Standardising services: a help or hindrance to service delivery

– a case study on the effects of standard operating procedures in service delivery

Master's thesis | *MSc in Social Science in Service Management*

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1 Abstract

The service sector has experienced a massive growth over the past decades and continues to be the fastest growing industry. Whilst standardisation for many years has been used in industrial manufacturing and production, little research has been done on the effect of standardisation in services. With increased competition and price pressures from the ever-growing industry, the need for standardisation is rising. Hence, many service organisations have implemented standards which seek to help ensuring quality and consistency of the service, providing organisations the means to compete and survive in the industry.

To understand whether standardisation has a positive or negative effect on service delivery, this study seeks to understand the challenges of implementing standards within service organisations. Firstly, by reviewing the literature, describing the nature of services, we have identified services as comprising of four characteristics: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability. Secondly, by reviewing the standard operating procedures (SOPs) definition, as proposed by Cyert and March (1992). By utilizing the mentioned definitions, a theoretical framework has been developed, assessing how and where the SOPs correlates with the service characteristics.

Against this framework, the thesis empirically investigates the effects of SOPs on the service delivery by conducting a case study. The case used for this study concerns a major Nordic hotel chain, Scandic Hotels Group AB, and in total 12 semi-structured interviews were performed at 5 different Scandic Hotels. This enabled the creation of an empirical framework, presenting how and where SOPs can hinder or enhance the service delivery.

As a result of the analysis several areas were identified, on where SOPs can have a positive impact on service delivery but simultaneously it also identified areas where the opposite was the case. The latter was particularly visible in scenarios involving more complex decision-making, such as complaint management, where the training and support of managers affected the service delivery to a greater extent than SOPs.

The results of this thesis therefore suggest, that service standardisation is not the only element which can affect the service delivery. The managerial style of the organisation should be highly considered as a mean to increase the quality of the service delivery in areas where SOPs are unable to provide comprehensive support in decision-making, especially in complex scenarios.

2 Preface

This master's thesis at Cand.soc.(SEM) – Service Management – has been prepared at Copenhagen Business School, Frederiksberg. The purpose of this thesis is to produce a research paper relevant to the Cand.soc.(SEM) programme, hence this thesis deals with a complex industrial issue in a case study. This study is based on academic theories and methods which have been chosen specifically to uncover the problem.

We have chosen to analyse how standardisation can possibly hinder or possibly enhance the service delivery in service organisations by conducting a case study with the receptions at Scandic Hotels Group AB. Little research has been conducted on the effects of standardisation in the service industry – an industry which appears to always be faced with the conundrum of standardising or customising: reduce costs or please consumers.

The theory therefore deals with both the identification of standard operating procedures in organisations as well as the characteristics of services, resulting in an analysis of how these have a possible effect on one another and ultimately how they are affecting the delivery of the service to the end-consumer.

We would like to thank our supervisor Claus Varnes, who has contributed with good and constructive advisory throughout this research process. In addition, we would like to thank our respondents, the managers and receptionists at Scandic Ringsted, Scandic Glostrup, Scandic Hvidovre, Scandic Palads and Scandic Sydhavnen from the case company Scandic Hotels Group AB, for participating in our interviews. Finally, we would like to thank our respective partners, Mehrdad and Sammi, for their endless patience, constructive criticism and inputs, as well as romantic late-night talks about hermeneutics, interviews techniques and everything in between.

> *"The ultimate inspiration is the deadline."*
> Nolan Bushnell

2.1 The writers' competences

It is relevant to consider our, the authors, competences both educationally as well as professionally as it has an influence upon our understanding of the problem statement. As it will be discussed later in section 5.1.4, our experience and skills will have an impact on the understanding of the empirical data which we have collected and processed throughout this research.

We have both worked in the service industry for many years; Cecilie has mainly worked in the restaurants industry as both a manager and waitress for almost a decade, and likewise does Zaiga have a decade of experience with customer service and sales in various industries ranging from travel to events coordination. Our many years in the service industry has provided us with great insight in the industry; the people in it – i.e. the service providers and the consumers – as well as the industry's development throughout the years.

Educationally, Cecilie has obtained both an AP and PBA Degree in International Service and Hospitality Management and likewise has Zaiga obtained an AP and BA Degree in Tourism and Travel Service Management supplemented with a PBA Degree in Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Together with this master's programme these form the basis for our theoretical and methodological approach to this study.

Our professional and educational competences indicate that we are already possessing some prior knowledge of the research area, but in order to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the problem statement, we will, as far as it is possible, keep an open mind and be objective towards any data collected for this thesis.

2.2 Structure of the thesis

This section provides a brief overview and structure of this thesis. Table 1 (see next page) provides an illustration of the structure as well as a short description of each element. This thesis is structured in chapters and sections, where the chapters provides an overall structure, while the individual sections and sub-sections assists in making each chapter more reader-friendly.

Chapter	Description
Introduction	During the introduction the reader will be presented with the problem motivation, formulation and delimitations which provides the frame for this study. Additionally, some industry terms will be clarified.
Research methodology and methods	A presentation of the theoretical perspective as well as the research design and respondents used for this thesis.
What are services	This chapter presents the phenomenon that is 'service' as well as describing and define the nature of services by reviewing the literature.
What is standardisation	This chapter presents and defines standards and standardisation in term of standard operating procedures. The chapter will also discuss the impact of standardisation on services.
Integrating services with standards	In this chapter, the standard operating procedures will be investigated in the light of the service characteristics, thereby creating a theoretical framework used for further analysis of the topic.
Case analysis, interpretation and presentation of results	This chapter analyses and presents the empirical data, based on the framework established in the previous chapter.
Presenting and comparing theoretical and empirical findings	Here, the theoretical framework will be compared with the results of empirical data collection and the major findings will be outlined.
Discussion	In this chapter we are discussing our results from the analysis in order to evaluate our findings. Simultaneously we will discuss the methods and theory used as well as the generalisability of the study.
Conclusion	The conclusion will summarise the results of the study based on the problem formulation.
Implications and recommendations for future research	This chapter proposes further research recommendations.

Table 1: *Structure of the thesis*

2.3 References

Statements in this thesis regarding e.g. theory is supported by references to literature in which the statement can be found. In this thesis, the Harvard – Anglia 2018 style of referencing has been used which presents with the following structure: (Author, year of publication, possibly page number).

Further information on references can be found in chapter 14.

3 Table of Contents

3.1 List of tables

3.2 List of figures

4 Introduction

The objective of the following chapter is to describe the purpose of this thesis and thus create an expectation of the nature of the analysis. To describe this, we will begin by introducing the case company, after which the problem motivation will be presented. Finally, a specific problem formulation will be presented, guiding the direction of this thesis. Subsequently, the delimitations to this thesis will be drawn up.

4.1 Standards and services

Standards, or standardisation, is generally an underappreciated art as the signal product of standardisation, i.e. a standard, is typically a document which for most is not a very exciting read. As a result, standardisation has therefore suffered from neglect from both academic and business disciplines (Cargill, 2016).

The changes experienced in the economy over the past decades, and with the emergence of servitization, standardisation have reached beyond the more traditional arena of manufacturing, to also include the service sector (Blind, 2006). However, Sundbo (2002) argues that service organisations are 'stuck' between customisation and standardisation due to their individual and customised character: while standardisation can be used to decrease costs, lowering prices and increase productivity, the emphasis on customisation due to a demand for better quality is greater than ever before (Sundbo, 2002). This is quite the contradiction and one which provides a challenge for service organisations – a challenge that can be largely attributed to the nature of services, which presents itself as a confounding, multifaceted phenomenon (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017).

There has been little qualitative analysis of the positive or negative potential for standards in the service industry, specifically whether standardisation hinders or enhances service delivery for the consumers. The aim of this study has therefore been to first examine the nature of services and then investigate how standards, expressed as standard operating procedures, operates in service organisations. In order to validate the capabilities of standardisation, this paper will address the conundrum of services and how this phenomenon affects standardisation in service organisations. This theoretical approach will be coupled with empirical information from relevant respondents who are representing the chosen case company.

Any identified challenges or benefits to service standardisation will be presented and thus this thesis will reveal in what way or manner standardisation affects the delivery of service.

4.2 Introduction to case company

This section introduces the case company which has been used as a focal point in this thesis. First, some of the organisation's characteristics will be described followed by a presentation of the organisational structure.

Scandic Hotels Group AB (hereinafter referred to as Scandic) is the largest Nordic hotel operator with more than 280 hotels, 55.000 hotels rooms and 16.000 employees. Founded in Stockholm in 1963, Scandic is now located in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Germany and Poland. Approximately 70% of the revenue comes from business travel and conferences, the remaining 30% from leisure travel (Scandic Hotels Group AB, 2015).

Scandic's organisation is decentralised through the 280 hotels, however certain functions, such as sales and marketing, purchasing, human resources, IT and product development, is centralised (Scandic Hotels Group AB, 2015). The investigated decentralised hotels have similar organisational structures amongst each other, however slight variations exist depending on the size of the hotel: at the smaller Scandic hotel in Ringsted, the front office and conference department functions more as one unit rather than two, and likewise does the smaller hotels not operate with supervisors/shift leaders in all departments. However, whether or not a Scandic hotel operates with supervisor/shift leaders, the organisational structure remains flat and department managers operates at the same level, as can be seen in organisational structure in Figure 1 below:

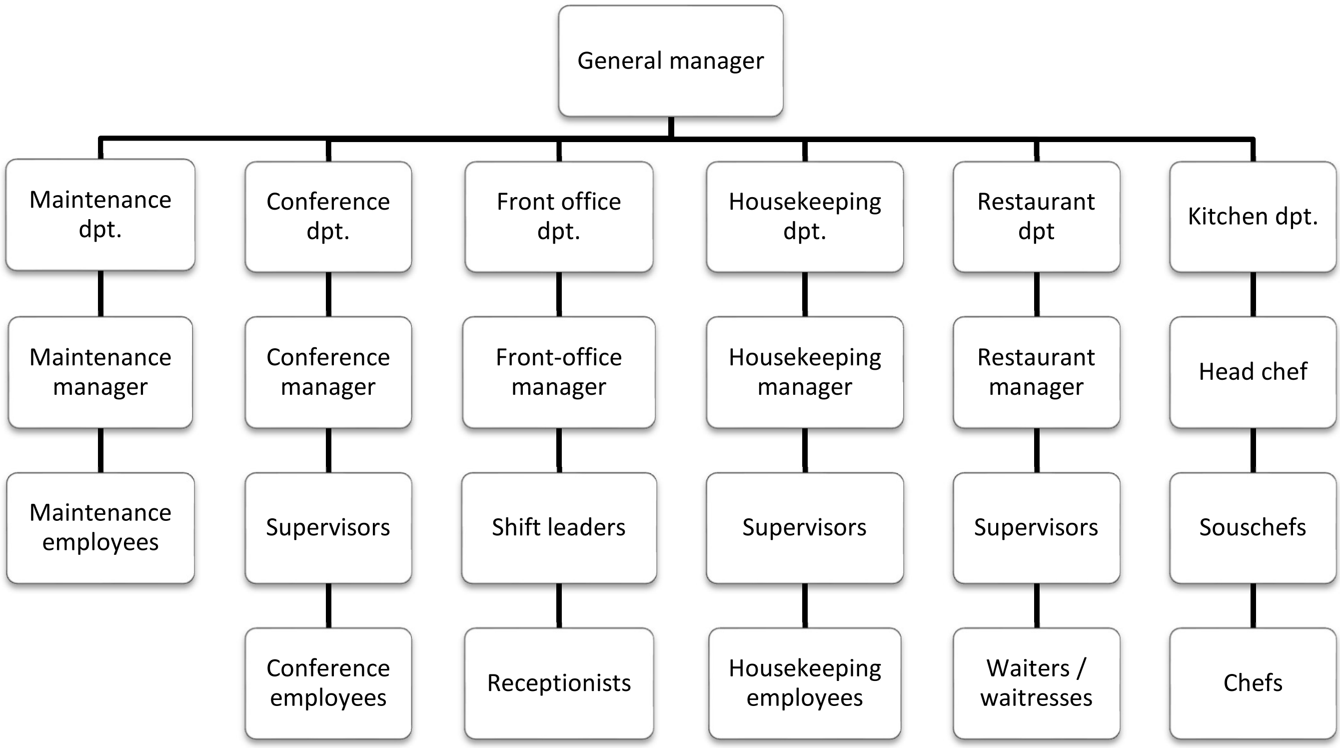

Figure 1: *Scandic organisational structure*

4.3 Problem motivation

Service industry is one of the largest business segments in the global economy. Since 2005 there have been a steady growth of the service sectors share in the global Gross Domestic Product. In 2015 services constitute 69 % of the global GDP (World Bank, 2017). To further localise this point, the largest part of Denmark's population in 2017 (78,63 %) was employed in the service sector (World Bank, 2018). On the basis hereof, it can therefore be argued that the services industry will continue to expand, and subsequently become an ever growing and evolving part of the modern economy.
In the modern world, the productivity of the service sector is an indicator of the nation's competitiveness (Lewis, et al., 1992). A subsequent major concern when having to operate within such a large sector, is creating and sustaining competitive advantages. One of the critical factors of competitiveness in the service industry, is creating and sustaining a high level of quality in the service delivery (Ghobadian, et al., 1994). One such method or approach, on which historically has been proven successful in other sectors, is standardisation. By achieving service standardisation, it is expected that consistency of service delivery can be accomplished (Sundbo, 2002).

However, a service offering is a complex construct that exhibits challenges posed by the nature of services – i.e. services cannot be touched, nor stored. They are also unique, as well as they are created and consumed simultaneously (Zeithmal, et al., 1985; Cooper & Edgett, 1999). This phenomenon creates a huge emphasis on the collaboration of work across all employees within organisations, as an encounter between service provider and consumer, e.g. an exchange at the front-office, is the essence of the service (Heskett, et al., 1997).

Since front-office employees have such significant influence and importance on the results of the service delivery, managers in service organisation should consider how to communicate and align organisational procedures with their employees, as to establish and maintain consistency in the service delivery. Cyert and March (1992) argues that, any organisation has its internal rules on (1) how the decisions are made and (2) how the general procedures are implemented in the organisation. These rules are also known as standard operating procedures. Since the standard operating procedures are framing the work of the front-office employees, it can be assumed that they also have a direct influence on the service delivery.

As of yet, there has been little empirical research on how standard operating procedures are interpreted in the context of services. Furthermore, there is a lack of knowledge on whether these standard operating procedures are enhancing or hindering the service delivery, and with the focus on operational excellence and uniformity, it shows that the knowledge and understanding of service sector is an essential need for the future managers, to help them navigate and operate organisations, in an evolving industry. If standardisation is one of such tools, which can contribute to achieving this goal in the form of standard operating procedures, we see a potential in evaluation if this is the case.

4.4 Problem statement

Considering the discussion in the previous section, this thesis will consequently investigate and answer the following research question:

How are the rule types, as defined by the standard operating procedure theory (Cyert and March, 1992) hindering or enhancing the service delivery?

To guide the study, the following areas will be explored:

- The nature of services will be investigated and defined to understand the challenges which these can impose on the service delivery.
- Standard and standardisation will be investigated and defined to understand how standards are implemented in service organisation as standard operating procedures.
- The correlation between standards and the nature of services will be examined to understand how standard operating procedures are problematized in services. This will result in a theoretical framework which will be adopted for the further analysis of the collected empirical data.
- A case analysis will be conducted to investigate and understand how a service organisation is implementing and interpreting its standard operating procedures, with the purpose of identifying how and why the standard operating procedures might affect the service delivery in a real-life context.
- The theoretical and empirical findings will be presented side by side to identify how, why and where standard operating procedures are hindering or enhancing the service delivery. The comparison of both theoretical and empirical findings will provide us with a more holistic and interpretive depiction of the effects of standardisation.

4.5 Delimitations

The main focus of this thesis is on the investigation of how standard operating procedure rules are hindering or enhancing the service delivery. To answer the research question, this thesis was delimited to a choice of two theoretical perspectives: definitions and characteristics of services, as proposed and summarized from the literature, and standard operating procedures as proposed by Cyert and March (1992). These two perspectives were chosen, as they focus on the essence of the topic and research focus of this thesis.
As the purpose of the research performed in this thesis is to investigate the influence of standard operating procedures on service delivery within service organisations, the base of the research is founded on such organisations users' interpretations of standard operating procedures. The findings of the thesis are therefore based on a single case study, more specifically receptions at Scandic hotels. The single case study enables the researchers to gain in-depth knowledge about the given phenomena (Yin, 2014). The findings of this research are not used to make generalisation to a population, but to gain insights and understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Moreover, due to the scope of the project and its financial limitations, the choice of the hotels within the Scandic chain was limited to the island of Zealand, Denmark.

Further details on the choices of the case selection is elaborated in section 5.2.2.

Lastly, this thesis is focused solely on the perspective of the service organisation and does therefore not include the perspective of its consumers. This is done to limit the number of variables which would be required to conduct and process the added empirical and theoretical framework to be conducted within the designated timeframe allocated for this thesis.

4.6 Clarifications of terms

In the service industry, 'customers' or 'consumers' are commonly referred to as 'guests'. Throughout this thesis, these three terms will be used interchangeably when appropriate, but they are all representing the final user of the service delivery.

5 Research methodology and methods

The following chapter intends to ensure, describe and explain that the scientific angle of this thesis is in alignment with both the field of study as well as the chosen theory. Therefore, the scientific paradigm will be presented as well as any related considerations.

Following this, the choice of data collection method and the choice of respondents will be presented, along with argumentation of how these are in complying with the research area. During this process, we will employ a critical view of the research paradigm as well as our impact and role in this regard.

5.1 Philosophy of science

Conducting a scientific study means that one would have to consider how to approach and structure such an endeavour and several methods for such exists. However, as there are quite the fundamental differences between the methods, it is of importance that it is being considered carefully which approach is the most appropriate for the problem area one wishes to investigate. Therefore, the choice of theoretical approach has consequences for the entire study; for example, for the way which data is collected, processed and analysed.

5.1.1 Research paradigm

This thesis adopts the paradigm of social constructivism, a philosophy which seeks to explain how knowledge is produced. We acknowledge that some researchers differentiate between up to five different types of theories (Constructivism, radical constructivism, social constructionism, social constructivism and sociological constructionism) on how the world is socially constructed (Holm, 2013) and others uses constructivism and constructionism interchangeably (Bryman, 2012).
However, we will disregard these distinctions and instead accept the more general depiction of social constructivism where the reality "*is something we create collectively through our interactions and ways of speaking about the world.*" (Holm, 2013, p. 137) meaning that social phenomena, or "reality", is something which social actors produce through social interactions – and that this reality is in a constant state of evolvement (Bryman, 2012; Holm, 2013).

5.1.2 Ontological and epistemological assumptions

By adopting the social constructivist paradigm, it means that our ontological assumptions are that of relativism as our knowledge of reality is (1) that there is no single reality or truth and (2) that reality is created via social interactions. However, while ontology as a discipline concerns itself with what exists, how it has come into existence and in which way it is related, epistemology concerns itself with what *kinds* of knowledge is possible, and how we can come know these things (Blaikie, 2010, p. 92).

Therefore, with the social constructivist approach it is required that we interpret the reality in order to discover any underlying meanings of events and activities. However, this also means, that due to our research paradigm, reality cannot be fully discovered and all social explorations made by us, the researchers, will reflect our personal standpoints and interpretations of the world.

5.1.3 Theoretical perspective

This thesis is working within the frames of hermeneutics, which, as it was also mentioned in the previous section, does not share the view that the researcher is a neutral and objective observer without any cultural or historical predispositions (unlike for example positivism which believes in a single reality or truth) (Holm, 2013, p. 83). Hermeneutics, which is the branch of knowledge which deals with interpretation, does therefore not seek to identify an absolute and objective truth. However, it is still possible to achieve a certain degree of objectivity by continuously working towards better and improved understanding and interpretation of the object of the study (Holm, 2013). This will be discussed further in the following sections.

With this scientific approach, we are able to investigate our established framework, but it should be kept in mind that due to our research paradigm, as well as ontological and epistemological assumptions, it will never reveal an absolute truth. However, as our empirical data is collected and interpreted, it *will* allow us to gain a greater understanding of the whole, as it will also increase our own horizons of understanding (Holm, 2013, p. 100). The method of empirical data collection will be described in the next part of this chapter.

5.1.4 The hermeneutic circle

Hermeneutics is relevant for understanding all types of human activity and all forms of cultural products (Holm, 2013, pp. 84-85), and thereby also service delivery and standard operating procedures. The word 'hermeneutics' derives from the Greek mythological character 'Hermes' who – besides being the god of thieves and trade – stood for the mediation of the words of the gods and the attempts of man to understand these. Hermeneutics therefore quite literally translates into "interpretation" (Fuglsang & Olsen, 2014).

The purpose of hermeneutics is understanding, which is achieved through a circular process where "*all understanding consists of the constituent parts being explained by the whole and the whole being explained by the parts*" (Holm, 2013, p. 86).

This means that learning is a contextual process where we as researchers are able to continuously create a better and wider understanding and interpretation of the investigated subject. In regards to this thesis, it will be the effect of standard operating procedures in the context of the service characteristics.

Only when one has reached an understanding of the parts, by means of the whole, and the whole by means of the parts, can a comprehensive understanding of the research area be achieved. Complete understanding however can never be reached, nor is this the aim of the hermeneutic interpretation (Holm, 2013, p. 96), but viewing understanding as a circular process is what will give us the opportunity to interpret the interaction between the parts and the whole. In this thesis the goal is to achieve a comprehensive interpretation of respectively the standard operating procedures in terms of their interaction with the phenomenon that is service and its characteristics.

The relation between the parts and the whole is supplemented by ours, the interpreters, understanding of hermeneutics and how we see ourselves interacting with the world. In modern hermeneutics, i.e. in Gadamer's view, this means that "*we never start from scratch when attempting to understand something*" (Holm, 2013). However, in classical hermeneutics, i.e. Schleiermacher and Dilthey, it is suggested that we will have to find a way into the hermeneutic circle, but modern hermeneutics suggests that we are already inside of it (Holm, 2013, p. 90).
Therefore, we, as researchers, cannot disregard that our own life and work experience, prejudices etc., will not have an effect on our generation and understanding of the knowledge. Consequently, the hermeneutic circle does not only consist of the circular process between the parts and the whole (the object), but an additional circular process containing the interpreter (the subject). It is important to emphasize the circularity of this process, as the flow is not only from the subject to the object, but rather a reciprocal process (Fuglsang & Olsen, 2014), see Figure **2**:

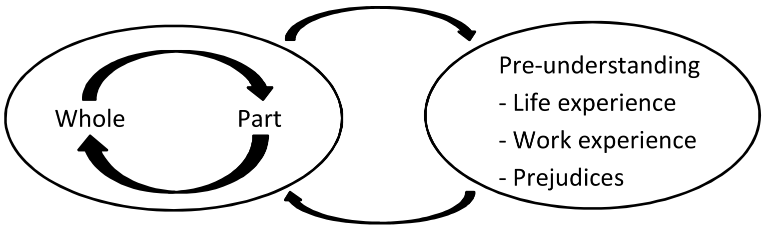

Figure 2: *Modern hermeneutics (based on Fuglsang & Olsen, 2014; Holm 2013)*

The understanding created in modern hermeneutics is therefore created by our pre-understanding and prejudices about an object, which constitutes what Gadamer refers to as the 'horizon of understanding'. According to Gadamer, acquiring horizon means "*that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion*" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 316).

The horizon of understanding means that we as researchers always interacts with the world as understanding and interpretive beings, consequently meaning that the horizon is changeable – "*the horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us*" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 315).

When the subject (us, the researchers) convene with the object (our research area), an incident, which Gadamer refers to as 'fusion of horizons', happens – "*or the dual process, which characterizes understanding*" (Holm, 2013, p. 94). This is where creation of new understanding takes place; or as in our case, when we are able to comprehend and understand e.g. the phenomenon of service and its characteristics – but not necessarily agree on the proposed sentiments (Fuglsang & Olsen, 2014).

Figure 2: **Modern hermeneutics (based on Fuglsang & Olsen, 2014; Holm 2013)**Figure 2 above illustrates that in modern hermeneutics, the hermeneutic circle has evolved to be ontologically founded, where reality is perceived as subjective. Consequently, reality is constructed in the minds of individuals, and each of them can have different perception of a given subject.

This thesis is theoretically and empirically based, and therefore the understanding of the research area has increased as more data has been collected, processed and interpreted. Additionally, our insight and understanding of the service industry has an impact on the interpretation of data, as discussion in section 5.1.6.

The empirical method is discussed in section 5.3.

5.1.5 Prejudices

As mentioned earlier, we as researchers have prejudices and that this will have an effect on the understanding of the research area. It is however important to notice, that 'prejudice' in Gadamer's view is not the same as being judgmental and narrow-minded, but rather something which is required for our understanding and interpretation of e.g. a text or a conversation (Fuglsang & Olsen, 2014).

This means, that prejudices are assessments made in advance, however not as final verdicts, as we are unable to understand or interpret the world if we have not made any prejudices in advance. According to Gadamer, prejudices ensures that we, as beings, are able to understand one another, whether this turns out problematic or not, as the expectations to status quo exists due to prejudice (Fuglsang & Olsen, 2014, p. 301).

5.1.6 The hermeneutic influence

The hermeneutic approach influences the way in which the empirical data has been collected, interpreted, analysed, discussed and finally concluded upon. Hermeneutics sets the requirements for how to handle the research, and the process of understanding takes places through the hermeneutic circle (see Figure 2). This means, that both our mutual and individual pre-understanding of the research area have an influence on the process in which the understanding of the research area is established.

This however, does not only apply to us, but also to the respondents who are involved in the process. They too have a pre-understanding of the research area. Ultimately, this means that this research can contribute to an enhanced understanding of the truth, compared to the understanding established prior to this process, as the understanding of the whole is expanded.

5.2 Research method

As this thesis stems from an initial identification of a gap in the literature, where the study seeks to focus on exploring a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, it is not possible, nor is it relevant, to control the surroundings or the behaviour of the respondents.
The purpose of the study is to generalise the results of the study so that it can be applied to other, similar, research areas.

5.2.1 Case study

A case study is particularly well suited to produce concrete, context-dependent, in-depth understanding and knowledge about the phenomenon in question. (Hancock & Algozzine, u.d.; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Moreover, the case study helps a researcher to *"understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to your case"* (Yin, 2014). Context-dependent and real-world knowledge is essential and valuable for the social sciences, as *"predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs"* (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 224).

Therefore, a case study approach has been employed in order to allow us, the researchers, to investigate how standardisation may or may not have an effect on the service delivery. In order to investigate and analyse this phenomenon, a single case study was chosen as it *"meets all the conditions necessary to confirm, challenge or extend the theory"* (Ghauri, 2004, p. 114).

5.2.2 Choosing case and units of analysis

When conducting a case study, a case selection is an important issue, as it is essential to decide on the target population, and to consider the accessible population. Out of the assessed population, the researcher should find a case that is coherent with the research problem (Ghauri, 2004). Since the research area of this paper is to explore whether standards are hindering or enhancing the service delivery, the main criteria for the case study was to choose a service organisation, that is exposed to the nature of services, as well as employing standard operating procedures. Additional criteria were choosing an organisation located in and around Copenhagen due to limited travel resources. Eventually Scandic was chosen as the case company, as it was established beforehand, through informal conversations, that Scandic operates with standard operating procedures.

Moreover, when the case is chosen, it is essential to '*bound the case'*, i.e. to distinguish which departments of Scandic will be included in the research and which will be left out of the research (Yin, 2014). Since the service interaction has a focal point in this research, it was crucial to find the department most engaged in service delivery. As such a department, the reception/ front office in Scandic was chosen considering that:

> *"The front office of any hotel is a central focal point for the whole operation at a number of different levels. For the customer, it represents the first and potentially last contact point with the operation."* (Ball, et al., 2003, p. 113).

Moreover, to get a deeper and better understanding, the case study will be analysed through two sub-units of analysis: (1) the receptionists and (2) the front-office managers from the chosen case company. This was done in order to investigate whether a difference in perception existed between these two sub-units on how the service delivery is affected by Scandic's standard operating procedures.

5.2.3 Generalising from a case study

When conducting a single case study, one should be aware of the issues of generalization. A researcher should be aware that s/he cannot do statistical generalization, as the case is not a representation of a sample. Instead the goal of conducting the case study is to expand and generalize theories, that is, doing analytical generalization. Case studies are, according to Yin (2014), "*generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations and universes"* (2014, p. 21) and they do therefore not represent a sample – meaning that the goal of a case study is to expand and generalise theories.
According to Flyvbjerg (2006) generalising from a single case study is possible, as he argues that:

> *"One can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods"* (2006, p. 228)

Which is why this study throughout will seek to accommodate generalizability as far as this is possible.

5.3 Empirical method

This section deals with the type of methods which has been used for this thesis in order to collect empirical data. Additionally, the choice of respondents will be presented and the selection process will be outlined.

5.3.1 Data Collection

For the collection of data, we have chosen to work with primary data in terms of interviews and minor observations. This approach is in line with the scientific approach, which primarily deals with collecting and interpreting qualitative data. Secondary data has been used when deemed necessary.

5.3.2 Interviews

Interviews are one of the most important data sources for case study research (Yin, 2014). They are soft data, meaning that interviews do not provide numbers, answers or fact which can be measured or calculated directly (Harboe, 2006). Rather, they must be interpreted and understood before they can produce empirical evidence.

The interview format consisted of face-to-face interviews with front-office employees and managers at various Scandic Hotels across Zealand over a seven-week period. Length of interviews lasted from 25-45 minutes for the front-office employees to approximately one hour for the managers. The interviews were conducted in English, based on the preference of the interviewers, however allowing the respondents to use Danish if they found themselves lacking. The interviews took place at different Scandic hotels, usually in a semi-quiet area near the hotel bar – with the exception of one instance where the respondent requested the interview to be conducted in a local park close to her home. Prior to starting the interview, most of the respondents where interested in why we were conducting interviews and for what purpose. The first five minutes of each interview was therefore unrecorded and spent discussing our reason and purpose for the study, our background and what we were seeking to accomplish. During this dialogue, we were also able to discuss consent including confidentiality and requesting permission to record the interviews for transcription. Some of respondents were visibly nervous before the interview began and these pre-discussions therefore also served the purpose of calming those respondents down, explaining to them the process and why they had been selected.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured (focused) manner where the structure remained open-ended and conversational, while the interviewee followed a certain set of questions (Yin, 2014). This approach allows for a more flexible execution, where the interviewee does not detain respondents from elaborating on topics relevant to the investigated phenomenon, as well as the interviewee can ask for opinions in order to gain a better understanding. Transcribing the interviews was necessary for analysing the data as dictated by the hermeneutic circle which characterises the hermeneutic process of analysis (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 46).

Interview guides used for respectively managers and front-office employees can be seen in appendix 1: interview guide: receptionists and interview guide: front office-managers.

5.3.3 Observations

As almost all of the interviews took place in the natural setting of the case company, we created the opportunity for direct observations (Yin, 2014). The observations were mostly distinguished as less formal, direct observations which provided us with some indications of the work climate as well as the service-scape of the case company.

5.3.4 Secondary data

As a supplement to the primary qualitative data, the case company's website has been used to the extend necessary. The empirical outcome of this data has mainly been for organisational descriptive purposes.

5.3.4.1 Choice of respondents

It is important to keep the goal in mind when working with case studies, as otherwise these can develop into a complicated size – therefore, the delimitation and choice of respondents is necessary to consider (Harboe, 2006). He delimitation is considered as to the problem statement in section 4.4, and the choice of respondents will be discussed in the following.

The selection of respondents was made for the purpose of creating a true and fair view of the case company. As already mentioned in section 5.2.2, this study is using Scandic as a case company, however only the thirteen Scandic's located on Zealand were contacted through email, requesting permission to conduct interviews with their receptionists and front-office managers. Ultimately, this meant that we did not have the luxury of choosing a sampling strategy but were required to stick to the respondents which we were able to recruit (Brinkmann, 2013). However, as all respondents were employed in the reception at Scandic, they were considered to hold key positions suitable for this research. In addition, this study is considered an inference study, which means that based on a part of the population, something is derived for the total population (Andersen, 2014).

According to Brinkmann (2013) one should "*interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know.*" (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 58). As the aim of this research study is to examine whether standards are an aid or hindrance to service delivery, we deemed the number of respondents to be sufficient, mainly due to the reasonable uniformity in their answers, regardless of position. Furthermore, it is neither the purpose of this research to reach absolute truth such as is possible with statistical representativeness, but rather "*the chance to look in detail at how selected people experience the world.*" (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 59)

An overview of all respondents can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3 below. The tables split the respondents into two categories: managers and front-office employees. Then is listed the place of work, name, title, experience and reference to the appendix where the transcript of the interview can be found.

Scandic	Name	Position	No. of years w. case company	No. of years w. position at case company	Interview transcript
Glostrup	Louise	Receptionist, full-time	2 years	2 years	L-SG
Glostrup	Shokoufeh	Receptionist, full-time	1.5 year	1.5 year	S-SG:1
Hvidovre	Janice	Receptionist, full-time	1.5 years	1.5 years	J-SH
Palads	Anca	Receptionist, part-time	2 years	2 years	A-SP
Ringsted	Jeanett	Receptionist, full-time	3 months	3 months	J-SR
Sydhavnen	Jaqueline	Receptionist, trainee	1 year	1 year	J-SS
Sydhavnen	Mathias	Receptionist, full-time	4 years	4 years	M-SS
Sydhavnen	Mie	Receptionist, full-time	3.5 years	3,5 years	M-SS:1

Table 2: *Overview subunit 1: the receptionists*

Scandic	Name	Position	No. of years w. case company	No. of years w. position at case company	Interview transcript
Glostrup	Stine	Front Office Manager	2 years	3 months	S-SG
Ringsted	Annie	Conference/Event Manager	7 years	1.5 years	A-SR
Ringsted	Ida	Front Office Manager	11.5 years	7 months	I-SR
Sydhavnen	Camilla	Front Office Manager	15 years	14 years	C-SS

Table 3*: Overview subunit 2: the front-office managers*

5.4 Coding and condensation of data

In order to work with and analyse our 127 pages of transcribed interviews, we made use of the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. Coding the interviews provided us with structure and overview of the data. Additionally, through content analysis were we able to code the text's meaning into categories which made it possible to quantify how often specific (pre-defined) themes were addressed in the interviews and comparing the frequency of the themes throughout the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

5.5 Summary

This chapter presents how the empiricism of the research is sought. The scientific methodology, theoretical perspectives, as well as the research method and empirical data collection tools has been identified and discussed. Additionally, the condensation and coding of empirical data has been introduced, as it is the main tool of the data analysis.

We consider that the chosen empirical methods are appropriate to investigate the phenomenon, and that they are compliant with the scientific methodology and theoretical perspective.

6 What are services

The purpose of this chapter is to define and describe the phenomenon of services and the challenges it poses to service organisations. The following section has therefore been divided into two main sections: The first section will help to understand and define 'what is a service' and the second section will examine the characteristics of said service.

6.1 Defining services

Many scholars have tried to define services. Services, as well as commodities (also known as goods) have been a part of economics and have been examined from different perspectives during different economical periods (Delaunay & Gadrey, 1992). Yet, even now in a post-industrial society, a service is an abstract and complex phenomenon that is difficult to encapsulate in a one clear and understandable definition (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017).

As services constitute to such big part of the global economy, most of the business schools around the world have at least an introductory course about services and service management, thus there are many textbooks provides basic knowledge about the field. These textbooks represent the mainstream knowledge and understanding of how services are displayed and perceived by the people (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004). This knowledge supplements the academic literature and provides a better understanding about services, as authors try to view the service phenomenon from their fields' perspective. Therefore, the definitions and explanations from various textbooks will be used along the thoughts and concepts of the scholars.

Reviewing different textbooks from different disciplines (operations management, marketing, service marketing and innovation management) one can see patterns in the definitions of a service. Authors describe service as an activity or an act that produces something intangible, and during this process at least two parties are involved. Additionally, many authors emphasise the characteristics of the service that varies from author to author, yet the most named are intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability. These characteristics differentiate services from goods and will be discussed in detail in the following section.

The early scholar definitions of '*a service*' are concerned with the relationships between tangibility and intangibility. J. Rathmell (1966) observed a strong understanding of what a good is, but a vague definition of a service as ‘*everything else’*. He proposed to see a *good* as a noun, i.e. a thing, and a *service* as a verb, i.e. an act. Rathmell (1966) developed ‘*Goods – Services Continuum’*, where all products are evaluated based on their utility: "*does the utility for the consumer lie in the physical characteristics of the product, or in the nature of the action or performance*?" (Rathmell, 1966, p. 33). Even though services are intangible, there are some element of tangibility in them, and vice versa. Therefore, there are only very few pure products and services, everything else along the scale is interrelated (Rathmell, 1966).

More comprehensible definition of services was given by W. J. Regan (1963); he defined services as "*activities, benefits or satisfactions which are offered for sale, or are provided in connection with the sale of goods*" (1963, p. 57). W. J. Regan (1963) divided a perception of services in three different categories: (1) services as intangibles yielding a direct satisfaction (e.g. insurance), (2) services as tangibles providing satisfaction (e.g. transportation) and (3) intangibles providing satisfactions jointly when purchased either with products or another services (e.g. delivery) (Regan, 1963). These two definitions of a service do not describe a service as something explicitly intangible, but talk about the interaction between intangibles and tangibles, both as separate elements or as a combination of both. Another perspective towards the service is an interaction between (at least) two parties. T. P. Hill (1977) construed a service as:

> *"A change in the condition of a person, or of a good belonging to some economic unit, which is brought about as the result of the activity of some other economic unit, with the prior agreement of the former person or economic unit"* (1977, p. 318).

This means that for a service to take a place, there should be an interaction between two or more parties. The result of this interplay is a change. Consider for instance a bike repair shop: a bike owner brings his/her bike to the repair shop to fix a punctured tire. The bike owner talks with representative of the repair shop and decides to use their service i.e. their expertise to how fix the punctured tire. This is the interaction between two parties. The repairing of the bike is the service and the outcome – the change of the interplay, is the fixed tire of the bike. This definition is widened by Grönroos's (2006) definition, that outlines more interaction between elements and states a different reason for the interaction. From Grönroos's (2006) point of view, services are:

> *"Processes that consist of a set of activities which take place in interactions between a customer and people, goods and other physical resources, systems, and /or infrastructures representing the service provider and possibly involving other customers, which aim at solving customers' problems"* (2006, p. 323).

In a former definition, the change was the outcome of the interplay, while in the later one, the goal for the interaction between these parties is a solution of a problem. Grönroos's (2006) definition indicates that a consumer has to have some problem that motivates him or her to reach out for a service offering in order to solve the problem. Based on the definition, the service offering most likely has been enhanced or created with a help of other consumers with a same or similar problem. This definition gives another perspective to the service – that a service is a process of value creation. (Grönroos, 2006). Vargo and Lusch (2004) expanded on this perspective and defined services as:

> *"The application of specialised competences (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself."*
> (2004, p. 2)

This means emphasising on the importance of the knowledge and experience within the organisation that leads to value creation either for a consumer or the company itself. Elaborating further on this definition, Edvardsson *et. al.* (2005) conducted a research where they surveyed different experts from the service industry. In this research, authors detected that experts described services as performances, processes and deeds. Furthermore, surveyed service practitioners emphasized the value creation to the consumers. This research affirms that not only scholars are concerned about service as a perspective of value creation, it is a concern for service managers as well.

Even though many authors have tried to specify and narrow down their definitions of service, all these definitions still are rather abstract and diverse. This tendency shows that '*a service*' is an expansive and complex phenomenon. To understand it better it is not enough to just define it, it is crucial to also discover and address the features of the phenomenon.

6.2 Characteristics of services

Characteristics of a service are not only something that distinguishes services from goods; they are also an integral part of the definition and perception of the phenomenon. Many academics have tried to characterize services and came up with various traits. Yet, the first ones to collect and summarize the main service characteristics described by various academics were Zeithmal, Parasuraman and Berry (1985). They gathered service characteristics published by scholars and discovered that all of them have named '*intangibility*' as a main service feature. The second most commonly mentioned characteristic is '*inseparability*' of production and consumption, followed by the characteristics '*heterogeneity*' and '*perishability*' (Zeithmal, et al., 1985). The gathered data by Zeithmal *et. al.* (1985) suggests that each of these characteristics create challenges for the managers (these challenges will be discussed in further detail later on in sections 6.2.1- 6.2.4). Whereas, the managers should follow some specific strategies when exposed to these challenges (1985).

A large and growing body of text books has also widely used the above-mentioned characteristics (also known as IHIP: short for intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability). Same as the academic literature, also textbooks are referring to intangibility as the main characteristic of a service offering. Heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability are another most commonly mentioned attributes of the service.
Some academics have criticised and re-visited the classic IHIP characteristics (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Zeithmal, et al., 1985; Correa, et al., 2007). All beforehand mentioned authors are criticizing the semantical usage of the words 'intangibility', 'heterogeneity', 'inseparability' and 'perishability'. In recent years, there have been "subsequent evolution of service markets, offerings, and technologies" (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004, p. 20). Therefore, authors are trying to accentuate the need for considering the new tendencies and developments.

In order to understand the classic service characteristics better, and to see what each of them mean and what challenges do they pose to the managers and service organisations, it is important to introduce oneself with each of them closer.

6.2.1 Intangibility

Intangibility is the feature that has been equated with a service; it is perceived as an essence of the service (Zeithmal, et al., 1985). It means that a service has no physical form (Cooper & Edgett, 1999); i.e. it cannot be touched, retained or owned. The benefits of the service are encapsulated in its performance – instead of owning a service, a consumer experience it. Benefits for a good come from the permanent ownership of a tangible element, while the benefits from a service comes from the nature of a performance of it (Lovelock & Wright, 2002). As Lovelock and Wright (2002) observes:

> *"The notion of service as a performance that cannot be wrapped up and taken away leads to the use of a theatrical metaphor for service management, visualizing service delivery as similar to staging of a play with service personnel as the actors and customers as the audience"*(2002, p. 10).

Consider for example a visit to the amusement park Tivoli Gardens: the consumer experiences the performance of the employees – it covers the work of all the staff members from the front-office, i.e. ticket sales, all the way to the maintenance and cleaning personnel. All the rides and decorations in the park are tangible elements; décors and theatrical properties which are creating an experience and ambience for the consumer. Yet, the visit per se cannot be owned, nor kept – it vanishes in the moment the consumer leaves the park.

Furthermore, as services are not physical, a service organisation "*cannot readily display or communicate services*" (Zeithmal, et al., 1985, p. 35). This 'tangibility – intangibility' feature is used as a main distinction between goods and services. Seeing intangibility as an opposite of tangibility is one of the most discussed and used approaches amongst academics and textbook authors. J. Rathmell (1966) developed a conceptual framework called '*Goods – Services Continuum'*, which was later revisited and refined by G. L. Shostack (1977) in hers '*Molecular Model'*. Since there are these two opposites, tangibility and intangibility, one should understand the connection between and importance of the two of them within an offering. Since services are intangible, it is hard to gain a knowledge about them, as they are dynamic, subjective and transitory. Services per se are abstract, thus they create different realities for services' providers and their customers.

Additionally, *"the lack of physical evidence (..) increases the level of uncertainty which a consumer faces when choosing between competing services*" (Palmer, 1998, p. 12). This uncertainty can be minimized by adding tangible elements to the service. When the consumers are judging a service, they are doing it based on the tangible cues and evidence, as well as its surroundings (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017). Therefore, it is important how those tangible elements, that can be altered and influenced, are managed by the service provider (Shostack, 1977). An example of such controllable tangible is a service-scape – an environment where organisations produce and customers experience services. This concept was developed by Bitner (1992) and is massively employed nowadays. Tangibility of things helps people to measure and to judge results. For an organisation, it provides an opportunity to evaluate its performance; for a consumer, it helps to align their expectations with a reality, or to ally different realities. Also, if taking the customer journey mapping into consideration, one will notice that there is at least one stage, where consumer experiences a tangible performance through at least one of his or her five senses (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004).

Moreover, services are "*doubly intangible; they are impalpable – they cannot be touched by the consumer – and they are difficult for the consumer to grasp mentally*" (Bateson, 1977, p. 8) This corresponds with Lovelock and Gummersson (2004) suggestion about two types of intangibility – physical and mental. The former describes inability to touch service, while the later represents inability to mentally grasp it (Edvardsson, et al., 2005). These two types can be related; the physical intangibility of a service often creates a challenge for a customer to conceptualize the service, i.e. physical intangibility leads to the mental intangibility. Based on the research conducted by Laroche *et al*. (2001) the mental intangibility is *"the most important dimension of overall intangibility"* (Laroche, et al., 2001, p. 34). This nature of intangibility is rarely mentioned and elaborated by the textbook authors, as well as scholars (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004).

An argument against calling services intangible, has been proposed by P. Hill (1999): he considers the assumption about goods being tangible and services being intangible, more "*casual and conventional rather than* *scientific*" (1999, p. 426). Hill (1999) argues that there are two types of goods: tangible and intangible, and that services should be categorised in their own category and should not be called intangibles, as it creates confusion between intangible goods (e.g. e-books, software, music in a digital format, etc.) and services. The difference between intangible goods and services are, that the former is:

> *"Entities originally produced as outputs by persons, or enterprises, engaged in creative or innovative activities of a literary, scientific, engineering, artistic or entertainment nature"* (Hill, 1999, p. 438).

While services "*involve relationships between producers and consumers*" (Hill, 1999, p. 441) and they cannot occur if these two entities do not interconnect. Hill's argumentation about intangible goods and intangibles as services gives considerations about the phenomenon, especially in a time of technological development. It is essential to know the difference between these two entities, yet the word 'intangibility' does characterise the nature and essence of the services.

6.2.2 Heterogeneity

Heterogeneity represents a variability and the uniqueness of services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). It is argued that services usually cannot be delivered the same way twice, as the delivery of the service is dependent on the individuals providing it (Cooper & Edgett, 1999). Also, Lovelock and Wright (2002) agrees that:

> *"The presence of personnel and other customers in the operational system makes it difficult to standardize and control variability in both service inputs and outputs."* (2002, p. 11).

Since each involved individual is different, a service delivery cannot be perceived as the same. Therefore, the variability of the service is a result of *"a lack of consistency in inputs and outputs during the service production process"* (Lovelock & Wright, 2002, p. 11).

Three main assumptions about uniqueness of services can be distinguished. Firstly, as established before, service delivery is dependent on its provider's behaviour and performance (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004). This premise implies that service provision is influenced by its provider's personal traits and that service organisation has a little influence over her or him. Therefore, the service organisation should employ a person either with personal traits related to the specific service offerings, or with experience in the given field (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004). For instance, for a cleaning company it would be more convenient to employ a tidy and neat person, rather than spending resources on teaching someone to be tidy. Secondly, each consumer is different and therefore their experiences are different (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004). Lastly, every interaction between people is unique (exclusive) and impossible to reproduce (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004). Since people (either service providers or customers) are unique, as well as influenced by different outside factors, it is believed that it is impossible to repeat interactions that leads to different experiences (they might be similar, but not the same).

Based on the previously mentioned premises, services are believed to be hard to standardise, as it is difficult to achieve a unite output, especially in labour-intensive services, as the majority of interactions are happening between different people. Rathmell (1966) contributes to this belief by asserting that even if some of the service procedures may be standardised, the actual implementation of the service will be different from customer to customer. Therefore, it can be concluded that not only is the service production variable, but also customer experiences and the outcomes of the service offerings will differ from interaction to interaction, and from person to person. This assumption has posed a big challenge for service managers, who want to sustain a certain quality level of the offered service. Additionally, the customer involvement and simultaneous service production poses challenges for the service organisations:

> *"Mistakes and shortcomings are both more likely and harder to conceal. These factors make it difficult for service organizations to improve productivity, control quality, and offer a consistent product"* (Lovelock & Wright, 2002, p. 11).

