place. Front offices in accommodation facilities are the main contact points between guests and hotels briefly. They play an important role in fulfilling the needs and desires of the guests and increasing their satisfaction and in productivity. For this reason, there should be an effective communication within the units of front office department. Front office is in a continuous relation with the other departments of the business and it collects and delivers the information. Information is collected in front office and it is delivered to all other departments by communication. Because of the coordination activities it does, it can be defined as the "brain of the hotel". The main duty is to keep the occupancy of the rooms full all the time. If there is a communication problem in front office, this leads to dissatisfaction of the guests. For this reason, the rooms cannot be full. As a result, the productivity of the business lessens and may end. Therefore, front office department is important in hotels in terms of productivity. Because it is the place where the first and the last impression of the guests occur, it is a very important department for image making, PR and sales. Therefore, front office is a very important department with regards to productivity (Kantarci, 2004, 45; Gökdeniz and Dinç, 2006, 21; Jones and Lockwood, 1989, 39).

Communication in front office department includes written, face to face communication, messaging via computers, documents used to transfer information, electronic mail and phones. The bigger hotels and the number of people gets, the more complicated communication becomes and for that reason it cannot be said that communication is easy even in small hotels (Kasavana and Brooks, 1999, 183).

Communication in front office is in four ways: oral (face to face and via technological devices), non-verbal, written and via electronic devices. Use of non-verbal communication is obligatory to support oral communication for productivity in flow of work in front office department. If the person you are contacting cannot understand your behaviours, facial expressions, the success in communication is very difficult (Tutar and Yılmaz, 2005, 62; Kalena, 2008, 25). Written communication takes more time than communication via phone when work schedule is busy. However, it is obligatory for the productivity of the works. Abstract service sales are done in sales marketing activities in front office but written communication elements (introductory booklet, picture, etc.) are needed as well (Halloway and Robinson, 1995, 105). The use of electronic communication, packaged software, computers and e-mail is also effective for easing manual operations and saving time (Mısırlı, 2004, 41; Gitomer, 2008, 94; Handler, 2008, 65-69).

### **2.1 Units of Front Office Department**

Basic units in a hospitality business are divided into two: these are 'front office units and back office units. front office service units are reception, front office cashier and concierge and back office units are reservation and switchboard (Gökdeniz and Dinç, 2009, 26-27; Akgöz, 2003, 22).

## 2.2 Common Communication Problems in Front Office Departments

Guest circulation takes place intensely in hospitality businesses. This situation requires the obligation of a very fast and effective communication in front office department. As the result of this, some problems are encountered. The solutions for these problems and productivity is determining problems encountered in front office, front office staff's understanding the people they are in communication with, seeing things from their perspectives and establishing proper dialogues. The reasons for the communication problems within businesses are as follows (Luecke, 2007, 139; Karaçor and Şahin, 2014, 105; Covey, 2005, 204-205):

- Not Delivering the Messages Completely and on Time.
- Language Barrier and Differences.
- Lack of Knowledge.
- Differences in Culture.
- Physical Distance.
- Physical and Technical Factors.
- Obstacle due to status.

## 3 An Application for the Effects of Communication Problems on Productivity

### 3.1 The Aim and Scope of the Study

Because service giving is priority in hospitality businesses, reaching the desired aims and increasing the productivity can be achieved with an effective and successful communication.

Satisfying the guests in hospitality businesses can be achieved with increasing the productivity of the business and minimising the communication problems of front office department which is in communication with the guests most.

This study has two aims; to determine the means of communication front office manager's use with other departments and within the department. To search for the communication problems and the effect of communication problems on productivity and to benefit to tourism sector by sourcing the studies to be made in this field in the future.

### 3.2 Methodology

This study is a descriptive study. Firstly, related literature was reviewed, and questions were prepared. Study findings were obtained by structured interview method. The reason for choosing this method is; Obtaining deeper information from the people interviewed concerning with the subject and the difficulty of obtaining the detailed information without using another method. Managers were asked face to face questions, given answers were noted and evaluated after categorization. At the end of the interviews, questions asked are examined one by one and the result is reached with observations by looking at the whole of the text.

### 3.3 Hypothesis

It is indispensable for the study to be based on some hypothesis in order to solve the general problem. For this reason, these ideas will be grounded on:

Communication problems within the department and between departments have negative effect on the productivity of the business in front office departments of the hotels which are accepted as a service sector and where service for people is the priority.