These principles create a challenge for monitoring and controlling the service delivery, that ensures consistent implementation of standards (Palmer, 1998, p. 14).
Furthermore, heterogeneity of the services can be divided into two dimensions. Firstly, the degree to which production standards deviate from norm, both in terms of outcomes and of production processes (Palmer, 1998, p. 14). If the input of the service provision varies every time it is produced, the service output will be inconsistent. Inconsistent service output leads to mental intangibility, that hinders brand building process (Palmer, 1998) Secondly, the degree *"to which a service can be deliberately varied to meet the specific needs of individual customers*" (Palmer, 1998, p. 14). This dimension represents on what extent the front-office employees can influence the service production – whether they are empowered to '*walk an extra mile*' in order to provide better customer service. It is a managerial decision to choose either standardised or customized service delivery (Palmer, 1998, p. 14).

6.2.3 Inseparability

A service is a process consisting of various interrelated activities, which are generally bought in advance and afterwards produced and consumed simultaneously (Grönroos, 2000; Palmer, 1998). As explained by Cooper and Edgett (1999): "*The act of supplying a service is virtually inseparable from the customer's act of consuming it"* (1999, p. 16). It means that the production of a service and consumption of it is seen as a simultaneous process that most of the time cannot be separated. First step is to sell a service, and only then is the service produced and consumed (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). A consumer is often present in the service provision and may even take part in the process of the production (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). The service provider can either be human or a machine. For instance, in the need of a basic financial transaction, such as cash withdrawal from a bank account, a consumer can choose to use an ATM machine. This service can happen only if the consumer interacts with a machine (in the given case machine is the service provider), thus service is provided simultaneously while consumed (Palmer, 1998).

The service manager should be aware of the importance of the process of a service offering. For goods, the most important is an *outcome*, the product, while the production *process* of the good has almost no value for the customer. On the other hand, in a service offering, the *process of the production* can be as, or even more, important than the result itself. The process of the production is what creates the enjoyment of the service. This also implies, that even some slight changes in a service production process can destroy the value of the provided service. (Palmer, 1998). For example, a consumer who has booked a bike trip to the mountains might not derive value from a service if it turns out to be a relaxing trip to a beach.
This service characteristic is very dependable on the specifics of the organisation, because many services are partly or largely produced apart from the customer. Some services are outsourced, others are consumed in the different time as they are produced, e.g. cleaning services. The production of a cleaning-service take place usually in early mornings or late evenings, while there are no employees in the office, while the consumption of the service – the usage of the clean office space – takes place during the day (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004). Even though there are some specific services that does not exhibit inseparability, most of the services does and therefore, inseparability will be considered as an important service characteristic in this thesis.

6.2.4 Perishability

Perishability refers to inability to inventory, store, resell and return services (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). This characteristic is tightly connected with intangibility of services – as they are not tangible, they cannot be produced in one point in time, nor stored to be used at a later time (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). As Lovelock and Wright (2002) notes:

> *"Because a service is a deed or performance, rather than a tangible item that the customer keeps, it is 'perishable' and cannot be inventoried. Of course, the necessary facilities, equipment, and labor can be held in readiness to create a service, but these simply represent productive capacity, not the product itself"* (2002, p. 12).

As an example, a cleaning company can have their cleaning supplies in stock, which can be used and reused. Same with the labour – the company can have their regular cleaners, as well as hire some replacement employees in the cases of emergency. Yet, when it comes to the service itself, an office cannot be cleaned five times on Monday and then reused when needed during the rest of the week. Cleaning is a deed that should be repeated every day of the week, as agreed with the consumer of the service.

Perishability in combination with previously discussed characteristics of the service leads to challenges for capacity planning and production. For instance, an unused bed in a hotel is an income opportunity that is lost forever. In order for this opportunity not to be lost, the service provider should manage to even out peaks and valleys of the demand (Grönroos, 2000; Cooper & Edgett, 1999). Most commonly used tools to tackle this challenge are pricing and promotion, discounts, special offers etc. (Palmer, 1998).
Some scholars have argued about different viewpoints to perishability, or even criticized it as a distinctive characteristic of services. Firstly, there are a service producer's and a consumer's perspective that determines perishability of the service. For the producer of the service, the most important thing is the time between production of an offering, and when it is possible to sell it in order to produce an income. Yet, from a consumer's perspective the most important thing is the time when the purchase can deliver benefits (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This means that the service producers are challenged by perishability, as there is a time gap between the production of a service offering and the time an income is generated. Yet, from the point of view of the consumers, there is no perishability, as the service offering delivers benefits already during the process of the service delivery or immediately after. For instance, a hotel room has been produced by the time the hotel was built and the hotel owner cannot store or re-sell rooms that have not being used. Yet for the consumer perishability is not an issue, as s/he is getting the benefit of the service during the stay at the hotel.

Lovelock and Gummersson (2004) divides these two perspectives into four angles of the perishability: the productive capacity, the producer's output, the experience of the customer and the gain customers obtain from the service offering. First two angles are related to a producer's perspective, the last two angles are related to the customer's perspective. For a service organisation, the productive capacity may be expressed in a 'pre-productions inventory', which is calculated for specific time frames related to hours of service and number of available employees (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004). The customer's positive, neutral or negative experience can be stored in the customer's long-term memory, and this memory can influence customer's future behaviour, as well as his or her perception of the service quality (Edvardsson, et al., 2005). This means that consumers store services in the form of memories. This adds another challenge to the service managers, as they need to consider with what kind of memories consumers will leave the organisation. These memories can either encourage or hindrance referrals for other consumers to use the provided service.

Lastly, Lovelock and Gummersson (2004) separates services based on Information Technologies (IT) from the other services. Authors argue that perishability as a characteristic does not apply for IT services, as the service performance can be recorded, stored and the same performance enjoyed over and over, e.g. a song on Spotify, or a ballet production recorded on the DVD (Lovelock & Gummersson, 2004). This critique fosters a discussion on whether the recorded performance is still a service or an intangible good? As discussed in section 6.2.1, not only services can be considered intangible. Based on Hill's (1999) proposed distinction, a recorded ballet performance on DVD should be considered an intangible good rather than a service offering, as the DVD can be owned and the interaction between the recording and the consumer is missing. On the other hand, Spotify is an online service that exhibits perishability, as the service cannot be stored – the songs (intangible goods) can be accessed only while the consumer is using the service provided by Spotify. Based on all the given arguments, perishability can be considered as a distinctive characteristic of a service from the perspective of the service organisation.

6.3 Summary

This chapter is discussing and summarising different definitions and characteristics of services proposed by different authors. To sum up, a service can be defined as an interaction between at least two parties with an aim to create value for a consumer. Services per se are abstractions that can include some kind of tangible elements. Furthermore, there are four main characteristics associated with services: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability – in short IHIP.

Two types of intangibility exist: physical and mental, the former one meaning that a service cannot be perceived through the 5 senses, while the latter one means that it cannot be perceived. An argument about heterogeneity of a service offering depends on the perspective it is viewed. The outcomes and experiences from the consumers' perspective cannot be standardised, while the service provider, in theory, has no limits on standardising the design and elements of the service. Moreover, as a service offering is an interaction between two parties, but based on different circumstances and elements involved, service deliveries cannot be replicated. Also, the inability to record, save, return and resell the service can be seen from consumers' and producers' point of view. The service is perishable from the perspective of the producer, while the service experience can be stored in the consumer's long-term memory. The last characteristic suggests that the consumption and production of the service offering cannot be separated from each other. This poses challenges for the service organisations, but, again, has little or no effect for the consumers.

7 What is standardisation

The purpose of this chapter is to describe standards and standardisation in a service perspective. The chapter will therefore be structured as followed: first, we will outline some base definitions of standards followed up by how standards can be designed in relation to standard operating procedures as well as how standards influence and operate in a service organisation. This chapter will end with a general discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of standards in relation to service delivery.

7.1 Defining and designing standards

Standards can be interpreted and used as a business management tool by organisations and has historically been used in industrial manufacturing and production, "*since standards provide the necessary interconnections to make things interoperate*" (Cargill, 2016, p. 18). In the simplest sense, a standard is "*an agreed-upon way of doing something*" and for further elaborating does a standard "*denote a uniform set of measures, agreements, conditions, or specifications between parties* [between industry, consumers, legislators or any other parties]*"* (Spivak & Brenner, 2001). The Oxford Dictionary define "standard" as "*a required or agreed level of quality or attainment*" and "*something used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluations*" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018). Commonalities for these definitions are, that a *standard* is an entity which not only creates *uniformity* but also something which can be used as a *norm* between agreed parties. In general, standards could be deduced to a definition which come in many forms; these may be physical products or standard units of weight and measures – or they can be written documents and published norms (Spivak & Brenner, 2001).

When describing and defining standardised *services* however, standardisation becomes "*difficult to define as a single definition given the diverse nature of services*" (Weyers & Louw, 2017, p. 410). Furthermore, a general belief within literature that it is not as easy to measure service performance and quality (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017), and it can therefore be a challenging task to create or establish standards for the service industry. The competitive environment forces the service organisations to industrialise their services and evolve and design standards for use in their specific organisation (Weyers & Louw, 2017). Therefore, in order to gain the benefits of service standardisation, such as increased efficiency, decreased costs and uniformity of products, it is clearly indicated that the need for standardisation is there.

Cyert and March (1992) has identified three basic principles which organisations typically adhere to when designing standardised procedures. We will look at these three principles from a service perspective:

1. *Avoid uncertainty*: in order to avoid uncertainty, the service organisation can look for procedures with which they can reduce their need for using predictive analytics. Such procedures can be created based on customer feedback and this feedback can be utilized as an indicator whether e.g. procedures or rules in the organisation requires changes or upgrades. Another way to avoid uncertainty is if the organisation accepts (and enforces) standardised decision rules (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 121), essentially providing a fixed method of handling work tasks and scenario.

2. *Maintain the rules*: once the rules have been established, the service organisation will only abandon these under such circumstances where the organisation would feel forced to do so. The trouble and effort needed for redesigning rules and systems is too substantial and especially larger organisations are therefore cautious about performing changes (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 121).

3. *Use simple rules*: simple rules are embedded in basic, simple procedures and service organisations will have to rely on individual judgement from their employees when flexibility is required to circumvent these. Most commonly, such rules have a 'list of specifications', describing and outlining under which circumstances the rule may be modified and to what extent (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 121). Adding to this, Newman & Summer (1961) explain that "*standard operating procedures tend to become complex and rigid for several reason*" (1961, p. 402) effectively also suggesting that rules and procedures should be kept simple and that "*a procedure can be revised so that some steps are taken concurrently*" (1961, p. 402).

Designing standards for service organisations can be done by creating or utilizing already existing rules by either use these as 'standard rules' – i.e. 'what to do/not to do in specific scenarios – or the rules can be embedded into the 'Standard Operating Procedures' – i.e. the general steps which an employee follows in his/her everyday dealings. In the following we will explore the standard operating procedures (hereafter abbreviated as SOPs) further.

7.2 Standard Operating Procedures

Prasanna (2013) defines SOPs as "*a routine or repetitive activity* [which] *is documented to form a set of written instructions, such* [as] *manual*[s] *which provides individuals or the employees to perform the job properly which facilitates integrity and quality in the end product or service*" (2013, p. 1). Newman & Summer (1961) points out that "*we usually think that policies, standard methods, or standard operating procedures are carefully designed (…) but in fact, standing plans are not always consciously and deliberately established*" (1961, p. 393).

While SOPs quite often has the physical appearance of a document, Newman & Summer (1961) also explains that "*the papers are simply vehicles for information and ideas. But there can be [standard] procedures with no papers at all (…) when people involved may have a well-established understanding about the steps necessary in making a decision*" (1961, p. 401). Additionally, Cyert and March (1992) describes SOPs as "*the memory of an organisation*" (1992, p. 119), meaning that SOPs can be used to transfer the knowledge from earlier experiences to be used in present time. Moreover, SOPs are of limited value if not written correctly – and fail if they are not followed (Prasanna, 2013). Finally, SOPs can be used as a method with which to create a common language in order to achieve mutual understanding between the members of the organisation (Hallström, 2004).

Earlier, we established that both rules and SOPs can be changed in accordance to feedback received from the surrounding environment of the service organisation. Amendments done hereon is done in order to adapt or adopt to any changes in needs or wants from e.g. consumers and other influential parties. However, Cyert and March (1992) remark, that specific procedures, which are incorporated explicitly in an organisation's SOPs, are more unlikely to undergo change and are therefore treated as fixed as they "*give stability to the organisation and direction to activities that are constantly recurring*" (1992, p. 122).

Cyert and March (1992) identifies four major types of procedures when considering organisational SOPs. These are: (1) task performance rules, (2) continuing records and reports, (3) information-handling rules, and (4) plans and planning rules (1992, pp. 122-123). These rules are described in further detail in the following.

7.2.1 Task performance rules

In terms of quantity of words, this section in an organisation's SOP is typically the most comprehensive one. Cyert and March (1992) describes the task performance rules as rules which consists of "*specifications of methods for accomplishing whatever task is assigned to an individual member or subgroup of the organisation*" (1992, p. 122). Explicit task performance rules can thereby enable the transfer of knowledge obtained from previous experiences in the organisation, to be used in familiar or new scenarios.

If an organisation or its members does not adhere to the same procedures, there is a risk that the organisation would operate with several methods and solutions for similar problems which diminishes the possibility of consistency on solutions and procedures, when compared with *other* solutions and procedures carried out elsewhere in the organisation. Therefore, the organisation must ensure that tasks are completed in synergy with other tasks being performed throughout the organisation in order to avoid unnecessary complexity (Cyert & March, 1992). Or as Newman & Summer (1961) puts it*:*

> *"Without a regular routine for handling such matters, customer service would be poor, salesmen would be angry, bills would have errors and become troublesome to collect, and inventory controls would collapse"* (1961, p. 401).

Meaning that organisations operating without SOPs would essentially result in organisational mayhem.
Moreover, Cyert and March (1992) argues that the rules of an organisation or department should not only offer "*an acceptable solution (…) but also a solution that has some "uniqueness" properties*" (1992, p. 123). The unique property is not necessarily the task itself, e.g. a receptionist checking a guest into a hotel, but rather '*how'* the task is solved. The '*how'* is the result of a combination of the performance rules as well as the training of an individual member or the organisation or a subgroup. If the organisation is able to create unique standard operating procedures, the processes cannot easily be replicated by competing organisations (Cyert & March, 1992). According to Cyert and March (1992), task performance rules can:

> *"Exist in considerable detail at many different levels in the organisation. Highly trained engineers dealing with complex design problems may have their work as precisely described by performance rules as the individual member of the production line"* (1992, p. 124).

This indicates that, even when an organisation is facing complex decisions or challenges, these can be reduced to somewhat simpler decisions and challenges by the use of explicit task performance rules.

Performance rules can be created both from internal and external sources. For example, certain work procedures can have its origins from time study methods – i.e. an optimal method for a specific procedure has already been established – and introduced into organisations via instruction and training of employees (Cyert & March, 1992).
Rules from external sources, outside of studies, could be collected by recruiting individuals who introduces new rules or standard operating procedures which has already been trained into that individual from e.g. previous working experiences from former workplaces in similar situated areas of business or operation. The rules can also stem from more general rules established in e.g. the industry. These are referred to as 'standard industry practice,' 'standard business practice,' 'ethical business practice,' or 'good business practice' – i.e. the way which certain things are done in the industry on business in general (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 124).

Looking into the internal sources for defining standard operating practises, scenarios such as rules being developed and defined using the experience and knowledge within the organisations members, is a common occurrence, as the interest of preserving and nurturing internally proved methods and practises, so that existing, and established knowledge and expertise can be described and transferred to other members within organisations.

7.2.2 Information-handling rules

Major activities, such as estimates, results and predictions, in any reasonable sized organisation, are usually communicated via a communication system or platform, ensuring that the relevant information is distributed and presented to the relevant members at the relevant time. Not every member of the organisation seeks out or obtain *all* the information flowing around in the organisation, nor is all information entering the organisation necessarily valuable. Organisations will therefore often have established rules, or screening decisions, on what information is relevant for the organisation (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 127).

Cyert and March (1992) describes the information rules as a communication system with four characteristics and rules which defines how the information is distributed in, out, and around in the organisation. These are: (I) characteristics of the information taken into the firm, (II) rules for distributing and condensing input information, (III) rules for distributing and condensing internally generated information, and (IV) characteristics of the information leaving the firm (1992, p. 127). The following will describe these four aspects in further detail.

I. The first characteristic clarifies, that information makes its way into an organisation in many different ways and forms. Front office employees typically hear about competitors from their consumers, while observing and noting consumer patterns during their buying process. Managers and executives read and hear about the general conditions in the industry via trade journals or from their professional network. All of these bits and pieces of information from different sources provides the organisation with inputs (Cyert & March, 1992).

II. Cyert and March (1992) has in the second rule identified, that procedures exists for how information inputs are distributed, changed or even disregarded by members of the organisation. Cyert and March (1992) asks: "*what does the* [front office employee] *do with information about competition? What does* [managers and] *executives do with the trade journal information?*" (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 127).
Not only does this raise a question about who will communicate what to whom, but Cyert and March (1992) are also concerned about whether it makes a difference *who* collects and distributes the information. This can potentially be important as "*the person who gathers the information, is also the first*

to communicate, condense, and evaluate it." (1992, p. 128). This suggests that the information input is subjected to bias and as a result, some information can as a result be rendered undependable.
As such, organisational members often perform some initial screening processes where information is collected and processed. For instance, the waiter at the restaurant may learn that one of the guests have bought a new house but does not consider this relevant information for the rest of the organisation. However, should the guest inform the waiter about his/her favourite items on the menu, this should be recognised as relevant information. However, some screening decisions can have important effects on the organisation (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 128). Should the manager count on someone's information from his/her professional network, the organisations future planning will now rely on the accuracy and reliability of those reports. How the members of the organisation decide which information goes where, typically depends on past training and/or perceptiveness of the situation (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 128).

III. The third rule concerns itself with the internal information. Cyert and March (1992) questions, that when "*different parts of the organisation make decisions, issues orders, and requests clarification, how (…) is information moved through the organisation?*" (1992, p. 127). In smaller organisations it would be possible to allow all of the information to be shared between all of the members of the organisation – and also allow the information-sharing to take place informally in smaller groups (Cyert & March, 1992). In larger organisation this is however not as doable, and Cyert and March (1992) also differs between two dimensions of internal information-sharing in bigger organisations; these being *routing rules* and *filtering rules*.

Routing rules specify who will communicate to whom about what (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 129). An example of a routing rule is what Cyert and March (1992) describes as the "through-channels" rule. This rule describes how certain information is handled through specific channels, e.g. the General Manager of a hotel only interacts with the Hotel Manager which then communicates with his/her department managers and supervisors, and so on. The through-channels rule principally follows the organisational structure in a hierarchical manner (Cyert & March, 1992). Consider as an example the sales department in a hotel: this department would in most cases not require the same information as the department responsible for housekeeping – except in instances when their task performance procedures are overlapping – and the through-channels rule therefore ensures that the information is flowing through the organisational structure, reaching the appropriate departments through the department heads.

In instances where information is required between departments, informal procedures on how to perform such actions are usually developed by the members of the organisation and are thus rarely the result of any conscious decision-making from the top. However, if the same informal procedure persists as a need for the information flow, that procedure can develop and become an official part of the organisational SOPs. The issue with routing rules however, is that, like in traffic, some routes have dead ends and some information may therefore never reach the expected destinations (Cyert & March, 1992).

Earlier, we explained that biases directly interferences in the context of information rules, and also appears in the process filtering of information. For example, sales departments can be biased in terms of sales estimates and, accounting departments may filter cost inputs and outputs differently than other departments. Therefore, organisations will have to deal with this unreliability of information by implementing procedures where the organisation can make decisions without having to rely solely on the possibly biased information. This would however require, that the organisation is able to make decisions based on easily verified information (Cyert & March, 1992).

IV. Lastly, the organisation communicates with its environment through orders and arrangements with suppliers, consumers, marketing efforts, participation in industry related events, conferences, talks and lectures etc. (Cyert & March, 1992). Through these interactions, the organisation is not only able to create an output consisting of information about themselves to their surroundings, but simultaneously take in new informational input to the organisation.

Organisations information-handling rules can therefore be seen as a flow of information consisting of input, transformation, output in a circular process, see depiction figure 3 below:

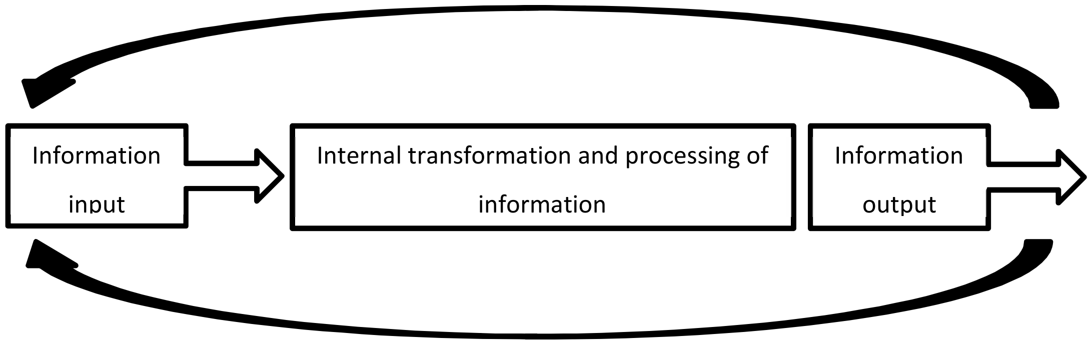

Figure 3: *Information flow in organisations*

7.2.3 Continuing records and reports

According to Cyert and March (1992) every organisation keeps a set of more or less permanent records, containing information about specific aspects of its operation and, according to Cyert and March (1992) does "*most organisations record- and report keeping serve two main purposes: control and prediction*" (1992, p. 125).

The records often contain what the organisation deems most important to its effective operations, which are typically financial statements and cost reports. Records and reports can "*have a control effect in the short run merely because they are being kept and the organisation members presume that they are being kept for some purpose*" (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 125). However, if the records and reports does not trigger any action in the long run, they will eventually become irrelevant.

The other important aspect to keeping records and reports is being able to predict what is going to happen in the organisation's environment. Records of past behaviour and experiences enables the organisation to make appropriate decisions when entering similar scenarios although these often are "*based on simple hypotheses about the relation between the past and the future*" (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 126). Therefore, in order to being able to make proper predictions of the future, the organisation "*needs both some idea of the relation between past and future events and also some records of the relevant past events*" (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 126). These conditions increase the pressure on the organisation for keeping track of important records and reports – and also on deciding which are the most important ones.

7.2.4 Plans and planning rules

planning activities in an organisation "*are usually as closely specified as other aspects of the standard operating procedures*" (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 131). An example of planning in an organisation is budgets, which as explained earlier, should follow specific procedures and rules on structure in order to show required information.
Budgets can be used as a management control tool in the sense that managers can set up strategies or goals to achieve and, using budgets they can check on progress. Additionally, budgets can be used to determine whether an organisational opportunity is feasible or not. Budgets therefore defines a framework within which an organisation can operate as well as evaluate its successes or failures against and, make changes to decisions and/or strategies (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 131).

Cyert and March (1992, p. 132) proposes four characteristics of plans and planning within an organisation which are: (I) goals, (II) schedules, (III) theories, and (IV) precedents. We will elaborate on these in the following.

I. *Plans as goals.* According to Cyert and March (1992), planning can help predict sales, costs, profit level etc. and can therefore act as a target goal for such factors (1992, p. 132). However, the problem with planning in accordance to predictions can be that organisations might assume that their predictions are always correct (Cyert & March, 1992). This can interfere with the planning goals in the sense, that it can render the goals unclear, unachievable or even unrealistic, and as a result can cause a loss of motivation for the members of the organisation.

II. *Plans as schedules.* Cyert and March (1992) proposes, that plans can function as a schedule, which "*(…) specifies* [the] *intermediate steps to a predicted outcome*" (1992, p. 132). The schedules, also referred to as guides, can be time-specific but are not necessarily completely fixed in advance. Furthermore, the schedules can be both organisational and departmental, but the departmental schedules should be in sync with the overall goals of the organisation. Lastly, the schedules should contain minimum achievement objectives for both the organisational departments, as well as for the organisation as a whole.

III. *Plans as theory.* Cyert and March (1992) uses budgets as an example for how plans can be used as a theory, as the budgets "*specifies a relationship between such factors as sales and costs on the one hand and profits on the other* (…) (1992, p. 132). This means, that an organisation can use the relationship between the factors and see how they develop, regardless whether this development is presenting positive or negative results. The organisation is therefore able to theorise how e.g. an increased sale of hotel rooms can affect the costs of e.g. the housekeeping department and thus whether the profit will result in any significant increase. However, as Cyert and March (1992) also points out, budgets may have the risk of being partial, only showing portions of the truth and can therefore be misleading.

IV. *Plans as precedents.* Organisations can define decisions made in e.g. one period or year, and thereby establish a *prima facie* case for continuing the same decision-making processes for the following period or year (Cyert & March, 1992). *Prima facie* essentially means, that an organisation will accept a certain method as the best, until this is proved otherwise.

The four characteristics of plans and planning rules provides the organisation with both short-term and long-lasting consistency, which they would not necessarily have otherwise. Like other SOPs, the four planning characteristics are all helping the organisation to "(…) *reduce a complex world to a somewhat simpler one*" (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 132).

These four types of Standard Operating Procedures (task performance rules, records and reports, information rules and, plans) as proposed by Cyert and March (1992), are:

> *"The focus for control within the firm; they are the result of a long-run adaptive process by which the firm learns; they are the short-run focus for decision making within the organisation"* (1992, p. 134).

Furthermore, SOPs "*reduces variations and promotes quality in the processes or procedures since it provide detailed work instructions*" (Prasanna, 2013, p. 1). Internally developed SOPs "*can therefore help the firm increase internal efficiency (...)*" (Johansson, et al., 2016) hence it is worth recognising SOPs as a method with which service organisations can induce standardised behaviour and procedures in the service delivery in order to increase efficiency.

Additionally, the need for detailed SOPs can increase as the need for consistency and coordination of work also increases. Newman & Summer (1961) explains that "*if the activities of several persons must interlock (in timing or quality), detailed planning may be necessary (...)*" (1961, p. 408) and likewise, if the work performed is largely independent, the need for detailed SOPs might be less important (Newman & Summer, Jr., 1961).

7.3 Standardising services

As we pointed out in chapter 6, services are an intangible process and according to Johansson, et al. (2016), this means that:

> *"Service organizations will rely more strongly on processes directed at the market or individual customers, than on goods and products. And therefore, Standardization of processes will play a specific role in the case of services, as services themselves are processes" (2016, p. 65)*.

As an example, the organisation would need to be considered how much of a customer's interaction with the service can be standardised; how much of it is open to customisation and to what degree members of the organisation can meet unusual requests (Lashley, 1997).

Moreover, consumers are increasingly seeking individuality and customisation with services, and service organisations must therefore be able to produce a service which at the same time is standardised, but also have the ability to be customised (Sundbo, 2002), thus creating a bit of a paradox. The aspect of heterogeneity is therefore especially difficult to relate to standardisation "*as the goal of standardisation is the opposite: to reduce heterogeneity*" (Johansson, et al., 2016, p. 65).

Furthermore, literature argues, that even though a service is customised, the input and the processes behind the service can be standardised; or as Sundbo (2002) puts it:

> *"The product may be combined by several standard elements and the process may be combined by several standard procedures; thus, the product and the production and delivery process could be different for different customers. This is* [modularisation]*"* (2002, p. 97).

Sundbo (2002) continues to argue that customising your services does come with advantages such as increased customer satisfaction due to the customers having their individual needs satisfied as well as feeling that they have been treated well. Furthermore, supplying customised services provides service organisations with a good opportunity to increase prices and thus increase overall profit. Standardising services does however, also come with both challenges and advantages which we will explore in the following sections.

7.4 Challenges to service standardisation

According to Weyers and Louw (2017), it is useful to consider the differences between manufacturing and services and they state that "*services are difficult to visualize and manage, they are diverse in nature and highly contextual and service procurement is not done in a centralised fashion."* (2017, p. 410). Weyers & Louw (2017) also argues, that it is easier to consider and recognise standardised processes with manufacturing and products, as opposed to services. They remark that it is especially the intangible nature of services which "*makes concepts related to services abstract as opposed to a tangible product allowing the concept of standardisation to be more concrete.*" (Weyers & Louw, 2017). Although the literature generally argues "(…) *that in the mind of a customer (...) it may be as difficult to evaluate a pound of tomatoes before eating them as it is to evaluate the service of a bank*" (Laroche, et al., 2001, p. 27), thus the consumer generally cannot assess the service before consumption. Sundbo (2002), however, argues that a standard service product can be assessed just as well as a standard good:

> *"The consumer can see all the previous deliveries of the same standard service and the service that might be delivered to him will be the same. That requires that he has some information which he must procure from other consumers who have got the service, or from the service provider, who can show him how they deliver to other consumers"* (2002, p. 98).

Moreover, is it often discussed that while the consumer can take a physical product in his/her hand and look at it, the same cannot be done with a service. However, to this Sundbo (2002) argues, that even though a consumer can see and touch the physical product, s/he cannot see how it functions. A product can be demonstrated on its functionality, but so can a service provider with a standardised service.

Another challenge to service standardisation is the intangible and co-creative nature of services, meaning that a high level of customisation is very often a part of the service delivery process (Løkkegaard, et al., 2016). Therefore, standardising services can be challenging as it requires that the service organisations may have to compromise and be flexible when wanting to meet the customers' needs and requirements. Adding to this, Newman & Summer (1961) also discuss that flexibility has been a subject of doubletalk:

> *"An executive may spend ten minutes emphasizing the need for a (…) standard operating procedure, and then finish up saying, "Of course, we want to keep it flexible." In a single breath, he has cast out his whole point"* (1961, p. 403).

However, this raises questions such as "how flexible?" and "in what way flexible?". Newman & Summer (1961) helps answering this by stating that "*sometimes there is even a standing procedure for making an exemption to a standing procedure!*" (1961, p. 405). Let us remind ourselves that this is also stated by Cyert & March (1992) who argues that procedures often have "*(…) a list of "considerations" describing the conditions under which the procedure may be modified*" (1992, p. 121). We therefore have to recognise that such variation can cause confusion with the members of the organisation, and thus such dilemmas should be dealt with (Newman & Summer, Jr., 1961, p. 405).

7.5 Advantages to service standardisation

Standardising activities in service organisations does also come with advantages. One of such can be an increase in customer satisfaction which can be caused by two things: standardised services essentially, meaning that the consumer will experience a consistent service delivery; thus, they will get what they expect – every time. Secondly, standardisation can also lead to a decrease in costs, meaning that the consumers too can experience a decrease in price (Sundbo, 2002). Adding to this, lower prices also means that the organisation can gain competitive advantages in the market and thereby increase revenue (Sundbo, 2002).

Furthermore, Sundbo (2002) argues, that not only can the organisation decrease costs with standardisation, but they will also be able to steer them. Take for instance compensation: by standardising the compensation process, the service organisation will be able to set e.g. limitations on the costs which an employee is allowed to allocate on compensation. Not only will this ease the decision-making process for the employee, but it can also prevent employees over-compensating if they have no standard practice for this procedure. Furthermore, standardisation of procedures can increase the productivity as the members of the organisation will know which, as well as how, tasks are to be accomplished (Cyert & March, 1992). Processes too, can benefit from standardisation as single standardised processes can be designed to be compatible and functions interoperable amongst the more complex systems in the organisation (Blind, 2006; Cyert & March, 1992).

Let us recall Sundbo's (2002) argument for standardisation of services having the best prospect of success by modularising the processes. In short, modularity means that "*parts or components of a product are subdivisible into modules that can be easily interchanged and replaced*" (Pekkarinen & Ulkuniemi, 2008, p. 86). Modularisation therefore enables the service organisation to standardise the 'sub-components' of the different aspects of the service delivery. By doing so, it makes it possible to define individual functionalities within each sub-component, essentially creating a service offering which can be put together in different ways (Slack, et al., 2015, p. 201). Weyers & Louw (2017) also notes that:

> *"Service modularisation [has] efficiency gains available through the standardisation of services and processes and the conceptual benefits gained through the implementation of modularisation of services"* (2017, p. 412).

Or as Sundbo puts it: "*we can say that this is an economy of compromise. It is semi-customised (semi-tailor made) services with relatively low prices*" (2002, p. 105). However, both Slack, et al. (2015) and Sundbo (2002) agrees that standardising the service processes of the organisation, helps reducing the variety which can otherwise lead to increasing costs.
As an example, a travel agency can put together a customised travel-package, manufactured from standardised elements, which can easily be interchanged and replaced, based on the consumers individual requirements (Slack, et al., 2015; Pekkarinen & Ulkuniemi, 2008). Standardisation and modularity can thus provide the service organisation with the opportunity to provide better customer value and profitability (Pekkarinen & Ulkuniemi, 2008).

Recalling the paradox of standardising the heterogeneous, Pekkarinen and Ulkuniemi (2008) argues that:

> *"In case of heterogeneous input and demand, the modular system is superior, while in the case of heterogeneous input and homogenous demand, the non-modular system is more cost efficient"* (2008, p. 86).

Backing up this statement is Voss and Hsuan (2009) who suggest that:

> *"Competitive advantage can be gained through both the development of unique service modules and the exploitation of these specialized modules across the organization's diverse sites and/or services"* (2009, p. 560).

Lastly, let us remind ourselves that this is also suggested by Cyert and March (1992) who states that "*the organisation needs not only an acceptable solution (...) but also a solution which has some "uniqueness" properties*" (1992, p. 123). It can therefore be argued, that advantages to service standardisation can be created through modularisation of processes.

7.6 Summary

During this chapter, it has been established that standard is an agreed way of doing things, which then creates unity of a product or a service. Due to the competitive environment in the service industry, organisations are looking more and more to standardisation of their services. In order to do so, organisations can consider their already existing rules or procedures, and develop and embed these into a standard operating procedure (SOP). SOPs are routines or repetitive activities that forms written instructions, such as manuals, which supports organisation members to do their job in a predefined and prescribed manner, thereby resulting in the homogeneous service delivery of high quality. These procedures can be presented either in written form, or in memories of long-term and experienced employees. Moreover, SOPs can also be seen as an organisational method to create a mutual understanding between the members of the service organisation.

Overall, four types of SOPs exist: (I) task performance rules, (II) information handling rules, (III) continuing records and reports, and (IV) plans and planning. Each type has its own objectives and characteristics; however, all of them combined together create the organisational focus for control and decision making, as well as facilitate organisational learning, knowledge accumulation and decision-making processes.

Standardising services, however, does come with both challenges and advantages: while standardisation can help increase efficiency and consistency while lowering costs and variety of the service delivery, services are per definition difficult to manage due to their diversity in nature and high contextuality. Modularisation is therefore generally believed to be the golden mean to create standardised, but also customised, services.

8 Integrating services with standards

This chapter will seek to investigate and understand how the nature of services and its characteristics, discussed in chapter 6, are affecting standard operating procedures which have been discussed in chapter 7. The investigation will be conducted by the discussing SOPs from the perspective of each service characteristic, i.e. intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability.

8.1 Task performance rules vs. the four service characteristics

Task performance rules plays a big part in what can be described as “the basic rules” for the service organisation, and they are often referred to when members of the organisation are interacting with consumers. The rules are typically delivered to the employee either verbally, or they are explicitly written down in one form or another. The rules can contain everything from employee behaviour and appearance, to specifications or guidelines on how to solve specific tasks.

Furthermore, it is important the service organisation can meet the demand of the consumers in order to create positive output, or experiences for both provider and consumer. Therefore, the organisation should consider how the task performance rules can contribute to maintaining quality in service delivery, regardless of the level of demand.

8.1.1 Task performance rules vs. intangibility

The intangible aspect of services can make it difficult for consumers to determine the quality of a service beforehand. Consumers therefore often look to the more tangible surroundings, i.e. the service-scape, for cues (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017) or they seek the security of branded services, where the service is standardised and meets the expectations of the customer (Lashley, 1997). One can therefore propose, that service organisations should consider both the process of the service delivery itself, as well as the physical environment *surrounding* that service delivery when designing the service.

Consider as an example, the atmosphere of a restaurant and our discussion on intangibility in section 6.2.1: Seeing that the atmosphere of a restaurant does not have a physical form, nor can it be touched, retained or owned, the atmosphere must therefore be considered an intangible feature in the service delivery. However, the atmosphere can be influenced by more tangible aspects in the organisations service-scape, such as the colour on the walls, the décor and display of art (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017).

Employee behaviour and appearance can also add to the service-scape, whether in a positive or negative direction (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017); while a uniform sporting the company's colours and logo definitely adds to the tangibility for the consumers, so can an employee's behaviour. This suggests that the otherwise intangible service can be influenced by many, more tangible aspects which also has the prospect of being precisely defined by the organisation. Therefore, it can be proposed that explicit task performance rules can likely reduce, or perhaps even remove, the intangible feature of employee behaviour in consumer interactions.

As an example, consider the airline company Emirates: besides having an explicit guideline on what to wear and how to look (including hair styles and makeup), Emirates also require that new applicants perform a personality test which has been specifically designed for the airline, ensuring that future employees fit the personality profile required and envisioned by the organisation (The Emirates Group, 2017). As a result, organisations can, when instructing and teaching specific behaviour and task performance rules to their employees, reduce or remove the physical intangibility which leads to mental intangibility (see section 6.2.1) and rather create or design a desired effect of mental tangibility for their consumers – i.e. such as in the case of the Emirates airlines, where one can always expect the cabin crew to be dressed for the part.
It can therefore also be proposed, that task performance rules can influence the intangible aspect of services, in the sense that the more explicit the rules for e.g. behaviour, the more predictable – and therefore less intangible – the service delivery becomes.

8.1.2 Task performance rules vs. heterogeneity

In essence, a service encounter is a scenario where an employee will have to determine a course of action in order to accommodate a consumer's requests. In this regard, Cyert and March (1992) proposes, that even something as complicated as determining the course of action, can be made less complex by the implementation of standardised task performance rules or SOPs. With standardisation, it can therefore be argued that, the service organisation has the opportunity to not only reduce the uncertainty for the employees in service encounters, but the heterogeneous aspect of the service delivery can also be reduced. It is therefore not unusual for some service organisations to allow their front office employees some discretions in order to be more flexible and accommodating on providing consumers more customised services; while other service organisations aim for service consistency – meaning that the service provided will not differ from consumer to consumer (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017). Buying a new car, for example, can be considered a customised service experience whereas at e.g. McDonalds one would experience an un-differenced, consistent service delivery.

Heterogeneity can influence the service delivery in both a positive and negative direction and it should therefore be managed carefully (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017). If the service delivery is highly standardised, and the employee is not motivated to follow the rules, the purpose of the standardisation can end up having the reverse effect – as such we have all tried to be told to "have a nice day" by a discontented fast-food employee (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017, p. 91).

Heterogeneity therefore has an influence on task performance rules as the output of the service delivery, which in the end will not solely depend on rules defined, but also very much on the employee delivering the service and/or the individual consumer receiving it (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017; Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004). This could indicate that although service organisations may wish to standardise their service delivery though their SOPs, the results may not live up to the expectations, as the service delivery in the end will depend almost solely on the employee delivering it – but also on the consumer receiving it (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017).

8.1.3 Task performance rules vs. inseparability

As discussed and summarised in section 6.2.3, services are inseparable from the act of the consummation, meaning that the service delivery is produced and consumed simultaneously. For task performance rules, this characteristic could impact the description of the rules and the actions of the employees. It can be argued, that when dealing with service delivery, scenarios can occur where the standardised task operating rules are not comprehensive enough to deal with complex scenarios. This can result in leaving the organisation, or the individual employee, unable to determine a course of action based on rules and/or procedures.

8.1.4 Task performance rules vs. perishability

While services are inseparable from the production and consummation of the service delivery, so are they perishable, meaning that the service ceases to exist in the moment of consummation, and it is therefore not possible to save, store, resell and return services (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). It is therefore generally believed, that faulty services cannot be returned due to their perishable state. However, Sundbo (2002) argues against this by stating that this is not true, and that consumers can always get compensation one way or another (Sundbo, 2002, p. 99).

This means, that for scenarios where the service was bad or otherwise unacceptable, the consumer should always able to either get a refund, some sort of compensation or even be offered a new service. Deriving from this, we can therefore propose, that in order to compensate unsatisfied consumers, the organisations task performance rules should include descriptions, or possibly even explicit solutions, on how to take an appropriate action in such scenarios. Furthermore, during every service encounter the service provider picks up new learning and information which can improve the service delivery and these valuable insights can be transferred to other members of the organisation via the task performance rules.

8.2 Information rules vs. the four service characteristics

Every organisation can be perceived as a communication system with four aspects: (1) how the information enters the organisation, (2) what the rules for distributing and condensing input information are, (3) what are the rules for distributing and abridging internally generated information, and (4) how are the information leaving the organisation (Cyert & March, 1992, p. 107). Additionally, there are two ways in which the information flows: through either routing rules or filtering rules, where former relates to the hierarchy of the distribution of the information, i.e. who will inform who about what, and the latter refer to the biases within the organisation which can affect the filtering, and thus some of the information can be unreliable (Cyert & March, 1992).

To better understand how information handling interacts with nature of the services, it will be examined through the lenses of each of the service characteristics in the following.

8.2.1 Information rules vs. intangibility

It is essential to keep in mind that there are two types of intangibility – mental and physical. As established in section 6.2.1, physical intangibility often leads to mental intangibility. Therefore, to make the service offering more comprehensible, the information (both, internal and external) should be homogeneous and consistent.

Intangibility of the service can form an informal information handling processes (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017) that influences both internal and external environments.

From the internal perspective, where no defined system for processing information is defined, either tacitly or explicitly, it could lead to distorted-, lost-, or even wrong information as a result of filtering when processed through the organisations members. With the possible pollution of information, the handling and further decision making for a given scenario could be influenced, resulting in an unexpected and in other cases an undesired outcome.

On the contrary, if the information handling system is standardised and systemized, it could assist in driving the information to the right designated recipients in a predefined formulated manner. Thereby creating a collective understanding of the given information, thus providing each part of the communication trail an undisrupted image of the scenario in place. This could in theory allow decision makers to perform the correct required action for the given scenario.

When viewing the information processing from the external perspective, importance lies with the outgoing information, i.e. what information is leaving the organisation, through what channels and how consolidated it is (Cyert & March, 1992). Consequently, it can be assumed that standardised information systems within the organisation ensures that the information coming in and going out of the organisation is consistent.

It is also important to design and standardise the information handling processes when it comes to the amount of information received. As Cooper (1999) points out, there is a risk of information overload for an organisations employees and customers, when dealing with service intangibility. A manager can be tempted to give too much information in order to deal with mental intangibility, yet too much information can immobilize employees and restrict their decision making during service encounters. Therefore, it is essential to not only standardise the information flow systems, but to systemise and standardise the amount of information both, internal and external.

8.2.2 Information rules vs. heterogeneity

Heterogeneity, just like intangibility, influences all four aspects of the organisational communication. A little overlap of these both service characteristics can be observed - heterogeneity poses challenge for the service to be fully standardised, and the information offering can be different every time service is delivered. Yet, if the service is radically different every time it is delivered, it influences mental intangibility, i.e. a service organisation is unable to create the right perception of the service in its customers' minds.

Moreover, the information handling system should be united and consistent within the whole organisation, to ensure the information channels, through which the information is coming in and going out, can be handled universally when information is coming from variable channels. And with the added complexity of the information itself being variable, the information handling systems would ensure consistency of messages across all channels.

From the internal perspective of the service organisation, the information sources are important – the more heterogeneous the system used to deliver information, the bigger the possibility is for the information to be lost, misunderstood or go unnoticed (Cyert & March, 1992). For the information flow to be constant and uninterrupted it is important for the organisation to limit the amount of information platforms as much as possible, e.g. for two-way communication using emails, and for all other information (regulations, news, learning, tests, etc.) using e.g. the organisations intranet.

Another aspect to the information and heterogeneity of the service, is the properties of the delivered information. More specifically, how the information should be delivered to the various departments within the organisation. In general, there are large amounts of information circulating within the organisation at any given state, but not all of it is relevant and relatable to all members of the organisation (Cyert & March, 1992). For example, budgets and their values can be informative for managers and decision-makers, but is not necessarily informative for janitors, or front-office employees. The challenge, here for the service organisation, is to incorporate the customisation of channels, for whom the given information is relevant within the standardised information handling system. All members will still have the access to all necessary and needed information, but by customizing it and making it more understandable, the organisation reduces the risk of information overload (Cooper & Edgett, 1999).

Lastly, informational homogeneity in a service delivery is important in order to ensure the quality of service and to meet consumer expectations that are already 'staged' through tangible element of the service – i.e. the service-scape.

8.2.3 Information rules vs. inseparability

Another aspect for being prepared for future encounters is inseparability, which refers to the fact that most services are produced while consumed in the same instance. Thus, it is highly important that all information

flows and systems are in place before the service encounter. And that the members have all necessary information for a service provision beforehand, before a costumer encounter takes place. Additionally, in case of need, the front-office employees should easy access the needed information, showing that there is a need for integrated relationships within the organisation (Cooper & Edgett, 1999). By providing the relationships within an organisational structure to be based on transparency, it would enable all its members to freely access each other across the whole organisation if needed. By implementing such a structure, the service provision time would be reduced and the efficiency of service would be achievable, providing means to solve potential issues immediately.
Lastly, by standardising the information flow within the organisation, the managers can prepare their employees for future service encounters. In this case, the right information at the right time, e.g. news and updates from previous shifts delivery to the employee before starting his/her shift, could ensure a more coherent and professional service encounter.

8.2.4 Information rules vs. perishability

Perishability means that service encounter cannot be stored, stocked, resold or returned. Yet, well-organised and standardised information handling systems can help organisations to overcome these obstacles. As discussed in section 6.2.4, services cannot be stored per se but it can be stored in the long-term memory of a consumer. Hence, with a help of a well-designed information system an organisation can 'create' desired memories for the consumer to store. Furthermore, the service firm can store the information about its consumers which could then be accessible to all the right members with a consideration of legal processes of storing and dealing with sensitive information. This information can be stored either in well-designed systems, or in the memories of experienced and long-term employees.
When it comes to inability to return the service, as Sundbo (2002) argues, a service cannot be returned, but it can be re-done or compensated in one way or another. In service organisations with standardised information handling systems, wishing to re-do the service (with considerations of what went wrong last time) would be easier, and with an increased opportunity of achieving better results, as there is a possibility to document the previous bad experience and reconstruct it, quite often in cooperation with the consumer him-/ herself.
To overcome challenges of the service perishability, the service organisation should consider the directions of the information flow as it ensures that needed information is not being lost but stored in the organisational memory (Cyert & March, 1992). It can be argued, that by implementing a possibility for information to flow bottom-up, the organisation ensures that the right information, from consumer perspective, is reaching the responsible decision-makers, but it should also have the ability to flow oppositely, to provide the service providers in the organisation the ability to review prior experiences.

8.3 Plan, goal and record rules vs. the four service characteristics

Organisations planning systems are typically very detailed, and revolves around providing predicting aspects such as sales, costs, profits, losses, and so forth - on the basis of various records and reports. In an ideal world, an organisation would be able to predict everything, however usually it will have to settle with qualified predictions and thus use the plans as goals, schedules, theories and/or precedents to map out future activities for the decision-making processes (Cyert & March, 1992).
As plans are derived from records and reports in service organisations, we have decided to treat these two SOPs collectively in the following.

8.3.1 Plan, goal and record rules vs. intangibility

As discussed in section 6.2.1, services are intangible due to their subjective and dynamic nature, and it can as a result therefore be difficult to plan service encounters, let alone predetermine the outcome of these. Consumer demands are ever-changing, but by using plans as a theory it can enable service organisations to predict changes and variations to these demands (Cyert & March, 1992). The theory can be generated from budgets; something which is not as well developed in service organisations as compared to manufacturing (Shim, Siegel, & Shim, 2012), but are usable as a mean to outline a prediction of the future. As established earlier, even though services may not produce a *tangible* element, it still produces an output: an experience produced by e.g. a front-office employee. Therefore, the major costs in delivering services is typically the personnel; reflected in salary, wages, bonuses and benefits (Shim, Siegel, & Shim, 2012). Due to this, budgeting in service organisation are used to plan the expected use of the personnel and control the personnel effectiveness.
Based on track records, a service organisation can typically create plans based on the preceding years, and thus plan for periods of high demands where extra personnel might be required to ensure fast and high-quality service delivery or the opposite; save on personnel in times of less need.

Being able to predict and plan for the future also means that the service organisation can create goals, which should be both tangible and understandable by the members of the organisation (Cyert & March, 1992). During slow periods, a hotel, for instance, can set up a goal for the front-office employees to try and maximise the revenue per guest checking in by e.g. doing up-sales to bigger rooms or provide discounts to the hotels other facilities, such as the restaurant, to ensure their usage. Budgeting reports can therefore be used as a tangible measurement tool for the organisation to confirm whether the financial goals have been met or not, and whether the personnel are performing effectively and efficiently.

8.3.2 Plan, goal and record rules vs. heterogeneity

In order for the organisation to make proper use of the records and reports for planning activities, these should be kept homogeneous. Records and reports ought to provide context and be beneficial for the organisation, meaning that the same entities should be entered and tracked over time to enable historical references, as to ensure the entities in e.g. a profit and loss statement does not vary from year to year, as it would render that statement impossible for managers to control, measure or even use, to predict the future performance of the organisation. Service organisations should therefore develop an overall budget and/or profit plan for the year and follow this slavishly, making only small adjustments on entities from year to year.

Moreover, creating and following appropriately planned goals for the organisation, can encourage members of the organisation to go forwards in the same direction, thereby producing a more homogeneous and efficient service delivery. Homogeneous goals may also have an effect on individual members or departments in the organisation. If a department has created a precedent for a certain action, but this does not align with the organisational goals, implications can occur (Cyert & March, 1992), i.e. the individual perceptions on e.g. budgeting and its importance, can alter decision-making and thus the final output of the service delivery.

Records and reports, being used for plans and planning, should therefore reflect the overall goal of the organisation, but also take into consideration the effect on individual goals. The same logic applies on the individual, should the organisation decide on a new course of action, on which type of records and reports to collect and use, in order to stay on track for that course, would require the individual to adhere hereon.

Ultimately, heterogeneity can affect the final service delivery both positively and negatively through both plans and planning as well as records and reports. It can therefore be argued, that service organisations should consider carefully how they are defined and consumed, and implement these aspects into the daily operations of the organisation.

8.3.3 Plan, goal and record rules vs. inseparability

As established in section 6.2.3, service provision is simultaneous with its consumption. Additionally, as discussed in section 7.2.3, financial statements and cost reports are means for control and prediction that enables short- and long-term planning (e.g. scheduling, budgeting) within a service organisation. Service delivery consists of many elements, like staff (labour), general resources and various tangible additions to the service and the quality of the service (Bateson, 1979). Inseparability as a service characteristic poses a challenge for the managers on allocation of costs (Cooper & Edgett, 1999; Goffin & Mitchell, 2017; Eiglier & Langeard, 1977), because services consists of the many elements requiring individual allocations. In the service industry, there is not one pre-defined productivity unit, as several units are involved in the creation of one service act. For example, at a hotel a service offering is co-produced by the front-office staff, house-keeping, as well as maintenance and restaurant departments. Since all these departments are involved, it is more complicated for a manager to determine the cost of the service offering per se. Moreover, it is hard to locate inefficiency and a possible waste in the service operation.

Records and reports are the main source for planning, as they give a decision-maker needed past information. This information can be used for the planning for the future, e.g. setting budgets for the upcoming year, or preparing the organisation for future events, such as conferences. Moreover, budgets are the main managerial control tools, which enable decision-makers to evaluate if previously set goals are being reached (Cyert & March, 1992; Glautier & Underdown, 2001). Furthermore, budgets are also used as benchmarks to measure organisational performance (Cyert & March, 1992). As established in chapter 6, services are a complex phenomenon due to its characteristics, and a service manager should therefore measure and control, not only the financial part of the business, but also other aspects of organisational performance, such as employee performance. Because of the difficulties imposed by inseparability of the service, a decision-maker should be very careful in choosing the right variables and performance indicators, as the wrong ones could provide only a partial or disconnected picture of the scenario.

It can therefore be argued, that in order to plan and to control the individual departments, and the whole organisation, reporting and recording processes should be standardised on all levels of the organisation. Enabling the decision-makers to efficiently withdraw needed information for decision-making and planning, thus ensuring the best possible scenario for the service delivery to be operating optimally i.e. with resource availability adjusted and preparation of staff.

8.3.4 Plan, goal and record rules vs. perishability

Unused services cannot be stored for the future use, as they perish in the moment they are not used (Slack, et al., 2015, p. 268). This is another challenge for a manager in regards of budgeting. The budget, however, can be reached in one way or another, e.g. if one unit is not sold as estimated, a division still can upsell another unit and therefore reach the target. If there are suitable indicators and measures in place, a decision-maker can see which parts of the service is underperforming, or which services face some challenges to be sold. Based on this information, a manager can improve the inefficient part(s) of service in order to generate better profits.

Tangible elements of services can be stored for input of the service delivery (Slack, et al., 2015). For example, a food for the restaurant can be purchased, prepared and stored in advance, so all the necessary ingredients will be available, when a guest will order a dish. Another thing that can be stored in some way is manpower in the form of the hired employees (Lovelock & Wright, 2002). These elements can easily be included into budgeting and planned in advance. As an example, a manager can schedule enough employees to satisfy the growing demand for the service delivery.

Moreover, the decision-makers should keep in mind, that the essence of the service is the employees' expertise in the given area (Shim, et al., 2012). The expertise is created by experience and knowledge created and obtained within the service firm. The knowledge and know-how can be collected, stored and distributed within the organisation through records, e.g. unusual past events. Thus, standardised record keeping and sharing would ensure that the new knowledge is kept and shared with all the employees at the organisation.

8.4 Overview of the integration of services with standard operating procedures

To sum up, the standard operating procedures have been summarized in Table 4 below, showing how and where the SOPs correlates with the four service characteristics:

	Task performance rules	Information rules	Plan, goal and record rules
Intangibility	Can influence tangible service-scape in terms of e.g. employee appearance and also the more intangible employee behaviour.	Can drive the right information to the right people, thus avoiding information overload and rather create consistency in service delivery.	Planning for the future means being able to create tangible goals and reports can be used as a tangible measurement tool for performance.
Heterogeneity	Can provide consistency in service delivery, i.e. making the service delivery more homogeneous.	Homogeneous information delivery systems can decrease the possibility of information overload, or lost or warped information.	Records should be kept homogeneous to keep consistency in planning, thus resulting in straightforward goals.
Inseparability	Might not be comprehensive enough for decision-makers to make appropriate decisions on the spot.	Timely delivered information can assist during the inseparable service delivery process.	Can assist in planning service encounters but may not predict the precise outcome, as every consumer has different needs.
Perishability	Can help keep experiences in organisation and transfer knowledge to other members, thereby increase quality of service delivery.	Information should be enabled to flow in all directions, ensuring that knowledge is transferred to the proper members in the organisation.	Records helps keeping knowledge of perished events, thus enabling planning for similar events in the future.

Table 4: *A framework of the standard operating procedures correlation with the service characteristics*

8.5 Summary

Throughout this chapter, the standard operating procedures has been analysed in the light of the four service characteristics.

It has been established, that task performance rules have an effect on the intangible nature of services through the tangible aspects of the service delivery, such as service-scape and employee appearance. By forming a consistent service delivery, task performance rules can manage the heterogeneous aspect of the service delivery. Furthermore, by implementing task performance rules, the service organisation can retain the experiences and knowledge gained by the employees. However, from the aspect of inseparability, these rules might not be comprehensive enough for enabling employees to making fast decisions in complex scenarios.
Information handling rules ensures that the right information is driven to the right people, thereby creating a more reliable service delivery while avoiding information overload. Creating a uniform information handling system, service organisations can limit the amount of corrupted or misplaced information, resulting in a more homogeneous service delivery. Meanwhile, timely information can support front-office employees during the inseparable service delivery. This analysis also established, that information flowing in all directions can help to overcome any issues of perished information which could be created during the service encounter – however this bears the risk of information overload, unless it is systematised.
By means of plans, goal and record rules, tangible performance measures can be developed. Also, consistent record keeping can assist in developing homogeneous goals, resulting in an improved service delivery. From the perspective of inseparability, these rules can assist in planning and preparing for the future service encounters, while perishability can be tackled by keeping the knowledge of past events in the organisational reports and records.

The main theoretical proposals have been wrapped up in a theoretical framework, which is used as the basis for the empirical data analysis in chapter 9.

9 Case analysis, interpretation and presentation of results

This chapter will present an analysis of the primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with the receptionists and their managers at several Scandic hotels. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Scandic implements and interprets standard operating procedures. The theoretical framework established in chapter 8 provides the basis for the analysis.

Before analysing the primary data, it is necessary to consider the research design of this thesis. In this case study, we are investigating a unit within Scandic – the reception – along with its two subunits: receptionists and front-office managers. In the following we will therefore present an analysis and subsequently the findings from each subunit.

9.1 Subunit 1: the receptionists

In the following we will present and analyse our findings from the eight interviews conducted with receptionists from five different Scandic hotels.

9.1.1 Task performance rules at Scandic

SOPs for task performances rules has been introduced in all of Scandic's receptions in which we have conducted interviews at. As mentioned in section 7.2.1, task performance rules consist of specifications on how an employee should accomplish whatever task assigned to him/her (Cyert & March, 1992). At Scandic receptions, task performance rules are first and foremost explicitly written down in what the employees refer to as both "best practice", "procedures" or "routines" for their workplace, and its content covers almost everything from their physical appearance and uniforms, on how to react in case of an emergency. One of the most mentioned task performance rules was the use of *"a checklist, where I have to do everything for the day.*" (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018). The checklists and general procedures for day-to-day operations are performed during every shift and, as it has also been suggested by Cyert and March (1992), provide the reception with "*stability to the* [department] *and direction to activities that are constantly recurring*" (1992, p. 122).
Although we have been unable to get a look at the checklists, we were given the impression through the interviews, that the check-lists are revisable and can be adapted to the individual hotel: "*if we have anything to add to them we just usually add them*" (Jeanett, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

Standardising general day-to-day procedures such as accepting payments and reservations, allows for the consumers to come to expect a certain level of service (Lashley, 1997). Lastly, standardised task performance rules, such as checklists, also enables the organisation to transfer previous learning as the checklists has been developed as needed and therefore contain useable information: "*otherwise you kind of forget all the things you that have to do. Because some of the things are not just obvious of what you have to do.*" (Jeanett, Ringsted, 24 April 2018). It can therefore be argued that, that check-lists are augmenting day-to-day operations.

9.1.2 Task performance rules and intangibility

In one of the four receptions, a distinction was made in the physical appearance of the receptionists. Where the receptionists in the smaller hotels (Glostrup, Ringsted and Hvidovre) were wearing a slightly more casual black and light blue uniform, the receptionists at the noticeable larger hotel (Sydhavnen) wore a more formal black and white uniform. Observing the service-scape of the four hotels, it was noticeable that Scandic Sydhavnen presents itself with formal atmosphere, displaying a minimalistic decor, whereas the other hotels exhibits more "hygge" in their décor. It can therefore be argued that a connection is existing between the interior of the hotel and the physical appearance of the receptionists. This assumption is backed up by Louise who states:

> *"It is very different if you are from a larger hotel and then the smaller hotel, like this. So, here it's more relaxed, it's kind of a small family hotel. So, it is ok for me to take my blazer off, it is ok for me to not wear make-up and just have my hair in a ponytail"* (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

However, during an interview with a receptionist from a larger hotel, it was revealed that even if bigger hotels appear more formal, the perception on the rules on appearance does not alter:

> *"Well, we have the uniforms, that we need to wear, but I think that Scandic is a lot about being yourself. We can be who we are, but within certain limits. It's not allowed to have pink hair or something very crazy, but we are pretty free I would say"* (Mie, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

Let us remind ourselves that in section 8.1.1 we proposed that the uniform and the service-scape of a hotel can enable the intangible services to become more tangible for the consumers (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017). It can therefore be argued, that Scandic has implemented the use of uniforms in the reception to create tangibility for the guests, but simultaneously they have allowed for flexibility in the employee dress-code. By doing so, Scandic can convey their mission statement in which they seek to "*exist for as many people as we possibly* *can. No matter who they are, how they dress, where they're from or where they're going*" (Scandic Hotels Group AB, 2015).

9.1.3 Task performance rules and heterogeneity

As established earlier in section 8.1.1, rules can also control and create predictable behaviour within the organisation as well as assist in determining a course of action (Cyert & March, 1992). In section 8.1.2 we argued, that by standardising task performance rules, employee uncertainty can be reduced, thereby decreasing the heterogeneity of the service delivery, as the employees will know, based on specific rules or standardised tasks, how to solve any given task or situation.

A common view amongst the receptionists was that the rules were neither constricting nor abundant. On the contrary, it was expressed that the rules are contributing positively for most day-to-day procedures:

> *"We have some standard procedures in terms of reservations (...) then you know what you are allowed to do, when you have this type of request"* (Anca, Palads, 25 May 2018).

And;

> *"It's good to have some guidelines in order if you don't know what to do about the specific problem, because the problems can be different"* (Matthias, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

However, the rules and procedures appear to be inadequate in other, more complex, scenarios:

> *"they [the rules and procedures] work more like more like a guideline I would say. Because they don't really help in situations that is more *gestures wildly in the air* like, I still have to make the decisions."* (Jeanett, Ringsted, 24 April 2018)

Likewise, were we informed that the rules are perceived more like guidelines as "*they show how to, like, manage everything. But sometimes it is your own responsibility to take action on some levels*" (Shokoufeh, Glostrup, 12 June 2018). This indicates, that even though the receptions at Scandic has explicitly written rules and procedures, scenarios occur where the receptionists are required to go 'off script'. Let us remind ourselves, that this is also what Goffin & Mitchell (2017) claims is often the case for service organisations – that front office employees are usually required to be more flexible and accommodating, and thus have to stray away from the otherwise explicit rules and procedures.

In section 7.3 we discussed that some service organisations aim for customised service while others aim for a more standardised and consistent service delivery. Scandic appears to be positioned towards the latter category, as it was mentioned that "*there are some rules, as there are guests who are expecting what they going to see here. So, the rules are good.*" (Jaqueline, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018). Based on this, we can argue that Scandic implements a certain level of standardisation in order to provide a consistent service delivery – however, as mentioned earlier in this section, the receptionists experience complex scenarios where the rules and procedures are not comprehensive enough. One receptionist clarifies it is due to the fact that:

> *"It depends a lot on what the problem is, so you cannot write down for this specific problem that we have something to do. When you are in the moment, you need to figure something out."* (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

Another receptionist elaborates that:

> *"There are no SOPs in terms of 'if you have this type of complaint, you need to give that'. You know, there is no such division of small, medium and big complaint. It is up to us to decide how to deal with it"* (Anca, Palads, 25 May 2018).

These two statements indicate that although Scandic may strive for a homogeneous service delivery, the heterogeneous aspect appears to be difficult to manage due to guests having different needs and requirements, which has also been suggested by Goffin & Mitchell (2017) and Lovelock & Gummerson (2004). Adding to this, there is a high risk of errors occurring during human interactions[1].

From the interviews, it became apparent that the receptionists have a high level of trust from their manager and that they are encouraged to solve any complex scenarios on their own volition. When asked how the receptionists solved such scenarios, the replies were unanimous – presenting here a few statements from the receptionists:

> *"It's our own choice. We are very free to do what we feel is best in that situation"* (Mie, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

[1] For an example, see appendix 2, interview transcript L-SG, where Louise is telling a story about a guest being wrongly informed about booking prices by the Scandic booing department.

> *"We have the power and that's what the supervisors say "you can handle it as you want, you are able to give them 500* [in compensation vouchers] *if you want to"* (Janice, Hvidovre, 28 May 2018).

> *"Our manager says, that whatever we think is right in the situation, we should do. Of course, I can ask her, and she will always approve it. In the end, it is my choice"* (Jaqueline, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

These results provided us with a strong indication, that Scandic empowers their employees beyond the task which "*involves employees in making decisions which might traditionally be the domain of management"* (Lashley, 1997, p. 50). It can be argued that this empowerment can influence the level of motivation as it can be reasoned that employees who may experience routine-based working days – such as following a check-list for each shift – are possibly more inclined to follow a strict set of rules in one area of work when they are otherwise experiencing freedom to make complex decisions beyond their normal tasks in other areas of work. By empowering their receptionists, Scandic has the opportunity to maintain a certain level of homogeneity in large areas of the service delivery by motivating the receptionists to follow rules and procedures for other, more standardisable tasks. Additionally, the output of the service delivery can very much depend on whether the receptionist is discontented or not (Goffin & Mitchell, 2017) and the empowerment should therefore provide the receptionists with a certain level of job satisfaction, thus reducing employee dissatisfaction.

9.1.4 Task performance rules and inseparability

As argued in section 8.1.3, due to the inseparable nature of services, scenarios can occur where the receptionists are required to take a course of action unprecedented to anything they have either personally experienced before, or scenarios the organisation have not previously described in e.g. a task procedure. In the previous section, we discovered that the receptionists are empowered to make decisions on their own, however talking about this issue, one receptionist stated that:

> *"I am not so good with the guests, because I don't really know what to compensate with, is it too much or is it too little, or what would the guest be satisfied with. So, it can be difficult sometimes"* (Mie, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

This comment shows, that even though the receptionists are empowered to make decisions, scenarios can occur where the receptionist is unaware on how to proceed. In larger hotels, where they are working more than one employee per shift, such issues appear to be solvable by asking colleagues for assistance in decision-making.

In smaller hotels, fewer people are at work simultaneously and in such instances the receptionists have to lean on their own experiences/judgement for the decision-making:

> *"There might be some times where you're, like, lost and you can't figure out what you should do and you're on your own (...) So, you just have to sort it as you think is good." (Janice, Hvidovre, 28 May 2018).*

9.1.5 Task performance rules and perishability

As discussed in section 6.2.4, services are perishable – meaning that they cannot be saved, stored, resold, or returned. However, this statement has been opposed by Sundbo (2002) who claims that while services are neither storable or saveable, they can be refundable and/or redeemable (Sundbo, 2002). Considering the findings about Scandic's compensation processes in a previous section, we are now aware, that the receptionists are empowered to deal with complex scenarios by making their own decisions on how to solve any given unstandardised issue which, could include scenarios containing reimbursement decisions.

In section 8.1.4 we proposed, that service organisation should include explicit solutions for reimbursements of received services, as is it also suggested by Sundbo (2002). However, a number of issues regarding such procedures has been identified as compensation "*depends how unsatisfied he* [the guest] *is"* (Mie, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018). It can therefore be argued, that the amount of compensation given is dependent on the needs and requirements of the guest. Therefore, writing up explicit solutions for compensation can be problematic, and the result will, once more, depend on the receptionist providing the reimbursement.
Although a service is per definition 'perishable' – however able to be reimbursed – the experience of the service does not immediately perish and the learning achieved from the encounter can be 'stored' in the organisation. Done through either verbal exchanges or written descriptions, the knowledge gained from the perished service encounter can be transferred to other members of the organisation via the task performance rules, which, as discussed earlier, can be revised to fit organisational needs.
The following section will look further into how this can be accomplished.

9.1.6 Information rules at Scandic

Most organisations have a communication system which enables the information to flow in the appropriate directions. Let us remind ourselves, that Cyert and March (1992) proposes four characteristics and rules, defining how the information flows in, out, and around in organisation.

As we are focusing on the reception at Scandic, we will begin with looking at the four characteristics from the receptions point of view, rather than the whole organisation. Meaning that we will look into how the (I) information is provided to the reception, (II) how the information is distributed within the reception, (III) how information is generated internally in the reception, and (IV) how the information is leaving the reception.

I. The information provided to the reception can come from many different channels; managers, Scandic headquarters, other departments in the hotel and from guests: "*I get a lot of e-mails from everyone – my colleagues, my manager, my boss"* (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

   This comment shows that information is delivered to the receptionists via email, i.e. written form. It can be argued that information from guests are picked up by the receptionists themselves, considering the reception functions as the 'heart' of the hotel and guests are disposed to go to the reception with any questions or issues.

II. When the information from the different channels has entered the reception, it is processed by the receptionists:

> *"So, the things I know that are important like right now (…) I keep them close so I can look at them - but everything that's too general about things I don't use them"* (Jeanett, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

> *"I don't think we need everything"* (Mie, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

> *"We all get it* [the information]*, so we all have an overview (…) If it's a really long e-mail about how to deal with some type of invoices, I will just keep it in the back of my mind (…) and I will go back and read it, when I have to deal with the problem"* (Anca, Palads, 25 May 2018).

   From this information it can be argued that the receptionists are filtering in the information, deciding individually how to mentally (or physically) store the information given to them, depending on what they, the receptionists, perceive as important information – as is also suggested by Cyert and March (1992).

III. The information within the reception, i.e. between the receptionists, has a formal procedure consisting of the written and verbal handovers at each shift change, as it was explained: "*I start my daily routine with a sheet what the night shift has for me. It's a small handover – if there is anything I have to be* *aware of for the day"* (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018). It can be argued that Scandic have established this standard procedure in order to avoid losing any important information about guests or specific episodes happening on a day-to-day basis.

IV. Information which flows from the reception and to other departments is typically concerning day-to-day operations and are delivered verbally and informally: "*If we need to reach the housekeeping, we give them call on the phone or, if we need to book a table for the guests in the restaurant, we go to the restaurant and speak with the waiters.*" (Mathias, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).
The preference to verbal information versus written on a daily basis, can be argued to be due to the fast pace in which service organisations typically operate in. Emails about emergent issues may not be read until several hours later whereas verbally handed information can be accepted faster.

9.1.7 Information rules and intangibility

For the receptionists to deliver an appropriate service, the information given to them should be both standardised and consistent. At Scandic, a common view amongst the receptionists were that they considered the information they are getting to be both consistent and easy to understand. When interviewing two of the receptionists, both with an international background (Janice and Anca), we discovered that the language mostly used for Scandic in Denmark is Danish:

> *"It's a little bit of a challenge because most of the communication is in Danish so I'm like, totally... I'm not Danish (...) I speak Danish but I don't write it that much but I have to do it. I hope that I understand it right"* (Janice, Hvidovre, 28 May 2018).

So, while the information is consistent in its language and its delivery method (email), this can cause issues with receptionists not being fluent speakers, resulting in information becoming distorted or even lost. Furthermore, as we also discussed in the previous section, the receptionists appear to be receiving an overload of information:

> *"We get emails as well about everything that's happening; updates, people getting hired in different places and different hotels (...). All the things involving the chain and general I don't use it"* (Jeanett, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

Let us remind ourselves that this is one of the risks which Cooper (1999) points out can occur when service organisation attempts to deal with intangibility in their service delivery and the organisation therefore attempts to provide their employees with *all* the information.

However, when the receptionists are finding it necessary to be filtering so much in the organisational information, whether it is due to the language or the overload, it can potentially damage the professional image, which it can be argued that Scandic is attempting to uphold by keeping their employees updated on everything. To avoid too much filtering from the receptionists and risking that they are missing out on potentially important information, the managers appear to be taking some responsibility in ensuring this will not happen: "*Every week we get an email from the receptionist manager with the highlights of everything.*" (Jeanett, Ringsted, 24 April 2018). Such measures can assist in making certain that the information become less overwhelming and therefore more tangible. This aspect will be discussed further in section 9.2.6.

9.1.8 Information rules and heterogeneity

As discussed in section 8.2.2, the more heterogeneous the systems are for delivering information, the higher the risk of information being lost in the process. As mentioned earlier, one of the main information channels used at Scandic is the email-system, for important information, and verbal information for day-to-day operations.

Let us remind ourselves, that according to Cyert and March (1992) routing rules specify who will communicate with whom about what. From interviews, we became aware that Scandic, currently, have implemented such rule, possibly to ensure that the information reaches the relevant departments *and* is delivered in a homogeneous manner to the receptionists from their department head: "*It* [the information] *comes from the same place. Normally it comes from the chain and then to our reception manager and then to us."* (Jeanett, Ringsted, 24 April 2018). Moreover, Scandic is currently in the process of establishing a platform, which they refer to as FUSE: "*we have this new platform, FUSE, that our manager said we can use it as a forum, where people can write stuff*" *(Anca, Palads, 25 May 2018).* Implementations such as FUSE can reduce the feeling of information overload, as members of the organisation can choose to gather information on their own volition rather than getting "*e-mails every single day*" (Jaqueline, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

9.1.9 Information rules and inseparability

As we discussed in section Information rules vs. inseparability8.2.3, it is important, to provide a proficient and effective service delivery, that all necessary information is in place before the service encounter. During the interviews, we learned that Scandic keeps a folder, or a book, at the reception, describing and explaining the most frequent procedures. However due to the inseparable nature of services, problems will typically be having to be dealt with in the moment they occur. The time pressure for finding an immediate solution can be overwhelming, as explained by one of the receptionists:

> *"Well, there might be some times where you're, like, lost and you can't figure out what you should do and you're on your own. So, then there's this file with the standard operating procedures that we can go and look at, but you are so stressed sometimes that you have no time to go and look for it and try to find the case so you can figure it out. So, you just have to sort it as you think is good"* (Janice, Hvidovre, 28 May 2018).

As established earlier, at other, larger, hotels they have the benefit of being more than one colleague during a shift, meaning that when inseparability causes time duress, situations can be solved without the receptionist necessarily having to make the decisions alone:

> *"I think it is really great that we work in teams, that there are always at least 2 during the shift, so if I'm really 'losing it', if I'm not that confident, and there is a bit too long response time from my side, then my colleagues might come and help me"* (Anca, Palads, 25 May 2018).

This could indicate, that even though Scandic has implemented an information system, in terms of a physical manual containing standard operating procedures, the inseparable nature of services can cause scenarios where the receptionists are unable to spend the time needed to go through such and they have to base their decisions on e.g. experience.

9.1.10 Information rules and perishability

In reference to earlier discussion, we have established that the service delivery cannot always be standardised – especially in complex scenarios. In such cases in can be of high value to somehow store the incident in the organisation in order for others to learn from it and thereby increase their own experiences to deal with similar scenarios in the future. At Scandic, they have regular staff meetings where the receptionists can share experiences from which their colleagues could learn:

> *"We talk when there are meetings (…) and then you can talk about the situation – how did you handle it (…). We are trying to use and discuss them in the context. We are discussing in the meetings and trying to explain other employees your experiences"* (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

However, it can be argued that holding onto the memory of a perishable service encounter until the next staff meeting, could present a challenge to even the most memorious of us – and thus the opportunity of learning from an informative encounter can be forever lost.
Let us remind ourselves, that in section 8.2.4, it was proposed that a service organisation should consider the direction of the information flow in order to avoid loss of information when the service delivery has perished. At Scandic the information flows as follows:

> *"We do give the information, I give the information for the boss and the manager. If you get some kind of information you think is important for everyone to know, then you use an e-mail. So, it doesn't have to be bosses who send the e-mails. Everyone can do it. This is very flat organisation"* (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

By ensuring that the information is flowing in both directions, as Cyert and March (1992) has also discussed, the perishability challenge can be addressed as the required information has a higher chance of reaching the proper decision makers.

9.1.11 Plan, goal and record rules at Scandic

Let us reminds ourselves, that Cyert and March (1992) argued, that organisations keep records and reports for two main purposes: control and prediction (Cyert & March, 1992). From the information collected during the interviews, it did not appear that the front-office employees knew much of the financial statement or cost reports. As one receptionist states:

> *"I think when you are on these under-departments, it's not strategic that way, they don't tell you how to do it* [reach the organisational goals]*, but for example, they try to motivate us by having these little competitions"* (Shokoufeh, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

From this comment it can be deducted, that Scandic is mainly 'controlling' its front-office employees to reach organisational numbers and goals through organisational competitions.

9.1.12 Plan, goal and record rules and intangibility

As it has been established, that while services do not produce a tangible element, it does still produce an output, i.e. an experience. As discussed in section 8.3.1, the major cost in delivering experiences lies with the personnel and the organisation can should create plan the use of the personnel. Based on the interview data, it can be argued that the receptionists neither feel very controlled nor do they feel decidedly paced to reach organisational goals. However, they are all aware that "*they [Scandic] want to earn money here *laughs* so that's why you want to do the upselling"* (Janice, Hvidovre, 28 May 2018). While the upselling is a big and important part of the receptionist's day-to-day operations, creating excellent service deliveries is another. In order to create more tangible goals for the service delivery, Scandic has introduced another concept:

> *"We have four values from which we are operating from – we have to be pro, be bold, be caring and be you"* (Jaqueline, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

Another receptionist elaborates further:

> *"So, you have to, of course, be you, but still be pro and be bold and everything. So, you have to do what you can to give world class service; to do what you can to make this hotel better"* (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

The goals created for the receptionists should be tangible and understandable, but based on the data collected from the interviews, it can be argued that the four values operate more like a 'soft' measure and mainly act as a guideline on organisational behaviour: "*The values are floating somewhere. But definitely embrace what you should do.*" (Janice, Hvidovre, 28 May 2018).
Similarly, another receptionist is stating that:

> *"We talk when there are meetings; then we use them* [the values] *a lot. And then you can come with some examples when you were bold and pro, and then you can talk about the situation – how did you handle it, and then tell if I would be a pro, how would I react then"* (Louise, 12 June 2018).

From these comments it can be argued that Scandic is articulating these four values in several scenarios in order to make the goals for the service delivery more tangible.

9.1.13 Plan, goal and record rules and heterogeneity

Referring back to section 8.3.2, we discussed how heterogeneity can affect the final service delivery if the goals of the organisation does not take into consideration individual goals of the employees and vice versa. As discussed in the previous section, Scandic employs competitions as a mean to achieve the organisational goals. However, the front-office managers do also set individual goals in collaboration with the receptionists, ensuring that the receptionists do their best to up-sell, but by collaborating on the goal setting, it ensures that the goals are attainable: *"In the last meeting with my manager I also talked about it with my manager and I lowered a bit my target, so I won't get so stressed about it"* (Anca, Palads, 25 May 2018).

Doing this, the management at Scandic can ensure that the goals are not seen too high, increasing the risk of employees losing motivation if they cannot reach the goals.
Specifying the steps to be taken to accomplish the goals can be time-specific but otherwise not necessarily fixed in advance. This appears to be the case at Scandic, where the goals are rolled out on a monthly basis but where the steps to reach the goals are more or less unspecified:

> *"It's up to us to do what we think is working. So, no, we don't have a manuscript of how to reach those goals. Normally, when we check people in, we ask are they members of Scandic Friends program"* (Jaqueline, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

The word of interest here is 'normally' as this statement indicates, that the receptionists may not believe they have explicit steps on how to accomplish individual or organisational goals. However, it can be argued that the receptionists perform a procedure which has created a more or less homogeneous precedent for certain actions, which Cyert and March (1992) also suggest can happen. Additionally, the four values, as we discussed earlier, acts not only as a guidance on work method but also as an enquiry about working within these 'frames' of character traits in order to provide a more homogeneous service delivery.

9.1.14 Plan, goal and record rules and inseparability

Recapping section 8.3.3, we discussed that due to the difficulties imposed by the inseparability of the service, the service provider should make certain to choose the proper performance indicators of the front-office employees. According to one of the receptionists, the four values which Scandic has implemented, are also used to evaluate personal performance:

> *"We also have this yearly meeting with the reception manager, where we are also evaluated how we perform based on these values"* (Anca, Palads, 25 May 2018).

Due to the fact that the service delivery cannot be separated from the production and consumption, the four values, albeit 'soft' and therefore difficult to measure, can be an important tool to control and evaluate *how* the service is being delivered.
In addition to being evaluated on the four values, Scandic also sets more specific goals together with their front-office employees: "*Every year we set a goal, so in these 12 month we have to try to reach that goal, and then we talk about new goals and how to improve again*" (Shokoufeh, Glostrup, 12 June 2018). These concrete

goals can make it simpler for management to evaluate performances if the increased level of performance shows a direct impact on organisational performance. However, due to service organisations primarily dealing with experiences where the production and consumption are inseparable, control and evaluation of goals are not being reported during the service encounter, but rather discussed later.

9.1.15 Plan, goal and record rules and perishability

Unused services, such as a hotel room, cannot be stored for future sale, and the possible revenue from this room is forever lost. In order to achieve budget goals, up-sales, as also discussed earlier, is frequently used as a strategy to reach the sales goals, however this is not always an option:

> *"Sometimes you can have shifts where we have only pre-paid reservations and they don't want to pay for upgrades, or they are all Scandic members and you cannot make them anything new"* (Anca, Palads, 25 May 2018).

In such instances the opportunity for increased revenue has perished forever. While the services perish after use, the knowledge accumulated during the service encounter does not have to. As we discussed in section 8.3.4, knowledge can be collected, stored and distributed in records or reports if appropriate systems have been set up for such. At Scandic, the information sharing on service encounters appears to be mainly verbal and can take place at meetings: "*We are discussing in the meetings and trying to explain other employees your experiences.*" (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018). However, it the data indicates that there is also continuous training going on with the receptionists and that the knowledge sharing is not strictly limited to meetings:

> *"They are good at teaching: 'you did it your way, but there is another way, so next time try this instead'. So, they do watch over your back." (Louise, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).*

Based on this it can be argued that although the service perishes at the moment of consumption, Scandic makes space and time to learn from previous experiences in order to plan and improve the service delivery.

9.2 Subunit 2: the front-office managers

In the following we will present and analyse our findings from the four interviews conducted with the front-office managers, hereinafter referred to as just 'managers', from three different Scandic hotels.

9.2.1 Task Performance Rules at Scandic

Based on the collected data from the interviews with managers, it can be deduced, that Scandic hotels have their own developed set of procedures and rules, which are applicable to all of their hotels:

> *"Scandic has a very clear book on how to do things and everyone gets this manual when they are hired at Scandic. So Scandic wants you to be similar if you check into this hotel or if you check into another Scandic – the experience is supposed to be the same"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

Also, the manager from Scandic Ringsted states that: "*Scandic is really good at describing procedures and how the problems should be solved*" (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018). As the main sources of these rules and procedures, managers named 'staff handbook' and 'best practice'. This shows that Scandic has designated set of rules and procedures.

9.2.2 Task performance rules and intangibility

As previously established, the rules and standard operating procedures are important, as they inform the members on how things are done in an organisation (Cyert & March, 1992). When asked to describe their daily routines, one manager answered: "*that is one of the more difficult questions I've ever had*" (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018). Another manager added: "*that's difficult, because not every day is the same*" (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018). Tasks varies from checking in on the receptionists, manage bookings, answer reviews and gaining a general overview of the day. These results suggest that the managerial tasks are highly diverse.

In section 8.1.1 we argued that the more explicit are task performance rules, the less intangible the service delivery becomes. However, when it comes to the managers daily routines and tasks, this is not the case. The empirical data showed that managerial tasks are not standardisable, as one of the main tasks for the managers is to provide support for the receptionists in the service delivery.

Since the daily tasks are varying in nature, it was interesting to investigate managers' attitude towards rules and operating procedures. A common attitude amongst the managers was that they are all sharing a positive opinion about the rules and the SOPs. One of the respondents even exclaimed: *"I love them"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May, 2018). It could be argued that due to this positive attitude, managers do not consider the rules constricting; on the contrary, the rules are perceived as guidelines on how to do things the right way[2]. It can therefore be argued that the rules are up to interpretation by its users and can even be broken if required. Moreover, the managers pointed out that some of the rules, like appearance, are up to the receptionist to interpret, but at Scandic the interpretation is facilitated by the managers, i.e. managers are explaining and discussing the meaning of the different rules together with the receptionists[3].

Another aspect of dealing with intangibility is to hire and train the right employees. This is due to the intangible nature of the service, i.e. the service delivery cannot be described nor defined in detail. The service delivery can only be 'framed' but it is up to the individual employee to act in accordance with it. In section 8.1.1 the Emirates example was presented on how hiring and training the right employees can reduce the intangibility of the service delivery as via training, the service organisation can communicate values and expectations to the employee; i.e. the organisation explains how 'things are done in this particular organisation'. By hiring specific personality types, organisations can assure that its values and most of the procedures are considered as being common sense for the new employee. Training existing employees assures the knowledge sharing within the organisation (Cyert & March, 1992).
In our researched Scandic reception departments, we discovered that even though Scandic as an organisation has its own e-learning platform for employees (FUSE), each manager also has their own methods for hiring and training new employees. Some of the managers, are also hiring based on the personality of the applicant[4].

9.2.3 Task Performance Rules and heterogeneity

When it comes to heterogeneity, in section 8.1.2 we argued that by allowing the receptionists discretion in order to provide more customized service, the uncertainty and heterogeneity of the service will be increased. During the interviews, some managers pointed out the unique nature of services that creates the need for the receptionist to *'break the rules'*, as explained by this statement:

> *"If you know them* [rules] *well you know WHEN it is ok to go outside the lines. (..) In some situations with the guests, you have to be a little creative or casual about some things"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

This means that managers accept that their receptionists are ignoring or avoiding some rules, as long as the guests are happy. This indicates that in order to overcome heterogeneity, rules do not always help, as sometimes employees and managers simply does not follow them due to specific reasons. It also shows, that the

[2] See appendix 2, interview transcript I-SR & S-SG
[3] See appendix 2, interview transcript I-SR
[4]See appendix 2, interview transcript S-SG

organisation has chosen to use elements of standardisation, while still allowing the receptionists to be flexible and to deliver customized service to some of their customers.

Another way to tackle the heterogeneity of the service, is the motivation of employees to actually follow the rules set by the service organisation. The empirical data showed, that all interviewed managers are highly empowering their receptionists. During the interviews, the high trust that managers have in their employees was detected. As one manager states:

> *"I encourage them to be themselves and I encouraged them to be able to take the control, meaning that they need to make decision by themselves and I support them in whatever decision they make (...) Because they need to have the safety and security in that I am behind them"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

Similar attitude was exhibited by Camilla:

> *"They know that I will never shout at them, I mean it should really be crazy before I get upset with them, because I have told them that they have full flexibility"* (Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

Also, Ida's receptionists know *"that I will back them up if there are any problems, or if they will take the decision, I will back them up toward the guest"*. (Ringsted, 24 April 2018).
From these answers, it can be derived that Scandic have a culture of high trust of their employees, as well as culture of empowering the receptionists. It also shows that the micro climate within the organisation is important, as good environment motivates the employees to be a part of the organisation, and therefore reduces heterogeneity.
A display of the high trust in their employees were the answers to the question: "*Do you believe that your employees are following the rules*?". All of the managers had a confirming response to this question. Moreover, they were convinced that if the employees where skipping some rules, they were doing that with good reason: "*Sometimes you skip things, you know it's wrong, but you do it to provide a better service"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018) and *"If they* [the receptionists] *don't follow them* [rules]*, I think, they have a very good reason for not following them, because sometimes we cannot put everything in the box"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

The receptionists are the ones dealing with guests on a daily basis and in order to deliver the service and at the same time and satisfy the needs of the guests, they need the support, trust and empowerment from their managers. Otherwise the receptionists can exhibit uncertainty during the service delivery process, which might create an undesired heterogeneous service delivery.

9.2.4 Task performance rules and inseparability

As defined in the section 6.2.3, inseparability of the service means that the consumption and production of the service is simultaneous and they cannot be separated from each other. Based on this premise we proposed in section 8.1.3, that an absence of rules and procedures on how to deal with complex scenarios can leave the front-office employees unable to make appropriate decisions.

In order to investigate how our case company deals with the challenge of inseparability, we studied the answers to the questions regarding complaint management and how they are dealing with such. All of the managers unanimously stated, that the most important thing is not allowing the guest to leave the hotel feeling unhappy. While the guest is at the hotel, it is easier to fix the problem and to make the guest happy again. During the interviews, one of the managers revealed that: "*If they go home they are usually more unsatisfied*" (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018). Two discrete methods of dealing with complaint management emerged from the interviews. The first method, empowerment and trust in the employees, was described in the above-mentioned section. Importance of trust and empowerment to make their own decisions stems from the inseparable nature of service delivery. Unforeseen and complicated scenarios per se can be very stressful, therefore with their trust, managers try to create a calm environment where their receptionists can do their best to create a good service delivery.

Second method is listening and learning from unsatisfied guests. There are a lot to learn from complaints and verbally expressed needs of unsatisfied guests, as this information can be used to improve the experience for other guests. As put by the manager at Glostrup:

> *"We handle them with interest (…) if they complain about that the chairs in the rooms are not wide enough, if they are big people, so when they check-in and we see that they are big people – we put them in the rooms with bigger chairs."* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

This type of information is essential for a service organisation, as it can be obtained mostly through the encounter between receptionist and consumer. Additionally, for the organisation this is essential information that can be used in order to improve the service delivery.

These findings emphasise the importance of the receptionists' interpersonal skills, as well as knowledge of the rules and procedures in order to deal with the issue while the guests are at the hotel. It can therefore be argued, that it is close to impossible to create rules and procedures for every single possible scenario. The employees of a service organisation should be granted access to additional written knowledge and/or have access to more knowledgeable colleagues or managers. It also emphasises the need for well-designed and standardised internal information channels, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

9.2.5 Task performance rules and perishability

A service offering cannot be stored and returned. Yet, as argued in section 6.2.4, the memories of the service and its experiences can be stored in the memories of the customers. Furthermore, even though service offering cannot be returned, it can be compensated in one way or another (Sundbo, 2002). It can be argued that the memory of the experience can be influenced by compensation rules.
Therefore, it was interesting to investigate how the managers are dealing with complaints and compensations. From the empirical data gathered at our case company, we observed two ways of people complaining: either at the hotel during their stay or by leaving a bad review after returning home. Consequently, Scandic have some initiatives and policies, when it comes to dealing with the complaints and compensations. Dealing with the online reviews and complaints is one of the managerial tasks, and Scandic has specific rules on how to deal with them: *"we have this rule that the* [reviews] *are graded on TripAdvisor on how bad they are, and if they are the worst, it is the General mManager who answers them and I answer all the rest"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June, 2018).
However, when dealing with in-house complaints, Scandic has *some* compensation initiatives, but not a specific set of rules and procedures: "*we don't really have any rules for that but we usually do it by trusting our guts"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018). It can be argued that specific compensation rules cannot be established due to guests having different needs and requirements. This argument is backed up by a manager who states that:

> *"The guest pay for different things, the guest wants different things. (…) it is difficult and different, so you can't put it down. (…) Many new people ask this and they would really love a standard, but (…) it is impossible, it is simply impossible"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

Thus, managers are trying to empower and train their receptionists to evaluate and self-assess the situation. Moreover, in Scandic all of the receptionists have the power to provide compensation to a guest. The data revealed that a compensation policy exist, yet there are no unambiguous rules on how to deal with compensation. It is up to the receptionists and their 'gut feeling' to evaluate the size and nature of the problem.

It is not only for the unsatisfied costumers, to whom Scandic is trying to create nice and positive memories about their stay at the hotel; it is for all of the guests. Annie points out:

> *"Our key point is to create a great hotel experiences for the guest"* (Annie, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

The data revealed that this is accomplished by encouraging and empowering employees to go 'above and beyond'. Each manager has their own methods of doing so, for example by giving compliments and presents to the praised receptionist.

9.2.6 Information handling rules at Scandic

As examined in section 7.2.2, each organisation has its own communication system. Since the focus in this study is on the receptions at Scandic hotels, the information system will be analysed through these lenses: (I) how and what information is provided to the managers, (II) how the managers are selecting and filtering the information, (III) how the managers are distributing the information within the reception and (IV) how the managers are distributing information outside of their own reception department.

I. Based on the gathered data, the main sources of information for the managers are (1) Scandic head-quarters or regional head-offices, (2) their own managers – i.e. general manager of the hotel, (3) from their colleagues from other Scandic hotels, (4) the other department managers and (5) Scandic's own internal platform - FUSE.
   When it comes to day-to-day operations, some of the hotels are using their booking systems log-book to leave an information for other colleagues. Others are passing on information in either written form or verbally. When managers were asked to describe the information flow in the company, all of the managers said that in general the information is flowing in all the directions (not only vertically, but also horizontally), however the biggest amount of information is passed top – down.

II. Based on the information flow model presented in section 7.2.2, it is important to consider how the information receiver – in this case managers – is dealing with the received information. Through the interviews, it was revealed that all managers are filtering and organising received information, as they also must distribute the information further on to the receptionists:

> *"But the one who has the information decides where it is going. But it's like a rule in Scandic, that you don't send out information to everyone. You have to think about your mail policy so that you're a bit critical about what you send out because you*

> *get a lot of e-mails when you are a big corporation. And a lot of it is not for you anyway…"* (Annie, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

The information filtering is particularly relevant to the smaller hotels. During the interviews, the managers of Ringsted and Glostrup pointed out that not all of the information they receive is relevant to the smaller hotels:

> *"If it* [information] *is not necessary (…) I don't want to fill up their* [the receptionists] *e-mails with unnecessary e-mails. And I even don't put it in my own mind because I have enough"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

Also, Ida from Ringsted states that "*we are different hotels and we have different guests. So, not all information is necessary for us"* (24 April 2018).
From this it can be argued that Scandic has developed information filters, so the right information can reach the right people. Yet, it might not be completely efficient, as managers have pointed out the huge amount of incoming information.

III. Scandic Hotels allows their front-office managers to decide on the channels how they will distribute the information to their department. Overall, depending on the hotel, there are two types of how the information is distributed by managers to the receptionists: either verbally or through e-mails. The information considered as very important and necessary for the daily operations, is always e-mailed. Then it is up to the receptionists to save – or memorise – and use the information when needed.
Even though the managers are trying to send out e-mails on a regular basis, it is hard to keep up with the schedule because of the frequency of incoming information: *"there have also been weeks where I haven't sent any* [e-mails]*, none in one week and then 5 – 6 in another week"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018). As pointed out by one of the managers, in the future, Scandic is planning to cut down the amount of sent e-mails, and instead using FUSE as the information sharing platform: *"in the future they are not supposed to send an e-mail. We are supposed to go in every day* [on FUSE] *to see if there are any new things."* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).
In all of the examined hotels, there are staff meetings, hotel kick-off meetings, as well as meetings aimed only for those working in the reception. The frequency of the meetings varies from one hotel to another. During these meetings managers are sharing different kind of information with their personnel – news, budgets and sales numbers etc. Furthermore, they are discussing the Scandic values and how they are implemented in the service delivery. It can be argued that these meetings are not only a platform of sharing information, but also as a place to share knowledge with other colleagues.

IV. Besides the above-mentioned communication channels within the reception, managers have mentioned an e-mail group for all Scandic's front-office managers, where they can ask each other questions and advice on how to solve specific issues.

9.2.7 Information handling rules and intangibility

As established in section 8.2.1, the management can be attracted to giving too much information to their employees, and too much information can overwhelm, demobilise and limit decision making in employees (Cooper & Edgett, 1999). This leads to limitations of tacking the service intangibility.
All of the managers agreed that the information they are receiving is consistent and understandable. Only one of the managers pointed out the possible issues with the language barriers: *"There's a lot of Swedes working here (including me) (...) and some Danes say that they don't understand them* [the Swedes]*"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018). It can therefore be argued that even though each organisation has its own language requirements, there is still a big risk for the information in an international organisation to be 'lost in translation', as not all of the employees are native Danish speakers and therefore, there are more space for miscommunication. Another paradox is the amount of the given messages. Therefore, there is a need for the managers to filter the information that is provided to the receptionists. From this it can be derived, that even though Scandic has some standardised information channels, the front-office employees are still risking information overload:

> *"I want the receptionist to have all the information but again you also have to be careful you don't give them overload."* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

The information overload is applicable not only towards the receptionists, but also towards mangers. For example, to the answer *"Do you use all the information sent to you",* the managers replied:

> *"No… No. (...) It's different because on one side you want to know everything, to feel 'best dressed' but sometimes I'm just sort of sitting like, 'delete', 'delete', 'delete'"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

And:

> *"The right thing would be to say 'yes' but I can't keep up with everything (...) We don't even experience half of these things because we're so small"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

9.2.8 Information and heterogeneity

As established earlier, Scandic's main information channels are their e-mail system, meetings (verbal communication) and their own IT-platform FUSE. Even though managers are sending all the important information to their employees via e-mail, it is still up to the employees to sort, save and memorise all the information:

> *"Sometimes (…) they come and ask me things, and then I say "but I just sent you an email about that last week" and they reply "oh but I don't remember.""* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

Also, when it comes to day-to-day operational information, it was discovered that different approaches exist on how information is delivered to other receptionists. The interesting thing is, if we look into individual hotels, then this information delivery can be considered homogeneous – but if we compare the receptions as an entity without separating the hotels, then the information delivery system can be considered heterogeneous. Meaning that, if one takes an individual Scandic hotel, e.g. Scandic Sydhavnen, and analyse their information system, it can be argued that their information system is standardised and homogeneous, as the same information flows through the same channels over and over again. On the other hand, if taking all the interviewed receptions combined as an entity, one will notice that each reception has different information flow channels, and therefore the information systems in this context are heterogeneous. This leads to an interesting finding that even though the service organisation will try to standardise the information systems, each subsidiary most likely will at some point in time create their own ways of handling information.