### 3.4 Sample

Target population of the study is five-star hospitality facilities in Alanya region where Turkish tourism takes place intensely. Size of the sample is 35 of these hotels. Interviews are made in the hospitality facilities which are in the sample and answers were obtained.

## 4 Findings and Comments

Front office managers were asked structured questions face to face. In the answering part of the questions expressions and attitudes are related to each other and notes were taken and taken notes were classified and divided into categories. Descriptive analysis was carried out. Revealing the works and explanations was achieved with the evaluation of the answers given for the questions asked.

The result which is wanted to be understood and implied with the answers given to the questions asked is to reveal the communication problems in front office departments of the hospitality businesses and the effect of these problems on productivity. For that reason, six questions were asked to front office managers and they were requested to answer those questions, given answers and comments on these answers are as follows:

### 4.1. Communication, communication problems between front office and the other departments and its effect on productivity

#### 4.1.1 What is the commonest means of communication between front office department and the other departments?

Table 1: Means of Communication

Means of Communication	%
Face to face and oral communication	30
Written communication	26
Via phone, walkie-talkie and computer	44

According to table 1, 30 % of front office people in charge communicate with other departments face to face and orally, 26 % communicate in a written way, 44 % communicate via phone, walkie-talkie and computer.

Communication with other departments in front office where communication is intense with the guests needs to be quickly. After intense check-in, the number of the people should be told quickly in order to speed up the food- beverage service. For this reason, when the results are scrutinized, it is clearly seen that phone walkie-talkie is used as 44% for communication with other departments quickly and effectively, face to face and oral communication is 30 %, and written communication which means more wasted time is 26 % and it is used by minority of front office managers.

#### 4.1.2 What are the reasons for the problems encountered during communication with other departments?

Table 2: Problems sourced from communication

Problems sourced from communication	%
Not sending the information to the other departments on time	54
Giving imperfect knowledge to the other departments	12
Not getting feedback for the messages	12
Unqualified staff	12

According to table 2, 54 % of front office managers answered that the problems encountered with the other departments are arisen from not sending the information to the other departments on time 12 % answered as giving imperfect knowledge to the other departments, 12 % answered as not getting feedback for the messages and 12 % answered as the unqualified staff.

#### 4.1.3 What are the effects of the problems with the other departments on productivity?

In this study all of front office people in charge (100 %) stated that the problems with the other departments affect the productivity of front office negatively.

If the information cannot be shared on time and accurately between front office department and other departments in hospitality businesses, the guests' satisfaction will decrease. If the number of the people are not advised to the kitchen on time and accurately, kitchen department cooks less food. Guests arriving later cannot find meal.

#### 4.1.4 Communication problems within units of Front Office Department and its effect on productivity

##### 4.1.4.1 How are the communication problems occur within units of front office department?

Table 3: Means of communication within department

Written or via computer	42 %
Face to Face	20 %
Telephone, walkie-talkie	19 %
Meetings done by chief	19 %

According to table 3, answers given 42 % of front office people in charge answered as written or via computer 20 % answered as face to face 19 % answered as via phone or walkie talkie and 19 % answered as via meetings done by chief people.

According to the study, 42 % front office managers stated that communication within the department is generally in written and via computer. Department chiefs deliver the information they want their subordinates to know in written format. Their subordinates do the same in written format when they want to inform them. Communication within the departments is done in written communication. All the works done and to be done during the day is recorder in shift log. At the end of the shift, all the information is given to the staff who has just come to work by his/ her signature.

##### 4.1.4.2 What are the reasons for the communication problems within units of front office departments?

Table 4: Reasons for communication problems

Reasons for communication problems	%
messages are not clear, accurate or complete	42
Messages are not delivered on time	34
Problems sourced from the staff	13
Problems sourced from the staff	11

According to table 4, 42 % of Front office people in charge answered as messages are not clear, accurate or complete 34 % answered as messages are not delivered on time 13 % answered as problems sourced from staff 11 % answered as not inspecting the staff.