According to the managers, all the standard operating procedures and rules are written down and available to their employees either in e-mails, manuals or on FUSE. Yet, one of the managers identified an issue of how misleading information is created within her reception:

> *"Someone is coming from another hotel who then maybe has a little bit different way of doing things and then suddenly I hear "this is the way we do it" and I'm like "no, this is for sure not that way we are doing it" (…) And for me, it can be a little strange because they have these things written down, how you do it"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

From this discovery it can be argued that there is a danger of the employees creating their own rules and procedures, which does not necessarily fit with the general organisational rules and goals. This can be a serious obstacle for the creation of a homogeneous service delivery.

During the interviews, it was also learned that Scandic is planning to integrate all of the communications in their IT platform FUSE. Judging by the empirical data, the system is already accessible to the users:

> *"We have a program in Scandic called FUSE where everything is in. You can find everything there; your learning plans, your ... everything. There is not something which you cannot find in there"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

Deducing from the interviews, FUSE, with time, will be the source of information to all employees at Scandic. Scandic are in the process of homogenising the information delivery and accessibility, however, it is too early to evaluate how this type of information platform is affecting the service delivery at Scandic, as it has not been fully implemented yet.

9.2.9 Information and inseparability

All of the managers unitedly replied that they do receive all the information that is necessary for their jobs, but one of the managers pointed out that:

> *"Sometimes there is the question "do you get it in time". I think we got the information about the training to the data law yesterday and everyone has to have taken it by Friday"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

From this it can be argued that even though an organisation, such as Scandic, is able to design the information flow and also manage all information channels, there is yet a question of whether the information is delivered on time.

9.2.10 Information and perishability

Let us remind ourselves that a well-thought out information flow ensures the right information getting to the right people at the time of need during the service delivery.
As described earlier, the information flow at Scandic flows in all directions. Some of the information at Scandic is sent top – down, i.e. some of the information is send from the top managers down the hierarchical levels. Other information is sent out directly to everyone working at the hotel. Even though some of the information is mostly flowing downwards, there is also possibility for it to flow upwards:

> *"They listen to what I say and sometimes I've been told "forget it, shut up and do what I ask you" and sometimes they have told me "you're right" and sometimes I've*

> *been told "okay, I see what you mean but it is not possible" due to maybe a law I didn't know about"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

Also, other managers point out the possibility to access any person within the entire organisation: "*we have access to everyone's e-mails, so it is not difficult to do."* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).
Since Scandic is a big, international organisation it means that information flows also horizontally between the hotels and the departments. Also, when focusing on individual hotels, the information is flowing in both directions: vertically (e.g. through the general hotel meetings taking place every quarter with GM and all of the departments[5]) and horizontally (mostly between, and in the departments).

Even though the service cannot be stored, all the knowledge and experience of service delivery can arguably be stored in the organisational memory. As the interviews revealed, as a mean for storing and sharing the knowledge Scandic is using 'best practice' manuals: *"you have from A to Z on how to do things"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018). Other hotels, like Ringsted, have created their own system how to share employee experience and knowledge by creating their own 'encyclopaedia':

> *"We can't remember everything, so here in Ringsted we have like an encyclopaedia where we write everything in; from 'what do you do when people bring dogs' or 'how do we do with pre-payment'"* (Annie, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

9.2.11 Plan, goal and record rules at Scandic

As established in section 7.2.3 organisations are using records- and report- keeping mainly for two purposes: to control and to predict, and Scandic is not an exception. Based on the empirical data, it is evident that the managers are not the ones who are creating the organisational goals. The managers are receiving finished budgets, which they must then meet and they are also the ones who are translating and communicating the budgets to the receptionists. The interviews suggested that the managers are using these budgets mostly for controlling sales and up-sales.

Budget creation and approval is very hierarchical and complex process:

> *"GM* [the General Manager] *makes our goals, in Scandic we call them budgets, with our controller, looking also to the last year's budgets and how to make them (…)*

[5] See appendix 2, interview transcript I-SR

> *When GM and controller have made the budget, they are discussing it with our district manager and financial team, and then they have a meeting and present the budget(..) It goes on until the budget is approved"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

Despite the long and complex process of budget approval, there is a practice to change the already established budget plans 'on the go', as Ida explained:

> *"I keep track how is it going, but it keeps changing over the month. (...) If* [the GM] *thinks that we don't have that much time to fulfil the budget/ target, maybe he can try to lower his expectations"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

When it comes to the report-keeping, Scandic has an automated report system – all of the reports are accessible and available on their booking system 'Scorpio': *"I don't have to do anything, the system does it all"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

9.2.12 Plan, goal and record rules and intangibility

Earlier it was established that despite the absence of tangible elements, services can still procure an output. Our investigation has led us to the finding, that Scandic hotels are recognizing this phenomenon and use the budgets to control and measure personnel's effectiveness. At Scandic two main types of employee performance measures exist: (1) employee evaluation meetings and (2) individual employee sales targets.

(1) Employee evaluation meetings are taking place once a year. During these meetings, the employees are encouraged to create personal goals and their progress is evaluated by both the receptionist and the manager:

> *"Goals are created both ways - either manager have to come up with something, or employee can choose [the goals] him/ herself. The goals can be a lot of things (….) it could be both personal or professional. We decide it together - we come with some suggestions and then we discuss it"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

An additional measure which the receptionists are evaluated upon, is the four Scandic values: "*we rate them through our values"*. (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018). Another manager explains the process of measuring receptionist's performance:

> *"Also, we have our values, which we also look at - ok, are you bold or are you not bold. You rate yourself, and then I rate you as well and then we can find some understanding and beginning of a discussion"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

It can therefore be argued that the annual employee evaluation meeting can be considered as employee development program.

(2) Based on our empirical data, Scandic organise sales competitions across all of the hotels:

> *"Everything headquarters comes with is a competition around all the Scandic hotels, and of course you want a hotel to be at least in the top three"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

A common finding across all investigated hotels was that even though collective competitions are announced by the headquarters, the individual managers are still organising their own, local competitions. The reason for this is to motivate and engage their receptionists, as one manager clarifies:

> *"But sometimes that goal can be too big. It has to be something you can see, you can obtain (...). But let's be honest, some of them* [the receptionists] *sucks at it [upselling]. But to make sure that they also feel like a part of it, so they don't give up, (...), we make sure that there is also a common goal"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

Another manager adds:

> *"Sometimes we get this note from the headquarters that we need (...) more Scandic Friends members (...). It is too big to grasp for only my employees in the reception, so I make it smaller and say "if you get 100 Scandic Friends you get a big gift" or something. You can win something. Then everybody is a little bit keener on winning. It is a way of putting some positive energy into it"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

This observation shows that in order to reach the overall goals set for the hotel, the managers create more attainable goals for their employees. By creating achievable and simple goals for each individual receptionist, the managers are assuring that the hotel will reach previously set financial goals. Through this initiative, the goals are more tangible, and therefore the employees should feel more motivated to reach them.

9.2.13 Plan, goal and record rules and heterogeneity

As established in section 8.3.2, reports and records should reflect the overall goal of the organisation, while considering the individual goals. As discussed in the previous chapter, the managers are dealing with the organisational goals, making them more attainable for the receptionists. This endeavour is not only tackling the issue of intangibility, but also the issue of heterogeneity of service. An interesting discovery is that besides financial goals and budgets, Scandic uses its four values as a tool to create a homogeneous service delivery, as one of the managers explains:

> *"We have to follow our values and these kind of things* [budgets]*, so everyone who comes to Scandic can feel that we live the values"* (Camilla, Sydhavnen, 23 May 2018).

This finding was unexpected and suggests that heterogeneity can be tackled by not only synchronized financial measures and budgets, but also by 'soft tools' such as values, vision and mission of the company. As one of the manager's states:

> *"Scandic values (...) are a good start-up for how we deal with things"* (Annie, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

From the interviews we discovered, that even though Scandic headquarters provides suggestions for interpretation on the meaning of the values, there is still space for the employees to interpret the values in their own way[6]. Ida explains:

> *"They* [Scandic] *are not really saying that you are wrong in your perception, so it depends more on the person who does it* [i.e. interprets the values]*"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

From this finding it can be argued that when it comes to heterogeneity, it is not only the financial measures, goals and budgets that create homogeneity within the organisation and its service delivery. Well-defined and implemented values, mission and vision, can also be a powerful tool to tackle heterogeneity.

[6] See appendix 2, interview transcript C-SS

9.2.14 Plan, goal and record rules and inseparability

Budgets were not particularly prominent in the interview data, as they usually are sensitive information within the organisation. Yet, we did manage to get some of the main performance measures Scandic is monitoring in their receptions: (1) average room-nights, (2) average room rates, (3) total revenue of the rooms and (4) number of conferences. Along these financial measures, Scandic also measures individual employee performance, as well as guest satisfaction. According to interviewees, these are variables that are measured gradually over the years[7].

The employee performance is evaluated through employee evaluation meetings discussed in the previous section, as well as their service and sales performance. These performance measures are used to measure the progress of the receptionist over time.

The four Scandic values recurred throughout the collected data. Three out of four managers, mentioned these values throughout the interviews, especially when they were asked about goals and performance measurements, as it has also been discussed in section 8.3.3.

9.2.15 Plan, goal and record rules and perishability

As argued in section 6.2.4, services cannot be stored and sold later on. Yet, the budget should be met by upselling or offering additional service or products. Therefore, we proposed in section 8.3.4 that with the right indicators and measures, a decision-maker can see the inefficient and unprofitable aspects of the service and use this information in order to change them. As a service organisation, Scandic is dependable on their guests, who are an enormously influence on the budgets. As one interviewee put it:

> *"We are dependent on guests and if the guest doesn't come to the hotel, it goes out on our budget and there is nothing we can do (…)"* (Stine, Glostrup, 12 June 2018).

Amongst all of the investigated receptions, the most popular tool to reach the budget is upselling. We discovered that it can be challenge in some of the receptions. As a front-office manager from a small Scandic hotel says: *"(…) here we are very limited, because we don't have so many rooms – few 'superiors' and one 'suite'."* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018). This demonstrates that up-sale can be a challenge if all of the rooms are almost the same and if there are only few upgrades available. None of these issues was raised by the bigger hotels, such as Scandic Sydhavnen. From this observation it can be argued that if all the rooms are standardised and thus 'the same', then perishability of the service have an enormous influence on the budgets, as it will create obstacles for up-selling and reaching the budgets.

[7] See appendix 2, interview transcript I-SR

In the interviews, we discovered contradictory information about the initiation of the up-sales. One of the managers mentioned that Scandic Headquarters are stating the amount that needs to be earned by up-sales, while another manager explained that it is up to her own interpretation of the numbers:

> *"The numbers go directly into our system archive. I log-in and take report and see how we are following with our budget. And then I can see, if we cannot sell more rooms, then we can maybe sell the more expensive rooms. Depending on how I analyse the numbers"* (Ida, Ringsted, 24 April 2018).

This discrepancy in the information leads us to consider different managerial approaches in the higher managerial levels. Additionally, managers were from different sized-hotels which could also indicate that the manager of a smaller hotel is more involved in budget interpretation and decision-making processes.

As discussed in section 8.3.4, another aspect of overcoming perishability, is by accumulating the knowledge and know-how through the records of the organisation., the front-office managers are sharing the 'good deeds'[8], i.e. deeds done by receptionists that have resulted in a compliment, or good review from the customer, amongst their receptionists through the e-mails. Other than that, all of the interviewees pointed out 'best practices' given by Scandic, as the source of obtaining the knowledge of other colleagues.

9.3 Summary

Throughout this analysis, the standard operating procedures has been identified and analysed in the light of the four service characteristics for each of the two subunits; the receptionists and the front-office managers. Each subunit has been analysed based on the framework created in chapter 8 and the summary of the main empirical findings of the analysis can be found in table 5 on the next page.

The key findings of the analysis are discussed further in the following chapter.

[8] See appendix 2, interview transcript I-SR

Table 5: *Receptionists & front-office managers' interpretation of SOPs at Scandic*

	Receptionists	**Front-office managers**
Task performance rules	*Check-lists for day-to-day operations. Specific procedures and routines for certain tasks.*	*Written staff-handbooks and best practice manuals.*
Intangibility	Rules for uniform (depends on hotel-type) and general appearance.	Have fewer tangible rules as they are fulfilling a more supporting and decision-making role where flexibility is required.
Heterogeneity	Their standard rules and procedures do not help in atypical service encounters. Different guests require different solutions. High level of trust from managers to make appropriate decisions – empowerment.	Hires after personality. Empowers their employees and have a high trust in them to make the proper decisions.
Inseparability	Have to make their own decisions on the spot. Can be difficult to know what to do in complex scenarios.	Listening and finding the proper approach when dealing with e.g. unsatisfied guests. Cannot make rules for complex scenarios as guests are different.
Perishability	Able to refund services to a certain degree – depends on the guest and the scenario.	Encourages employees to self-assess scenarios.
Information rules	*Information comes from many channels. Important information is written; less important information is verbal or written. Receptionists filter information.*	*Information comes from many channels. Important information is written; less important information is verbal or written. Managers filter information.*
Intangibility	Consistency in language and delivery system Information overload – getting information highlights from managers. Receptionists save the information for when they need it.	Slight issues with language due to international organisation. Information overload to and from managers – filtering information given to receptionists.
Heterogeneity	Information is routed to the relevant departments. Implementation of FUSE to reduce information overload.	Deals with information in different ways at different hotels. Implementation of FUSE to reduce information overload.
Inseparability	In stressful situations, there is no time to find required, written, information. At larger hotels, it is possible to seek help from colleagues.	Do not always get information, which they need to pass on to the receptionists, on time.

Perishability	Share experiences and know-how at staff-meetings. Information from receptionists can flow in all directions.	Uses the standard manuals from HQ to share knowledge but they also create additional. encyclopaedias for their receptionists. Information from managers can flow in all directions.
Planning and goals	*Receptionists have little knowledge of finances. Organisational goals are reached through competitions.*	*Budgets are created by GM and HQ* *Managers translate and communicate received budgets to receptionists.*
Intangibility	Scandic creates tangible goals (e.g. sales goals) Scandic's four values are used as a tangible goal on how the service delivery should be executed.	Evaluate receptionists on the four values Sets up competitions to reach goals.
Heterogeneity	Scandic's four values creates a more homogeneous service delivery. Goals are homogeneous for the organisation but heterogeneous for the individual employee.	Scandic's four values are used as a 'soft' tool to create a more homogeneous service delivery. Financial measures are used for setting goals
Inseparability	Achievement of personal goals cannot be evaluated until after the service delivery is completed.	Use both financial data and Scandic four values to evaluate the receptionist's performance.
Perishability	Knowledge-sharing on service delivery is mainly verbal and not explicitly written reports. Scandic takes measurements for receptionists to share experiences at e.g. meetings.	Are more concerned about not losing revenue on unsold rooms. They share the good stories about the positive service encounters with their receptionists for inspiration.

10 Presenting and comparing theoretical and empirical findings

This chapter aims to describe and highlight the findings from the case analysis which relates to the research question guiding this study. The empirical data has been analysed to identify, describe and explore how standard operating procedures are affecting the service delivery in a real-life setting. The empirical data, which has been described and analysed in chapter 9, will be presented along with the theory presented in chapter 8.

10.1 Presentation of findings

In chapter 8, a framework was presented, providing theoretical propositions of how standard operating procedures are affected by the four service characteristics. From the analysis, it has been possible to explore and investigate a real-life phenomenon and thus interpret how the standard operating procedures are affecting the service delivery. In order to retain a sense of the contextual perspective between the theoretical results from chapter 8 and the empirical results, the findings are presented side by side in table 6 below. The theoretical results were first presented in chapter 8 and are not re-presented in the left column of Table 6. These results are positioned, allowing for a side by side comparison with the results from the empirical data analysis, summarised for the first time in the right column. The findings reveal that while some standard operating procedures can enhance the service delivery, other procedures appear to be constricting or even hindering.

Table 6: *A comparison of the theoretical and empirical results*

	Theoretical results	Empirical results
Task performance rules		
Intangibility	Can influence tangible service-scape in terms of e.g. employee appearance and also the more intangible employee behaviour.	Can influence tangible service-scape in terms of e.g. employee appearance and also the more intangible employee behaviour, thus enhancing the service delivery.
Heterogeneity	Can provide consistency in service delivery, i.e. making the service delivery more homogeneous.	Is not adequate in complex scenarios, such as with complaint management. Service delivery risks inconsistency.

Inseparability	Might not be comprehensive enough for decision-makers to make appropriate decisions on the spot.	Are not comprehensive enough for decision-makers to make appropriate decisions on the spot, thereby risking the ideal service delivery.
Perishability	Can help keep experiences in organisation and transfer knowledge to other members, thereby increase quality of service delivery.	It is not possible to explicitly state procedures to be applied for all scenarios, which can result in a poorer service delivery as decisions will have to be made on an empty foundation.
Information rules		
Intangibility	Can drive the right information to the right people, thus avoiding information overload and rather create consistency in service delivery.	Finding the balance between information underload, or overload to avoid mental intangibility is complicated. Mental intangibility can decrease the experience for the guest during the service delivery.
Heterogeneity	Homogeneous information delivery systems can decrease the possibility of information overload, or lost or warped information.	A homogeneous information delivery system such as FUSE can decrease the possibility of misrepresented information, and rather increase the likelihood of an enhanced service delivery
Inseparability	Timely delivered information can assist during the inseparable service delivery process.	During time duress it is not possible to obtain not already acquired information, thus increasing the chance of a poorer service delivery
Perishability	Information should be enabled to flow in all directions, ensuring that knowledge is transferred to the proper members in the organisation.	Staff-meetings, encyclopaedias and the sharing of experiences supports knowledge-sharing, thereby increasing the prospects of an enhanced service delivery
Planning and records rules		
Intangibility	Planning for the future means being able to create tangible goals and reports can be used as a tangible measurement tool for performance	Difficult to evaluate service performance on front office employees. 'Soft' tools, such as the Four Values can increase the tangibility of the evaluation of the service performance
Heterogeneity	Records should be kept homogeneous to keep consistency in planning, thus resulting in straightforward goals	Financial measures can evaluate the sales goals but not necessarily the service performance thus decreasing the possibilities of creating a homogeneous service delivery

Inseparability	Can assist in planning service encounters but may not predict the precise outcome, as every consumer has different needs	Performance during service delivery cannot be evaluated until the service delivery is complete and it cannot be repeated if in order to attempt a better service delivery a second time. Precise outcomes of service delivery cannot be planned due to consumers' diverse requirements
Perishability	Records helps keeping knowledge of perished events, thus enabling planning for similar events in the future	Records of past service deliveries are primarily transferred verbally, thus carrying a risk of important knowledge to perish, resulting in a decrease in the final service delivery

10.2 Summary

The results presented in this chapter indicates, that although standard operating procedures *in theory* can provide stability and direction to a service organisation in their service delivery, the empirical research has shown that the service characteristics can provide challenges in terms of designing comprehensive enough SOPs. Most noticeable was the discrepancy between the theoretical and empirical results for task performance rules, i.e. the rules are not sufficient to provide proper direction for decision-making when dealing with complex scenarios. This aspect will be discussed further in the following chapter.

11 Discussion

This chapter intends to discuss the results of the presented theoretical and empirical analysis which has been conducted in this thesis. The theory and method which has been chosen as a basis for the thesis are also discussed with the purpose of identifying possible improvements for further analysis of the subject, and finally, the generalisability of the study will be discussed.

11.1 To standardise or not to standardise

The empirical evidence presented in Table 5 provides us with an overview of an interpretation of the standard operating procedures seen from both the receptionists as well as the managers' point of view. While performing our empirical data collection, we purposefully sought out to retrieve data covering more than one organisational sub-units understanding and interpretation, of how their understanding and indirect interpretation of Standard Operating Procedures influence their daily activities and behaviours. From our data collection, it became clear that Scandic has historically, and still has, applied rules for task performance, information handling, as well as for plans and records. During the interviews and subsequent analysis, one key finding emerged when comparing the two respondents' responses. The comparison showed that the respondents emphasized differently on specific areas during the interviews depending whether the respondent was a receptionist or a front office manager, which clearly signifies that two different levels of perception of rules exists between the two subunits of surveyed respondents.

The empirical data suggested, that the receptionists were both mindful and attentive to the standard operating procedures implemented at Scandic, and also highlighted specific task performance rules such as uniforms, check-lists and general operating procedures for the reception (such as check-in/out procedures). On the one hand this could indicate that the receptionists are not only aware of the rules, but also consider these a large part of their daily work, and that the rules are well-known and accepted amongst the employees, thereby reducing the more **intangible** elements of the service delivery, as it was also presented during the findings in chapter 10. On the other hand, this could also indicate that the receptionists are dependent on the rules and are therefore less inclined to 'think outside the box' when having to deal with complex scenarios. This will be discussed in detail further down.

The managers, however, emphasized to a greater extend that their primary 'operating procedures' are not interpreted as manuals to follow exclusively, but rather fulfilling a more supporting role for the receptionists. A

possible explanation for this may be linked to the **heterogeneous** nature of services, and the services Scandic seeks to provide, are not possible to fully standardise on all levels of the service delivery. This signifies that that there will always exist scenarios where procedures fall by the wayside - which could result in variations on quality of the service delivery.
This is especially true in scenarios where the receptionists are experiencing difficulties when having to make appropriate decisions in complex scenarios, such as with complaint management. While this recurring issue which the Scandic management are aware of, they outlined that such scenarios are not possible to standardise due to the varying needs and requirements from the guests. The managers will therefore need to find other ways of ensuring a certain 'standard' for the service delivery.

With the notion that the service delivery should adhere to a defined level of "standardisation", certain preventative measurements have been established to encourage just this: first; the data revealed that the receptionists are hired based on personality, indicating that the receptionists may all possess similar character traits, resembling the Emirates method of hiring employees as it was described in section 8.1.1. Second; the managers empower the receptionists to self-assess and seek appropriate solutions to complex scenarios on their own. It can be therefore argued that due to the **inseparable** nature of services, meaning decisions is requited to be taken within a limited time-span, it is necessary for front-office employees in the service industry to obtain competences on making fast and appropriate decisions when dealing with complex scenarios. These competences would have to be acquired, but by hiring individuals who are already predisposed to deliver excellent services, it can be argued that such skills are either already obtained or can be done so effectively.

Another possible linked effect of management empowering is an increased employee satisfaction, as well as it could be argued that through empowerment, the receptionists experience a psychological response as a result of their service delivery, hereby increasing their job satisfaction, dedication and employee retention, as well as job commitment and turnover intention. These factors cannot only increase the quality of the service delivery, but also reduce the **perishability** of the valuable knowledge which is created during the service delivery as employee retention must all things equal also result in knowledge retention.
So, how can service organisations ensure that the service delivery is performed appropriately, if the nature of services in its self does not allow for comprehensive standardisation? The answer may lie in the managers' formulation of decisions, which are translated and then implemented at employee level, meaning that a process from macro to micro implementation is taking place, as it is also suggested by Borum and Christensen (1993), see figure 4 on next page.

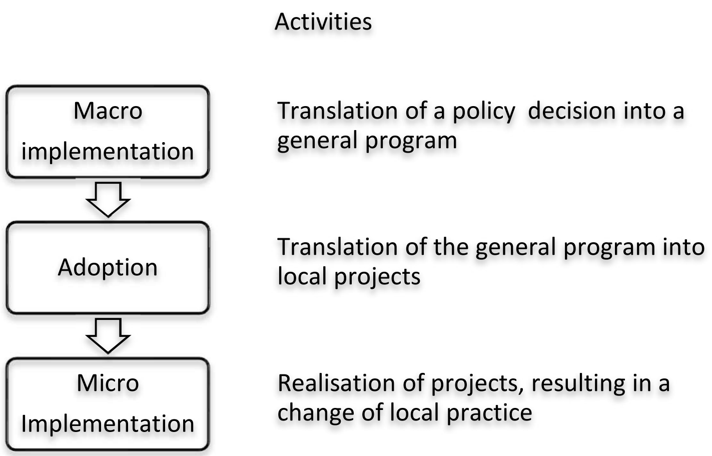

Figure 4: *The three phases in implementation from macro-implementation through adoption and micro-implementation (Borum & Christiansen, 1993)*

Further indications that this is an occurring process is apparent when one considers the employment of the Scandic's four values, which were also presented and discussed during the case analysis in chapter 9, which could be argued are used as a 'soft' tool/ruleset to 'control' employee behaviour and thus the service delivery. Scandic headquarters formulates the values to the department managers at a macro level, and the managers subsequently adopts these values to function on a department level. The micro-implementation then occurs when the receptionists interpret the values and acts by them accordingly. It can therefore be argued, that by utilizing something similar, such as the aforementioned Scandic' four values, is it possible for a service organisation to influence the more **intangible** employee behaviour, which in return could result in a positive, and somewhat consistent service delivery outcome.

11.2 Application of theory

This section addresses the relevancy of the selected theory, which has been used to focus on one of the main areas of this thesis: the service characteristics. To investigate the nature of services, four long-established and frequently cited characteristics were utilised in order to develop an understanding as well as specification of the characteristics of a service. We consider that the four chosen characteristics has contributed to the holistic coverage of the problem, but simultaneously they have posed some challenges as the literature have shown many variations of the service characteristics – which have been dependant of the viewpoint of the author as well as which field has been used as perspective.

Other potential service characteristics could, however, have been appropriate for this study: while we chose to work with what we consider the most common as well as accepted definitions of service characteristics, they could be considered old-fashioned and out-dated whereas other, newer, defined characteristics may have a better fit with today's economy. One characteristic which could have shed a different light on the analysis and results could be that the ‘service quality is multifaceted’ as defined and explained by Goffin and Mitchell (2017). By investigating the perception of quality as a complex construct it could have enabled us to gain an understanding of the front office employees’ abilities to meet customer expectations whilst being subjected to standard operating procedures. However, to investigate and apply this characteristic, it would have required an expansion of the case study, including a wider range of respondents, i.e. consumers of the service delivery. It is difficult to assess whether applying other service characteristics would have had an influence on the final results of the study, but they could have been a useful tool in the toolbox and should not be overlooked in further or future research on the subject.

11.3 Application of method

From a method perspective, we have worked with a case study as a means for empirical data, which has enabled us to investigate a specific area in ‘the real world’ with respondents directly affected by standards and standard operating procedures. However, the subject could also have been tackled from a more theoretically approach, where the focus point would not be a company, or a single department or specialised unit within one, but rather a general study of the industry and its application of standard operating procedures in a service delivery setting. Where such a study to have been conducted, rather than a case study, the effects on the generalisability would have had a positive effect as it would have resulted in a more clinical approached analysis. Nevertheless, we are satisfied with the choice of a case study as it has provided us with a previously unknown insight into the hotel industry, which could become beneficial in our future endeavours in the service industry and has possibly created a foundation to build further research upon.

The data collection was performed by way of semi-structured interviews which have continually contributed to expanding our knowledge of the field of study and also expanding horizons of our understanding of the world in which the case company is situated. The semi-structured interviews, albeit time-consuming to collect and analyse, have also enabled us to identify areas which we could not pre-emptively have identified using structured interviews. In addition, this interview technique encouraged a two-way communication where the respondents were able to express their views on their own terms as well as asking questions along the way, thus increasing and expanding our own field of knowledge about the problem.

11.4 Empirical data collection

This section is concerned with the empirical data collection which has been collected in the second language for both the researchers and respondents. Whilst it has been a necessary delimitation to perform all interviews in English, it has possibly affected the acquisition of the data itself and subsequently the analysis and interpretation. It can be argued that words can have different meanings in different language, and it was observed that

words such as ‘rules’, ‘procedures’ and ‘processes’ was perceived differently from respondents to respondent and certain words required further elaboration and/or translation to ensure common definitions.
It can therefore be argued that in order to avoid such issues, interviews could have been conducted in the native language of the respondents (mainly Danish) and then translated for the study. This could however have come with consequences of its own, as opinions and views can get ‘lost in translation’.

11.5 Generalisability

This case study has generated contextual knowledge of a theoretical problem, which has been investigated in a real-life setting, and has been used as a foundation to extract the forthcoming conclusions. Furthermore, the knowledge generated within this thesis could provide absolutely useful for the service industry itself, but we also consider the study to be relevant as inspiration for other studies.
The topic presented in this thesis has been investigated from a hermeneutic perspective, meaning that interpretation has been a significant part of the understanding. Our own contextual comprehension of the subject is therefore important for understanding why we have had the opportunity to ask in-depth questions as well as question topics mentioned by respondents to create a better understanding of the subject.
We argue that the results of this study could be applicable for other service organisations operating under similar circumstances, however it is clear that while the contributions from the respondents may vary depending on the organisation, the methodology and conclusions could be transferred and replicated for future studies.

12 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to determine how standard operating procedures (SOPs) are affecting the service delivery. As such this study has involved both theoretical as well as empirical aspects to answer the research question.

This thesis has performed an assessment of the main elements of relevant literature and theories, which has provided insight on how SOPs can impact the service delivery. This has been achieved by first establishing a common definition of the nature of services, and continues onto identifying and assessing standardisation and SOPs. From this, it was possible to develop a theoretical framework which was utilised in the empirical analysis, using a case study, to understand how, why and where the nature of services, when in combination with SOPs, could affect the service delivery.

The study revealed that the nature of services has an impact on how the SOPs are being applied, as well as how they are utilised in service organisations. From one viewpoint of the respondents, the receptionists, their perception of the rules suggest that they had a clear understanding of the organisations SOPs, and appreciate having these as a ruleset and guidelines for their daily activities and interactions. This can be explained by the fact that they are the ones who are typically subjected to scenarios, where they are required to make immediate, and often complex decisions.
However, other evidence collected from the second group of respondents, the managers, suggested that even the most comprehensive SOPs cannot fully cover all probable situations, which was also the case in the case company, leaving the receptionists forced to make baseless decisions in complex scenarios and could thus compromise the delivery of the service.

In general, it therefore seems that the desire and aspiration for standardisation is there, but due to the fact that not two service encounters are identical, complete and comprehensive standardisation is not a possibility. Taken together, these results suggest that SOPs are juxtaposed between hindering and enhancing the service delivery. The procedures show a positive effect in the service delivery for routine operations, however in complex scenarios, they are a hindrance as they are insufficient in information and will therefore cause undesirable variations in the service delivery.

The study has found that there are more methods and strategies which can enhance the service delivery, other than SOPs. Such as the managerial style of the service organisation in terms of employee empowerment, recruitment and retention, should be viewed as is equally important. The findings suggest that managers can facilitate the development of appropriate employee competences, which will help bridging the gap on areas where the SOPs are coming up short, and where complex decisions will have to be made. Such competences can be developed by 'standardising' employee behaviour, using 'soft tools', such as organisational values and/or mission/vision statement to influence employees in delivering a desirable service delivery.

While constructing this thesis, we regard is as has having contributed to the existing knowledge by providing new perspectives on service standardisation. This has been achieved by using existing theoretical models and definitions as a framework, hereby enabling our investigation of service standardisation from the perspective of SOPs. The findings from this study can be interpreted and applied by service managers as an inspiration for standardising and enhancing the service delivery, or for scholars to assist in their future research.

During the process of writing the thesis, we as researchers have also broadened our understanding, of the complexity of services. And furthermore, have we developed and provided new insights on the importance of standardisation and managerial style in connection with service delivery.

13 Implications and recommendations for future research

This thesis raises opportunities for other researchers to further investigate the given phenomenon. More research will be necessary to enhance and further expand on the findings. Following recommendations for future research has been identified:

Firstly, although this study has generated new and, we believe, valuable insights into how standard operating procedures are hindering or enhancing the service delivery from the organisational perspective, there is a little knowledge on how these aspects are perceived by the consumers. Therefore, this study could be refined by adding consumer perspectives and opinions about the service delivery to the findings, when investigating how the service delivery is affected by standard operating procedures

Secondly, the findings of the current study are derived from a case study in hotel chain that employs standard operating procedures. However, little research has been done on how a possible absence of standard operating procedures can influence the service delivery. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study, by investigating an additional hotel chain with little or none defined/employed standard operating procedures. Thus, both findings could be compared in order to further evaluate the effect of standard operating procedures in service delivery.

Lastly, this study has determined that there are elements which can potentially affect the service delivery and thereby also the standardisation process in service organisations. Therefore, another possible area for future research could be to investigate how managerial style and employee empowerment are influencing service standardisation and thus service delivery.

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15 Appendix 1 – interview guides

15.1 Interview guide: receptionists

Task performance rules

- Can you please describe us your daily routines?
    - *What do you do when you start your work…*
    - *During the shift…*
    - *Near the end of your shift?*
- Can you explain to us what kind of rules/SOPs you have? *(consider service-escape)*
    - *Appearance, behaviour, tasks?*
        - *Are these rules written or verbal?*
        - *Who are creating them?*
            - *Do you have influence/changing power over them?*
        - *Verbally: who informs you?*
        - *Written: how do you get it?*
    - *Are some of the rules for this hotel only or are they organisational?*
- How do you handle unsatisfied customers?
- Are you empowered/authorized to go "above and beyond"?
- Do the rules help you make decisions in your everyday work and how?
- Do you believe that your colleagues are following the rules or is some of them more followed than others? If yes, please elaborate
- Do you always follow the rules/handbooks/etc or do you think some of the rules are more important than others? If yes, please elaborate – if no, also elaborate…
- In your opinion, do you think you have many rules to follow?
- Do you find your rules constricting?
- Do you find your rules simple to follow?

Information rules

- Which channels do you use to obtain/or is given information? (*Facebook, intranet, manager?)*
- Is all information stated explicitly in e.g. a written document?
- Do you use all the information given to you?
    - *Why/why not?*

- Is the information top-down/bottom-up or both?
- Does everyone have the same access to all information?
- Do you get the information you need to do your job?
  - *If no, what type of info are you missing?*
  - *If yes, what do you get which you can use?*
- Is the information available for you when you need it? (*E.g. during a guest encounter)*
  - *In case of conflicts?*
- Is the information understandable?
- Is the information consistent?
  - *Is it delivered in the same way, language consistency etc.*

Plans and planning

- What are the goals?
  - *Environment*
  - *Competition*
- Are the goals explicit and easy to understand?
- Is the strategy for reaching the goals understandable?

Reports and records

- What/are performances monitored and evaluated?
  - How, when?
  - Do you see the results?
- Do you do daily reports? *Budgets/arrivals/departures/numbers/general information about the day/customer information*
  - Yes, about?
  - How? Specific templates?

15.2 Interview guide: front-office managers

Task performance rules

- Can you please describe us your daily routines?
  - *What do you do when you start your work…*
  - *During the shift…*
  - *Near the end of your shift?*
- Can you explain to us what kind of rules/SOPs you have? *(consider service-escape)*
  - *Appearance, behaviour, tasks?*
    - *Are these rules written or verbal?*
    - *Who are creating them?*
      - *Do you have influence/changing power over them?*
      - *Can you implement new ideas from your employees, and how?*
    - *Verbally: who informs you?*
    - *Written: how do you get it?*
  - *Are some of the rules for this hotel only or are they organisational?*
- How do you handle unsatisfied customers?
- Are the creation/development/editing of rules being influences by the other departments?
- How do you train new employees? *Training manual?*
- Are you empowering your employees to go "above and beyond"*?*
  - *How?*
- In your opinion, do you think you have many rules/procedures to follow?
- Do you find your rules/procedures constricting?
- Do you find your rules simple to follow?
- Do the rules help you make decisions in your everyday work?
  - *If yes; how?*
  - *If no; why not?*
- Do you believe your employees are following the stated rules/procedures?
  - *If yes; why?*
  - *If no, why not?*
- Do you believe your employees understand the rules given to them?
- Do you always follow the rules/handbooks/etc.
  - *If yes, why?*
  - *If no, why not?*

Information rules

- Which channels do you use to obtain/or is given information? (*Facebook, intranet, manager?)*
- Is all information stated explicitly in e.g. a written document?
- Do you use all the information given to you?
  - *Why/why not?*
- Is the information top-down/bottom-up or both?
- Does everyone have the same access to all information?
- How are you deciding what information your employees need and what they do not need?
- Do you get the information you need to do your job?
  - *If no, what type of info are you missing?*
  - *If yes, what do you get which you can use?*
- Is the information available for you when you need it? (*E.g. during a guest encounter)*
  - *In case of conflicts?*
- Is the information understandable?
- The information is consistent?
  - *(Is it delivered in the same way, language consistency…?)*

Plans and planning

- What are the goals?
- Are the goals explicit and easy to understand?
- How do you plan activities in your department?
  - *What tools are you using?*
- Is the strategy for reaching goals understandable?

Reports and records

- What/are performances monitored and evaluated?
  - *How, when?*
  - *Do you see the results?*

- Do you do daily reports? *Budgets/arrivals/departures/numbers/general information about the day/customer information*
  - *Yes, about?*
  - *How? Specific templates?*

16 Appendix 2 - interviews

16.1 Interview transcript L-SG

Respondent	Company	Date
Louise	Scandic Glostrup	12 June 2018
Position		
Receptionist, full-time		
Number of years with company		
2 years		
Started in April 2016 at Scandic Copenhagen as a trainee		
Full-time at Scandic Glostrup since February 2018		
Number of years with current position		
2 years		

Transcription:

Can you please start by describing your daily routines when you come to work?
It's very different. When I have the morning shift, like today, I start my daily routine with a sheet what the night shift has for me. It's a small handover – if there is anything I have to be aware of for the day. Then we have a checklist, where I have to do everything for the day, make everything easier for the evening shift. So, we have an arrival list I have to print out, see all the comments that guests have made – if they would like to have a disabled room, if they have children that they haven't added to reservation, so we have to make sure that there are extra beds, actually to make everything perfect for their arrival. And then I have, of course, all the check-outs and e-mails, a lot of e-mails, phone calls… So, it's basically it's all to make it easier for the guest and my colleagues.

Can you explain to us, whether you have any rules or procedures, or standard operating procedures?
Regarding to…?

We are also thinking whether you have a staff handbook with rules how you are supposed to behave, have you're supposed to look, for instance, how are you supposed to do things?
We do have a staff book, but it doesn't really say: "you are not allowed to have tattoos"; it just say that you have to be… what is the right word …*soigneret* … clean. Yeah. You don't have to have a make-up, I don't

have any make-up on today because of allergy, so I cannot wear make-up, so you don't have to wear it. You just have to look ok. You have to wear your uniform.

I wasn't allowed in Copenhagen [Scandic Copenhagen, the biggest of the Scandic hotels on Zealand] to not wear my blazer. I am allowed to do it here – if it's too warm then it's ok for me to take it off, but it's a bit weird for me, because I am used to have a bit, kind of different rules about how to look and how to behave. It is very different if you are from a larger hotel and then the smaller hotel, like this. So, here it's more relaxed, it's kind of a small family hotel. So, it is ok for me to take my blazer off, it is ok for me to not wear make-up and just have my hair in a ponytail. I have a lot of colleagues who have tattoos, not on their face, but I do have colleagues you have tattoos on their hands…

Why do you think there is such a big difference between Scandic Copenhagen and here? Except for the size?

This is a business hotel. We do have here guests for another country, but this is a hotel where are just Danish people from all around Denmark. In Scandic Copenhagen it's really people from all around the world, and I don't think they have the same loose feeling about tattoos. I think we [Danes] are really used to see tattoos in Denmark, but when I have guest from the other side of the world and they come to Denmark, I don't think it's ok for me to show all the tattoos. It could also be that GEO have different expectations for the employees. In Copenhagen, it was very strict and we did have a lot of guests who… Scandic Copenhagen was Sheridan before, and this is a high-class hotel. So, when they come to visit Scandic Copenhagen again, they think it's the same as Sheridan, so they do have another **pause** expectation for the hotel, then just regular business guests at this hotel. So, I think that is why. And there are lot of people who think that we are star classified, but we are not anymore. So, when they come to Scandic, they think it's a four-star hotel, but we are not anymore, so when they come to the hotel we have to meet the guest, but still tell them that we are not a four-star hotel. Then we have to it for showing ourselves from our besides, but still add Scandic on their rules.

These rules, is that something written down or you are being told verbally?

It's been written down that I have to look, I think it actually says 'clean' in the book. It doesn't say anything about make-up, hair or anything. It just says that you must look clean and not that tired, and that you have to look ok. And then can you do your own way. But in Copenhagen I have been told that it is good idea that I don't have any tattoos on my hands, but my colleagues do have tattoos on their legs. In this case, it could be a good idea to wear something that could cover them. They [management at Scandic Copenhagen] wouldn't say anything to you anything if you would show them, but you could feel that they would like you to wear some pants.

If you have an unsatisfied guest, how do you deal with that?

That depends on the guest and what they are unsatisfied about. I am a person who likes to be fair, and if I feel that guest is not being fair about their complaint, then I will tell the guest that I don't think it's a problem that we should compensate the guest for. There are some guests who think it's ok to just complain about something and just got a refund of something for free, but I would tell these guest that it is not ok. For example, we got a guest earlier today to whom we gave a free upgrade yesterday, so she stayed in junior suite, and she had some noisy neighbours, therefore she wanted to be compensated. I don't think that it's fair that we gave the guest an upgrade to the junior suite and then she did not say anything yesterday. She wanted us to compensate for the room bill today. So, I told the guest that we gave a free upgrade yesterday and she was more than welcome to let us know on the day, or in the night or whenever she heard the noise, or we could do something when the problem is there, and not the day after. They have to let us know when the problem is real, so we can do something and not just compensate. But if she told it to my colleague yesterday and my colleague didn't do anything, then I will start to compensate and see what I can do. We can feel when the guest just wants to have a cheaper room or cheaper bill.

Do you have any rules on how much can you compensate, for instance? Or on what you can compensate?

Normally, we start with offering free to-go coffee, sandwich or soda, if that helps. If I feel that it won't satisfy the guest, then I would start to think how many percentages I can take off the bill. It can be 15 or 30, depending on how angry the guest is. Because sometimes guest can get really angry because they did not get any sleep or anything, and, like, these nights we were fully booked, so I cannot to just start to move guests around if there is something wrong with the room, so I have to see what I can do for the guest right now without changing the room, otherwise I will have two unsatisfied guests. If I will change the guest to another room, then there will be another guest in that room who will have the same problems, so we will end up having two unsatisfied guests. So, if I can do anything for the guest right now to see what I can do.

Is that, basically, what you decide yourself?

Yes, because when I am in a small hotel like this, I am alone. I have Stine, my boss, and GEO sitting in their offices when I have my morning shift, but when I'm here in the evening shift, I am alone and I have to make the decisions. At Copenhagen we had shift leaders, so I could always ask them to see what to do in these situations, and they would advise on how to handle the given situation. But here it's just me, so I have to decide. That is what our bosses are always telling us that we are the only ones that know the situation and that we are the ones that can make the decision right now, so we just have to think. And I think that you are also the best one to feel what can you do to make the guest satisfied, because you can feel if it's just a cup of coffee or removing of the whole bill before they are happy. So… yeah… I like to have free hands to just do whatever

I want. Of course, before I remove the whole bill, I have to tell the boss what happened and what I had to do. It's not the best way, but sometimes we have to do it.

Do you think you are empowered by your manger to go 'above and beyond' for your guests?
Yeah, I think I am allowed to do what I have to do. Of course, there are some rules. A couple of days ago I was here almost 18 hours, because it was so busy, and I was told that it's not ok, because it is too expensive for them to have me on that many hours. I replied that it's fine, but the result they would get complaining guests and they will need to compensate and that would be more expensive for them and for the reputation, and compensation, than having me trying to satisfy the guests and help the colleague who is new. But then I was told that I have to go when I am supposed to go, and that is actually the first time I disagreed with that, but then I have to do what they say. Otherwise I think it is ok for me to do whatever I want, as long as the guest feels satisfied.

How about going 'above and beyond' for the guests. I'm thinking not only unsatisfied guests, but in general. Do you do something for the guest something out of ordinary?
Yeah, yeah. We do. Once I offered my couch at home, because we were fully booked, that was last year at Copenhagen, and I felt so bad for her, because she had a reservation, but the forgot that it was 6 pm reservation, and when it's 6 pm, you have to contact the hotel and give some credit card details for guarantee that you will have it later than 6. She forgot, and she came in the evening when everything was sold out, everything was booked. I think Malmö also was booked, and she was sitting in the couch in the lobby and trying to call everyone. Then she said that she has to go back, I think it was Århus, so she could take the night train, then she could be home for an hour and then take a train back to Copenhagen in the morning. So, she would use the whole night by just being in the train. Then I texted to my boyfriend and said that MAYBE, only maybe, I will take a guest home to use our couch for the night. So, I went down to let her know, but she thanked and said that she texted a friend she hasn't been in touch for many years, so she could sleep at her place instead. That is the most extreme I have ever done. Another time I lend out my jacket, because they lost their jacket and it was cold, and I was supposed to be in the hotel for many hours, so she could just use mine. So, sometimes you do things like that.

What makes you do these things? Also, because they are your own personal items?
Yeah, I think I just wouldn't do it to anyone, but when I feel that it is something the guest really needs, then I can feel that they would do anything to return the jacket. And it is just a jacket. If it makes guest happy and she can go out, do what she has to do in the city with my jacket, then as long as I get it back, it is ok.

How about manager, what does he say when you do these things?

I haven't tried in this hotel, I have tried it only at the other hotel. Because this hotel is business hotel, so I don't really have… I do have drunk guests here, but sometimes at a larger city hotel people just forget things and be too drunk and do other things than just business people do. So, I haven't had the chance to try it here yet.

Talking little about the rules and procedures that you have here - do you think some of the rules and procedures help you to make decisions in your work?

Yeah, of course. There is a procedure how to handle complaints, and there are the things you should do before. For example, offer a cup of coffee before I just remove the whole bill, so there are some procedures I would to have in my mind when talking to the guest. There are procedures when we are overbooked, and… what else… there are procedures when the fire alarm goes off, and when the guest calls form a room, at the larger hotel I was not allowed to go alone the room, but I have to do it here… But there are rules that says that you have to take care of yourself before the guest, because if something happens to you, you cannot help the others. So, that is also when a guest calls and ask me to go into the room, then it is ok for me to say no. If I feel that it's not safe for me, then I rather have to say no to the guest, and that he / she have to take care of that herself, I can help, but then it means that the guest has to come down to the lobby.

Are these rules being written down explicitly in a document, staff handbook or something similar?

Oh, so long time I have read the book. I actually do think it is written down for the fire instructions. *Thinking* I don't think it is written down about the guests in the rooms, but for security – it is written down that you have to take care of yourself before the guest.

Do you believe your colleagues are following the rules, or some follow more than others?

I think that some people follow the rules more than the others. We do have the rule that says that one should give a guest a registration card they have to sign, and there are many hotels who does not really follow that procedure. The same about … *thinking* … It is illegal in Denmark not to show the breakfast on the bill, when breakfast is included. That is not just Scandic, that is in whole Denmark. So, when breakfast is included in the bill, you have to slit the breakfast in the bill so they can see what breakfast could have cost. When I started here, I saw that many my colleagues removed the breakfast, so I told them that it is not ok, and that it's actually illegal to do it. Then they said that they will not do it, but there are many in the Scandic that tries to satisfy the guest by removing the breakfast from the price, so they can get a full refund from their company when they go home. But that is not ok, because when the guest comes to another Scandic hotel, they would point out that the other Scandic did do that and would wonder why we cannot do it. Then it's just… yeah… a bad circle. So, yeah, there are these small things…

How about the rules that are not required by law? Do you have some that you do more than others?
Thinking Can you give an example?

For example, if there is something on your checklist what you would skip a little bit on for any reason?
Of course, if you don't have the time, you skip it. And then there are … *pause*… some colleagues here that are not so good with replying to e-mails. So, when other comes to the morning or evening shift, then there are MANY e-mails. Today I had e-mails form the weekend; we are morning, evening and night shift, and we could reply e-mails all the time, so… That is a small thing I would say, could be done better. But I think I am a person who likes rules, who like that you have to do as much as you can on your shift. Of course, if it is busy, then you have to skip e-mails and all that, but then you have to tell the next shift that you didn't have the time, that you did as many as you could, but did not the time to finish them all. We just need to keep a track of all the things we have to do, otherwise there are so many guests who are waiting for the answer and eventually they will choose another hotel, and then it's A LOT of money that we will lose, because we were too slow.

So, you mentioned that you really like the rules that you have.
Yes, I do like the rules.

Why?
Because I think that, when you have a checklist and all those rules, then you can… for example, with the registration card. I have some colleagues who does not bother with the registration card. It does take time when you are busy, it also takes time for the guest to sign them. But, if I have a guest where I have to charge the bill, because they broke something in the room or left the hotel without paying, then I am authorised to deduct the money from their card. If they [the guests] haven't signed it, then I don't have any proof that it is ok for me to charge the amount. And it is just a safety for, especially for the morning team, who do have the check-outs. If I have to charge the guest who smoked in the room, then this card is a safety for me to show them that they authorised me to charge them. If the card is not signed, then it might end up that they will leave without paying the damage.
Those kind of rules helps everyone to feel safer and to feel they have to get the checklist done, and then you have a hotel that runs better.

In your opinion, do you think you have many rules to follow?
I don't think we have many, but we do have them in mind, especially about not removing the breakfast from the bill, for example. But it's not that many, it's just, I think when you have been in Scandic for a while, it's a routine for you. You don't see them as rules anymore, it's a thing that helps you and your colleagues to do your job better and to be safer.

Do you find rules constricting in anyway?

No.

Do you think that the rules you have are simple to follow?

Yes.

Are they easy to understand?

Easy to understand and easy to follow, and everyone understands them. If the rules would be something I would not understand “why should I do this or that”, then, I think, it would be difficult for me to work here. If I have to question everything my boss would tell me to do something, then I couldn’t work here.
I understand why they want us to do what we do.

How are you given information? E-mails, Facebook, meetings, etc?

Yeah, information about…?

How to do your job, for instance, or new stuff that’s will happen in the hotel? Information from your manager.

To the guest or… my colleagues?

Info given to you. Within the reception.

I get a lot of e-mails from everyone – my colleagues, my manager, my boss. From everyone. If something happens that we all have to know about, or they have changed some rules, we will ALL receive an e-mail. Again, so we have it on the paper. So, they can notify you and make sure that you read the e-mail. Then we have a handover, where we give the information we think is important for the next shift to know. It is a bit different from hotel to hotel how to do the handover. At Copenhagen everyone had been gathered in back office, and then you had the handover. The shift leader read the handover and explained to all the others, in the evening shift, what was new and what they have to know and be. Now, at this hotel, you just write it all down in a Word document and then you can print it out and leave it on the table.
I don’t think it is as good as you explain to another colleague what you have written. If there is a time, I try to explain what I have added on handover, so they understand it. Because I understand what I’m writing, but if they don’t understand what I’m writing, then it is no help for them. So, try to read the handover to your colleagues and explain what they have to be aware about and what they have to be informed about, and then everything is easier. So, e-mails, a handover…*thinking* This hotel really does not use Facebook and Instagram, we had that in Copenhagen – we had an Instagram and Facebook profile, but I think this one is too small. I think it would help for the restaurant and all that, if we have campaigns and offers for rooms. Otherwise it

wouldn't really help that much. So, mostly I get the information through the e-mails and handovers. Sometimes the manager would tell me something, but if it's something important, then she will send it on e-mail.

So, the most important information you get are through e-mails?
Yes.

Do you use all the information that is given to you?
Thinking

…Or do you filter it a little bit?
Mmm… Most of the time I do use it, but if I think my boss would like me to do something I would not like to, then I would not do it. Once I was told that we were overbook in one category, and he wanted me to call all the guests and sell upgrade. And I don't think that is ok. I don't think it is ok for the guest, and I don't think it is ok for me or the other ones who should do it. I think it is ok to sell an upgrade, when you have the guest inform of you, when they have arrived to the hotel and you can see what kind of guest this is. Because sometimes you can see that these guests have saved up for many years for this trip, then I won't be calling them and try to sell many things. I think it is a feeling with the guest that you get – can I sell the upgrade and how much can I take for an upgrade. I won't use my time to call all the guests and try to sell an upgrade, I'm not a salesman. So, I said I wouldn't do that.

Was he ok with that?
Yeah. Of course, if he could have told me that I have no choice and I have to do it, I don't know if I would have still done it, but I would have though more if I would do that or not. But sometimes I think they would appreciate us saying no, instead of doing something we don't want to do.
So, I think I am the person who say no. I feel like it.

Would you say that the information flow in the hotel is top – down, bottom – up or both? Do you feel that information is *only* coming from managers or can you also…?
No, no, no. We do give the information, I give the information for the boss and the manager. If you get some kind of information you think is important for everyone to know, then you use an e-mail. So, it doesn't have to be bosses who send the e-mails. Everyone can do it. This is very flat organisation.

Has everyone the same access to all of the information?

Thinks Yeah, I do think it is easier for managers to get the information, but I can still get it. I just have to contact the right people. And again, I can contact the CEO of Scandic, if I would want to; I could just send him an e-mail, and I think he would listen to me if I would have something important to tell.
Yeah, I really do think that everyone can just inform everyone.

Do you believe you get the information you need to do your job?

Thinking Yeah, I think so. *Pause* Sometimes I … No, I think so. Sometimes I would like to get the information couple of days before I receive it, but I do get it. I know, everyone is busy, so sometimes they just forget to send it out. For example, “these people are coming tomorrow, can you please, set up the room for them”. It is nice to know some time before, and not just couple of hours before. So, for example, I didn’t know you guys are coming here today. That could be a good idea for me to know it a little bit before, so I can plan my time.

Fair point. Sorry *giggles*

No, no, no, it’s just I do receive the information, it would just be a good idea for me to receive it a little bit before.

Do you think information is available when it is needed? Now we are thinking about situations like, when you have a conflict with the guest or something unexpected happening. Do you think you have the information to solve this situation?

Not always at the time.

Do you have any examples?

Am… *thinking* I had a guest couple of days ago. I think it was last week. He had made a booking for two nights. One night was, something 805kr, I think, and the next night was almost 2000kr. He made the reservation through Scandic booking department, and the person who made the booking, forgot to inform him about this price difference between these two days. So, he thought he will have to pay these 805kr both days, and when I got the guest, I think it was 8 pm or something, then I cannot do anything, because the reservation department leaves around 16 or 17, I don’t have the manager and then I have to decide what to do, because I can get the right information the next day. So, I told the guest to get in touch with the person who made the reservation to see if they can send us or him an e-mail, where they state that they have told the guest that it will be 805kr for both days. Because, then, of course, I will change the payment to that price. Normally, we have to take the payment at the check-in, but I told the guest to postpone the payment and see if he can get in touch with the person who have made the reservation. I couldn’t do anything, I could not get in touch with anyone. This is just a small example, but sometimes there are situations where you just can't do anything, because everything is closed, everyone has left the building, so to say. It can be conferences. A guest can come in and say that he has a conference right now, and the conference manager has left an hour ago, then I have to do what I can do, so…

How about the information you do get? Do you think it is understandable?
Aaaa… most of the time - yes. Not really for the conference department, because there are so many things changing all the time. If they have made a block sheet or made a paper for me stating that we do have these different companies in the house today, and that they will have the dinner later, and also how many people are there… there are so many things that change all the time, and if they forget to update me, then I don't have the right information and I cannot do my job correctly. Yeah… everyone has to do their job, they have to always update the information and always update each other so we all know what happens and what's going on. For example, my colleague forgets to chase & trace the reservation – if it says one adult, but there are 2 adults and 2 children, and if we have a fire then I have a paper that says that there is only 1 person and I don't know how many people should be saved. It is not only about meeting and conference rooms, it is also about their safety.

How about the consistency of the given information? Is it delivered always the same way, is language the same?
Yeah. For the guest or for me?
Information given to you. For instance, from your managers?
Most of the time it's Danish. It was in English when I worked in Copenhagen, because we had so many more employees who weren't Danish. Here it's only housekeeping who doesn't really speak Danish. So, most of the things will be in Danish. E-mails and everything will be in Danish.

We're will talk about goals. Both about organisational, but also for the ones only for your department – for the reception. So, what are the goals for Scandic? DO you know where they want to go?
World class service. To be one of the best hotel chains. To be bigger and better. And be that hotel a guest will choose first.

Do you have any goals just for the reception?
Goals for me or for the whole reception?

We will talk about both, actually.
Reception is that place at the hotel, where everyone, not only guests but also all the other departments, will always come with their problems. So, we really have to do things we don't think is really fair for us to use the

time. Because the kitchen could do that as well. For example, if a guest comes to the waiter and says that there is no soap in the bathroom, and the housekeeping is gone for the day, then it is not only reception who have to do it, because the information was given to the waiter. Then it could be the waiter who went down to get some soap and solved the problem. But they are really good at pointing it to the reception, because we are dealing with the guests. So, they are coming over and telling us to fill the soap. But sometimes we are very busy, so it would be a good idea for the whole hotel to help each other. I think, one of the things for reception is that we run very fast, and we, of course, will do everything we can, but it would be nice to get some help sometimes, so we have the hotel that run better. But, I don't know really what our goal is … of course we watch ourselves the rooms as much as we can. Our goal is to have zero rooms. Yesterday we were 100% booked, which we sometimes celebrate, because then we get all the money we could, no more, no less, that was just perfect. So, strike for 100 % each day, without any complaints, and without any compensation or anything. Just happy guest and no rooms available.

Going back a little bit to that you have to do the world class service, which is part of your mission. Is there a strategy for reaching those goals and are they understandable?

Yeah, we have 'be you, be bold, be pro'. I think there were those three. So, you have to, of course, be you, but still be pro and be bold and everything. So, you have to do what you can to give world class service; to do what you can to make this hotel better. Also, other hotels, coz you can affect the other hotels as well. If you are fully booked, then you will send the guest to another Scandic hotel, and not Radisson or another chain, so you still let the other hotel to be better, to be them 100 % instead of just sending them away.

You still have to affect the guest to get him to the other Scandic hotels. For example, when you talk with the guest and he say that they are planning to go to Hamburg, then you can say that there is Scandic as well and try to sell it to the guest. Talk good about Scandic and affect guests to choose Scandic. So, this is also how you can make Scandic the world class hotel.

You mentioned 4 values 'be bold, be pro, be you, be caring'. How do you work with these? Is it being told by someone how to be e.g. 'pro'?

You see them everywhere, when we have meetings and all that. They really care about the four lines, and it is up to you which one you are when you are in certain situation. I was caring, when I asked the guest, if she would like to use my couch, for example. Then it is ok for me to make that decision. When there is a guest who is really mad, then should I be caring by removing the whole bill, or should I be pro and trying to solve the situation as a pro. Sometimes I'm just me, when I handle the situation in the way I think is appropriate. Then the next day my boss can suggest me to try next time in another way. Then you can learn. But when you are in the situation, you have to choose what you will do, and then you can choose to be a pro, to be caring, or yourself, or bold. But bear in mind which one am I now and what would be the best for the guest.

Do you talk with other about how you do these four values?
Not really. We talk when there are meetings; then we use them a lot. And then you can come with some examples when you were bold and pro, and then you can talk about the situation – how did you handle it, and then tell if I would be a pro, how would I react then. We are trying to use and discuss them in the context. We are discussing in the meetings and trying to explain other employees your experiences.

But how about your performances? Is that monitored and evaluated somehow?
searching for words Of course, if I don't do it right, someone will notice and then I will hear about it. When I was a trainee at the Copenhagen I won title 'Scandic's Best Trainee 2018', so someone saw what I did and gave me a price for it. Of course, it means something to me that I know that I do my job right. But if I always made mistakes and didn't do my job properly, then they would tell me. I think it would help me if they would just tell me that something is not good enough. They are good at teaching: 'you did it your way, but there is another way, so next time try this instead'. So, they do watch over your back.

What about here? Because you guys work here by yourself?
Yeah, but they can still see how many e-mails we reply. If my boss came every day and saw that I have not replied any e-mail last week, then, I think, she would ask what have happened – is it too busy or are you too lazy? They don't say that they look, but I do think they will notice if I was too lazy or did something really wrong. Because the guest will write it on Booking.com or TripAdvisor, or our Facebook page. They [the guests] will let them [the managers] know if I didn't do my job well. They will notice.

What about your service performance?
They are really good at giving wine, because when you receive a personal card or message from the guest on Facebook or TripAdvisor, they give you a bottle of wine for your effort, for what you did to the guest. Once I got a pizza slice form the guest, who felt bad that I was not eating, because we were too busy. So, the guest saved the pizza slice for me and wrote a really sweet letter. And then my boss saw it and gave me a bottle of wine for that.
When guests say mention our names on Facebook, then they [the managers] will let you know that they saw the message.

So, is it mainly though the guests that…
It is mainly through the gusts that they can see how well I'm doing with the guests. And then, of course, they can see if I haven't been answering any e-mails or picking up calls.

But I do think that the bosses know what happens, because they are here and they can see what is happening – am I on my phone all the time, or never filling up the fridge or answering e-mails. When next person comes after me and points out that I always skip doing some tasks, then, of course, they will know. Because we are really good at, I wouldn't say at pointing colleagues out, but asking was it too busy and are there some need for a helping hand, because we have noticed some things not being done from the checklist. So, we really try to make everything run better, because we know that sometimes it's busier than others. We never know, depends on how many phone calls and e-mails are there, and how many problems. You never know.

Post-interview conversation.

(Louise talking about the differences between Scandic Copenhagen and Glostrup.)

Ways of doing things in Glostrup and Copenhagen are way different. Have you been in Scandic Copenhagen?

No.

Ok, there are almost 500 rooms, here we only have 120 rooms. In Copenhagen, there are 18 floors. So, there are so many other things to do. It is also different about how the payment is charged. Usually the night shift charges the Expedia and other bookings like that. We have to do things to help the night team here, coz we do have time for it. We didn't do that at the Scandic Copenhagen. So, we had a lot of other things to do, because it just was so busy. We had 24 h housekeeping on, and here they are until, I think, like 15, so when something is not right in the room, I have to go up. At Copenhagen I was not allowed to just leave the reception, I could say that I needed to go the certain room, and, of course, then I could go, but they would have preferred that I stayed in the reception, because it just was so busy. Am…

Also, the checklists are different – how to do your checklists, what to do and what not to do for the guests. We have a lot of disabled alarms at the large hotel, and it was couple of times a day when an alarm when off. And we had to get in touch with the guest to make sure that everything was ok. And sometimes it wasn't ok. I haven't really tried it here, I have picked someone up from the room, but I haven't really tried suicides or anything in this hotel. But I have had them at the Copenhagen hotel. There we also had more prostitutes, homeless people and all that, that I had to take care of. I see more business people here, and Copenhagen was everything else – the fine people who thought it was Sheridan, and the prostitute who gets high in the bathroom, so I saw everything.

And what are the similarities of the hotels? Is it only uniform and name?

Almost, and then also – 'if you want to do service this way, then you do it this way', because that is who YOU are and how you do your job the best. But otherwise, it is very different how to do your job. I am still learning, because there are so many things I do one way, because I was told, and you don't do that here. At Copenhagen, we went rounds, because it is such a large hotel, large conference area and sometimes you do find people who are not supposed to be there. Therefore, you are in touch with the police.

This is a small hotel, but I was more in touch with all the departments at the large hotel. Because, everything was going so fast and everything should have been done at the right time, otherwise you had so many guests who wouldn't be satisfied. Here the housekeeping leaves at 15, so I won't see them. If I have an evening shift 14 days in a row, then I won't see them.

I think I am the person who should be in a large hotel in Copenhagen. And my manager does know that. This is not really me. I do try to learn this kind of hotel, because you have more computer work, and you will see other ways, but I have to be on the floor, I have to go and help people, I have to run. Because, at Copenhagen there were many times you didn't get your breakfast or lunch, anything, because there just was not enough time. And I just like to have a day when it us just so busy, the time flies, and I talk with so many different guests – girls on a city trip, who would like to see what kind of bars they should go to or what to see and what not to see… This is something very different, because here people just go to the meeting for the whole day, get lunch and then go back to room and sleep, and the same next day. Then I would like to have to have ALL kinds of guests around me, and they have all these different kinds of questions. Also, even if it means I will see some suicides, and people doing drugs in the bathroom. But that is just another side of perfect hotel experience. It is very different if you are in a large hotel in Copenhagen or a small hotel outside Copenhagen.

16.2 Interview transcript S-SG:1

Respondent	**Company**	**Date**
Shokoufeh	Scandic Glostrup	12 June 2018
Position		
Receptionist, full-time		
Number of years with company		
1.5 year (since December 2017)		
Number of years with current position		
1,5 years		

Transcription:

Can you, please, start by describing you daily routines, when you come to work and during the work?
You just want everything in the details, or just mainly…

Just like overall tasks.
Ok, we have two different shifts – morning shift and evening shift. So, morning shifts are basically checking-out people, checking if there are any specific needs for the new people coming in. If they have any specific needs, then we need to inform the housekeeping. We also have conferences here, so in the morning we have to show the guests to their conference rooms; we have to welcome them, we have to check guests out and checking the payments. Basically, that's the morning part. In the evening, it's basically checking people in, sometimes helping the restaurant. That's the mostly part of the evening shifts. There is also more works … oh, I can't say the English word, in Danish '*administrativ'*, where you have to check, for example, during the night I have to check for the morning team to check if there are any specific needs that new guests have, we give them the room numbers beforehand. If there are any groups we have to take care of. Also, we check if there are anything to be aware of and everything we need to know.
Just basically, inform the dayworker in the morning shift to know. For example, today I am here at work at night [evening shift] and my main job is to check e-mails, so there are no e-mails, and then I have to check that everything is under control – that I have given the rooms for the guests that are coming in. And then check for the next day's arrival as well, if there is anything specific what I have to, for example, family rooms. We have family rooms where we have to put the beds out, so I have to write it down in our information called 'Traces' for the housekeeping, so they know that there is a family coming in and they have to put the beds down. We have 6 bedrooms [or bathrooms] in 2 floors, so we have to be aware of that as well, so we have to

be under control all the time. Also, housekeeping needs to know if any pets are coming in, we have only 6 rooms in first 2 floors, so we have to inform the guest that they cannot have their pets with them at the hotel. So, that's basically what we do.

How about, if I say standard operating procedures – rules or procedures in general. Can you tell us what you have? Now we are thinking in terms of your appearance, how are you supposed to behave, how you are supposed to work?
Ok, well, you are not allowed to have too much make-up, you have to be on a decent side of it. You cannot have too colourful nails. You have to be clean, and then we have to wear shirts, skirts or pants – black, and also black shoes as well. It's not a written rule, but you have to be decent here **points out the chest area**, so you cannot have your buttons opened, and so. That's the appearance wise. Is that all?

Unless you have something more to add?
That's it.

Are these appearance rules written down?
Most of it, and then some part of it we are told about. But most – black shoes, pants, clean nails, are in our manual, what you need to read when you start working here. Nails. Some hotels are ok for you to have colourful nails, but it is written down that you have not too much colourful things to distract the guest.

How about how you are supposed to behave?
Well, you have to be polite, and, of course, service minded and help the guests. And you have to be aware what's going on all the time, and you have to be patient with the guests. If they are angry so you try to, it's as any other jobs as well, you just try to figure out how to be the best possible self, because we are representing Scandic. So, we have to all the time be aware of the brand behind, so we have to be patient, listen to the guest, and if they are angry, then to try to help the guest, and if it's out of our control then we have to tell them to get to our managers, because then we can't do anything about it.

All the things you just said about your behaviour, is that something written down specifically or have are you being told these things?
Well, it is not written down as that, but you have these vision, missions, these goals and Scandic has always been told them to us, so they are telling us in the other words how to behave. So, for example, one of our, I think it's missions or is it vision, I can't …. I think it is more a goal, that you have to be caring for the guest.

To your colleagues as well, so that is where you get measured as well. We have these performance measurements once in a year, where you value yourself and then your manager, or boss, tells you where you stand and what you should work with as well.

The goals that you have, because you already mentioned them, 'be bold, be pro, be caring, be you', we have heard them already before. Do you think that the goals for your organisation are explicit, are they easy to understand?
Yeah, it's pretty basic and pretty easy to understand. And it is also not something unexpected from the workplace. They are pretty general. But is good that they are written down, so everybody knows. But it is pretty general, I think.

Digging little bit more into these four values, how do you interpret those? Do they tell you how to be bold, be pro?
In some ways, because sometimes we have these meetings at the hotel when we talk about, then we take these small **searching for the word** tests, so you can see how to improve yourself. In some ways, these little meetings help you to know how to be bold and how to improve yourself. In that way – yes. Otherwise, that's … yeah … I have also been in this place only for 1 year, so it's pretty new to me as well.

You said something about the meetings, are those meetings with your manager?
It's for all of the hotel. It's once in every 3 month, I think it is 45 minutes, no … 2 hours meeting, where we talk about the numbers, about how the departments are doing, and then also sometimes we have these task sheets, where we try to improve ourselves and see how to be bolder, or how to be more caring, and showing examples from ourselves. Sometimes when the guests have reacted on something, sharing that with others, so they know what's going on at the reception, and so on, sharing with us what's going on at the restaurant… So, everyone is involved on what is going on.

So, some of the other goals that you have, mission and vision, something about being …
… greatest hotel in the Scandinavia.

Yes, thank you. Is the strategy reaching these goals understandable? Do you know how to get there?
I think when you are on these under-departments, it's not strategic that way, they don't tell you how to do it, but for example, they try to motivate us by having these little competitions. At the moment, we have this little competition between us just so we can reach higher room sale numbers. They suggest to us that is we will up-sale a room from a standard to superior extra rooms, we have to up-sale for 150 kr. That is the strategy for us to reach their goal. They are often making these small competitions, or small things just to us know how to get

level higher up, and in the end, it will reach the higher goal. But as I said, it's the smaller departments. There is not like a specific strategy to reach the goal.

You mentioned competitions. Can you tell us a little bit more about what kind of competitions you have?
Well, for example just the one I mentioned. We try for one month to sell more, because we have been behind our numbers for rooms, so they try to motivate us to try to win a gift by giving a competition between the receptions, where we need to up-sale as much as possible the standard rooms, so we can get a higher rate for our rooms, because we are very behind other competitors. So, that way they make us to contribute, to sell more, but also get higher numbers, and also give a guest a better room experience.

How about your personal performances, also thinking in terms of four values? Are your personal performances monitored and evaluated?
Yeah, once in a year. And also, we have these one-to-one meetings once in a month. Then we just meet every month and talk about my own development, am I happy, am I doing anything here that makes me happy, do I need to improve anything work wise. That's why we need it once in a month, and then last one, called Performance, we have it once in a year, where evaluate your improvements during the last 12 month, and how you want to reach another place. Every year we set a goal, so in these 12 month we have to try to reach that goal, and then we talk about new goals and how to improve again. For example, last year I said that I would like to learn more about the conferences, how to take care of it and I want to be more involved, that was one of my goals. And because my manager knew that, he tried to give me more of those tasks and if I want to be more involved, then I should try to learn more about the conferences that way.

If you have unsatisfied guest, what do you do?
Well, I try to calm the guest down. It depends on situation. The guest can be angry because at the moment the temperature is very high and the rooms are very hot. Unfortunately, I can't do anything about it, but I can try to calm the guest down, say that I understand him, and then I can try and find a solution for him. Some guests are very angry and you can't anything about it, you cannot calm them down. So, the only thing you can do is to try to calm them down as best as you can. We have a lot of responsibilities we cannot… we are not allowed to much also, so for example sometimes these gift vouchers, if guests are not happy with everything, we have to just contact our reception manager and ask if it is ok if we give them one night free voucher, and then we can give it to the guest, so that they could be happier for the moment and then ask then to contact our manager to reach someone in the higher position to find a solution and give them his e-mail address. And ask them to write us an e-mail, coz if I can't do anything about it, then that is the only way to solve it.
But we try to make them at least little happier about the situation by offering something to drink at the bar, or something from the shop, so at least to take the most anger away, but sometimes people get angry and you

can’t control it, so you just do what’s best the best for you and what’s the right intention for the guest. It really depends on the situation, how guests are and how angry they are, so you just work with it.

You mentioned compensation, do you have any rules on how to do compensation – are you allowed to do this or are you allowed to give that amount?
Well, we have these one free night vouchers, but for example, me and the reception are not allowed to give them, so we have to contact our manager before. I have to have really decent reason to give it, like if the guest is really upset about some things, so we just contact our manager and then we give the gift voucher. Usually they [managers] agree with situation and allow to give the voucher. Then there is a paper form we have to fill out, and the write the reason and explain, and then you will get the director’s signature. Then that’s ok. They just have to have a reason.

Is that the highest refund?
For us it is. And then they have to contact our manager, if there is something really bad. Then director takes care of it.

When is it so bad, that manager has to take care of it?
Luckily, I haven’t experienced it. **Giggles** But once there was one guest that was very upset for a very normal thing – his TV was not working in his room and he was like “*I’m paying so much for this room, and this cannot be true”.* It was because our connection was down, and the TVs were not working because we had the renovation going on. So, I thought how to make his bad experience better, so I gave him a gift voucher, so he could come here again when everything will be fine. And I contacted, of course, my manager who approved it.
Some people are angry, but when you talk to them, when you try to explain to them stuff, be human with them, then they calm down. Luckily, I haven’t experienced any bad situation yet.

How about empowerment form manager? Do you feel like you are empowered and encouraged to go ‘above and beyond’ for the guest? We are not only talking about unsatisfied guests. We think about guests in general, to make them extra happy.
Well, we’ve been told that, so we do our best. But sometimes it’s a bit difficult, because at the small hotel, like this one, you have to have responsibility for your job first. For example, when I am in the reception and there are some older guests who can’t get to the room because they have a lot of luggage, I have the responsibility to help them, but I need to see on situation – if there is a big line behind, then I cannot help them. They [management] helps you and encourage to do whatever is correct to do. If there is something wrong, then that is discussed afterwards and they give some advices on how to do next time to not make the same mistake again.

In that way, I feel secure enough to do any extras for the guests, when I feel for it, when there is necessity for it. But sometimes it is a bit difficult, when you are alone at work, especially these evening shifts when you are alone, to be there for the guest constantly, because you are alone and you have, for example, 30 people to check-in. But you try your best and sometimes other departments helps you too. As a hotel we are smaller, so we help each other out that way. Yeah, we are given pretty much… yeah…

So, you have this staff handbook. Besides behaviour and appearance, do you have some rules how to do things?
Well, like a handbook, or…? Because we have a checklist. Checklist for the morning, evening and night shifts. So, that checklist should be done before everything else. You have to go through everything; that's the basic assignments you have to do before you go home. So, they have to be finished in every shift. So, yeah, that was the normal work side you talked [asked?] about.

What about specific rules and procedures that you have to do – such as specific ways of doing things?
Well, uhm, for example maybe that's the only rules that when you check in people you have to take the payment and most of the hotels wait for the day after. We do it immediately because we want to make it easier for the morning shift. So, because sometimes there are a hundred people checking out and you have to help them because they will... people get angry so we will ease the situation by taking the money now, at the moment that they check in.
That's the only thing, otherwise you are being told "*well, we have this way of when you check in*". I of course greet the guests, you give them their registration, they have to fill that out all the time. Those are basic things. Maybe that is basic for me but everyone does that. And then how you do it and how you show the guest how to do it or something – that's your own way to do stuff. And they always tell you also, that we have these basic things that has to be done, but you can do it on your own way. You can change it up to how you like it, how you think it's more logically and how it makes the guests happier or their experience of the check-in easier.

So, what I hear is that you have some rules or procedures on some things – do you think that they help you make decisions in your everyday work?
Of course, they are our guidelines so they show how to, like, manage everything. But sometimes it is your own responsibility to take action on some levels. So yeah.

Do you believe that your colleagues are following the rules – or are some of the rules/procedures more followed than others?
Well, we are now a new team so we try to figure it out everything together because there has been a lot of changes in our reception but we follow the rules and the… well, for example this registration card it's a… It

has to be done all the time and sometimes some people don't fill out their phone number or email because they think they will receive like information from us which they don't wants, advertisements, so that's why they don't want to give us this information but we need this because if they lose anything we have to have a way of contacting them so we have to have this information. And sometimes we forget this and this is a big "*nono*" so you have to remember. So that way it can unfollowing the rules, I don't know if that's what you're searching for. So, they will remind us, like, remember to do this and it is important and sometimes we have… When you're in the reception you have a responsibility for too many departments in one because if you forget to inform housekeeping of some information, they forget to do it, then you have to do it yourself and the guest will be upset. So, you have to, like, you have all the responsibility for the small departments. For example, when they check in, it is my responsibility to ask the guest if they want to eat anything at the restaurant so the restaurant knows how many guests they are receiving that night.

And sometimes we have a lot of guests, and they are eating at a specific timetable, then we have to tell the guest that they need to be aware that there are a lot of guests at this timetable so that we can prevent this busy so they have to wait too long. So that way we have to always remember these things. But these are small stuff and sometimes you can forget and sometimes it makes problems in small departments.

Do you always follow the rules/handbook/SOPs?

Well, uh, I have read it once [the handbook] *laughs* and there are no such rules that if you're like, if you break this rule it'll make anything. But security-wise you have to be aware of that but otherwise most of them, as I told you before, they tell you that you do it with your own responsibility, you do it your own way. You know the rules but you do it your own way. So, you make everything is a pleasant manner for the guest, for yourself and for everyone around you.

In your opinion, do you think you have many rules to follow?

No, I don't think so, actually. I think we're pretty… We have a lot of responsibility in a good way and we have a lot of – what do you say – we have a lot of, you can be a part of the decision without asking or taking… I think it is because we are a smaller hotel and that's why we are more on the shoulders of yourself. When you are alone you just take the responsibility for the stuff and you just take actions and if something wrong happens, then we'll talk about it; how to prevent it, how to learn from it. So, that way they give us a lot of responsibilities.

Do you find your rules constricting in any way? Do they ever prevent you from doing something that you want to do?

Uhm, no, because they are only here to help me and also the company so I don't think so. I haven't met any rule that has been…

When you say "*there are here to help me*" what do you mean by that?
Well, for example some guidelines are there to protect you as a working employee so… *pause*

Do you have an example of such…?
For example, where there is some guest that don't have their credit-card with them and they say "*just take the payment with the credit-card*" because there are places where they can just put down their credit-card and you can take the money from that one but we have this rule we have to have an authorisation from that card so we can take the money through that, so that they have authorised you to take money from this card without them having it. So, if I did it that way by myself it's my problem in the end because I have taken money I don't know which card it is. So, that way the authorisation rule helps you to not be stuck in a situation that you don't want to be in. So, some small rules… I don't know, I can't find anything [else]…

In general, do you find your rules simple to follow?
I think so, I think they're pretty basic and easy to understand and they are being formulated like… They are written in a way you can understand on any level. So, for me it is… yeah.

How do you obtain or how are you given information? Information given to you by managers/colleagues and through which channels? (Facebook, e-mail, verbal etc)
We get information most of the time by email. They have also our… My manager has my/our phone-numbers so if there is anything urgent they will write us and, in a SMS/text-message. So, we have by phone and by email but it is our working mails but they have our private ones as well, but they use our work on most of the time so that how we communicate.

You also mentioned meetings at some point...?
Yeah, yeah, we get them on the email and then they will be plugged in as a date immediately so you can see it in the calendar as well so you can see which date it is. Every third months we have a meeting.

So, what I hear from you is that it is mainly emails?
Yeah

Is all the information you get in some sort of written form?
Well, sometimes they can come and give the information as well and then that's it… they also give mouthly [verbal] information for example. I have been told I am for example going to be at the... our conference for 2 days. It's been not written anyplace, they just come and tell you. Sometimes that, also… We have to be very good at, like, always communicating but they can also tell you by mouth and call you sometimes but it is not

that common that they call you, but for example the mouth [verbal] information giving by, they come and give information, sometimes that's happens too.

Do you use all the information that is given to you?
Yeah, because it's mostly directly to me, the information. It's information that is, that I can use for something so I don't get unused... Okay, sometimes you get... It's good news to know for example we get this marketing news from our [*basics? – couldn't hear*] so sometimes it is good to know but sometimes it is a lot of reading so sometimes it is – for me as a receptionist – not that important to read what's going on in the… But those emails are not from our, here, management – is more from the desks and the ones that are controlling management yeah, and so... HR and stuff.

Would you say that the information is very much top down or bottom up or both?
Well, it depends on what we are talking about because if I have any information I have to give to my colleagues, we just talk to each other. If there's any meetings or any things we have to take care of, we get it from our managers to know. For example, if there is a meeting in 3 months... For now, they ask if you are available for that date, that's from up-down so. But between us it's just… For example, if there are many guests at the restaurant and they ask for a special menu, I ask the chef in the kitchen. So, it doesn't have to go through our manager and then from manager to the kitchen so we do it in between ourselves.

For example, if you have a suggestion, can you go to e.g. the CEO?
Yeah! Yeah, we have been told that if we have... But also, sometimes… Most of the time our director now, he encourages sus if there is anything we want to change, then come and tell him. We can tell him and if there is anything that we want to change… Also, these marketing mails we get, there's sometimes anything you want to change there's an email address we can write to about.
But I haven't done it so I don't know how it feels like if you get answer back or not, I don't know because I haven't had anything on my mind I wanted to contact the bigger bosses about so I don't how fast they answer you, how long it'll take. But there was one suggestion I had once, I talked with my manager and he took it with our director then and they spoke… Because there was a general Scandic… I wanted to… We have these gyms in our hotels that I wanted the employees to also in the time before the guest check in and I thought it would be a good idea that we were allowed to do that. But I had to… I went with this information to my manager and I asked my manager if there was anything we could do about it and he said 'this is a general rule that we are not allowed to be too much interacting with the guests' so he had to figure it out if we could do it. That way he went up and I got the information pretty fast back.

What did it up with then?

Well, we are not allowed to use the gym but we… They came up with a compromise and such but we still… it's not written down so you can't… So, it's not a written down rule and I didn't want to break any rules by that.

Does everyone in the reception have the same access to all the information, do you think?

Uhm, to begin with, when I started here there was some… For example, there is something called overbooking in our system so they can be overbooked and there is one thing you can go and delete those but I couldn't because I couldn't because I didn't have the manager access. And I think the same goes for Louise as well, she didn't have the access but they saw that we are only… There's not too many receptionists here so, and, we have been told that we have to let these overbookings… Like, we have to use our brains and then... *interviewer accidently laughs* It's true, because during the day 'till 3 o'clock; for example, Louise is in the morning shift and she can see that we have an overbooking – we are allowed to overbook by 5 rooms. And we are already fully booked or something, so, sometimes the mornings shifts they can see that they want to help the night shifts, so they delete all these overbookings so they can't be overbooked. But then in the evening there is for example 3 cancellations and then… And we have plenty of rooms then it is not good. So that way they didn't allow us to have this access but they… I talked with our director to ask if we could have this responsibility so we could take care of it, and that we don't overuse it. So, that way we got the manager access. I think Louise has that as well so we can prevent to be overbooked.

Do you believe that you get all the information to do your job?

Sometimes. I don't know is it because there is a lot going on in the hotel right now, so maybe that is why we don't get all the information; there are lot of movements. But before this, I have been working in other Scandic as well, so I have been in 3 places at Scandic, so in other places we got any news, any information, anything that was specifically for the reception, we got it immediately. What I mean with a lot of movements / changing here, it is not about the rules and how to do your job, but it's a lot people are moving around within departments, so you don't know what's going on at the moment. That's what I mean that sometimes information is lacking.

But do you think it has to do with…

… a lot of changes at the moment. Yeah. Because I have been here from December till now, so before everything was at the place. But there are some changes in the department, so that's why. Yeah. We have not all the information all the time.

Is the information available when you need it? Now we are thinking, for instance, if you have a conflict with a guest, or something happens that does not normally happen?

Well, there's something called 'Best practice', that's like a set of rules always to do everything. Most of the time you can find the advices on how to deal with different situations and how to use them in practice. For example, Scandic Friends membership had a lot of changes, and people were very angry, so we got the new 'best practice' how to tell about the changes to the guest, and how to manage and control them.
We get them [best practices] when things are changing and when we need to know something about them. They are like guidelines for you.

What is this 'bet practice', where do you get an access to it? Is that a book or…?
No, it's like set of rules, like guidelines for some specific subjects. For example, a new Data Policy – we got a best practice for that, where it is explained how to tell to the guest, how to manage everything, how to save information, etc.
So, if there is something you need to know about something new then we get 'best practice' how to deal with it. Everybody get it, it's the same for everyone.

Do you know who makes these 'best practice' – is it manager, or HQ?
Eeee… actually don't know who specifically. We just get them handed – out in our hands, so I don't know.

So, the information that you get, is it understandable?
Yeah, it's pretty easy. Also, we are told from our management that if there is anything to ask questions, or send e-mail. Both to our managers, but as well to the people who are sending the information, like HR department. We can always contact them if there are any questions – we can call them directly or send an e-mail.
We also have this IT service, for example, whom we can contact if we need any help with something. We have the phone numbers for all the departments, so we can contact them, if we need help.
Also, hotels help each other. For example, Glostrup helps Hvidovre a lot. We try to help out each other a lot.

How do you do that?
We call each other and ask them how they are doing some specific tasks. If there is anything I don't know about, I ask them how they take care of the specific problem, or how are there any specific rules they know that we ned to take care of. So, we help in that way.

Why specifically Hvidovre?
It's because they are the closest. And we have connection with them. We've been told that we can call all the Scandics, but because we know each other, that's why it is easier to call them.
I've been at Roskilde before, so sometimes I call them, because I know people there. Also, some of our employees go and help other hotels. That's the way we help each other across the hotels.

16.3 Interview transcript J-SH

Respondent	Company	Date
Janice	Scandic Hvidovre	28 May 2018
Position		
Receptionist, full-time		
Number of years with company		
1,5 years Started in January 2017 as part-time at Scandic Weber Full-time at Scandic Hvidovre since August 2017		
Number of years with current position		
1,5 years		

Transcription:

Please start with describing to us your daily routines - what do you do when you come to work and during work?

The first thing you have to do is check you in, in the system. Then afterwards you have to check what the arrivals list look like. I mean how many people should be arriving and how many people have already left and how many are groups and how many are individuals. And afterwards you have to check whether there are some rooms out of order in the house, then you should - so I am describing the checklist because you have a checklist that we have to follow every day - then you have to check if you need to allocate some rooms to people that are coming, for example if there are families coming because we do have some family rooms here. Then you have to check if we have groups, so you have to allocate them.

This is what you do in the morning shift. And while you during this checklist you'll have to check out people coming to your desk, and then you have to inform them if you have some questions, or if they have separate bills you have to split them. If it is a company that you have to send an invoice - so there is a lot of things.

After you've been through that you have to sometimes take some payments in advance if they're paying with some external travel agency, like Expedia or booking.com. So, with these kinds of things you have to be really aware. And then you give them their room and deliver them information that is important to tell, like for instance we do have a swimming pool in the basement, a fitness centre and a sauna and that the rooms have no air condition - because now it is really hot and most people are coming and asking for it. And are they Americans for instance, they can't understand that we don't have air condition. But then we tell them that we are environmental friendly and then we don't have this kind of air conditions in the room.

So yeah, stuff like that. We inform them and if they come up with questions like “we need to go downtown” then you'll have to explain that there is public transportation which takes you to the Central Station. And so on and so on.
It is very important to just check the rooms that are ready. The housekeeping haven't checked it in the system, you have to call them and ask them “is that room ready or not?” - because that happens sometimes.
When you are done with checkouts, because you have to finish that at twelve which is the latest check out - but some people are allowed to stay a little bit longer, but they have to pay extra. But you have to tell housekeeping if there are some people staying longer so they don't knock the door and try to do the cleaning.
If people are coming with babies you have to put a crib for the baby, or tell housekeeping to do that. So, we are communicating with housekeeping a lot, we always keep the phone besides us.

Is communication with housekeeping always by phone?
Yes. We can't really leave the reception because there is only one receptionist per shift and you have to deal with so many things… There should come another receptionist when you have your break for lunch so then you swap and then you can go and have your meal; you have 30 minutes for that which is not paid because this is a private company. What else… Oh yeah, when you start your shift you have to count your cashier and then when you're close the shifts you have to do the same. Print it out and accumulate all the receipts that you've got and then put them in a file, sign it, drop the money that you have over exceeded with the amount of being a cashier and then put that money in a special place. During the week we have all sorts of different duties, like ordering money on Tuesdays, on Sundays we have to make the reservations for groups, because in this hotel we have a lot of companies that are coming every single week so we have to make reservations for Monday to Friday mostly. And every single one is coming every single week so we need to know exactly when they are leaving and when they're not, and the type of room that they like. Because they are, you know, preferred guests so we have to know “okay, so I am trying to allocate you the room that are facing this side or not the other side” because then they can’t sleep or whatever.

How about standard operating procedures? like rules/procedures that you have for this hotel in terms of appearance, uniform, makeup, behaviour and so on?
Okay, there's not much of it. In my case I don't have anything tattoos or nothing but I know a colleague who has a nose piercing and he has to take that one out.
I mean, I can come like, you can see I'm wearing a bunch of makeup but that’s how I feel comfortable and they don't say anything to that. We all have to be dressed in this way *points to light blue shirt and black skirt* with a uniform with the name on it *taps name tag*. There are no requirements or restrictions on whether you want to wear shorts, skirts or trousers. Just how you feel comfortable, like, they don't want you to be - I mean, I can have my hair long like this and they don't really say anything to that.

How are you being informed about the rules and procedures?

They print it out in sort of like a staff handbook for all new personals. So you read that once and then it's *gestures hands in a go-out-of-the-head gesture and chuckles*

Do you have any other specific rules?

Generally, we got to give the good service. So that you even when you're stressed you carry on and give a good smile. But I always say that you have to be honest with your smile. But sometimes with the service, because we keep the records among all the Scandic - because we have a table that shows how good are you on upselling, how good were you on service, how good are you on cleaning. But they always want to keep this above 90 and when it drops to 80 they will start saying “what happened”, “did you not do a proper job, did you not smile enough?” or maybe there has been a complaint because they're definitely are complaints once in a while so you just have to keep going and try to make them happy at the end. But sometimes it's hard because sometimes they didn't like the room or they didn't like the smell of the room so yeah…

So how do you handle unsatisfied guests?

I talk to them, I try to make them happy. So, I tell them that I gotta give you some, not compensation, some upgrading next time he or she comes or I give them a little gift, like we have a bunch of little gifts for preferred guest. So, they smile. But I've had some, you know, some guests are just naughty. They like to complain, but not our preferred guest they never complain, but there are the ones that comes once in a while that says ”we are never coming back to this hotel” because of this and that. With this you just have to deal and be like “ok I'm sorry, I'm so sorry you had this experience, we will try to improve for the next time”.

What are the gifts that you're giving them?

They are chocolate and such. We have these little chocolates that we can give them.

But how about actual compensation?

I have done it, it has happened to me but it was kind of a cheat, I mean, they make such a big deal of something, and I believe it was a new one, and I gave them... you might give them at least 200, and I gave them 500 and they were more than happy but they were still complaining. This kind of people that are going to hotels and then they start saying but the hotel was cold. It was in the winter time and I saw them wearing t-shirts but they were complaining that it was too cold - what is that. And then she started, the guest, making a big noise so that the people in the back were like “what’s going on”. They like doing that, they like to get the attention of everybody so they are naughty, naughty guest. And then you're like desperate just to try to manage and give them the money and try to tell them that ”sorry, sorry, sorry” but they got what they wanted and they leave even making so much noise.

Do you have any rules on how you are supposed to act in situations like that?

We have the power and that’s what the supervisors say “you can handle it as you want, you are able to give them 500 if you want to, if you feel like that you should give it away. But not in money, you give them sort of like a voucher and tell them that next time to come to another Scandic they can spend that voucher in the restaurant or even as accommodation payment. But they, the managers, they are very good at supporting you in these decisions. The best way, I mean, you can try to read them, the people who are the ones that are doing this for a living or maybe they doing this because they are really mean. So, you have to learn how to notice that. You use your intuition for this and try to figure out whether the guest is being fair or not. But they always give you the support [the managers] and if you have to give them [the guest] money then that's ok.

Do you feel that you are authorised and empowered by the managers to go above and beyond?

yes, yes!

Can you do something extra to make your guests happy?

Yes. Is actually one of the new ideas for scandic that you do something, over the top for the guests. So, if you have a guest that are telling you that they are sick, then you can go knock on their door and maybe give them some soup with some bread, or a banana, or anything. But, you know, we don't have that time, sometimes. We are so full in the reception and we have to follow this list, I mean, sometimes we are so busy that we don't have an extra minute to do anything extra for a guest. that's how it is and they have to understand that as well.

Do you think that the rules that you guys have help you make decisions throughout the day, for instance when you're dealing with certain situations?

well, there might be some times where you're, like, lost and you can't figure out what you should do and you're on your own. So, then there's this file with the standard operating procedures that we can go and look at, but you are so stressed sometimes that you have no time to go and look for it and try to find the case so you can figure it out. So, you just have to sort it as you think is good. and then perhaps together with his supervisor you can try and fix it up. But you have the power, they give you the power, and they trust you.

Do you think that your colleagues are following the rules?

I mean, everybody's doing their best, I know. They’re really… They're doing their best.

Do you think that there are rules of procedures that they follow more than others?

I'm pretty much sure that that every single person that works in scandic are doing their best. I got the idea that they are smiling as much as they can even though if they have had a tough day, they are giving the best for the people that are coming here. So, I don't think the problems in this hotel is the service at all. it is more the overload of job it's the amount of work you have on your back; that you have to do.

How about yourself, are you always following the rules?
I mean, I try to do it.

Are there some rules or procedures that you follow more than others?
Not really, I mean, it is important to do that checklist. You mark it and you have to file it - that paper is not going anywhere. somebody can come later on and say ”ah, but you haven't done that, you are supposed to do that”. So, you're mark that you've did it and if you haven't done it they will ask you why.
But I haven't been called out for anything that I have done either right or wrong so far.

Do you think that you have many rules?
Not really. No. I mean, we have rules and they have to be done but it's not like… well, the pressure for me is like we have to do service, a lot of series on top of what we are already doing and we can't do it because we are so busy doing other things.

Do you find your rules simple?
Yes, not complicated at all.

They are easy to read and they're easy to understand?
Yeah.

Do you find any of your rules constricting in any way? like, do the rules prevent you from doing the service?
they all want you to be good at service, all the rules.

How are you giving information? here we are thinking about Facebook and emails and so on.
We have an internal communication by mails, all the time.
Oh, and this is another thing - that in every single shift you have to do a written handover on work and you have to file that as well. you see, in our back office we have a lot of files on everything. It’s all, filing, filing, filing. In the computer, in paper, it’s everywhere. so you can all recorded watch what you have done. But if something happened yesterday, I was working in the morning I came in at 7, and I had to get the information from my colleague who was working in the evening.