Information given in the communication within front office department should be loud and clear. There will be a big problem if the receptionist cannot give the room number or if he gives the wrong room number to a friend of the guest who asked for an extra bed for his room. In the study, 42 % of front office manager stated that the problems were because the messages were not loud, clear and complete. 34 % of front office managers answered that the problem was due to not delivering the messages on time. If reservation department does not inform reservations immediately on time, receptionists will think that the empty rooms are full and sells the rooms and they cannot sell the rooms

##### 4.1.4.3 What are the effects of the problems within units of front office departments on productivity?

In this study all of front office people in charge (100 %) stated that the problems within units of front office department affect the productivity of front office negatively.

According to the study, front office managers stated that problems in front office department leads to negative results like dissatisfied leaving of guest from the facility, their advertising the facility badly, tarnishing of the image of the facility, not being able to sell rooms productively, unproductivity of the staff because of not being able to generate motivation. Furthermore, in the interviews front office people in charge stated that front office department is unsuccessful due to communication problems in front office so, as a result of unproductivity in front office department affects hospitality business's productivity in a negative way. For example, if there is a problem between switchboard and reception unit due to lack of knowledge, this causes some problems like misconnection of phone calls, not doing wake-up service on time. This situation causes reduction in the satisfaction of the guests and a decrease of productivity

## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Today people have started to feel the need of going on holiday due to intense business atmosphere and stress caused by living in metropolitan cities in a developing and changing world. They satisfy their needs for communication in accommodation facilities during their travels. Hotel businesses, which only serve accommodation at the beginning, started to serve food- beverage and entertainment in parallel with the changing needs of the guests.

Hotel businesses' reaching to big values in country economy in employment and benefit they ensured for the country economy has increased the importance of the hotel businesses. Competition among countries and regions due to the increase in importance of hotel sector for country administration cause opening of big hotels. Activation of big hotels has obligated professionalism in service. And some departments and sub-departments of these departments have been formed to ensure the professionalism. At the same time, as hotels whose main aim is to make their rooms full and increase room sales, are getting bigger, making their hotels full and maintain this fullness has revealed the importance of communication with guests.

Front office department, which is one of these formed departments, is the first department which communication starts with the guests. Communication with guests from reservation phase to check-out phase which is the last phase and the phase after check-out is ensured in front office. Information about the guests is shared with other departments by front office. Therefore, front office has become an important department in hotels. Communication within the department and with other departments and guests should be without any problems for productivity.

In this study; it is determined that front office managers communicate with the other departments via telephone and walkie talkie or computer most. Moreover, it is also concluded that they have the problem of not delivering the information on time problem most. Communication within front office units is carried out in a written way or via computer and it is determined that messages are not accurate, complete or clear causes to the problems. Moreover, it is inferred that all of front office managers stated that communication problems in front office affects productivity in a negative way.

There are fewer mistakes in written communication, writing is permanent, extensive and complicated messages can be delivered easily (Mısırlı, 2016, 102-103).

Although communication with other departments is oral, by phone, walkie-talkie in terms of rapidity, not using written communication might cause disputes on whether the problems are transferred or not.

It is inevitable that information is forgotten or is not delivered on time in front office department which is too busy. For this reason, written communication must be given importance and delivery of the messages should be complete. Although phone and walkie talkie are the fastest means of communication, information cannot be delivered on time. This situation can be thought as some problems sourced from the staff. So, it is recommended that the staff is educated.

Even though communication problems with other departments does not affect the productivity in front office department directly, this will cause the dissatisfaction of the guests in the hotels where there is the obligation to work as a whole and as a result of this, they will want to leave the facility and they will advertise the facility badly. This will cause the rooms to remain empty and front office department whose main duty is to keep the rooms full all the time cannot do this duty and the productivity of the front office department and business will decrease or come to an end.

Communication within front office units is carried out in a written way or via computer. Moreover, it is stated that messages are not accurate, complete or clear causes to the problems. Ensuring standardization in businesses, evaluating success at work can be achieved by inspection (Şimşek, 2006, 220).

Because the information is not complete and clear despite written, it is recommended that the staff are inspected by department chiefs.

For this reason, it is an obligation for administrators to set up a proper communication in front office department and to take precaution for the atmospheres that might cause communication beforehand. It should be remembered that guests who left with a positive impression will want to stay in the same facility once again and they will tell other

people positive things about the facility. This will both increase their share in tourism market and increase the productivity by preventing business from the harms of the competition conditions.

This study was applied to 35 front office managers in Alanya region the same study can be done in the same region or different regions or countries. The same study can also be carried out at different times and the results can be compared.

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