Janice gets interrupted by her phone ringing, picks it up, interview is paused for a few minutes - comes back and continues to tell the story about two tourists getting their bag stolen by 2 strangers who just walked in the hotel

So, these guys, there were to actually, came in and they robbed a bag from one the tourists. so, eventually we were talking but we hadn't even noticed, but then they rush out and yell "my bag is stolen" and we were like "what's going on" but a guest was smoking outside and he saw the two people get away. So, we had to call the police, and tell them and make the whole statement on the phone.

but we can't do anything [for the guests] and they were desperate, they thought it was our responsibility. in some way, I'm not sure, but we don't have someone outside like a security guy watching for people coming in and out. we don't have that, any of the hotels here in Denmark don't have that. but they [the guests] were expecting us to do it all because they thought it was our mistake - but it's not our fault, it is *your* responsibility to look after your stuff. but somehow you have to deal with this kind of stuff. For these people I made so much for them, I even made all the paperwork for them to send to the embassy because they had to have these emergency passports made. So, that kind of stuff is over your job, it's not a part of your duties, but you have to help them in these kinds of situations.

Then the police asked me to send over the security footage, but I can't do that, so I had to tell them that they would have to wait for the technicians to come in tomorrow morning. So, when we do the handovers we would also include things like the robbery, but if you have time you spend like 5 minutes speaking with your colleagues about the handover but if you're busy you just going to give them the paper with all the information on which have happened during your shift, like that guests have left his bag here, or that person is coming back later or whatever.

How do you get information from your manager? is it always via email?

We do have monthly meetings, where we talked about for instance improving procedures. But currently we have this girl, Line who is a substitute while our manager is on a maternity leave but we expect her back in June or July.

Do you use all the information that is given to you?

We try but sometimes it's like... but, yeah you have to. because we have some kind of new thing going on in the entire chain that all of these memberships, the loyalty programme, have been changed and you have to inform the guests about that.

How is the information flow? is it top down, bottom up?

Well, when we have these kinds of meetings we have to tell them what we don't like, or what we are doing wrong and then obviously they have to do adjust it to us.

For instance, Line that just came, she wanted to about some things because she said that we are wasting time on doing some things but we were like "no, we are comfortable that way and it is fine by us, it is easy for us and *you* have to adjust to us because that is the way how it is being done". it's just, you'll get used to one system and then this person comes and say "now you are going to do this this way" and you think it is going to give you troubles, you try it once and then it definitely gives you troubles. like, just go back to the other system. So, they have to listen to you too.

Does everyone in the reception have the same access to all information?

We have that SOP for the reception and we have that printed out. Everyone in the reception has access to that but there are some things, for instance, where the supervisors in the reception can manage and you can't because you can't get that in the system, like, you can't manage the time schedule for instance because it's not my duty and I can't even see how to do it. There are others in the evening would look for instance at the complaints from the guests because you have to do some kind of records of that but I don't have that access but the guys in evening has.

So, some things that you don't need to use, the tools, are according to the shifts and are different.

Do you feel that you get information that you need to do your job? The tools for instance?

Yes.

Do you think that information is available to you when you need it, for instance when you have a guest conflict, and how you supposed to solve that, or if you have a situation that you haven't encountered before? Do you have the tools so you can figure out how to solve this new situation?

The only thing that we have had, that I have found a little bit challenging was because we have conferences in the hotel. And sometimes they [the guests] come and say "okay, I would like to rent the conference room" in the middle of the day and they haven't booked anything directly with the conference office, so you don't know what the prices are so you give them roughly something and they're like "what the, that's too much" - and then you just start negotiating and then you just talk to the people who are i charge in the restaurant so they have to clear it up and put it in the right way, put water in and so.. Sometimes you come up with different prices and then we create a little problem because then they say "you gave me a room, a meeting, for 1000 and it's supposed to be 2000". But we're working on it, we already talked about it, and so we need to make a price list of what the costs are, what time, how many hours and so on…

Are you creating these lists because this is the problem that you often encounter?
No, I just had it once or twice. But mostly… we also have a lot of sports groups who wants to have a private area where they can discuss the strategy, for I don't know, because they're hockey or football players - but I can't give them a room like that they have to pay, otherwise I'll tell them " ok, go down in the bottom and try to do your meeting there because otherwise it will cost you to rent a room".

Is the information that you are given understandable? Language, way of delivery and such?
Most of our guests are Danes because they mainly come for the conferences but now has started these groups of Americans, because the tourist season has started, with the cruises. So, there are lots of Americans coming over as well, and they can have such different questions such as "what's this coin, how much is it, can you tell me how to get there and there, how do you say 'thank you' in Danish" and so on….

We were also thinking about the information that you get from the hotel, from your colleagues, your managers and so on? is that information understandable?
Yeah. and a lot if, yeah well, it's a little bit of a challenge because most of the communication is in Danish so I'm like, totally... I'm not Danish is one thing and another thing is that I haven't finished the Danish courses. I speak Danish but I don't write it that much but I have to do it. I hope that i understand it right. So far, I did, I guess.

So, the emails you get from your managers, are they in Danish?
Many of our emails, we get a bunch of emails as well from our customers, asking stuff, are in Danish. I answer back in English, and they perhaps know me already some of them and they answer back in Danish *laughs*. So, although I wrote in English, they answer back in Danish. But that's how we communicate.

The managers also speak Danish with you?
Yeah. We speak Danish in our meetings and so on. But I write them in English. I write my handovers in English. A lot of them, because they... She *gestures toward colleague at the reception* she speaks Danish as well, but she doesn't write in Danish much. But most it is mixing it up - Danish/English/English/Danish.
The Danish language is strong in this culture. And although you want to make them international, you can't because we have a lot of Danish coming over. And I know, because I know there is this one girl who speaks English and when the Danes are coming she just swaps to English, they are upset, totally upset. There are people who are like... They don't want it! *impersonates guest *er der ikke nogen der snakker dansk her!" so you have to help her. So that can be tough for me. For me too, still, because I am not writing in Danish.

How about goals for the reception - do you have any?

We always would like to have a good environment among ourselves. It is not because we don't get along but we get stressed sometimes. But we have a good environment I would say. We are friends working in the reception but we also keep a good relationship with others, like housekeeping, restaurant, conference and so on.

The other thing is to keep a very good, high service. And this is dated everywhere, high service, that you gotta be friendly and smile. And everywhere you smile. And up-selling's.

We used to do this membership, asking guests "would you like to become a member of Scandic" and I get so many loyals - and you get a price of it, because you win it, you compete with your colleagues.

With up-selling's you do the same. I've never done... I've done once I think but for upselling you get a price if you win among your colleagues too. So, there are some things like this. You also get prices if you're the employee of the month or you have been given a good, what do you call it, like a history with a guest. So, if a guest was happy with you, especially with *you* so that it is stated your name on it and is says "I reviewed this hotel and you were so good with the service" or whatever.

Do you have some more definitions and how to provide the service?

You gotta be calm, not be stressed, very secure. But if you are insecure, don't show it that you don't know what to do. So, you should just always be very calm and carry on and smiling.

Is this written down?

No, they tell you. And when you are, once in a while dealing with a guest and you are giving good information, and your supervisor is passing by, or they can hear you from the back office, they are good at saying "you did a very good with that" so they're good at that as well.

How about goals that you do have, you talked about upselling and such. Are the goals that you have, are they explicit and easy to understand?

Yeah, yeah everybody is aware that they want to earn money here *laughs* so that's why you want to do the upselling. but the membership program is over, because of the new law in Europe that we cannot expose our personal information. So, there's no more competition among us on this this. No memberships. I don't know what they're going to do, maybe it's going to be online, I don't know.

Is there a strategy for the up-sales or for having a nice environment?

No, nothing written. It's only verbally. I mean, you just have to know these things.

But how are your performances monitored and evaluated? you mentioned earlier something about that the services would have to be over 90% - can you elaborate on this?
Mm, this is not personal though, it's for the entire hotel. So, you never... Perhaps you get a call or a... if you've done something wrong they might tell you but they are not making any records, they are not evaluating any of us. Like, who is doing it the best or who is giving a better service. It's just the entire hotel which qualifies, so they summarize all the reviews that they got and that's where they get the 90 from.

Do they monitor up-sales?
Yeah. if you've done an up-sale you would put it in an Excel sheet and then you count it monthly how much you did.

So, you don't pull these numbers from the system?
No, you have to do this yourself. Otherwise it is too much.

How about your personal goals?
So, yeah, I would love to escalate right away. My supervisor has been in that position for 1 year and she just got that position after working 3 years as a receptionist. I am applying for supervisor in another hotel - but let's see what's gonna happen.
Scandic is expanding and there's a lot of new hotels and I hope that eventually I can escalate a little - that's my goal.

Are your managers helping you with that?
I told them that I wanted to, but perhaps they are too busy now. We're in the middle of the changes, and we have to get new replacements. I wanted to do something with revenue, I always said that, I wanted to do something with revenue management at some point. But let's see. They'll send me to some course eventually. So, I'm just waiting.
But the guy in the evening comma who has been working here for 5 years, he has just made management courses and he was asking for that for about a year. So, it can take a while *laughs*.

So, you have some courses here, within Scandic?
Yes. they have a lot of courses going on. And they can just subscribe people who they think are ready for it.

How about annual performance reviews?

So far, I haven't got any, but I haven't been here for an entire year yet. You get a performance - I've already been through one - meetings, where you can say "okay, I would like to do this", "I wanna be the best at upselling", "I wanna get some very good reviews" and so on. So, in six months, I just had my review in March, we're going to do the same again and they're going to ask whether I achieved my goals or not.

Are you given any tools, by Scandic, on how to be better at upselling?

No. I was expecting a course, but it's not really a course. I was just being told how to.

Do you have a script in the reception on how to do upselling?

No, it's just your own creativity.

Do you know the Scandic values?

Yeah. They have 3 values: to be bold, to be proactive and what's the other one… and to be creative, I think it was.

Are you using these on a daily basis?

The values are floating somewhere. But definitely embrace what you should do.

16.4 Interview transcript A-SP

Respondent	Company	Date
Anca	Scandic Palads	25 May 2018
Position		
Receptionist, part-time		
Number of years with company		
2 years		
Started in June 2016 (3 months internship), part-time since		
Number of years with current position		
2 years		

Transcription:

Can you please start with describing your daily routines?

We have a bit different routines depending on either we have morning or afternoon shift. The first thing we do when we arrive – we receive a handover from our colleagues. This routine is the same no matter is it morning or evening shift. That's the first thing you do – you take the handover from your colleagues. They tell you what happened during the night or during the day, about different situations with the guests or reservations. Then we also have a physical handover paper, where is written the name of the staff member who wrote summing up, the name of the guest that has the specific problem, the date of check-in and check-out and then the description of what happened. But when we start our shift we need to make ourselves cautious about what we should be careful about. After that we start to go through our task lists. We have these sheets with tasks for morning shift and evening shift. In the morning shift you need to first check if you have any wake-up calls – then you have to call them. Should I just describe all of them?

No, it's fine. It is just to get an overview.

Yeah. So…

So, you have a checklist what should be done in the morning and in the evening…

Yes, we have the checklists. And then, that's really important, that you look at the handover. We also have a whiteboard in the back of the office, where we write the numbers of departures, arrivals, the colleagues working that day in both shifts [3 shifts], and if we have any events at the hotel. So, then we have an idea, where the wedding is in, or the conference, because people might ask about it.

Can you explain your hotel's rules and standard operating procedures? Like uniforms, behaviour, what are you supposed to do?
In terms of uniform, we all have the uniform from the hotel, including name tags. We are supposed to have our name tags on, and then guys need to have ties and girls have a scarf. So, we are considered professional, if we actually wear them and not be like avoiding it. There are still many guys who would not wear them. That's not how it should be.

Are you wearing them even when your managers are not there?
I mean I am, but I do have colleagues that sometimes don't. I mean that [wearing all parts of uniform] should kind of be a standard of looking professionals.

Is the way how you are supposed to look written down somewhere?
No.

Any handbook or anything?
No. There are no handbooks. It's just what has my manager told me when I started. That it is nice to have it. Then our manager and shift leader are always dressing like that. So, you see it around.

How about the training when you started?
My training. Yeah. At that point, there wasn't anything written down, therefore it was more learning by doing. I had my own notebook where I was writing down procedures. Then they started to develop, I'm not sure is it ready yet, a standard operational procedure book. Also, at the back office we have a folder, where we can find printed e-mail with very important SOPs. It is because we have this oral training, like 'deltagelse' and they show us how to do things, but then with time it looks like people tend to forget things, and then either our manager, shift leader or any experienced receptionist, those who have been there for more than 5 years or so, if they discover a mistake, they just send out an e-mail to everyone saying that they have noticed how things are done and how they actually should be done. Then this e-mail will be printed out and put into the folder.
Apart from that, we don't have written down standard operational procedures. For example, we have a delivery service, which is called 'Your deliver service', and we got an e-mail about the procedures; they printed it out and they told us where we can find them in the back office. So, those could be standard operations.

What are the delivery services?
If guest forgets stuff at the hotel, we need to put those things in the storage room, and by law we are required to keep them there for 3 months. We are not allowed to touch them within those 3 months. We have to register 'lost and found' at the reception in an Excel sheet in the system. We write the date of the item was found, the

room number, what items and your initials, and then we put it into the storage room. So, when guests call, you just check if there is anything in the system that matches their description, and then a receptionist is asking about the delivery of the item. Some returning guests will ask to just keep it for them until their next time, otherwise people might ask to ship the item to them. Then we contact the company [shipping]. Of course, we have a lot of procedures how to proceed the payment. Initially we ask guests for their address, phone number and credit card to charge it. Then this information is sent to the delivery service, and when the delivery company has picked the package, we will charge the credit card. But then we had the problems in terms of security of payment, cause sometimes credit card won't work. So, now we are asking to fill in credit card authorisation. Also, we have meetings every month, staff meetings. Because some people tend to not attend, there is someone responsible to take the minutes of the meeting, and then sent them through e-mail to everyone. Sometimes, when you don't remember something, but you know you have been at that meeting and someone said something about that then, you can also check it. But, I think, that the rule in our team is "if you are in doubt, you always ask". If you are in the deep shit, and there is no one who can help you, you can call your manager or your shift leader.

How about rules about how you are supposed to behave?

I think that is something more linked with the values of the hotels, the Scandic chain. They have this 'be you, be pro, be bold' and I cannot remember if there was something more. I remember, when these values had been introduced, we had couple of meetings with our reception manager and the director of the hotel, who introduced us with the concept. Then we had to make a survey where we were asked questions to realise and understand better what it meant with these values. Then we also have this yearly meeting with the reception manager, where we are also evaluated how we perform based on these values. So, then it is something that is in your mind. Then we also know that we are highly empowered. When I started my internship here in Scandic, I was a bit more reserved, I wasn't sure how to behave. Then I had a meeting with my manager, where he told me to be bolder and to trust myself more. He let me know that I am empowered to make the decisions, and that I don't have to be afraid to make the mistakes. The most important thing is that I don't repeat the same mistake twice, and that our manager always will support our decisions. For example, during the weekends we have no managers. During the weekends we are completely alone, and we have to deal with customer complaints on our own. And then, if there is a really big case where the guest makes huge scandal, then you need to hold your ground and you need to figure out how you will handle this. You would not call your manager, well I would, especially I am not so experienced, but most of my experienced colleagues won't call the manager. Unless it's really, really, REALLY bad. And then they would have to write an e-mail to the manager and to explained what happened – what kind of complaint was it and how he/she dealt with it, what has been said, so the manager knows more about the situation. But it is nowhere written down that we are empowered to deal with requests;

this is something we have been told to, that it is a part of our responsibilities. It is a part of us being in the team.

What do you do when you have a super unhappy guest or just like unsatisfied guest?
I think it is really great that we work in teams, that there are always at least 2 during the shift, so if I'm really 'losing it', if I'm not that confident, and there is a bit too long response time from my side, then my colleagues might come and help me. Otherwise, I would just try to figure out the solution. I haven't had that bad complaints lately, but then we know what we can do in the terms of compensating our guests, are some restaurant vouchers or some drinks on our house account. For example, "you are really unhappy, I can understand your situation, but I can give you this number of vouchers to spend in our restaurant for this type of drinks". And then it's up to me what will the amount I give to them.

So, you can decide yourself the amount of the refund?
Yeah. Of course, I will not give them a thousand of worth in vouchers, you know? There is also a limit. For example, once I had a guest. I think housekeeping forgot their door opened, or something like that. You know, that is a really big security issue, because they can lose their trust in us. So then, I think, I gave him 400, 500, 600 DKK worth of vouchers. I think it was quite ok. Even if the door was opened for a few minutes until it got discovered. If a guest would have come down and would say that their 5000 DKK watch has been stolen, then few hundreds would not be much compared to the lost amount. SO, yeah, I would not call in this situation to my manager asking what to do. I am just trying to figure out what is a common sense in that situation.
There are no SOPs in terms of 'if you have this type of complaint, you need to give that'. You know, there is no such division of small, medium and big complaint. It is up to us to decide how to deal with it.

Do the rules, or the lack of the rules, help you to make decisions when you are at work?
Yeah. For example, we have some standard procedures in terms of reservations – which reservations can be refunded, which can be changed, like the dates, which cannot be changed. There the reservation is made by the third party, the dates cannot be changed, but there are many people who are calling and trying to push the date change by telling that they are sick or have booked wrong dates, etc. If the guest has booked the wrong date, it is not a hotels fault, and the reservation is already pre-paid, then I just tell them that they cannot do that.
In a sense yes, cause then you know what you are allowed to do, when you have this type of request. Some guests send e-mails about forgotten invoices, or they want confirmations for their made reservations. But again, if the reservation I made through an agent, we are not allowed to send the confirmation to them. Instead we need to send them to the agent to fulfil their request.

Do you think your colleagues are following the rules? Or some of the rules are followed more than others?
Thinking

You already mentioned uniform?
Yeah. *Pause* They are… Let me think … I am part – time, so I don't work with all of them. I would say they follow the rules, but at the same time we might have our own way of dealing with things. There are lot of people who forget small things. For example, if guest has double reservation in stay over, we are supposed to write in the second reservation that it is stay over and make traces to the other reservation, both for reservation and housekeeping. It is done when we check the arrival lists. Yet, there have been some occasions when some-one has forgot about it. That's not nice, but it can happen. But I think it's more like a human mistake, than people not being willing to follow the rules. So, yeah, there are mistakes, lot of communication mistakes, and there are people who forget things. But I am not really sure if it's because they don't want to follow them, or because they are really bad at remembering.
We have this Scandic Members program, and then members can receive vouchers. If they are on the Level 2 or above, they receive voucher for every night, and then they can use that voucher to pay for food and drinks in the hotel. We have two ways of charging that vouchers – either in the Opera, in the system, or in our Micro shop thing, it's a small thingy. Then depending, whether we charge it and get the receipt from Opera or Micro Shop, we have to put receipts in two different folders for our financial department. Each folder has dates for each month, and then you need to put the stamped receipt together with voucher in the date number that cor-responds when that voucher was charged, but not the date that is printed on the voucher. And there are lots of people who kind of mix this around. And then we have this colleague who is in charge of making sure that receipts fit with the charges in the system and Micros. We receive so many e-mails from him reminding to get better at sorting these receipts. That's a mistake that has been very common lately, but I don't know what's the reason behind it. It might be just because people are stressed and then they do it in the hurry, and therefore just look at the wrong date.

Is it not written down how you are supposed to do it?
It is. Thomas has written multiple times.

Is there a little instruction where you do it?
I think. *pause* That's a good question. I know that in the both folders there is a paper stick that says some-thing, I cannot remember. I know how to do it, but I don't read that paper. I think it just says we have to *pause* … Oh yeah, it says... the holders have – how do you say it - this grey thing where to write a date, and then the paper hold thingy. On the transparent folders inside, there are note saying how to arrange the folders

by date. That's because people get confused do you need to put the following date on top or under. The, regards of this issue, my colleague and shift leader sends e-mails explaining how this procedure should be done. Also, mentioned that on the staff meeting.
I don't think people are doing this mistake any longer, because recently we haven't received any e-mail about that. So, maybe they got it.

How about yourself, do you believe you are following all the rules or are there some that you skip? Why?
Thinking I have realised that I forget some of them. It's because there is nothing written down, and we always get things through the e-mail. As a result, we need to ask people around, if you are not sure how to do something. I have a tendency to forget things if I don't do them every shift, and you don't do things every shift. Additionally, my shifts are 4 – 5 times a month, and sometimes it can be two weeks between my shifts.
Then I was mentioning this thing about not being allowed to send confirmations to the people who have booked their reservations from an agent. When I read the e-mail from my shift leader, I realised that if she would have not sent out that e-mail, I would have not thought about it. Somehow, I know that the third parties' websites have different rate, this is also why we are not allowed to give a receipt, but I haven't thought about that it is for all third parties' bookings, like Expedia, Booking or Hotels.com
So, I think, that sometimes you just might not see the whole picture. Maybe, sometimes, it is easier when you have some specifications about each and every thing, but it can also be a common sense. But I think it is easier if you know the rules for each and everything, cause then there is no doubt about it.

In general, do you think you have too many rules to follow?
Thinks Yeah, I would say so. *Trying to formulate a thought*. Many… How would you define many?

Some of them are 'this is how you do things' in general, but besides those standard things, there are also things like your uniform, how you have to behave, tasks for the day?
I mean, this with how you are supposed to behave – we are supposed to be friendly and helpful, but I would not say that there are many rules in terms of how you should behave. I think that rules in terms of how you should behave are those values. So, I don't think there are many in that sense.
But then, yeah, there are lots of standard operating procedures, I would say. And that is important, because that can help you sometimes with how to deal with the situation and complaints. it is so important to know. There are so many rules regarding bookings and reservations – when you can book them, can people bring pets or not and which rooms to put them in. Things like that. They are really important.

Do you find the rules you have constricting? Do they prevent you from making guests happy?
No. I don't think so.

Are the rules simple to follow?

Yeah. I think they are easy to follow. It is also easy, because we know we can ask about it. Like, asking to explain again some rules. Our manager and shift leader are very helpful, and in every e-mail, they are sending to us, they are saying that we can ask. The colleagues are also very helpful; if I'm ever in doubt, I can ask. Otherwise it is quite easy.

I think, when they [the rules] new they might seem a bit overwhelming. For example, in February – March this year, the procedures for Scandic members have been changed. Like, ALL the rules, when they can become Level 2 members, and things like that. In the beginning, I found it really overwhelming, because there are SO rules. Like, all the details – when they can use their points, and when they get points, and there are so many details sometimes. It is not about that it is difficult to follow, but there are just so many details and that can be a bit overwhelming.

But all those details, are they somewhere where you can read them?

Yeah. There's a lady that's in charge of, I think she is from HR department, developing all this. Then she sent us a HUGE *illustrates with the hand gestures* manual with all the new Scandic Friends procedures. She also said, that we can ask her, if we are in doubt of anything.

How about information… You already mentioned e-mails…

… and meetings.

And meetings. Is there any other way you obtain the information?

We have this new platform, FUSE, that our manager said we can use it as a forum, where people can write stuff. I went only once there to see what it is about and no one wrote anything. So, I am not really sure if people use that. I think they might find it a bit too much, because we already send e-mails to everyone, when we have a problem and figure something out. Then we have a handover. Oh, and we also recently got this procedure regarding complaints. There is a complaint list and you need to write, whenever you have a small issue, like 'housekeeping forgot to bring the towels in the room' or 'the safe is not opening', you need to write it there, and then you need to write if it was resolved or not. That's important to know for the next shift, as well as the shift next day, because guests come down in the afternoon or day after and ask about the problem. The new employee is clueless of what have happened, but with this list one can see what actually have happened and what has been done.

How do you know that the issue has been resolved, like the lightbulb has been changed?

They need to write it on the list that it is resolved.

Is that a printed-out list?
Yes, it is a printed-out list, where you have date, room number and the complaint. So, when the guest comes with the complaint, you have to write down the date, room number, very short about the issue and your initials. If it is a weekend, we have no maintenance in the hotel, so there are not lot we can do about it apart from writing it down and putting it in maintenance list. But then at least people know about it. If we have maintenance problems and we have no maintenance, weekend people just try to put in the maintenance list, but then our shift leader decided that it would be way easier for us to have an overview over this. Because in the system, in the maintenance list you can have a lot of stuff for, like, days. And then you have the overview of the all complaints.

Who signs that the issue is resolved? Is that the maintenance worker or the receptionist?
No, it is not the maintenance person, it's the one, who put the issue on the list. The receptionist has to be in charge of it. If it is a weekday and guests come down to complain about non-working light bulb, then I have to call the maintenance, and ask them to call the receptionist back when the problem is solved.

How about all of the information that you get. You get a lot of e-mails, right?
Yeah.

Do you use all that information that you get there?
Thinking

Is all the information that you need to do your job?
Yeah, it is. I mean, there can also be many information mainly for the night shift, but anyway we all get it, so we all have an overview. I am not there that often, so maybe I don't have to deal with all the things, but then again, you never know. So, even though I don't maybe read the e-mail thoroughly, I will not remember all steps, then at least I will have it in my mind, that there was the e-mail about it, and I know where I have and re-read it.
Honestly, I would forget stuff. If it's a really long e-mail about how to deal with some type of invoices, I will just keep it in the back of my mind that there is an e-mail about it. And I will go back and read it, when I have to deal with the problem.

The information that you get, is it very top-down, or also bottom – up, or kind of both?
It's both. We are empowered, because we are there every day and deal with problems. My manager actually does not have any idea about all the small problems that we encounter every day, or how efficient or inefficient the work processes might be. Shift leader is there also mainly during the morning shifts, and not evening shifts.

Then there are some pro-active colleagues who try to find solutions on how to make our work life easier. The they just send the e-mail with proposition to everyone. Let me thing of an example… So, there are not only managers. For example, we have a colleague who is a part of the Official Concierge Group in Denmark. He is also a concierge during the summer and he took over dealing with most of the guest transfers. We have a partnership with Danish limousine service for private transfers. Then he [the concierge colleague] came up with this 'official confirmation' that can be sent to the guest, because when we get the confirmation from the limousine service it lists the price that is given to us and that differs from the one we charge the guest. We can't just print the confirmation that is sent directly to us. Until now he sent out the confirmation e-mails about these transfers, but then he thought that it would look more professional if we would have a standard type of confirmation. He also made an Excel sheet where we can see an overview over all the transfers. Normally, when we get the confirmation from the limousine service, we need to print them out and we have a folder where we store them for each month. When we register it in the system, we need to write also down the date with hand on the print-out and to put our initials.

Would you say that everyone at the reception have the same access to the information?
No. They don't have access to all the information, and it is because there are full-time colleagues, that have a bit more responsibilities than I do [interviewee is a part-time employee]. Therefore, they have access to more things. We have a colleague that is 'elev' [translation from Danish – trainee] and then he is also doing commissions. I haven't been shown how to do the commissions and I don't do it. So somehow, he gets bit more information about certain things. In that sense, the information access is different.

And your shift leaders also have access to more information?
Yes. I would say, that if you have the same level of tasks you have the same access to the information. But when you get more responsibilities, new tasks, then you get a bit different overview of things.

How about you, do you think you get the information that you need to do your job?
Om… Yeah. About the information you need, it happens that there are lots of miscommunication between departments, like reception – housekeeping and restaurant, and that is really annoying. We – the receptionists are the ones that deal with guests, and then we end up being a trash bin for the guest, because there has been some miscommunication somewhere. Then the guests scream at us. For example, in the weekend comes in the guest that has booked a conference, and they would like to order lunch. Because there is no reservation manager in the weekend, we have a folder with all the functions for the conferences, that means all the confirmations for the reservations for conferences or events. In this folder, there was no written information, so we had to find managers numbers, because she actually forgot to print it out for us. And then there was no chef, and then

there was a big mess, and we seemed really unprofessional, because we were really clueless and had to all around. So, it can happen.
We also had a case with complaining guest, who went to complain to housekeeping, and afterwards came to us complaining that nothing has been done. Housekeeping did not say anything to us. It was such a huge mess…

How do you guys speak with each other?
With housekeeping, we communicate through internal phones. There are internal phones for their supervisor and then for housekeeping a phone on each floor. When the housekeeping supervisor is there, we call the supervisor, I mean, in the working days there are manager and supervisor, and during the weekends there is only the supervisor. So, as long as the supervisor is there, we communicate with housekeeping. Housekeeping has a phone on each floor, so if they have any problems, they could just take the phone and call to the receptions and tell the issue. Also, if they have time, they can just come to the reception.

Do you think you have the information you need, when you need it? When you have an issue – a complaint, reservation, etc. Do you have the information to solve the issue?
Thinking I have experienced many times, when I have to ask around colleagues. Because it was either the first time when I encountered it, or it was too long ago when something similar happened, and I honestly could not remember exactly, so I was a little bit in doubt.

But you can always just ask?
Yeah, I can always ask. But there have been many times I have been in doubt.

How about the information you get, going back to e-mails, meetings, do you understand it? Is the information you receive understandable?
thinking I would say – mostly yes. I have had only few times when I was in doubt and send an e-mail asking for clarification.

Is this information consistent? Is it delivered in the same manner? Do the information channels change?
I think that each and every person has their own way of communication, so it would be consistent from each and every person, but the communication style and language will differ depending who is sending it out.
Our manager has his own way of communication, but then he also forwards mails from others.

How about goals for your hotel and department?

In the beginning of the year, February – March, we have this employee evaluation meeting with the manager, and this is where we, together with the manager, talk about our individual goals. In terms of the goals of the hotel, we are supposed to have every quarter general meeting with all the department and the director of the hotel [general manager], where he presents the results of the quarter. Like, how is the revenue - from house-keeping, from reception, are we going up or down in the customer satisfaction, how well have we performed in all of this compared with previous quarter, and are the numbers showing that we are reaching our goals as planned, or not.

Thinking I think we had a quarterly meeting that was at Weber's this year, but I haven't joined it. But this is how we get them [goals], through quarterly general meetings.

Ok, so would you say that it is easy to understand these goals? Do you understand where hotel wants to go?

Yeah, but then we also know that they are trying to attract lots of business people. We also know it from the e-mail from General Manager. Last year they were also trying to do some activities. They were trying to go out to the different companies and to present the hotel. If there is a big action General Managers are taking, then we receive an e-mail about it. From the General Manager.

How about the goals for your department, for the reception? Do you have any?

I know about my individual ones, because I set them up with my manager, and then I know that there is some help to reach our team targets. But those big numbers are something that my manager knows. So, I don't know the big numbers. What I know, is that if I manage to reach my targets, and others are reaching their own targets, in terms of numbers… For example, our targets are for up-sales, walk-ins and enrolments of Scandic Friends members. Then we also have this monthly competition for up-sales and walk-ins. So, we are encouraged to do as much as possible. In the last meeting with my manager I also talked about it with my manager and I lowered a bit my target, so I won't get so stressed about it, because I also work part-time. Sometimes you can have shifts where we have only pre-paid reservations and they don't want to pay for upgrades, or they are all Scandic members and you cannot make them anything new.

We also need to make these restaurant reservations, we need to sell our restaurant. So that's also a target for the whole team, and there are competitions every month for the restaurant, and the bar team as well. So, I know that we need to sell. If there are many free rooms available in hotel that day, I know I have to try to up-sale as much as I can.

Are you given the tools how to up-sale? Are the managers giving you the ideas how to do it?
No. No. No. But then my manager would send me to the colleague who is doing very well and could give me some tips.

How about your performances. You mentioned this annual employee meeting with your manager. How else your performance is monitored or evaluated?
pause

Of course, you can see how much sales you do, of course.
Yes.

But how about your own personal service delivery?
Thinking In the rooms we also have these notes saying 'if you have a problem or if you are unhappy with something, please let us know'. So, sometimes they can write 'Thanks Sam in the reception doing a great job and helping me out'. So, this might be a way, but in generally they just look at the reviews on Trip Advisor, Booking.com, etc. There guests generally review the hotel and staff; they talk general. Our managers check a lot our customer satisfaction and reviews on booking.com, Expedia and Trip Advisor. At the last this evaluation meeting my manager told me that they would like to see more specific names in these reviews. But is really tough to see that, they mainly see general comments: good or bad, about the team in general. That's another way you could measure performance.
But then, when you have these annual meetings with the manager, my manager would also mention his observations from the shifts together, so I think they also look *[watch]*, pay attention a bit to us.

How about daily reports? Is that automatic from the system?
Yes, there is a daily report that night shift has to print out and send it out to everyone in the morning. Then we print it out and put it in the back office. It states how many check-ins, check-outs, if we have any conferences. The thing is, that the only thing I look at it is, do we have any conferences or not. Otherwise, on the white board in the back office, you anyway need to write how many check-ins and check-outs. Sometimes it is easier for me to just check that in the system than look into that piece of paper. This also how I have got used to. And I like logging into the system and looking there and having the bigger overview of guests and everything. So, that is the only thing I use the paper for.

[Handovers are both written and oral]

16.5 Interview transcript J-SR

Respondent	Company	Date
Jeanett	Scandic Ringsted	24 April 2018
Position		
Receptionist, full-time		
Number of years with company		
3 months		
Number of years with current position		
7 years (trained receptionist since 2011)		

Transcription:

Can you please describe to us your daily routines?

It depends of course which type of shift I have. If I have an evening shift I come in and hear what has been going on during the day and my colleagues tells me if there's anything I have to pay attention to. Then I count the money in the cash register, check if everything is ok and from there on I have a checklist I go through. I usually start by checking arrivals, just if there is anything I have to pay attention to. And then I am here if anyone wants to speak with me, wants to check in and out and so on.

There's a different check list for morning shift to afternoon to night shifts so depending on what kind of shift we have there are different kinds of tasks which we have to complete. For instance, the morning shifts will have to prepare things for the evening, evenings for night shifts, and night shifts prepare things for morning shifts and so on. When the different shifts prepare for each other you also know what is going to happen during your own shift cause the previous one prepared certain tasks for you.

Do you find your checklist simple and do you understand them?

Yeah, they're kind of good made, but we edit them whenever there's something that's kind of unclear and so we edit them to make them more specific

Who does that?

The night shift edits the night one. I don't really know who edits the day one but if we have anything to add to them we just usually add them

Do you find this checklist is constricting?

No, I it's very good, otherwise you kind of forget all the things you that have to do. Because some of the things are not just obvious of what you have to do... and it's not too many assignments it doesn't take long to do the things.

Do the rules help you make decisions in certain situations?

No, they work more like more like a guideline I would say. Because they don't really help in situations that is more… *gestures wildly in the air* like, I still have to make the decisions

What do you then do in unexpected situations?

We have a guideline on what we can do if there is an unsatisfied guest and what we allowed to give them. We're not allowed to give them discounts, but we can give them some wine. We have things that we can give them but it is also about knowing what is required, or if it's needed, to make the happy. And then of course apologising.

Do you decide yourself "what do I need to do to make the guest happy"?

Yes. And also, if sometimes they get upset about things when there's no reason to get upset and where it is not our job to fix it, because we're not the reason why they're upset, but because they themselves made a mistake and in that case I don't give anything... But of course, if they've booked in a wrong date and such I will try to fix it but yeah…

But what if you have a guest that's really angry and he's not happy with the bottle of wine then what do you do?

All I can do is apologise because you can't really do anything else because in my opinion there's also limits on how much I *can* do and how much you *should* do. And if you're already apologised, if it was actually your fault, then there is nothing else I can do.

So, you have rules for compensations and you follow those

Yes

What kind of other rules do you have on e.g. appearance?

In the reception? Skirts. We wear skirts which have to be reasonable long so not up to the thigh. In the summer, as far as I read, you can choose if you want to wear leggings or not if it's very warm outside. So, it can also depend on the weather and when it can be a bit warm then we can wear t-shirts in black, blue or white.

Do you know this because you read it in a book or rule set?

Yes, I read about what I was supposed to wear

Who makes these rules?

Scandic HQ

You get this manual and of course some hotels can be larger about it and other hotels stricter. But here they're kind of large about it but I think it's because we're so small and we're small team

Can you change any of these rules?

Depending on which one I guess. I don't think I can change them in the manual, but I can probably get permission to do it here [for this hotel]. For example, it says you have to wear neutral nail polish but I have seen receptionist wearing very colourful nail polish, something with leopard and dots and such. So, I think it's a little bit on and off I think, but I don't think we can change them I think they have to be standardised.

So, is it more of a manager who can change the rules?

Yes, I think they can point down to something and say this will have to be changed or this rule you will have to follow.

Going back to how you compensate your guests in case of need; do you feel that you are allowed to go "above and beyond"?

Yes. They actually tell us that if we have anything we feel like doing that can make that guests stay a little bit better, we are allowed to do it - of course I cannot cost the hotel any money.

Can you give us some examples you have rules and compensations but not when it comes to making people happier; what are the rules here?

I don't think you're allowed to give them wine just to make them happy. Then it will be something that we would do ourselves, like handwritten messages. I don't know if you can get something sent to the room like a plate or something. I know that we do that sometimes with VIP guests.

Do you have money wise limitations on making guests happier?

Yeah, I think it cannot cost, or it shouldn't cost, the hotel money just because we want to make a guest happier, but as long as it doesn't cost anything we can do whatever we can imagine.

Do you always follow the rules?

No, I don't *smiles*

Do you think some of the rules are more important than the others?

Yeah, I do.

Can you elaborate or give some examples?

For example, I know that we just got this new rule about the vouchers that people have. They can no longer use them for nuts and stuff. So sometimes when I have guests coming, but they don't know this and they have taken nuts, I just let them know, sometimes saying that "this no longer works for nuts but I'll let you have it this one time" and I just put it [the voucher] in so we still get money for it. But I explain that next time the voucher won't work for nuts - instead of being really strict and saying no to the guest.

Does your manager know this?

I actually don't know. I do it sometimes I feel like everyone is making exceptions. The same way that when we have to take the deposits from guests when they don't have credit card and they have a debit card. Sometimes you just go with your gut feeling. Is this person really worth [the hassle] or is this person really nice and coming back all the time…

Do you feel that you have a lot of rules to follow here?

No, I do I feel it's very calm here.

Do you find the rules constricting?

No, I wouldn't say no.

D**o you find them simple?**

Yeah, yeah.

How are you given information on what's going to happen?

We have a lot of on the computers that we check <u>every time</u> you come in for a shift. We get emails as well about everything that's happening; updates, people getting hired in different places and different hotels. Every week we get an email from the receptionist manager with the highlights of everything.

I heard about an Intranet?

Yeah, I see it when I log on but it's mostly about opening new hotels, but there's no specific information in there for me. It's about the chain and general so I don't really look at that that much.

All the information you're getting is emails and through the logbook - what about verbal?

I get information when I come to work about that specific shift but otherwise everything comes in writing so we can go back and look at it if we need to.

You get a lot of information from what I understand; do you use this?

No

How do you decide which is information you need and which you don't?

There is a lot of things, about like all the Scandic Friends and stuff; I put it in a folder in my email and then I can look back at it when I need it.

All the things involving the chain and general I don't use it because that is stuff who is the new Beverage Manager in the new hotel in Sweden or Denmark or whatever. So, the things I know that are important like right now, like the Scandic Friends, I keep them close so I can look at them - but everything that's too general about things I don't use them.

Is the information top-down/bottom-up or both?

The things in the logbook is normally edited by us, the receptionists. E.g. if there is something that we have noticed that everyone is doing you can write e.g. “hey please stop doing this or that“ or “we are doing this but can we perhaps please change or edit this” or whatever.

Whenever you need to communicate with your colleagues it's via the logbook?

Yes, because I don't know when we’ll see each other I person.

Does everyone have the same access to all information? E.g. logbook and intranet access

Yeah, I think so yeah.

Do you feel that you get the information that you need to do your job?

Yeah. I would say that.

We also have a lexicon on our computer where you can go in and check if there's anything you’re in doubt about and then you can go and look it up. the lexicon is written by us and you can also edit and add in it if you want to. I'm actually not sure if I can edit but I can let someone else know if I think we should add something to the lexicon.

How does the lexicon work?
It's a Word document. I don't know who made it but someone in the reception has made it. It has all the topics that normally comes up like “what to do if guests are coming with a dog”. It's about 20-30 pages long but it could probably be longer. It's like a bullet list. To find stuff in it I just search in it in the side menu.

Ok so we have all this information that you use to do your job. Let's say you have a conflict with the guests - is it easy for you to figure out how to handle the situation here and now, while being face to face with the guest?
I'm new still so I would probably find a way to get the guest to go up to his room - and then figure out what to do unless of course he would be screaming right in my face then I would figure something out…

Are you working alone? there is no manager?
Mornings there are someone in the office, but evening and night shift you are by yourself.

Is there anyone you can call?
I can call them if I feel it's important enough but there is no one on call as such - so they might not even answer *laughs*.

The information that you have; is it understandable?
Yeah, it's good. Because it's also written by us, the people in the reception [the lexicon].

Do you feel that information that you do get is it consistent?
Yeah, I would say so as it comes from the same place. Normally it comes from the chain and then to our reception manager and then to us. So, I would say is the same way they're putting it, yeah.
When we write in the logbook we just write it in our own language and however we want to.

What kind of information do you put in the log book?
It can be everything from “put the candle holders to wash on Sundays” to “we have this guest that might call in about rooms in the next two months so if he calls you have to just give him this rate” and so on. Or I can be smaller information, like, “remember to turn off the printer in the reception”. So, all the small things that you want to inform people about.

How long does the information stay in that system?
It stays there for quite a while, until they are no longer relevant or until we believe that people actually just remember them, e.g. like the thing about the candle holders.

So, when it has been there for long enough we will remove it or when it is no longer relevant.
The log book is in Scorpio, our booking system.

You also have information about the guests in Scorpio and you can write small notes about the guests if you want to, but in order to see this information you have to actively click on that guest. Here you can also see the guest history with the hotel, e.g. which room they stayed in before, which room they prefer and so on.
You can also add an alert if there is important information about a specific guest but I will not see this information until I look up the guest but then this important information will also pop up directly.
Otherwise it [the important information] would have to be written in the logbook or given verbally if that person was here to inform me.

Can you tell us a little about any goals you might have for the department and/or the hotel?
I know that the only goals are a guest satisfaction; that we have to make the guest feel like home.

What about budgets?
Ah yeah, we have something on this. We only get emails about this when we need to sell e.g. more rooms.

They are informing you, if they think that you're not performing/selling enough?
They are telling us if we're lacking in the budget. Not that it is our fault, but it's more that, that if we have a lot of rooms they might just suggest that we should go a little bit down in price.

Are the goals explicit?
There is something in Scandic, you know, like when the letters each spell out something - but I don't remember it's exactly for Scandic. But it is something about making the guest happy and feel like home.
We are very calm and down to earth here and we don't call the guests for Mr and Mrs, we go on first name and we joke around with guests and stuff and we have to be very normal with them.

So, from what I hear is that you do not have any specific goals, but more how to handle day to day operations?
Yeah exactly…

Is your performance monitored and evaluated? sales personal performance etc…
When we do up sales it is monitored because we put our initials in the system. It is very hard to upgrade in this hotel because the rooms are very similar so it is only if you can sell the room to an early check-in; but it

depends if the cleaning is done faster. But it is monitored in that way and they print reports out of the system, but I wouldn't say that it's used a lot. It's not like a competition where we are competing against each other.

Do you have competitions?

Yes, right now there is a chain competition about getting standard members so signing up new members.

What about internal competitions?

Not what I know of, but I'm still rather new here.

What about your personal performance? satisfaction surveys? Is that being measured?

No, not that I know of.

Do you hand out guest satisfaction surveys?

No but we have some at the door. I know that they send some out when people have stayed here via email. But it's nothing that I hear about and the questions are more general, like, "do you feel welcome", "are the rooms clean" and so on.

Do you do daily reports when you work in the reception?

Logbook. But you don't even *have* to fill it out; it's only if you think you have something that you need to write to your colleagues. But otherwise we're just checking to see if someone else wrote something. Except for the cash register and when I'm handling money in general, we fill out papers for that.

16.6 Interview transcript J-SS

Respondent	Company	Date
Jaqueline	Scandic Sydhavnen	23 May 2018
Position		
Receptionist, trainee		
Number of years with company		
1 year		
Number of years with current position		
1,5 years		

Transcription:

Can you please start by describing your daily routines?

We have a handover – we talk to our colleague, the one who have been here before. If it is evening, like now, we talk about how many rooms are booked, what they have experienced during the day. Then we have a checklist that we need to go through. Then we have mails, we have check-ins... Yeah, things like that.

What about the checklists, what is on the checklists?

We have agent bookings, like Expedia and Booking.com, that we need to check and see if the payment is done in advance or the guest should pay at the hotel. Then we have to register payments for the other days for the booking agencies. *Thinking* If we have groups the next day, we have to do daily sheets, so they can see it next morning that the group will arrive. Hmm… To check if the rooms are clean, if the rooms are registered clean in the system. If they are not, then we have to call to the housekeeping. If there is something out of order or broken, we have to call the technician and follow up is it fixed or not... Then we have to check how many check-in there are. If we are fully booked, we are in minus, then we have to call to the other hotels and hear if they have any rooms available. Things like that.

Can you explain to us what kind of rules and procedures are in your staff handbook?

We have four values from which we are operating from – we have to be pro, be bold, be caring and be you. These values have to 'shine' through when we are checking guests in and everything else we do: Maybe one doesn't have all four in the beginning, but it is our goal in the end to have all four values in us. We have to have nice nails, hair, uniforms. Have a nice tone, don't speak badly or rude with the guest.

How do you know these things? Are they written down or said to you?

Yeah, when you are starting to work here you get a letter from our manager, where all these things are written down. You have to read it and follow these rules. Yeah, it is something we get before we start to work here.

The rules that you have, does they help you make decisions in your daily work, and how do they help you - or disturb?
Here we should do more than in other places. Like in the situation I was before, even when guest yells at me, I still need to speak quiet and calm with them. This is where the value 'be pro' shines through. I will always have these values in my head in different situations will try to remember and act them out.

How do you handle unsatisfied guests?
The situation I had before *gestures towards the reception where a colleague has taken over 3 guests whom Jaqueline was dealing with before the interview* – they were unsatisfied because they were supposed to pay, even they were told by Booking.com that the booking will be paid. This is a flex booking, so I can't do anything about it – they have to pay here. This is a stressful situation where I go through different emotions, but I have to keep it calm and think about how to fix the situation.
I don't want them to be unsatisfied, otherwise they will complain and I don't want that. Therefore, I do my best and hope that it is enough. If they want a compensation, in the end I can do that, but I won't say anything until they have to check-out. If they complain then, or they will come down later and complain, then I will ask "what we can do about it, how can we handle this together?".
I try to be empathetic with the guest and understand his / her situation, but I also ask them to understand me. In the end, it's the whole thing that matters.

When it comes to compensation, how do you know how much and how to do that?
Well, if they are eating here in the restaurant, I know how many people are there and I can offer some, e.g. 2 glasses of wine or soft drinks. Or, if they don't eat in the restaurant, we can take off 10 % of the room price. You start with a small offer and then see, if it is necessary, you can compensate more if they are still unsatisfied. But you should be careful, sometimes people can misuse it.

Do you have any rules on how much you can compensate?
No. Our manager says, that whatever we think is right in the situation, we should do. Of course, I can ask her, and she will always approve it. In the end, it is my choice.

Going back to the rules, checklists and your staff handbook… Do you believe your colleagues are following the rules?
Yes, I do.

Are there some rules they follow more than others?

Yes, of course. We all follow all rules to one point. But sometimes we are going a little bit further and sometimes we just skip something. We have this program, File Explorer, that we are using for registering payments in Nets. To access Nets we have to use this File Explorer. But today I cannot access the program, so I will leave it for tomorrow, as I am working evening shift as well. If the managers will notice it, they will ask me to do it since it was not done and will remind to do that on time.

Do you feel you are always following the rules and procedures?

Yeah, most of the time yes. I would like to say I am doing it every day, but… *giggles* more or less yes.

Do you think you guys have many rules that you have to follow?

No. We have free range. The managers are going home around 16, 17 and then there are just us, and then it is up to us to decide what we have to do, if we face some issues.

Do you think your rules are constricting in any way?

Thinks

Like how you are supposed to behave or look, or your staff handbook?

No, I think the way how we look [the uniform, hair, nails] is our image. So, it has to be there. There are other hotels who does not have uniforms, but then you can see that the guests staying there are opposite of who are staying here. Therefore, there are some rules, as there are guests who are expecting what they going to see here. So, the rules are good. And sometimes you slack a little.

What do you slack with?

For an example, I'm missing a nail *shows her ring finger which is missing an acrylic nail*. My manager has not yet seen it, because when she will that she will ask me to do something about it.

Do you find your rules simple to follow?

Yes.

Do you feel that you are empowered by your manager to go 'beyond and above', to do something extra for your guests?

Sometimes I feel like a robot. I used to work in a phone shop, where we had this manuscript to follow, and now I'm feeling I'm doing it here, because I do the same thing every single day. If the guests think we are like robots, I understand them. Sometimes if guests are coming and expecting a little bit more, then I am above that.

How about doing extra things for your guests?

Yeah, well, for example, those four guys *referring to the situation from earlier*, they are expecting me to follow them up with their luggage. Normally they have to book the luggage service in advance, but they haven't done that. And normally, I have to charge 200kr for the service. But we had a little agreement, so I agreed to do that for free. If there are many people I would charge, but usually I don't feel good to charge people for the luggage service.

You mentioned manuscript – that you need to say the same. Are your managers giving you what you should say?

Not here, but there is a certain information that should be given to the guests and that is the same. In the end, it is something like a manuscript. It feels like that.

So, it is more that those are the things you must say to the guest?

Yes.

To information. How do you obtain and how are you given the information?

Amm… *thinking* For the guest, if they are going to tell about hotel to their families and friends, then you have to do a little bit more, because we want them to come back and bring others with them. We have a Facebook site and we have some commercials on Facebook, as well as Danish TV2. I have been in commercial, so… *giggle*. Also, we are on Instagram. Actually, I have been here for a year so I have been given permission from hotel to hashtag Scandic Sydhavnen. Otherwise, I don't have information like that.

But what about the information from your manager? Like, change of procedures, rules, news?

Then we have staff meeting. We have one every third month, yeah, every third month we have a staff meeting. Otherwise we get the e-mails every single day. I was here yesterday, and when I came in today, there were 15 mails! I was surprised that I haven't been here for 12 hours and I got 15 e-mails. That's quite a lot.

Do you use all this information that you get?

I have to.

How about all information that you get, is it written or oral?

Most of the time the information is in written in e-mails or written down. For example, File Explorer has been down, so I got information from our IT Desk through the e-mails.

Do you all get the same access to the same information?

No. We have our shift leader, and she have to more information, of course. Also, our manager has more access than we have. But otherwise, yeah, we have the same access.

Do you think you get the information you need to do your job?

Yes, I do.

What kind of information? Do you think about anything specific?

For example, we have some cruise guests - a group called Holland American. Regarding them, we get the information from our manager on the e-mail, and then I have to act based on the e-mail.

If you are in the situation, where you don't really know how to handle that, do you think you have the information available to solve the issue?

Yes, and if I feel uncomfortable I will ask my colleagues. I am trainee and they are here to help me.

Do you understand the information that is given to you?

Yes. Otherwise I will ask my manager or my shift leader.

And you think the given information in consistent?

Yes, it is always consistent. For example, if a group who have ordered a luggage service come in, we have an Excel sheet where this information is written down. Normally the housekeeping is taking it in and one of the reception is taking it out. It is always written there, otherwise, if the system is down, then my manager will write it down and will send an e-mail to us.

Do you have department and organisation goals? What are they?

We have our values, I mentioned about earlier, and mission. We get our goals for every day.

What these goals?

I cannot remember our mission and values right now, but we have to work out from them every day.

Are they easy to understand and is it easy to understand where the organisation is going?
Yes. We have them written down in the back office, so we see them every day when we come in.

How about goals just for reception? Do you have any of them?
Yeah, we are setting some individual goals, I think. And sometimes it is for the whole reception either for the evening or morning shift. Like, the checklist we have. It is actually a goal and we have to do it every day. We have to do all the things on the list every day. If it is not done, then we have not reached the goal. Yeah, there are some goals, but we set them individually as well.

How about long-term goals, like sales, up-sales, etc.?
Yes, we have Scandic Friends, we have up-sales, and actually it is not that good, because we did not reach the goal last month and the month before. I haven't said that, but it's not that good.

So, you have these goals for Scandic Friends memberships and up-sales. Do they give you some tools to reach them?
Yeah, the ones you are reaching, the goals, they will teach the rest of us how to do it, but otherwise no. It's up to us to do what we think is working. So, no, we don't have a manuscript of how to reach those goals. Normally, when we check people in, we ask are they members of Scandic Friends program. If they are not, then we offer them to enrol and explain about possible benefits from the program.

What about your personal performances; are they monitored or evaluated?
Yes. In the end of every month we get an e-mail, where you can see how many members you have signed-up for the program. Everyone gets an e-mail, where are numbers of all of us, so you can see how others did that month.

How about your service performance?
No. *thinking* Actually, no.

Are the sales and the membership count only things you are measured?
Yes.

16.7 Interview transcript M-SS

Respondent	Company	Date
Mathias	Scandic Sydhavnen	23 May 2018
Position		
Receptionist, full-time		
Number of years with company		
4 years: 2 years part-time, 2 years full-time		
Number of years with current position		
4 years		

Transcription:

Can you please start with explaining what are your daily routines when you come to work?

Well, it depends on if it is my morning shift or evening shift, because there are different routines in each shift. In the morning… usually we start with like going through the lists we have where we have all kinds of…yeah... normal daily routines to allocate rooms to different people, if they want special preferences or something like that. *Em*… we count our … cash [breaker], where we keep all the money to make sure that it is ok, and we print some different lists in order if system go down or the fire alarm goes off, or something like that. *Em* and then in the morning it's just usually checking guests out of the hotel.

What about evening then?

Yeah, well evening is the same with the list and counting the money, and *em* yeah, the main focus there is to check people in *em* and then you have some different routines that you do to the day after, like if we have tourist groups coming, we print the sheets so it is ready for the morning. Otherwise, yeah, we locate some rooms also there, if we have families coming here so the housekeepers know which room they have to put an extra bed and other stuff. So that's …and then we have …. We through [did not understand this phrase] the deposits also, if people have booked special type of room, where they need to pre-pay and we take the money in the evening of the day of arrival.

We heard from your manager that you have a staff handbook. Can you tell us about different rules you have, standard operating procedures, e.g. uniform, behaviour…?

Yeah, as you can see now, it's a little…. Not everyone has got the same uniform, because, you know, we just switched uniform recently. So, not everyone is in place with that.

What is the new uniform then?

It is a white shirt, like this one, and then a blazer, black blazer and, yeah, and black, what's it called, pants as well.

What about rules and terms about how to behave?

It's just to be polite. Always be nice to, not everybody at the reception, but in the hotel. Even if it's a housekeeping – always talk like you would talk to anybody else, because sometimes they have a feeling like they can talk rough to others. That's important to do that. You treat others the way you would like to be treated.

Is that something you been told - how to behave?

No, it's not like there are certain rules for that. It's unwritten rule.

I know you only worked in this one, but do you know if any rules are specific only for this hotel, or are they all for Scandic in general?

Well, it is like an overall, but there are rules for the whole concern and not only for this hotel, because no matter which hotel you come to, it should always be the same, in terms of how do you speak to the guest, and how you act, and other stuff. So, they always feel like it's the same, not so different in hotels.

Can you tell us a bit what you do, when you have a guest that is unhappy or unsatisfied?

Well, then we ask what the problem is, of course, and then, in terms of whatever it is, we try to do something better for him, upgrade him for example, if he is unsatisfied with the room. It could be a lot of things... You know, if housekeeping hasn't cleaned the room, or something like that, we'll always try to fulfil whatever the problem is.

Do you have any procedures on how to do this?

Not really, because it depends a lot on what the problem is, so you cannot write down for this specific problem that we have something to do. When you are in the moment, you need to figure something out.

Do you feel you are allowed to go 'above and beyond'; do you feel you are allowed to do something extra?

For the guests?

Yes, for the guests.

Yeah.

Can you give us the examples on what you guys do?

Well, for example... I don't know how much you know about our membership program? Because there we have different levels of it, and in the top level we actually put gifts in the rooms for these guests. And they get, I don't know can you call it a special treatment, but they always get the better rooms – we upgrade them every time they come, even if it is for 5 nights or something like that. If some guests here at the hotel have some birthday or something like that, we can arrange something. We always put a card or maybe a little present for them as well.

Is that just what you feel like doing or are you being told to do this?

No, no, we are not told to do that. Well, regarding the membership program we are. But the extra things for the guests, if they have birthday or something like that, is not something you have to do that. It's just for an extra service we do that.

Do you feel you can just do 'whatever you want'? Let's say someone has a birthday – can you just get them a bottle of wine?

No, no. Of course, there are limits. It's not like we can take a wine for 500 kr and put it in the room. We need to, you know, do it within reasonable constraints. It might be a box of chocolate for 50 – 100 kr.

But you don't have any limitations on how much can you spend on it?

No, no.

So, you have this handbook. We haven't seen it but we assume it contains quite a lot of information. Does all the procedures and rules from handbook help you in your daily work?

Yeah [sounded very sure about the given answer and said it with determination in the voice] of course! It's good to have some guidelines in order if you don't know what to do about the specific problem, because the problems can be different. Sometimes this book can be very helpful.

Would you say, it helps you make decisions throughout the day?

Yeah. It can, at least.

Do you believe your colleagues are following the rules and procedures you have?

I would say that.

Can you give us some examples?

Thinking I can give you one example. Every time a guest come we have this piece of paper, like a registration card that they have to sign, where they just write the name, address and everything, and then they sign it. They sign it, because if they leave the hotel without paying the bill or something like that, it [the registration card] says that we are allowed to take the money from the credit card that is registered. And, for a long period this card wasn't registered every day. That was everybody actually [who did not register the card daily].

Why do you think it happened?
I don't know. When I started here nobody did it actually, and it is one of the things you have to do. I don't know. I think it was like, some kind of "now it hasn't been done for a long time, so why we should start doing it". I think it was that kind of mentality we had it over. But I started doing it.

But in general, do you always follow the rules?
thinking for some time

Do you think some of them are more important than others?
Yeah.

Can you give an example?
Yeah, well… *pauses for a while* I try to follow the rules as much as I can, but sometimes it's just easier, you know, to skip them. At least some of them.

Can you give an example?
Hmmm… *thinks* Let's say, a company wants to book a room for their employees and they want to pre-pay the room. Then we have this credit card authorisation that we need to send to them in order to fill it out and send back to us. And sometimes it's, small things, but sometimes they just send a credit card and you just take the many from it, even though it's not sent through this authorisation. And I never had any problems for that, but from not long time ago we had somebody who was trying to make a fraud at the hotel. They send it in the e-mail [the credit card information] and one of my colleagues just withdrawed the money from it. It was 60 000 or something like that, that they had to pay. The few days after the guy who booked the rooms, the wrote that there have happened some things with these guests and that they were not able to come. Now he wanted the money back, but on another credit card. And then, thank God, we did not put the money back to the other credit card. But that just one of the things.

Do you think you have many rules to follow? In your opinion?

No. I mean, I have been here for a while now and many things are already in my sub-consciousness.

Do you remember how it was when you started?
Yeah. It was very stressful because I began in the summer, and it is pretty busy in that moment. I don't remember, it was almost 4 years ago.

Do you think your rules are constricting you in your job?
No, I don't think so.

Do you think they are simple to follow?
Yes, but even though sometimes you skip any of them anyway, but yes, they are.

About information – how do you gain information and how are you given information?
Through the colleagues?

Yes, colleagues, verbally, e-mail, etc.
Mostly by e-mail actually, because when you work here, you work in the different shifts, and when you need to communicate with people who are not here, so it's much easier to do it by e-mail. That's also how we usually get e-mail from our boss, because she needs to reach all of us at the same time.

How about verbal communication?
That is more through the different departments throughout the hotel. For example, if we need to reach the housekeeping, we give them call on the phone or, if we need to book a table for the guests in the restaurant, we go to the restaurant and speak with the waiters, or something like that.

Is all the information stated in the written documents – e.g. staff handbook, e-mails, etc.?
Yeah.

Is there anything else how you get the information?
No, not really. Not that I could think right now.

So basically, everything is written down?
Yeah, for all the guidelines, at least it is. But of course, you can be in a situation where you cannot read the answer.
How about all the e-mails sent to you with information, are they only from your manager, or do you get some e-mails from headquarters, do you get something from them as well?

No, it usually goes through my manager. First the general manager and then he put it through to my manager if it is something we should know.

That information you are given; it is something you use?
Yes, it is.

All of it or 90 % or…?
Well, most of it. It is hard to say how much of it. For example, when we change things, it comes from the Head office and then it goes out to the General Manger, and to the Reception Manager, and then we get the information.

How about information flow – is it only top – down, or is it possible to communicate from bottom to top? Do you have to go through your managers, and how does that work? Can you reach out to your General Manager?
Well, I would do that only if it's urgent and my supervisor is not here. Otherwise I would usually go to her first and then up to the General Manager. But it's no problem, for example, if I need to speak to the restaurant manager, I don't need to go through the waiters or my manager, I just go directly to him and ask him.

So, across departments it's just….
Yeah, it's …

Do you think that everyone has the same access to all the information?
Well, I can speak only for the reception, and yes. Everybody has the same channels to get it.

Do you think you get all the information you need to do your job?
Yeah, yeah. Yes. Mostly, sometimes there can be some misunderstandings or whatever, but mostly yes.

Do you had a situation where you kind of felt that you were not told or informed properly?
No, not that I think of right now, but sometimes, for example, if they change some things, or there comes some kind of new reservations or different types to book, like reservation, because a lot of things change within just a year, and that you find new ways to do things. Sometimes, if you haven't done that before, or you don't really understand the progress or something like that, yeah, it can be. But most of the time it is good enough.

So, do you have the information when you need it?
Yeah.

So, if you have a situation where you don't know what to do from the top of your head, do you look it up in your staff book?
Yes, or ask one of my colleagues. That is also very helpful, actually.

Are you always working two people here?
At least, yeah.

Also during the night?
During the night time, they are also beginning to be two at the night. Before it was only one.

How about information you are given - is that understandable?
Yes, most of the time.

How about the consistency? Is it always e-mail or…?
Well, mostly it is. Yeah, because again, when you are not here and you need to get some new information, they send an e-mail, also so they don't have to say the same thing 13 times to each person.

Do you have daily, weekly and or monthly meetings?
We have a reception meeting once a month, where all the reception is gathered. We speak about what is good and what's bad, and what's new, everything. If we have any problems or something that need to be changed, we speak about it.

Do you have some goals in your department?
Yes, we do. We have for up-selling and then we have to recruit some new Scandic Friend members as well. Then we have a conversation with a manager two times a year, where we set some goals for ourselves that we have to reach during the year. Then, after some 8, 9 months we go to conversation again with her and then we speak how it went this year the goals and everything.

How about organisational goals – for all of the organisation, not only for the reception?
All of the hotel?

Yes.
We have some, I think it's like some *tries to think of the word* turnover… 'omsætning', we have to reach something that is sent from the he

adquarter, I don't know what it's about, but they put some goals for the turnover throughout the year and we have to reach them, otherwise the General Manager needs to improve his things and the staff, you know.

So, what you get for the organisation is how to sell the rooms, or up-sale?
Yeah

Is it mainly numbers?
It is, yes.

Do you understand the goals you are given from your manager, but also for the organisation?
Yes.

Are they easy to understand?
Yes.

And you can see where the organisation is going?
Mhm.

And also, do you understand how the organisation will get there?
Yes.

Are you given the tools how to reach the goals, e.g. up-sales?
Yes. Those are the things we also discuss in our meetings – how to do better and we try to do some… how to say … a practice, where you say this and I try to do up-sale.

Is your performance monitored, is it evaluated?
Yes, and that's also with the conversation 2 times a year, that is where we evaluate how it went and put the goals for what I want to do during this year.

So, your sales can be monitored, but how your personal performance – is that only through this annual conversation?
Yeah, it is.

You don't do any other measures?
Not that I can think of.

16.8 Interview transcript M-SS:1

Respondent	Company	Date
Mie	Scandic Sydhavnen	23 May 2018
Position		
Receptionist, full-time		
Number of years with company		
3,5 years: 2,5 years as trainee, 1 year as fulltime receptionist		
Number of years with current position		
3,5 year		

Transcription:

[Mie was very nervous about the interview]

Can you start by explaining us your daily routines? What do you do when you come to work?
It depends if it's morning shift or evening shift. When we have a morning shift, we have to count how much money we have. Then we have these lists we have to fix, we need to check everything on that list, then we talk a bit how did it go during the night – were there any troubles or something else. Then we check guests out and basically be there for the guests. Also, around 12 o'clock we need to check departures, we need to bring some fruit baskets to some of the rooms, and make some group keys.

And what about evening shifts?
In the evening shifts we'll count the money as well. We have also the lists for the evening shift. Then we get this little 'hand over' for 15 minutes, where we speak with the morning shift and see if there were any troubles – just sharing information, and then we start to check –in. Often people start to check-in very early, so we start to check-ins. Then we have these daily routines. There are not so many things we need to do in certain times in the evening shift, basically just to check –in.

I heard from your colleague that you have a staff manual. Can you tell as a little bit about the rules that you have, like how you are supposed to look, behave, etc.?
Well, we have the uniforms, that we need to wear, but I think that Scandic is a lot about being yourself, so we don't have to look the same as, for example, as you would work in another hotel like Hilton. We can be who we are, but within certain limits. It's not allowed to have pink hair or something very crazy, but we are pretty free I would say.

How about behaviour? Do you have any guidelines and rules on how you are supposed to speak or act?
Well, yes. We can't use swear-words in the front desk, and we cannot talk bad about the guests and about each other.

These rules, are they something you know or are they written down somewhere?
They are written down.

Is it in the staff handbook?
I would say. I can't remember. Most of it we know as we were told.

If you have an unsatisfied guest, what do you do?
Depends how unsatisfied he is. Often, we try to resolve it just by listening to the problem – if there is something we can fix, if there is a problem with the room, if it's dirty, if there is something more with safety we will try to make them as comfortable as possible. Sometimes we refund certain percentage of the room price. We can also offer dinner in the restaurant. If it is a family, we can offer something from the shop. We are trying to look at the guest and to see what they want. It can be difficult. I am not so good at it, so I think it is difficult to read the guest. We try our best.

Do you have any rules of how much can you compensate them for?
No, it's our own choice. We are very free to do what we feel is best in that situation.

And how do you feel about just been told to do what is the best in the given situation?
As I said, I am not so good with the guests, because I don't really know what to compensate with, is it too much or is it too little, or what would the guest be satisfied with. So, it can be difficult sometimes, but at the same time her trust in us, the freedom that can be nice is some situations.

Do you feel you are allowed to go 'above and beyond', that you are allowed to do some extra things to the guests?
Yes.

Can you give an example?
Thinking. Well, it's a bit ridiculous, but one there was a guest that were going to a party and she didn't have any hair-spray and hair brush, and we didn't have any in the shop. So, I gave her mine, but I never got it back. *laughing* But she was so satisfied. It made me happy. We are not supposed to give our own things, but she looked like she really needed it, and in the end, she was happy.

Do you think these rules and procedures in the staff handbook help you to make decisions throughout the day?
No. I would say that it's more my colleagues that help me through the day. We speak more than it is written in that book. I would say we don't read so much that Scandic staff handbook. We use each other.

So, if you have an issue that you don't know how to solve, you talk with someone instead of looking in the book?
Yes, sometimes, when there is an issue with the guest, we can ask guest to return tomorrow or later, as we need another opinion. Often, they're [the guests] fine with that.

Do you believe your colleagues are following the rules and the procedures that you have written down?
Not always.

Can you give some examples?
Yeah. We have a rule not to drink in the front-desk, and a lot of people have their coffee by the computer. That could be one of them.

How about you? Do you always follow the rules?
No *said with conviction in the voice*

Can you give an example?
Yes. We are, it is a bit ridiculous, but, sometimes, when I feel hot and sweat a lot, I feel comfortable to take my shoes off. When you stand a lot through the day I like to take my shoes off. Sometimes I forget my name sign. Also, if you follow the rules, you should have your hair away from the name tag, but I don't always do that. We should all wear a blazer in the winter, but I feel warm, so I don't. Those kinds of rules I don't follow. But I think I have a free-pass from Camilla, because she knows me *giggles*. I hate that blazer.

Do you think you guys have a lot of rules or procedures to follow?
If I should compare with other hotels – no.

Have you worked in another hotel?
I haven't, but I have heard from friends working in other hotels, something about the jewellery, the hair, nail polish. But I think it has gotten stricter through the years.

But do you have some rules about the hair, nail polish?

Not really. Camilla [the reception manager] told us that you have to have full nail polish, it cannot be missing from one of the fingers; it needs to be 'all or nothing'.

A friend worked in Tivoli hotel and they were allowed to have 2 pieces of jewellery. We can have all we want. So, we don't have so many rules.

Do you find your rules constricting?

Some of them.

Can you give an example?

Well, I'm against the uniform. I'm the only one here against the uniform. I don't feel it's fits good with the all 'we need to be casual' and be like friends with the guests. That is something Scandic wants to be very good at, and sometimes I feel it's too strict; that we lose a little bit what we had before - 'to be ourselves'.

The rules you have; do you find them simple to follow? Do you understand them?

Yes.

Now we are going to talk a little bit about information. How do you obtain or how are you given the information? E.g. Facebook, managers, e-mails, Intranet, etc.

Information about the hotel for the guest or for us as the staff?

For you as the staff, the information you need to be able to do your job.

It will be through e-mails, or, we have this website where we can read information about Scandic – FUSE. And I think they also have it as an App now.

How about verbal information? Is everything in the e-mails, or do you also speak with managers?

Also speaking. From Camilla or something.

Is there any difference in what she tells you face-to-face and what she writes in the e-mail?

No, it's the same. It can be that she sends something in the e-mail and we forget it, then she tells it to us.

How about the communication between the departments?

It's only verbal.

So, all the information that you have is written down in e-mails, documents?

Yes.

All the information you get in the e-mail, do you use that? Do you need all of that information?
I don't think we need everything. I feel that a lot of information they need to send to us, because we need to know. But we cannot remember everything. Some information is not so relevant, I think. We get a lot of e-mails every day about something Scandic is doing or changing, or what they are doing somewhere in Jutland – that is not so relevant for us, I think.

So, the information sent to your e-mail is not only from Camilla, is that also from other people?
Yeah, it can be from the other Scandic people. But often they send something and then Camilla send it to us, like forwarding the e-mail.

Do you think that everyone the same access to the information (like, your colleagues in the reception)?
Thinking Yes. I am not quite sure if Jacqueline [trainee at Sydhavnen] has the same access in the system. For lot of things our supervisors have the information about, since they are doing it every day, and then we are just asking what to do with this problem and they reply:" oh, you need to write this e-mail" or something.

Do you feel that you have the necessary information?
Yes. I would say so.

Is information available for you when you need it? For instance, when you have a conflict, or unhappy guest? When you have a situation that cannot be solved from the top of your head, is the help you need easy to get?
It is a bit difficult to answer that. *thinking* Well, I think it depends of the guest. Sometimes there are things I don't feel I have an authority to do or say yes to. Then I would need to ask my supervisor. If you think about that, you would say I don't have the information about what should I do, but… I'm not sure I understood the question.

But you answer it perfectly...
Ohh.. ok *giggles*

But what about the supervisor, is that person accessible to you, when you need it?
When she leaves – no, because we don't want to call to the people who are off the work. Then we just take it the day after, or take a decision ourselves. But then it can be the wrong decision. We don't have any to call 24/7 to get like answers to something.

Do you find the information you get understandable?
Yes.

Do you think it is consistent?
Yes.

It is mainly through e-mails, right?
Yes. Sometimes there's a lot of information, and some of it does not stuck in the head, so we need to read it several times. Sometimes there is a lot of information.

Do you have some goals in your department, as well as the hotel? Can you tell us a little bit about those?
Some goals?

Yes, like sales, or you have to meet some certain numbers, or sell certain amount of rooms, etc?
Aaa… Yes, we have some monthly up-selling goals. I don't remember the amount right now, but every month we need to upsell to that amount. Also with Scandic Friends [Scandic membership program] we set a number of Scandic Friends we need to sign-up for the program.

The goals given to you by Camilla, are they easy to understand?
Yes.

Is it easy to understand how to reach them? Are you given the tools to reach them?
Yes.

What kind of tools do you get?
Well, if we need to get new members, she [the manager] advices us to tell about the benefits of the membership card [discounts, benefits in restaurants, etc.]. So, she gives us some tools we can tell to the guests to make them want to sign-up for the program.

How about organisational goals? Do you understand what the company stands for, in what direction they want to go, what do they want to accomplish?
Yes, we have this goal to make the world's best hotel experience for as many people … I don't really remember it, but there is a goal.

Would you say, that tasks you do daily helps the organisation to reach this goal?

Pause Well, I hope so. I am not really into all of these ‘how to get to the goal’. I am here because I just like being with the guests. I mean, a lot of my colleagues are seeking to get reach all the given goals and to be Nr.1 in competitions. I’m just more here because I like being here, so I don’t think I’m the right person to ask that question.

How about your personal performances – is that monitored and evaluated?
thinking

Like, how well you are doing?
Yeah, I would say you can have good periods and bad periods. I think, if you do something really good – you are told about that, and if you do something bad – you are told as well. I think that they are noticing everything you do.

Do you have anything else you would like to add?
I hope you will succeed with your assignment!

16.9 Interview transcript S-SG

Respondent	Company	Date
Stine	Scandic Glostrup	12 June 2018
Position		
Front Office Manager		
Number of years with company		
2 years		
Number of years with current position		
3 months, shift leader since August 2016		
Number of employees in reception		
3 fulltime (2 day, 1 night), 2 part-time, 3 extras		

Transcription:

Can you please start with describing to us your daily routines?
What I do when I arrive is that I check the reception if they are busy, and if they're busy I'll lend them a hand until they're not busy anymore. And then I kind of take the temperature on the staff, see how they're doing, do they need and extra… how do you say that... do they need some extra time from me? do we need to have a chat or something, or are there any issues that we need to take care of, are there emails that are difficult that I need to attend to and help with but that's the beginning of the day and when everything is running smoothly I go to my office and then I start checking the timesheet, if everything has arrived at the right time today, and did they go at the right time, and if they didn't why didn't they, is that something which I have to pay for or do they just stay behind to have a chat.
And then I'll look into my own emails and see what's lying there that I have to attend to. and then I always have a long to-do list, you know, you always three steps behind. So, I have a lot to do.

Is that to-do list something which you make yourself?
Yeah. But I do get emails from my boss asking me to look into this and that or telling me that I need to do this and this is as soon as possible... so I make my own to-do lists because I like a little bit of structure, so I make my own little to-do list so I know which is important and then I take them one by one.

Can you tell us a little bit about your rules / procedures / standard operating procedures? for instance, things like behaviour and appearances?
The uniform is either black pants or a black skirt, which I am wearing today, and a light blue shirt. black jacket, but when it's warm you are allowed to take off your jacket. And you need to wear black shoes

How about makeup, are there any rules for that?
Yeah, you are allowed to wear make-up, but in a… in the book where it says how to dress and wear at Scandic it says as natural as possible. but it's all up to the individual. Because we have different opinions about when you are natural or when we are not.

You mentioned a staff book, so does that mean that all the rules are written down?
Yeah. They are clarified.

How about procedures for your staff, for instance how are they supposed to work, any rules for that?
They are supposed to stand when a guest enters the hotel. They have a chair that they can sit on at work but they have to stand when the guest comes and greet them welcome. And it's a rule that they have to say welcome before the guests says “hello”. Sometimes it is impossible if you are doing something else and you haven't noticed or, but that's the main rule, always greet the guest welcome and it's the same on the phone, you say “welcome” on the phone as well.
These rules are also written down.

Is that book just for this hotel or?
I think it's for the entire Scandic.

Do you have any rules or procedures that are specific for this hotel only?
No. Because Scandic has a very clear book on how to do things and everyone gets this manual when they are hired at Scandic. so Scandic wants you to be similar if you check into this hotel or if you check in to another Scandic the experience is supposed to be the same.

Do you have any changing power over the rules or the procedures?
Yeah, you have to because we are very small hotel compared to some of the other hotels so we have to do things a little bit differently because we're not that many staff. So, we have some things that we do differently. because in my reception we don't only check in and out we also make the bills and the credit *notas*, the changes... and we help each other in the restaurant as well. because we are very small so if the restaurant is really, really busy, we help with the dishwasher or other little things. and that's because we're so small. and when you go to some of the really, really big hotels and check the reception, they stay in the reception because that's where they supposed to be.

How do you handle unsatisfied guests?

Depends on how they are unhappy and how they act and stuff. But we handle them with interest because we can learn a lot from unhappy guests and we always try to make them happy before they leave. sometimes we have to refund them, not moneywise, we don't give money back but we refund them with gift certificates or new stay or something like that - or a meal in the restaurant, something like that. Because we are very keen on I'm not having any unhappy guests leaving the hotel.

Now you mention compensation; do you have any rules or procedures on how to compensate?

We do have this, you know, where you can reply like TripAdvisor or something like that, we do have this and we have this rule that they are graded on TripAdvisor on how bad they are and if they are the worst it is the General Manager who answer them and I answer all the rest. But when it it's in the reception it is everybody, and we don't have any rule on what you're allowed to or not, you have to have a feel about the situation and just do what it takes within certain limits of course. You can't give them everything but you are welcome, even the receptionists are welcome to give them another stay.

You mentioned that you learn from unhappy visitors but how do you do that?

Well, if they complain about that the chairs in the rooms are not wide enough, if they are big people, so when they check in - and we see that they are big people - we put them in the rooms with bigger chairs. It is the little things and then we have a lot of guests coming again and again and again - you know, regulars - and we put them in their favourite room if possible.

How do you transfer this knowledge onwards to other employees?

If we have had a complaint about that the receptionist had been a bit sharp in the way that she addressed them, we take it up on the next meeting. I show them all of the guest replies; all the good ones, and all the bad ones. And then we talk about it, why and how can we do it better. And sometimes it's also due to that we have been a bit busy, so maybe the receptionist has been a bit stressed. So, then we try to level it out. we try to find the reason for the unhappiness and if it is something that we can work with, we do it. but we also get a lot of complaints about heat in the room, due to the summer, and that's out of our power.

Speaking of your employees, how do you train new employees? Do you have a training manual, or some courses that they have to take?

Oh, Scandic has a lot of those but I only have educated ...they need to have the education as a receptionist, I only have those. I have a few, you know, after hours who is not trained. Otherwise the staff, the regular staff, is trained as receptionists. And Scandic has a lot of courses and we do have online courses, we have an entire program, and before you are allowed to be behind the reception desk you need to learn about safety and security, and credit card handling and all these kinds of things.

How about empowering your employees to go above and beyond? Now you already mentioned a little bit about compensation but they are allowed to do more less whatever they want to, but are there other things where you encourage your employees to do something extra?
I encourage them to be themselves and I encouraged them to be able to take the control, meaning that they need to make decision by themselves and I support them in whatever decision they make. It might not be the right one but they have my support and then we'll fix it if it was not the right one or do whatever we can. Because they need to have the safety and security in that I am behind them. Sometimes they stand in a situation that is not fun all by themselves, so they need to be able to handle it and knowing that they are not going to be yelled at by me. Then it is no fun.

How about doing something extra for the guest not just in delicate situations, is that encouraged?
Yes! When we have the time.

Can you give some examples?
Well if we have a guest carrying three luggage's - we don't have bell boys or anything in this hotel - but if we do have the time to help them with their luggage to the room, then we do it. That's just one of the small things.

How do you encourage them your staff, to do anything extra for the guests?
I don't specifically tell them to do extras, but if there is time I encourage them to try to make the guest happy, you know. And sometimes it's not enough to check in and check out, you need to *ask* the guest: "*have you been happy*", "*have you had a good night's sleep*" and stuff to really get to know the guest if the guest was happy. Because if you say "oh, you want to check out, ok have a good day and thank you" and they are out the door and they might be smiling but they might be unsatisfied with something so we need to ask, we need to talk with the guest. and that's what I encourage. and then I give them compliments when they do those little extra things. We have these guest's cards in the room, where guests can write compliments, or "this has not been so good", they can write this down. And if there is a personal compliment saying "ok this receptionist, by name, has done a really good job" you know, I can tell exactly who it is and then they get a bottle of wine or something.
And I get a lot of those: "this receptionist gave a really good service, and we were so happy etc., etc., etc." and so we quickly take a picture of it and send it out and say:" *hey, well done, wine coming your way*"

You mentioned that this is a concept hotel, but do you think, in your opinion, that you have many rules or procedures which you have to follow?
Yes! but they are... I don't feel them in my daily work because for me by now they are just a part of how I work. And they are not, how to say this, they are not difficult. They are just common sense - I mean, most of them are common sense really.

So, if I asked you whether you find your rules or procedures constricting in any way?
I would say no, because they are just…. they are helpful for me to do my job in the right way.

Can you elaborate a little bit of this, how the rules and procedures help you to do your job?
There are so many rules about… let's take credit card handling: you are not allowed to write the credit card number down on a piece of paper, so that's constricting in some way because some of us, me, is old-fashioned and I like everything on my post-its. But that's just one of the things that we are not allowed to do because of people's personal credit card information and stuff. But for me to follow the law I am not allowed to write it down. So that is helpful for me, to know that because otherwise I'll just write it down I do with my own way.

So, could you say that rules like that help you to make minor decisions?
Yeah. But by now, for me, by now it is just how I do things. In the beginning, it was a little bit like" ok so I'm not allowed to do this, so I'll work the other way then".
But this is also the way of Scandic to put us all in the right way to do things and do them the same way. And it is also very helpful I must say.

Do you find the rule simple to follow?
Yes! very! Because we have this best practice so if you have any difficulties with any tasks, you have got this best practice on for example how to take payment from credit cards. You have from A to Z on how to do things.

What is this "best practice"?
It's a manual. It's online. Scandic has its own program where every employee can login with their own - **is that FUSE? -** yes, that is FUSE. And before that we had another one. And it is also Scandic business school and there are many online courses in there but it also has the best practices. and if you don't know there is also this network, kind of like a Scandic Facebook but on FUSE, where you can talk with your colleagues at all the other hotels and be "hey, I have this problem can you help me". And we also have it [the best practice] on our intranet, not only on FUSE, but we also have it on our computers.

Who develops that best practice manual?

Difficult to say. We all do kind of in a way. Because if there is an upgrade on something or that we find a way that this is an easier way to do it, we save it and then we share it with all our colleagues and then we say" hey I found this much easier way to do something, it takes me like 10 minutes "blah, blah, blah" and then I uploaded in best practice and there you go.

So, everyone can upload on that best practice?

Yeah. It has to go through HR but you can send it to them and then they can add it. And FUSE is one big community. It's very new though so everyone is fumbling around in it a little bit - it is not completely developed yet either, it needs a little bit more 'red line'. But so far it is ok.

Do believe that your employees are always following all the rules and procedures that you have here?

Yeah.

Why do you think so?

Because they [the rules] are easy. Yeah. And that's just the way to do things. It is not difficult rules it is not more difficult than doing it your own way, it's actually a simpler way to do it and it's the Scandic way to do it.

So, you believe that your employees understand the rules?

Yes!

Which channels do you use to obtain or how do you give information - now we are thinking about Facebook, email, meetings - how do you communicate with your employees?

I use a lot of direct because I see them all or I use emails. If it is something that I like them to remember, something important a new change for instance I send an email and then they can keep that in their inbox. I don't know how they develop their inbox, if they have an "important to remember" box but I sent them an email so they can always keep it if they have any doubts.
So, the really important things they go on email and they go on the staff meetings.

How often do you have staff meetings?

Once a month.

Roughly how many emails would you say you send them in a week?

Thinking 2 or 3.

Sometimes probably more if I haven't had my time in my office and I am way behind, but there have also been weeks where I haven't sent any, none in one week and then five or six in another week, but average…

You also mentioned that you speak a lot with your employees?
Yeah, I help them in the reception so I know what's going on. It is not that I am hiding in my office.

All the information that you and your employees need to do their jobs, is that is something that is always stated in for instance of written document?
We have this to-do list on each shift so you have a to-do for each shift that you enter. And those things have to be done. And then there are all these small jobs next to the to-do list but that's just things that has to be done so that the day runs more smoothly.

Do you use all information given to you from e.g. headquarters?
long thinking break the right thing would be to say "yes" but I can't keep up with everything. And again, we are so small so maybe some of the things that are passed down, or that we need to pay attention to this and that... We don't even experience half of these things because we're so small.

Some of this information, do you forward that to your employees?
Yeah

How do you decide "this is what they need and this is what they don't need"?
Due to my experience, I do know what kind of guests we have and how this hotel works. So, so if it is not necessary, if it is something about parking of buses, that they have to pay for parking or the like, it is not necessary for my employees to have that message coming down because we have free parking and we have plenty of space for busses. So, I don't want to fill up their in-boxes with unnecessary emails. And I don't even put it in my own mind because I have enough. So, it is one of those things that I am not paying attention to.

How would you say the information flow is in your organisation? is it very top-down or bottom-up? Does every employee also have the opportunity to speak with higher levels in the organisation?
Yep! I would say we're... Due to that we are small and that we are not that many full-time employees, we are 26 [26 full-time employees in the entire hotel], there is a good communication in every department.

Does everyone in the reception has the same access to all the information?
Yes.

Maybe not the same knowledge about how to find them, but they do have access to the same things. Maybe they don't know how to search on the computers, in the “best practice” for instance, but information is there for everyone. And everyone has access to FUSE once they get their login number or employee codes. Everybody has their own FUSE account.

Do you think that you get all the information that you need to do your job?
Yeah. yes, I am most certainly do, but I don't think I get enough time to do my job - the case always. Scandic is not a secretive operation. We share the budget, we share the money, is this a good month or how many nights... With everyone. It is not just for the management to know that if we are behind budget or if we need to pick up a little bit more room nights or whatever. Everybody gets a feeling about how it goes.

Do you share that with your employees?
Yes. We used to have a meeting every quarter where everybody could get the numbers but we changed it a bit so now we just do it on the staff meetings and discuss “ok this month has been really good, this month has been really bad, we are so far behind on rooms and we are way ahead and budget, or we need to cut down on hour's”

Do you only show your employees the budgets are you do you also ask them how they suggest that it could be changed?
There are many things we can’t change. In my department, it is... we are dependent on guests and if the guest doesn't come to the hotel, it goes out on our budget and there is nothing we can do but we cannot go out on the street and say “hey you have to sleep here”. So, we can't do much. We do have departments taking care of advertising and groups and stuff. We just have to take care of them when they come.

How about wage percentages [lønprocenter], do you share these as well with the staff?
We don't talk about salary but we have a budget and, on the budget, that's on the big screen, you can see that this is the average salary this month for this entire hotel.

And also, the revenue?
The revenue is room nights, that's how much we sell per room, prices and so on. Revenue has got nothing to do with salary but we have a budget and everything is on it. So, we put this many hours on this month and that will be at total of this salary this month for the entire hotel. But it isn't state specifically what each individual gets in salary. Other than that, there are actually no secrets. And it is also an idea to give the feel of, that this is also “mine”, you know, “I take ownership”.

Do you think it works when people that are allowed to see the numbers?
Yeah, I think so.

Are they telling you that or is it something that you can see on, for instance, sales numbers?
I think, you know, because everybody takes pride in it when we have a full house because they know that's good, money in the business, money in the bank. We turn it around to use it as, say, as a good thing. We are hungry for guests, we need it, we need it in the bank, right.
We do it, like, in a fun way, or with some humour. Not like "ohh, we are behind" get moving. It's nothing like that. It's just because when you show them [the numbers] they're like "okay, I understand now why we haven't been so busy". It's also to get an idea about how things are going. At least in my department.

Is the information available to you and your employees when you need it - you've already mentioned best practice but is there anything else you could add to this?
Is also common that when you are front office manager at Scandic you're in a group with other front office manager from the other Scandic hotels. Every time we go to the meetings, it is the same front office managers and they have this way of communicating as well within the groups so if they have something they want to share or ask "how you do this" they sent the question out in the front office manager group.

Is that on FUSE?
No, not on fuse. On email.

Would you say that the information that you get from Scandic, is that understandable?
Yeah. It's simplified, I would say it is.
Sometimes there are fancy words, but then you just need to learn. l like revenue. If you haven't been in a hotel before, if you are fresh out of school, revenue is not a normal word when you are receptionist but that is like everything else.

Can you tell us about goals for Scandic - now thinking about both for the hotel as a whole but also just for the reception, if you have put up goals just for the receptionists?
Scandic has their own goals, have you looked them up? "to make great hotel experiences for the many guests" that's the main goal that Scandic has. And Scandic would also like to be the Scandinavian, or the Nordic, leading hotel company and they are already there.

Do you have any goals just for the reception or the receptionist?
To reach the budget be happy and make happy guests.

How do you figure out whether your employees are happy?

I talk to them. We have one to ones once a month with me for approximately 20 minutes to half an hour and we turn everything.

How do you - you already mention TripAdvisor - but is there any other way you…

Scandic has its own SGS - Scandic Guest Satisfactory Programme - that's also a TripAdvisor thing. And then when we check them out, the receptionists are the first ones to greet the guests and the last ones to say goodbye. So, you can kind of like get a feeling so that's why it's very important that the receptionists say "good morning, did you have a good night's sleep" or "I can see you dined in the restaurant yesterday, was it good, did you like it?" and so on. There has to be these little talks just to get a feeling of things.

How does the SGS system work specifically?

The guest fills them out and they grade us. They get an email after their stay with a link to the survey.

Would you say that the goals for Scandic are easy to understand and obtainable?

Yes! It's very easy to understand, not always easy to obtain. Because it is due to people.

What do you mean "people"?

Guests. The goal is to keep the budget and do well and have a thriving business but it is not easy to have a thriving business if we don't have the guests to put in the rooms.

So, in the end of the day, Scandic a business and it needs to make money. It also needs to provide good experiences to these people who comes and puts their money here so that they will come back. But in the end of the day it is a business.

But a happy employee is a better employee than an unhappy one. And they provide a better service and they give positive energy to the guests and their colleagues. So, it is my job to keep them happy and it is my job to feed them with information and it is my job if they have ambitions to push them.

Are there any other ways that you keep them happy except for the one on ones?

We have staff arrangements. Summer days where we go out for cocktails or... Yeah. Small things.

How about activities in your department - competitions and that kind of things?

We have that too [competitions]. When headquarters come down and says "hey you need to obtain 1000 Scandic Friends for the next 3 months" or something like that I put up a competition for my employees and say "hey, if you can do this" - because everything headquarters comes with is a competition around *all* the Scandic hotels and of course you want a hotel to be at least in the top three. It is the same with the Scandic Guest

Satisfactory Programme were the greatest. It is also a competition, well it is not a competition, but when you get an e-mail from all the other hotels, then you can see where all the other hotels are lying on the list, and of course you want to be in the top.
So, yeah, I put competitions in the reception for the receptionists because we are very competitive.

Are some of the competitions *just* for your hotel?
Yeah. Sometimes we get this note from the headquarters that we need, as I said, get more Scandic Friends members and we go with this competition, they have this entire competition for all of Scandic that but then I made it into a smaller one so I say "you need to get this and this and this" and then the hotel gets 5000 for a staff party or something. It is too big to grasp for only my employees in the reception so I make it smaller and say "if *you* get 100 Scandic Friends you get a big gift" or something. You can win something. Then everybody is a little bit keener on winning. It is a way of putting some positive energy into it.
Do you give your employees some kind of tools or ways on how to perform well in these competitions?
Not exactly because I think they are already there. You know, because the main thing is to be polite and welcoming. And we already ask them if they want to dine in the restaurant in evening and ask "oh, are you a member of Scandic? You should become a member" and they already do with it so I haven't found it necessary for me to interfere and say "hey you have to do this and this. They find their own way and so far, they are all good, they find their own different ways but they are all good. But I am very keen on that they are polite, that is one of my main things.

Do you believe that the strategies that you are giving the employees to reach the goal that that strategy is understandable for them?
Yeah. It is a competition it is simple.

How are the performances of the employees monitored and evaluated? You already mentioned the SGS but do you monitor and evaluate your employees in any other way?
Yes. We have this form within Scandic, that once a year you have to take this... It is not a test but I can't remember how many questions there is, but it is your own performance that you have to... You have these, 25 points I think it is you have to go through and say "hey, you goal last year..." - you have to put up goals that you want to develop - and then last year... and then you have to evaluate how well you have done and what can you do further. And then you have to grade yourself on different kind of tasks. And then you sit down, and it takes an hour to one and a half hour and you do it every year. And then we go through all the goals and see how far you've come and what new goals can we make. It's called Scandic Perform. It is private and between the manager and the employee.

And then they [the employee] send it in and I get it and I evaluate with mine and then we sit down and have a one to one and talk “okay, I have evaluated you like this and you have evaluated yourself like that - can you give me some examples of why you do this and I've put this because what I see is this…” And it is a good way to talk and say “ok I need you to maybe perform a little bit better on this area and what can I do for you to perform better”. But I think it is a good way to get a feeling about to act around your employees because everyone is different.
But I think Scandic is changing it now to something else less paper-wise.

We are aware from some of the other interviews that Scandic has these 4 values: be bold, be pro, be you, be caring. How do you work with these here?
We have workshops where the questions go like “how would you be bolder; how do you see yourself be bold” and then you have to write down an example where you are bold. For instance, that could be someone who is very shy perhaps and then some day they stand in front of the reception with an entire group and say “welcome blablabla” and you have to be bold to do that if you're a shy person, so you have to push his limits.

Who defines what it means to be bold for instance - is it the receptionist her/himself who does that?
Yes. Scandic doesn't have “be bold is this way” it's for the individual to decide.

Is this also something to talk about during your annual meetings with your employees?
We talked about it in the staff meeting, sometimes, not every time but sometimes. How do we live up to this and which of these 4 ones would you like to develop more? Because some of them is be a pro, be bold, be you and be caring. And some of us may be really, really caring but not very pro - so how would you like to develop the pro? “ok I would like to maybe get to know the tasks a little a bit more or maybe gets an extra task” because we have all these extra things that has to be done and we hand them out when people are ready for them. So that could be some of them. But the 4 things are individual because we can’t be the same, that’s impossible.

Do you have anything you would like to add?
Yeah, I guess I want to say that when we talk about the things from headquarters or from me that “how we do the things in the reception” and I say it’s simple - but it is simple for me because I already know how to do many of the things in the reception so for my receptionists it might not be as simple because they maybe not have the same experience in the different kind of things.
But if you do know how to check in and check out and there comes this from headquarters for instance that “oh, you have to say welcome, you have to say goodbye and you have to ask how the guest have slept” then it is simple. But if you are still struggling and spending a lot of energy on “oh, I have to check in and I have to

check out and I have to do this and this and that" and then sometimes it can be difficult when you're new. My receptionists are relatively new.

How many receptionists are working at the same time?
We have 2 on Mondays, because Monday is a busy afternoon. Otherwise they are alone. But I am here and I always step out it is busy. I work Monday to Friday, office hours.

How many receptionists do you have in total?
I have 2 full-time during the day and I have 1 full-time during the night and I have 2 part-time in the weekends, every second weekend. And then I have 3 from these extra hands coming in whenever one is sick or when I need an extra hand or…

When you hire new receptionists, are there any specifics which you are looking for?
They need to be trained receptionists, of course they do. But I don't look that much into their application, I am more interested in the conversation that we are going to have. I look after chemistry. For me it is *very* important that I have to positive chemistry and that they are easy to talk to and that they have... I don't know… something that tells me that is going to be good. A sense of humour is also very important I think, because then you can handle a lot of things.

Are you also considering the 4 values when you hire people?
I look at their resumé, you know, and I see if they have done former jobs and I see how they have stayed there and I see "okay, you're loyal, you've stayed there 10 years. You must be very happy there so you stayed" and if they have only been 3 months each place I think "ahh, what are the chances that you will stay here for 3 months".
But be bold, be pro… *thinks* No, I don't think I put those 4 terms when I read their application, no.
But if you have a conversation with somebody and they just look down all the same time, you think "okay, how are you going to look the guest in the eyes." Then you're not bold enough. You don't have to be like "heyyy, welcome" but you still have to say "hi, welcome. What can I do to help you?" So, I do put them under things but that's something I am unaware of. But if you start to evaluate, so of course they do.
But again, as i said before, many of the things Scandic has, is common sense. They don't, in my opinion, they don't put something really difficult in your hat that you have to struggle with.
Scandic is also a business that does a lot for their employees. If you have some ambitions, Scandic is more than willing to help. With all those programmes and stuff.

So, you can push yourself off the ladder?

Yeah, I really think you can. If you are one of those people who would like to do it. There is also the employee who just likes to go to work and go home again and that is also okay.

My job is to make them [the employees] into *me.* We are building a lot of hotels and my job is to make good employees to ship out to all these hotels. That's my job.

So, whenever they are ready for another task in the reception, whenever they have time and have the surplus and overview then they get a little bit extra.

How have you been trained for this position?

The same way. Started as a shift leader. I started within Radisson, another chain, and then I moved here and I started at Scandic and my boss kept giving me extra jobs, extra jobs, extra jobs So the step from shift leader to front office manager is not that big.

I started as a receptionist trainee at Radisson and before I was finished I was part of management in Radisson because I have always been very ambitious and I have my CV from former job is quite good. So, I didn't have the receptionist job, the normal one, I jumped right into management.

You are the third manager we have interviews and we've discovered that you guys a very similar You are saying a lot of the same things…

I think Scandic goes after certain profiles. Scandic would like to do things the same way so you can step in in any Scandic and do a good job but of course the different hotels are different - size matters. But are looking for a certain profile, I think. You need to have some ambitions, you need to be.. I wouldn't say young, but you need to think out of the box and you need to be prepared to changed.

When you say "size matters" for the hotels, what do you mean?

The bigger, the more things there is, it's common sense. Because we are small I know what is going on in every department and I also know all the housekeepers by first name. But if I had a 600-rooms hotel I wouldn't know the names of half the housekeeper's name. So, size matters. It's easier for us to keep a good vibe in the hotel because we know each other and we have fun and we laugh together because we are small and intimate. Radisson is just a different kind of way of having a hotel. Everything is a secret. The normal staff doesn't know about the budget or anything. It's not very informative. And they are also a little bit more posh in some ways - not in a negative but they are just also expecting themselves to be on a higher level and guests expects Radisson to be a little bit higher than Scandic. And they do things differently. Not saying that it is bad but I am not saying it is good either. It's just a different way of doing things. I think Scandic has made a decision a while back, saying that this is how we are doing things.

16.10 Interview transcript A-SR

Respondent	Company	Date
Annie	Scandic Ringsted	24 April 2018
Position		
Conference/Event Manager		
Number of years with company		
7 years		
Number of years with current position		
1,5 years		

Transcription:

Can you please describe to us your daily routines?

I take care of a conference guests and make sure that they are welcomed to the hotel, that their facilities are in order in accordance to what they've booked and their requests. I check up on the guest I have in the house today, who has already arrived, who is arriving later…

When I have done the walk around to check if everything is on order, I turn on my computer to check the email; is there something which needs urgent attention, and in general get an overview of the emails and tasks I need to follow up on.

I check up on the timetables for the day, how many conference guests are going to eat lunch and so on. I check the program and make sure that my kitchen and restaurant is updated on the time schedule, and whether they have any issues. So, coordinating with the other departments in the house, and how we are going to do the day. Then I often sit in the back office, do some emails, phone calls with people who wants to book meetings and then send them offers or confirmations, make changes in existing bookings and so on. I also take requests from guests in house for instance if they need copies or changes to the schedule then of course I'll fix that. but otherwise it's booking, answering the phone and so on.

Can you elaborate on your time schedules, how do they function?

We have a plan in advance for a week at a time. What I do every week is that a follow-up what's going to happen next week, which teams are going in Monday, Tuesday and so on, when are they, the guests, having lunch and ensuring that are not all having lunch at the same time, that we have enough seating, if we have any special requests like gluten free diets, and so on. Of course, all this I check in advance, but you can always get all details in advance. Often there's someone coming “oh by the way, I don't like fish” on the day.

So, every week I follow up for the next week by email or phone, but on the day of the event all communication in-house, checking the timetables with the guests during the day, so if the guests have changes, then I can adjust the time table. so that can be very back and forth to ensure that every department, kitchen, waiters and of course guests, are having information they need and are getting what they need.

How do you coordinate with the other departments?

Each day we have a 10 o'clock meeting so if it's something that can wait until 10 o'clock, we need one extra fish for lunch, or that we have an allergic, that is something which is ok for the chef to know at 10 o'clock. at the meeting, we go through the timetables, give updates if there’s any changes and so. And if there's more changes during the day I'll make sure to update the time schedules in all departments. This is done a bit on *ad hoc* basis.

Each week we also have a function meeting where we talk about next week. If there is any changes to the event after this weekly meeting, you need to go out to each department to make sure that they get the changes. If the event is for instance one month away, I can just put the changes in the system, I don’t need to inform the departments. But changes made at the meeting the previous week, for an event next week, will have to be informed to each department.

This information is written down on our function sheets which I print for each department who needs them at the weekly meeting. After this meeting I have to manually make changes to the function sheets if I get any updates. Depending on the changes I either print a new function sheet or I just change it by hand.

The function sheets are like reports which we draw from the systems and we use the same type of reports for all departments and for all events. If I get any special request from the guests which I cannot answer myself for instance “can we have a chocolate fountain for our wedding?” Then that is something I will have to go and check with the chef because that is not something that we have as a standard. But this is a small hotel so it is quite easy to go around and ask in the departments, and sometimes it's quicker too.

Can you explain to us what kind of rules/SOPs you have on e.g. how you are supposed to look and behave?

We have a uniform, but we can mix and match it a little bit as we like, e.g. a blue shirt and a black jacket. Of course, you have to look presentable, you cannot smell and you have to make sure that your appearance is good for the guest. But we don't have restrictions or like, you don't ‘have to wear make-up’, or ‘wear a specific colour of lipstick’ or the like.

Then we have some values which is used both which is used both in the relation to customers but also it in relation to colleagues. You know, how are we going to be professional with guests but also with colleagues. So, we have different angles on how we can use those values… So, we have “be bold”, “be caring” ... Like we have Scandic values, which actually is a good start-up for how we deal with things.

And then of course in my department we have some standards on what you can expect when you book a meeting at Scandic. E.g. meetings are always including ice water in the in the meeting rooms, which is a part of our standard package which the guests can read about before they book a meeting.

Are these values and standards written down anywhere?

We have standard meeting packets which everyone can read about. But then we have the more 'soft' standards with the values, but of course Scandic has a specific way of how you should interpret them but it's used all the way around.

What do you mean when you say "they have a specific way of being interpreted"?

When they teach us these values they think "this is how we want it to be". But if we take for instance "be bold" but it's not only that you have to be out there and be selling, but it can also be that you can be bold and be extra caring for the guests. So is used in many ways, both in soft relations but It can also be used in connection with, for instance, when we have to raise our sales numbers, so we have to be bold and really ask the guest "are you sure you do not want that upgrade". So that's also being bold, but it's also bold being interested in caring in your team members. Or be bold in a sense of "hey I want to do this" and then go for it.

Who informs and teaches you about these values?

We have hotel kick-offs, where it's a part of the mentality; how would we like to be as a company, it's very important for us that we have a good working environment and that we are happy to go to work. So, it is a big deal about what makes you happy in your work and it's very important for Scandic to know this. The caring value is not only for the guests but also that we take care of each other as colleagues.

The values are something which the headquarters has in print and they present them to us in a short formulation but you can interpret them yourself also and decide for yourself "this is how I am being bold." It is up to you to interpret and live out the values. Of course, we are a chain, and we have a concept, but we also need to be individual. We are very big fan of the personal place.

If you have an unsatisfied guest what do you do?

Our key point is to create a great hotel experiences for the guest. So first of all is the problem something we can do something about. It's not like 'the guest is always right', you know. When they guests come to us and ask for a room with a bathtub, and we don't have any rooms with bathtubs and we can't fulfil that wish, instead we try and give other solutions, e.g. inform that guest about the sauna in the basement which they are free to use instead. And if we can do a little bit extra, like when we have a small kid at the breakfast who really wants Choco puffs, we try and get them for the next day.

Would you say that this is something your manager is encouraging you to do?

Yes. Everyone is allowed to take action if there is an issue, and you don't have to check with your manager first if there is an issue. We have a very high level of freedom to do what we find the correct thing to do in the situation. So, everyone handles the guests. And you could say it's a key point that no guests leave the hotel without any action if they have been unsatisfied with their stay. We never ever send the guest out the door without doing *something* about their complaint - which could also just be noting their complaint, inform the manager, and inform the guests that we will get back to them.

This is almost like a rule here, that we have to fix situations right now while the guest is here. Action here and now. But really, we have more guidelines on how to do our job is more of a guideline - we can decide for ourselves how we chose to do our job. Of course, we share with each other, like, "last night I had this challenge with a guest but I did such and such and they guest was so happy". So, we do a lot of sharing on how we fix issues, and if it a recurring problem we try and figure out 'so, what can we do next time this happen'.

What do you with recurring problems?

We can't remember everything, so here in Ringsted we have like an encyclopaedia where we write everything in; from 'what do you do when people bring dogs' or 'how do we do with pre-payment" etc. and then of course we have the emails, we have a weekly email where we put all of our key points together e.g. 'remember this' or 'this is a new thing we need to do'.

So off course we have a lot of talking and verbal communication, but of course if we find something which we can use, we put it together so we have something in writing. Because otherwise you would get a lot of info all the time, all day. So, we put it together in writing in an email and send it out once a week. Both positive and negative information is being sent out in these emails. Or we can be asking for suggestions if we are having a problem which keeps occurring, or we inform if we are planning on implementing something new in the future.

Can you explain a bit further on the encyclopaedia, does it help you with making decisions?

Well, in some situations, yes it does. But I'd say that a lot of it is basic know-how. It is difficult if you're new in the business because you don't know where the extra thick pillows are, or you don't how you can increase the height of the bed – we have some boxes in the basement which can be used for this. All these things, you don't learn them at day one. So, a lot of these things are learning by doing. Everything we can write down we write down in this handbook, so you can read and search for something specific, but a lot is really down to experience. It's a service business, and not all have the service gene.

Do you think that your colleagues are following the rules and guidelines that you have?

Yeah, I think so yes, they do. And also, because it's of course rules and guidelines, but it's not like definite, like "this you have to do that way". They're quite open so you are free to handle within those barriers. It's not like you'll feel "I want to do this, but I can't" because, if you ask me, they're some good values so I have never ever felt restricted by them. They're guidelines, they're rules, but I have never felt that I can't do something specific because of them.

Do you think I have many rules to follow?
No. Absolutely not.
Do you think that the rules you do have, are they simple - do you understand them and do they make sense?
Yes, they do. They are very low-key and basic. Easy to understand and something which speaks to everyone. Even if you're a chef, or front-desk or a housekeeper; it's for all.

How do you give and obtain information?
Emails I think is my primary giving and receiving way of communication. But otherwise there's talking. We are a small hotel so we have a lot of informal communication, e.g. I ask a waiter if we can have to extra chairs for lunch and so on. Other than that, we use the function sheets which contains all the details for the events, which I put in the systems and all the departments at the hotel use them. The function sheets are identical so if we have any changes, we put it on them. If I have any requests from the guests, I can go out and check e.g. the waiters function sheet and update them with e.g. mayonnaise for the fries or whatever they need.

Are other people allowed to change the function sheet?
Yes, they are.

Do you use all the information that is given to you?
We are as concept hotel, that's clear. So, we have a concept, but the focus is on what does the guest need. So, it's not how the guests fit in our boxes it's how to we build the boxes around the guests, so how do we customise their meeting experience. So of course, we have some concepts, but they are flexible.

Is the information flow top down or bottom up?
It comes from both ways. If a waitress can inform me "I only have 80 chairs" but if have 100 lunch guests, then I need to know and plan that they're not all going to eat at the same time. But do we have information regarding changes to the brunch, or that we are going purely organic, then that info comes from headquarters. But I also need to the information from kitchen and from the waiters in order for me to do my job. I can't dictate that I want e.g. all 100 guests to eat at 12 o'clock if we don't have the chairs. Then I need to find another way around this.

Does everyone have the same access to information?

It’s a bit divided, because it’s not all information that is important and needed by everyone. The housekeeper doesn’t need to know that we have a new breakfast on the buffet and that it will change on the 4th of May. So of course, we sort in who gets what info. And also, if it is e.g. food and beverage related, well then, it’s the kitchen and the waiters and me at the conference who gets it, but housekeeping doesn’t. E.g. if we get a new cleaning soap or something, it’s the kitchen and the housekeeping who are being told - it’s not important for me to.

How do you decide who gets what information?

I think it’s the one who has the information and want to give who decided. E.g. if it’s F&B decisions, it’s the F&B director at the head office in Copenhagen. It could also be from Sweden - but it depends on what kind of decision it is. E.g. if it’s about a new agreement which only counts for the Danish hotels, the it would be the Danish office who decides which departments will be a part of the new agreements, but if it’s global agreement then it comes the head office.

But the one who has the information decides where it is going. But it’s like a rule in Scandic, that you don’t send out information to everyone. You have to think about your mail policy so that you’re a bit critical about what you send out because you get *a lot* of emails when you are a big corporation. And a lot of it is not for you anyway…

Do you feel you get the information that you need to do your job?

Yes, I do.

What if you get a special request, something outside the norm, is it easy for you to obtain information you need to solve this request?

Yeah, I think so. We are quite clear on who is responsible for each department so if it’s something local, e.g. I have guests who wants to know if they can have a chocolate fountain, then I go to the head chef in kitchen. If it's something about our packages how do they are put together, then it’s the F&B manager at the head-office because this would a more of an all-round decision.

We all have names and titles so we know who is going to be the one we need to contact. And is also very clearly stated from the head office who is responsible for what. I know, even though I am not in the head office in Copenhagen, I know the people, know who’s responsible for what and if I have any questions, I know who to contact. We also have an intranet with all this information, so you can go there and search. It’s also where they publish articles and news info and so on.

Is the delivery of the information consistent?

It always depends a little bit on who you're speaking with. In Scandic we have a corporate language which is English, so it's expected that everyone is fluent in English on a certain level if you are on a email, e.g. if you are a manager.

If you are e.g. housekeeping, maybe not the same level is required because you don't need to answer emails. Then it's more your manager who makes sure that you get the information you need

I think it's structured - what you get is worked through and it's clear and easy to understand.

What about the goals for Scandic and also for your department - do you have any and can you explain what they are?

Yes, we definitely have goals. You know, it's always about numbers. We have a budget that we need to make every year. It could also be on e.g. food waste. We have breakfast and lunch buffets so we have a focus on how we can narrow down the food waste from the buffets. It's not so much my department, but I know its fills a lot in the kitchen and in the restaurants.

There are a lot of different goals. Some of them are more department related because they are more specific and then we have a general with the mission and the values about "create great hotel experiences for our guests".

I can't remember the numbers exactly, but we get an update with the weekly emails about how it looks now, e.g. showing the average room-rate at the moment, but this is where we should be so let's try and do a bit better".

We also have these hotel kick-offs four time a year where we all meet and where all the General Managers come and show the numbers. It's a bit boring but they're actually kind of nice and also good motivation for us to know "What do we do, what do we need to do, and are we doing it, or do we need to make any adjustments?". Because, it also gives us something to work against. So, it is also good for us to know how it is going.

Is it easy for you to understand which direction to go to reach the goals?

Yes, because I think the managers are good at take out the numbers and make them more [tangible], e.g. "what do you do in your work that affects these numbers" or "how can I raise the average room-rate" for instance. This could be "make an up-sale to a bigger room instead of the standard room". Then we have tried to focus on that and then we can see e.g. "okay, actually Annie, you sold up-sales last week for 5000 and Lisbeth and you up-sold for 4500". They are good to get the numbers down, so you can see "so, what does this mean for me"

You are monitoring your performances mainly through budgets and numbers?

Yeah, because that's the measurable ones. But we also have personal goals. We also have annual performance reviews every year [MUS-samtaler] where we talk about personal goals, e.g. "where do you want to be", "do you want to be a manager one a day", or "do you want to be better at this", "do you want to focus on that", or "do want to be better at answering angry guests" etc. And all of Scandic have these annual performance reviews.

Can you measure if the employees are getting better, performance-wise?

Yes, you can. For instance, if you are new, you don't know everything but you can see how people develop, how they are getting more confident and how they are handling the issues which they are getting during the day. For instance, I am in conference and I am the only one sitting in the conference coordinating department, so when I am off the front desk is taking care of requests and so on. I can see if they get more knowledge and know-how to handle these requests, and then they can also take in bookings instead of leaving a note for me the next day and telling the guest I will contact them tomorrow. Then they can take the information I need so I can get back to them [the guest] with an offer, but I don't have to call them [the guest] and ask for details on how many they are, what do they need, what date do they want to book.
They [front office] can ask these things too when they get an understanding what the business is about.

How do they get this understanding?

Some is learning by doing. You get more info the longer you work but also, we have best practice. A lot of best practice "how do you do this; how do you do that" in our system. E.g. how do you book in a conference booking, or how do you add coffee to a booking, or how do you put a deposit or make a *pro forma* invoice. We have a lot of best practice and how you do it in our system. You get a lot of manuals and then of course we have learning by doing and then of course I have focus on teaching them [front office]. So, we have a session on one hour and I will go through how you do this and that. So that is also something which we focus on.

16.11 Interview transcript I-SR

Respondent	**Company**	**Date**
Ida	Scandic Ringsted	24 April 2018
Position		
Front Office Manager		
Number of years with company		
11,5 years		
Number of years with current position		
7 months		
Number of employees in reception		
3 fulltime (2 day, 1 night), 2 part-time		

Transcription:

Please, start by describing your daily routines / tasks?
That's difficult, because not every day is the same. But usually I start with checking how it is in the front office - are they busy, are there a lot of things to do, and conferences, I check them both at the same time, checking the lists. Checking if anyone needs my help, otherwise I will start with my own working tasks.

Do you have a specific checklist or do you just know what you need to do during the day?
The boss that was here before me, she used to have a checklist. I started out by using it, but now I know all the things that I need to do during the day, so now I don't really use it. It is typically follow-ups on TripAdvisor, on own SGS, which is that our computer is sending out questionnaires to the people you have stayed here. Booking.com, Expedia. Answering reviews and is there anything that I need to take an action to → either I forward it to another departments, if there is anything they should do, or if there is a really good one I put it up on our little TV in the staff area, so they can see the great reviews. And what do I do more? I check numbers, I keep track how we are with this month budget, both in conference and the reception, bot hon rooms and hours, and conference & meetings - if we are selling enough meetings.

The previous checklist made by previous manager? Is that she made herself?
Yes, she made it.

Is it something she made to be nice to you?

No, I think she did it for herself. And then she left it for me and that I can use it if I want to. It is just an Excel form, so it is very easy. It's more like -> these are the things you need to do during the day, ones that are really important to do during the day, and others are the tasks that can wait if you don't have the time.

So, this is also like a prioritization list?

Yeah.

Going back to more like a specific rule. It was mentioned before that there are some specific rule sets. What kind of a standard operations procedures do you have?

We have a staff handbook, where we have information about how you should look at work, but we are more, now in the later years, "it's ok to be yourself at work" so we are not really so strict. Of course, if someone looks terrible at work or doesn't really look presentable, then of course we should act on it. But we are more like, nowadays, "ok, you need to bring yourself to work as well"

Who defines presentable?

Yeah that's a good question.

...because I can think something different than you.

I think it lays with us - the managers. And of course, we always can have a discussion about it with our team members. If there is something I think you should not look like when you come at work, then I have a talk with the staff. If he/she says that this is happening only this time because of something, then that is accepted. We can always discuss in staff meetings how should we look in the reception. For example, for Jeanett I just bought a new uniform, because she didn't have any, and she was very happy. I was really happy as well, because I got to buy it for her, because I have not done that before. So, yeah, it depends, of course, I think in our handbook it is said that we need to have our jacket on, but we can't really have the jacket on all the time, because it is so warm. So, I almost never use my jacket.

But the HQ or main Copenhagen office is not checking on how you look like?

No.

There is just a guide book on how to look.

Yeah. I know, it could be in some of the CPH hotels, if country managers, the CMT team, if they are in one of the hotels and see something, they will to the GM, who then will tell the manager, who will tell… and so on.

That could happen, but I have never been at work where, if that manager says something what person him/herself cannot see.

You have these written rules, but don't you kind of need to follow them?
Not really. The change in Scandic over the years have so big, because I can see totally different company now, that I saw 11 years ago. They wrote those rules, but they are more allowing to be yourself now more.

Why do you think that has happened? It used to be stricter, and now it's less strict. Why do you think that has happened?
Not sure. Might be because of the environment around us, maybe. That they know that the guests are not as strict anymore. I think, that is probably why. And because of the social media and that kind of stuff.

You have general rules, that comes from HQ. Do you, as a manager make rules for this hotel, that only counts for your employees?
It depends on what it is. In Scandic we have a lot of procedures and a lot of things we should do. In Scandic they are really good at procedures and how we should solve a problem. Also, we have 'best practices' and signed procedures, and everything. They are really, really good at it. But usually, as I say to my staff, it is really good to know these procedures, because if you know them well, you know WHEN it is ok to go outside the lines. I have never known anyone who has been following a procedure, or anything like that. We can make our own rules, we do things differently here than in Scandic Copenhagen, for example. But is not really like rules, it's more like how to do things.

Can you give an example on what you might do differently here than there? Just to give an idea.
It is more like how you either solve a problem or come up with the …. It's more like how, because we have some things we should do during the day, on our checklist, e.g. we should go through the arrivals and see if there are any special requests we should observe or should take an action on. The same things should be done in all the receptions, but how we do them is different. Even our current intern told that we all do things differently.

Do you know why you do things differently?
I think it depends on how you are as a person. I, personally, prefer to take a report and go through every arrival. Others, I know, go into the each and every booking. But some bookings have no extra information there. So, I think it is how you are as a person, how you learn things, how you take in the information. It's the same how we learn. We all learn differently - some needs to do it, some - read a book about it.

How do you train a new employee?

We usually use a lot 'learning by doing'. So, in the start they are standing next to you and watching what you are doing and try some things and when it gets under your skin you go and try it out yourself. So, then we stand on the side and they are doing. and we also try our employees to try working in another departments, just to get the whole picture of what going on. And how their actions in reception affect other employees in other departments. So, they have an understanding what happens in other departments.

But you only have this training manual or is there also something you should go through with your employees?

We have our own e-learning program, it's a whole platform with an e-learning. We have, I don't know how it is called now, but some years ago we had this "Get on board with Scandic, then we also have all training in our systems, e-learning.

What you call the system / platform?

Fuse. Now they have built almost most things in there. They are saying that in the future, all things should go through this system.

Do you have tests there as well?

Yes. After each course, you have a little test. If you don't pass the test, you have to re-do it until you pass the test.

How you handle unsatisfied customers? what you do?

We talk to them of course. it is really important but we always try to catch them here in the hotel before they go home. If they go home they are usually more unsatisfied and they can go to TripAdvisor and complain there, because no one ever asked them how they are, and if there something we can do better, or anything. So, we try to ask the guest. Sometimes guest says anything. So, we try to ask them questions about their day / stay. We try to see what conversation suits particular guest the best.

So, the guest doesn't like something and it's very unsatisfied do you have any compensation system or rules about compensation?

Not really, we don't really have any rules for that but we usually do it by trusting our guts. but sometimes it's really difficult sometimes you offer guest compensation and they say "no, no, no that's not good enough", so you offer more but they are still not satisfied. So, then we ask ok so what would you like to have as compensation what do you think is a proper thing to give you?

but we don't really have any guidelines how to do that. if they have been in the restaurant we are usually trying to take out the dinner of their bill.

Is anyone allowed to do this?
Yes

So even the part-time employees?
Yes

Are you empowering your employees to go above and beyond?
We have this 'voice', where all the team members, including me, get to answer questions on how do you think your manager is doing in these situations, are your work environment good, are you feeling empowered?
We have that every year every manager has a score in it and I got 100% empowerment actually. My employees know that I will back them up if there are any problems, or they will take the decision I will back them up toward the guest.

Are you in power in your employees to make it even more happy
Yeah.

Do your employees do something extra when they are no issues?
I think they do. you have a lot frequent guests here, like guests that we all know, even in the back-of the house, and my team is doing a lot of things. They are always suggesting things what should be done, and I give my acceptance.

Do you know what they are doing?
Yes, because I follow up on them.

So, you follow up and they tell a story of what they did and you praise them. Do you log this information anywhere or does it stay only between you and that employee?
I do. I send out –it's not a weekly email anymore – but with some consistency I try to send out an email, where I collect most information to send it all at the same time, and I add a 'good history [story] of the week'. Last week we had 3 'good histories [stories]'. It also depends what kind of histories we have at that time. I guess I need to get a bit better at telling my team about these 'good deeds'. Usually it also comes with a good review or I am told by guest what my employees have done great. But we should get better at sharing these stories.

Is this practice exclusively only in here - your hotel, or is it the same way in the other hotels as well?
I never had it in other hotels. I think it something that last from what last manager started with.
But we are such a small hotel, so it is a bit easier here. Because I send it to all the other managers, and some of the waiters that does not have Scandic email but would like to have it on their personal emails to keep a track what is going on.

Do you have a lot of platforms with different information on them?
We have a lot of platforms, yes. We think it’s too much sometimes. But we have our Intranet that is supposed to be moved over to FUSE in the future. So, we have a FUSE for that kind of information, but then of course we have our system we work daily and there we use the log-book in that systems. In other Scandic hotels we used an Excel document for such an information - a handover. We had a handover between shifts, so each time one person from earlier team sat down and wrote it – different information from a group coming in in two months to ‘yesterday we had a burglary’. So yes, we have a lot of platforms, but they are trying to gather all the general information on FUSE. So not much the local hotel information.

So, local information is up to you how to distribute it - physical book, or log-book.
Yes.

How are you giving out the information - emails, verbally, written?
I try, of course, if I gather some info I should share with the team, then I tell them verbally to the ones who are at the work right now, but then I always send an e-mail to my team, if there is anything that should come up to e-mail, or else we have a log-book where we can write information.

How does the information flow work? Is it top-down, or bottom-up? Where does it start and ends?
Well, it depends on. Some info is sent top-down and some info is sent to all. I think it depends on the person as well. I would not send the email to our CEO to Sweden with our suggestions, but there might be some teams who do it. We have access to everyone’s emails, so it is not difficult to do. But it depends on the person, I guess.

Does everyone have the same access to all the information?
Yes, I guess so. I could get some info I shouldn’t share with the team, confidential or like that and then they don’t have access to it, but this information I usually will get on email or verbally.

What about information on budgets?
They do have the access, but I am not sure that anyone is sure how to access information. I try to write it out for them, e.g. this month we are missing this much.

So, you are simplifying that information for them?
Yes.

But they can, if they want to, to see the information themselves? Yeah. We also have the hotel meetings, like once a quarter when we try to gather all hotel employees, and then GM [the General Manager] goes through the numbers, how has it been last 3 months / is it good or is it bad / Scandic knows - are we having some new hotels, etc. So, we try to brief everyone, but they can freely access the document and see how we are doing.

Do you filter some of the information? Do you have some information you think they don't need it?
Some information we get, yesterday actually, where I thought 'mm.. Not really for us. Maybe because it was more for the bigger hotels. They [the employees] got email, but I don't think really, they would need it. But it was sent out to everyone

It was from HQ?
Yeah, yeah. That was actually from one of … what you say … sales managers or something. But it's also because we are different hotels and we have different guests. So, not all information is necessary for us, maybe.

Do you have a filter in the information you are given? Some information on above is given to you & you should deliver it to your employees. DO you filter that or is that completely unnecessary?
Not really. We are pretty much straight with each other - we try not to filter information that much and we try to be open about what is going on. Of course, some things you can't really... If someone has difficulties, you don't say 'yeah, this person here …'
Sometimes we have briefing that this employee has some difficulties or something, and then I am not going around by pointing out to everyone the situation.

Do you feel you get the information you need from the HQ, GM or hotel manager? Do you get the information you need to do your job?
Yeah, I think so. Yeah. If I feel that I need more information on some particular subject, then I would always ask for the information.

Is the given information understandable?

Yes.

Is the information consistent? Is the language understandable?

I think it's a matter of where people are from. There's a lot of Swedes working here, including me, working in Denmark and some Danes say that they don't understand them [the Swedes]. The longer time you work with person, they understand you better. I have some old colleagues, also Swedish, but sometimes I don't understand what they are saying, because they get funny accent when they speak Danish. If it would be because of the language, we would definitely say it. But if I don't understand what they mean, if it does not make sense, then I would ask colleague - is it just me or is there something I don't understand here.

Do you think, if your employees have that issue; do they understand the information given to them? Do they come to you and ask?

Some of them yes.

Do you have a perception that they are seeking the information or at least are trying to?

Yeah. Most of the time yeah.

Do you have some specific goals for your department and / or the hotel?

We measure average room rates and room nights per month, and we also looking into total revenue of the rooms, of course. In conference, we are measuring ourselves on room hire and F&B - we divide it up, so we have one goal for, like, room hire and one goal for the all F&B, and the conference. That's pretty much… those are the ones in our budget that we measure ourselves at reception, the front-office.

In the hotel, we measure us on what we have overall. What we make on rooms, then Food & Beverage all over the hotel, and the conferences are actually under F & B there.

And then…. We measure us on how many people go through the restaurant, how many percentage is going into the restaurant while staying here. I know that kitchen is measuring themselves on how much they waste, I think, but also how much they spend, for 100DKK how much they spend on it. I haven't really... I know it is something like that. House-keeping is working a lot with an efficiency and they are measuring a lot how many rooms they do per hour.

What about guest satisfaction?

We do that as well. In 2017, we actually ended on shared 3rd place – that was actually a first time in a LOONG time that anyone from district EAST has been on that list. We had 93% on service out of 100%.

Is that based on the send out guest survey?

Yes

What about your employees? Do you measure their performance?

Yeah, definitely. We, of course, have some competitions about who can up-sale for the most of everything. But then we also have once a year a performance of Scandic as well - an evaluation of the employee [MUS – samtaler], and then we have documents, but the important thing is to open up and talk with the employee, what you normally have no time to do in your busy schedule normally, you sit and talk. They also rate themselves - am I strong or very strong, or good, or need an improvement. Then they also have some goals from the last year, so we evaluate have they reached them, how they done well. Goals are created both ways - either manager have to come up with something, or employee can choose him/herself. The goals can be a lot of things - it could be smiling more or be booking conferences. It could be a lot of things - it could be both personal or professional. We decide it together - we come with some suggestions and then we discuss it.

Also, we have our values, which we also look at - ok, are you bold or are you not bold. You rate yourself, and then I rate you as well and then we can find some understanding and beginning of a discussion.

But this is based on a personal perception because BOLD can mean different things to different people. Who defines what 'BE BOLD' means?

When we got to know… When we were introduced to the values, we got some, like, different explanations, e.g. Be bold means going outside your safety bubble, doing something unexpected, taking a chance. Of course, guest can turn out to be upset with it, but at least you have been bold.

It could be very personal thing.

This was my first time to be 'on the other side' in this Scandic performance thing. But employees could see themselves - yeah, I'm really not so strong in this, I need to work with that. But I would usually be that they have written the same thing.

So, you have this statement 'Be Bold' but the interpretation of it is up to you. Kinda…?

Yes, kinda, but in that document, they fill out are listed all values. And then in that box are listed different things. Like going beyond your working tasks.

But Scandic does not give you any definitions.

Not really. It is difficult to explain it, because it is also 'soft', but they are not really saying that you are wrong in your perception, so it depends more on the person who does it. 'Be a pro' is also one of the values. Lot of guest we have here would like to have this personal connection. After working awhile, you get to know and read the guest, so you can see what the guest would like to receive. Some people just want to get up in the room and work.

Are you training in that or is that something people figure out on the way?

We had trainings. It has been a while we have had them, but when we started with values, there was a training in each hotel. We don't get trained in reading the guest, because it is something you can't really learn from someone. It is something that just comes.

Do you have any guidelines or some notes, where you describe the guest types?

No. Not really. Because one businessman is different from another businessman. Some of them like to be friendly and small-talk, and then there are those you do not acknowledge you even you know you have seen and check him in many times – they have no idea who you are. We don't really have a type. But we, of course, we can divide up to business guest and leisure guests. That's pretty much it.

How do you carry the values to the new employees? Do you train them, or is it just written down?

There were different steps in the initial trainings. First training was in introducing the values, then - how to work with the values, then another training - where you needed to point out your weakest value. The last one we had, it was a while ago, where we draw ourselves and pointed out the hardest to live out [of the values] and then we wrote down what we think we should do to live this value.
This training is available on 'Get aboard' platform, where all values are written down. But it is a good point - how do we implement these values in our new employees or the new interns?

Back to performance measures. So, we have budgets. Do you use them for something - do you show them to your employees, or do you measure yourself based on them?

We use them in the quarterly meetings with all of the hotel, but we also, I started, to send it out in the weekly emails, where I point out where we should push more in the areas where we are so much behind, or that we are doing really good job because we are above our plan for this month. And in conferences me and Annie have talks about how we should get more businesses in each month. We also look which guests we are missing - who was here last year, but who we haven't seen this year. We also work with up-sale. In my previous hotel we were really, really good in upselling, but there we also had many different room categories. We always got some opportunities to sell other type of rooms. But here we are very limited, because we don't have so many rooms - few superiors and one suite. But we are getting there. Since I started, we have had some up-sale each month. So, if we are in behind the rooms, we try to upsell and to get some extra money that week.

That upselling the rooms, do you get that from your financial department?
No, not really.

Who tells you to do this? Or is that something you print out yourself and be like 'we need to sell more rooms guys'?
Yeah. The numbers go directly into our system archive. I log-in and take report and see how we are following with our budget. And then I can see, if we cannot sell more rooms, then we can maybe sell the more expensive rooms. Depending on how I analyse the numbers.

So, that will be you analysing and figuring that out?
Yes

Do you get budgets from finance department?
It is actually GM, maybe, together with our controller, they make the budgets together. And then I have budgets for each month of the year. They are on different measures: how many room-nights, average room rates, how much conferences, etc.

Does that come with expectation margins, saying that you should sell more rooms for a higher price? Or you should refer more people to the restaurant? DO they tell you that?
No. Also, each month we have a meeting with all the managers here in hotel, where we look how we did last month and then each of us [the managers] tell about their own department. E.g. about the rooms - e.g. if we had low numbers on avg. room rates, then I explain why it could have happened. The meeting is like analysing the previous month.

Are you analysing only the events that happened? Or are you using them for forecasting?
Yeah, I have an access to the last year data. E.g. the lead time for booking the conferences are very short time, people are booking conferences very short time before. So, if in upcoming month there are few conferences booked, and we are in doubt should we be worried or should we expect people to book conferences, we look into last year data and see that last year we picked up so much within a month. We have some forecasting tools as well, what one of our revenue managers has made.

Do you relate this information to your employees? Do you think they need to know this information (this year compared with last year)?
It depends on what thing it is. If we are missing… But also, when they are doing budget they put in how much we should make on groups, or company rate. Is how much in the budget should be from this. This information

can be totally way off when we look at it after a month. E.g. last year we had a big group staying from a company and they were doing some rail-works in this area. They have finished that project and this year we are behind, because there are no more projects in this area. So, I can explain that to my team why we are behind this year. “We can’t really have an impact on everything. Because we don’t set the prices”. We have a revenue. Of course, we can, when it is walk-in we can always try to sell a bit more expensive, but we are doing what we can. And not all bookings are coming through us anyway. Some come through the web or our booking department. So, it could be really difficult for a receptionist, sometimes, to see - ok, but what does that mean to me? Why should I know this? Mostly I just tell them about how much we are behind or how much in front of the budget, coz that makes more sense to them.

You have some goals for the hotel. So, who makes those goals?
GM makes our goals, in Scandic we call them budgets, with our controller, looking also to the last year’s budgets and how to make them. We are on the stock market, so we also need to grow a fixed percentage each year. When GM and controller have made the budget, they are discussing it with our district manager and financial team, and then they have a meeting and present the budget. If the financial team does not approve it, then GM and controller make a new one and go into the meeting again. It goes on until the budget is approved. Then this budget is approved, then the district manager goes to Stockholm, having all his hotels and present the budget to them. And then they should approve it.

Between you and GM, because you have some communication on the budget, right? He tells you to do something?
Yeah, that’s when the budget is done. At least here, because it is different in other hotels. I know that in the Copenhagen hotels front-desk managers are involved only in how many hours they should use; they are not very involved in budget planning as well.

For me it sounds that you are really not having goals. No, we have the goals. I can go and get some papers for you. *goes away*

comes back and explains about budgets – confidential information and is therefore not disclosed in this transcript.

Do you interpret the given budget yourself?
Yes. There is the budget plan. I keep track how is it going, but it keeps changing over the month. Also, average room rate - it depends on what our revenue manager thinks. If he thinks that we don’t have that much time to fulfil the budget/ target, maybe he can try to lower his expectations, but the plan is still the same, but then he

tries to correct the digit to what we THINK we will accomplish. I give this to my GM and she sends this information to Stockholm. So, they can see, that we cannot reach the initial number, but then we will reach this one.

Is it up to you to figure out how to meet these numbers?
Yes.

And you are checking up these numbers every day?
Yeah, I try to.

I will go back to some very simple questions. About rules. You have some rules. DO you think your employees understand them?
Yes.

How do you know they understand them?
How do I know it? Hm… that's a good question. Aaa… I think, because are pretty much opened, so if we don't understand anything, we just ask. Sometimes we can also discuss the rules, like, for me this thing means this - what does it means to you? If the understanding is too different and opposite, then we are trying to figure out what Scandic really mean with this. And then we try to contact one of the person in charge of it.

Do you think your employees are following the rules you have?
Yes.

Why do you think they do?
"If they don't follow them, I think, they have a very good reason for not following them, because sometimes we cannot put everything in the box". But, *pauses* … That's also a very good question *pause*. Most of the people here in my team, if they would not agree with the rules, if they thought it was a stupid rule, they would say that. And they would pretty much say that they don't agree with it and why should they do this? When they understand why we are doing it, then they accept it - they still might not agree with it, but they understand why they need to understand that rule.

The rules you have; do you think they are simple?
Yeah. And we don't really have a 'stone hard rules', like - if you do this, you get fired. The rules that we have is more like what we should do, but sometimes, of course, you should go outside the lines.

In general, do you think you have a lot of rules to follow?

No.

Do you always follow the rules?

Hihi… I try to. I want to be a good example, so yes, I try to.

Is there some certain situation when you would ignore some rule?

Not really. In some situations, with the guests you have to be a little creative or casual about some things [allowing some things to happen 'for this time']. We have had some issues as well, like if all the hotels are doing the same thing, like we had these vouchers that guests could get when they have had paid for different times, and then before, couple of years back, they could take a candy from the bar on the vouchers. But then Scandic decided to change it and give no more candy, in Denmark. It's fine, but some hotels still gave them candy, and then those guests coming to another hotel, which actually is following these rules, they were upset with the staff and pointed out that in other hotel they always get candy and why I cannot do here. And then it is a little upsetting.

What do you do then?

We usually contact the hotel and say that it is not ok to do that, coz all the other hotels get in trouble. Also, we recently got updated membership program, and then they have made the same rules in all countries, before there were different rules and benefits in each country. Now they have made easier for guests. That was too confusing.

16.12 Interview transcript C-SS

Respondent	**Company**	**Date**
Camilla	Scandic Sydhavnen	23 May 2018
Position		
Front Office Manager		
Number of years with company		
15 years		
Number of years with current position		
14 years		
Number of employees in reception		
15 full-time, including 3 trainees and 2 shift leaders		

Transcription:

What are your daily routines?

That is one of the more difficult questions I've ever had. I mean, that, is almost impossible for me to answer. I will answer complaints, I will go to TripAdvisor, I would look at the system how much are we booked, are we overbooked. I would look at the categories, do we need to upgrade someone, I would check the email in the reception, are there any guests who are expecting an answer. I would check if everything is okay... I mean, that is so different from day to day what I do; very different. I check up with the reception how are they doing, are there any problems, how is the day looking in the reception, do we have any groups arriving, all these kinds of things.

Do you have rules which you have to follow, like standard operating procedures?

Yes! *laughs* I love them *smiles*

Can you tell us about them, do you have rules for appearance, behaviour and so on?

We have *everything* in Scandic almost. We have a staff manual where everything is stated, you know, there one which is general for all of Scandic where you can read most of the things. There are also some specific pages for this specific hotel. And that is about everything; like appearance, how do you clock in and out when you get here, what do you do when you call in sick, you know, all these kinds of things. How do you check a guest in, how do you check a guest out, how does Scorpio works – that is our system – how does Micros works which we use to sell things from the shop. We also have, that is not a standard operating procedure, we like a check-list, like, “this is what you need to do on your daily shift, this is for the evening and this is for the night”

and for many of the points of the check-list there is a standard operating procedure on how you do this e.g. "how do you withdraw money on Expedia booking" and things like that.
I mean, almost everything is written down if you want to. The only thing which is not really written down in Scandic is more like the service and the flexibility of the service that you cannot write down that way. But everything, like also security, safety, crisis management – all this is written down in handbooks which we have in the receptions. So, let's say that someone is calling in now with a bomb threat; of course, there will be some panic because that is not nice but then you have this book, you open on a page "okay, what do I do" step by step by step. What do I do if a robber comes in, what do I do if a guest gets sick. It like a tool to lean on. Of course, many of the receptionists – of course they have to *read* it – but they don't open it after that, after they've started. And for some it's a safety, you know, every time something happens, they can open it. It's the same with for example the fire drills, how do you do that, what do you do, where do you stand, where do you go. Because what happens often is that you know these kinds of things but when the adrenaline goes on – I mean, I've been 15 years in Scandic but if the fire alarm goes on I'll still go *makes shuddering noise*, you know. Because it's such an important thing [to know] its very, very nice to have these kind of things, these work tools that you work with in the daily work.

It all of this printed out, or is it on a computer – the staff handbook – do they have it in the reception?
Yes. I mean, most things today, of course they can also find it on the computer, but for an example when I started some years ago we sent them the handbook in a paper format but now I email it to them. But we have the crisis book, the safety and security and things like that we always have it written and printed out so they can open it. There is a lot of thing which we have printed so they can easily find it, like all of our best practices. Of course, it's also on the computer so you can easily find it but some also like that you can sit with the paper *mimics opening a book*
I also sometimes, if I have a difficult thing, then I print it out and then I sit with it in front of me instead of having it on the computer. For me that is still easier. Maybe it's because I was born a long time ago…

Can the staff handbook be changed?
No. no, we cannot change the general handbook. But we can change the pages specific for this hotel, so the general things I cannot change. The things which are specific for this hotel is information about who is the General Manager here, how do you get in contact, where is the canteen, what is included in your daily meals here. It is very soft things; we have not had anything out here where would have to go further than the staff handbook.

So, something like uniforms…?

That is not something which I can do anything about. I have tried, and I do it sometimes but then I have been told by headquarters that it's not something which can be changed. So, no, I cannot do anything about that.

You also mentioned something about that you don't write down the "flexibility of the service" but who do you then control what people are doing with the service?

Yeah, we do have in Scandic – it is a little old now and we are working on something new – but we have this called "service at Scandic". That was a whole year where we went through this, with all the staff. It's a "pearl necklace" and then for every pearl there is a "check-in", "check-out" and everything in between. It was used to symbolise that if a necklace break, if one these pearls on the way of the guests' tour of the house is breaking, then everything is breaking. And then we have standards like you know, you have to look up with the guests are coming in. So, everything is written down, you know like "know your product": we have a lot of things which we need to know about the hotel and the area around it. So, we do have something written down but that is always going to be a little bit more "flurry" than... of course you have to get here on time to get your salary, but you cannot say that "this is the exact way to handle a guest" because we have so many different guests out here.

So, the right way to treat a business guests are not necessarily the same right way to treat a leisure guest or a group guest. We see that the business guests, that for them everything is about the speed where as for the leisure guests it's all about information. If you would be here tonight where most of the guests are business guests and you are trying to tell them what time breakfast is, like would like, turn their eyes at you because they know that better than you because some of them have been coming here for 10 years. So, we do have this, that all new people have an introduction at Scandic when they start, they watch the Fish Movie, that's also a part of it, you know, to be there, to make them happy, the guests, so that's a big, big part of it. But you know, the Fish Movie is all about that it is not a standard, it is not something which you can write down. Services is something that you have in you, something that you will give the guest. You cannot write it down. You can write some frames down, like "this is the *least* you should do" but you are allowed to do more. All the time.

How do you train your employees? You have the handbook, the training and what else?

In the beginning, they will go through this programme where we go through things like welcoming the guest, checking in the guests, what to do when the guest is here, checking out the guest, after the guest have checked and things like that. They will see the Fish Movie, we will tell them about the different kind of service and then it is during the training – they have 3 weeks of training in the front before they are let lose – and in that time, we also have our e-learning program where there is both service but of course also things like security and things like that which they will need to go through.

What they are all busy with now, is that they need to before Friday to all have taken an e-learning course due to the new data-law that will start on Friday.
So, for that we have a program in Scandic called FUSE where everything is in. You can find everything there; your learning plans, your… everything. There is not something which you cannot find in there.

How do you handle unsatisfied guests?
Erm *chuckles* That is… not a *tricky* question and I don’t think you ask me that because you are trying to trick me but it is very difficult and it is something which we talk about often, also when we have receptionist meetings, how do we do this and if they have had an experience, how can we do it differently next time. What we have seen the last few years is that the guests are so individual and sometimes they only tell us just for information. And sometimes they tell us because they want something. What we are doing out here is that I am trying to train them [the receptionists] and to learn them that everyone can make the guest happy. Everyone can give compensation. I have heard about a lot of hotels where you all the time have to ask the manager. Everyone here, if you are a student, a trainee, or fulltime you can give compensation. Then we can always talk after, “okay, should you have given one free night because this and this”, “was is the right thing to do, or were you a little afraid of the guest” or “how can we do this the next time”. But it is very rare that I don’t agree with them. For me the most important thing is that the guest doesn’t leave here without being happy.
Both because we know about the speed of the internet nowadays but also because its normally gets twice as expensive if I have to compensate afterwards because then they are *really* upset.
So, we are training everyone, you know, and they can always come to me and ask “what do you think” and I always try to say “how would you *have* solved this” or “how *will* you solve this if it was up to you”.
And most of them have very good, sensible ideas and the same ideas as I would have come up with. The thing is to not be upset afterwards. Guests today are, what do you say, a little bit meaner than we I started working in the hotel. They are a little more personal. You know, they can really... the other night in the restaurant someone called one of the waiters a “fucking bitch” because she wasn’t fast enough. So, they are getting you, very much over the line. So, it takes something to handle this and go home and forget about this. And that is also why we talk about it after, when there has been a very upset guest. Because they threaten them with everything sometimes like “I’m gonna make sure you’re gonna lose your job” and such.

What are your compensation rules, do you have rules for how much you can compensate for?
No. A lot of the new people ask that when they start: “do you have any rules” but that is so impossible for me to say because the guest pay different things, the guest wants different things. Some of them – if the company pays – then they are not interested in getting money back cause their company paid. They are interested in maybe getting a dinner for free or getting a gift voucher. If they are here on family holiday they are interested in getting money back because they have paid themselves. So, it is difficult and different, so you can’t put it

down. It's not the first time I hear this and many new people ask this and they would really love a standard, a form like "if this happens, I can give this", "if this happens, I can give that" but it is impossible, it is simply impossible. I have tried and every time a new one asks I'm thinking "can I do something?". But what I tell them is: make your decision and come and talk to me about it after, and we can talk about "what do I think" or "was this the right decision". They know that I would never shout at them, I mean it should really be crazy before I get upset with them, because I have told them that they have full flexibility. And you don't know what the guest wants. As I said to them 'ask the guest'. Ask them "what would make you happy", "how can you leave here and be happy". Okay, if they say "give me one week for free" then maybe not, but most guests don't do that, they say something reasonable.

Are you empowering your employees to go "above and beyond"?
Yes. Of course.

How else, besides giving them free reign for compensation, how else are you empowering your employees?
Of course, compensation is a very good thing but it is also celebrating different thing. For example, if someone have a special day, or sometimes they just chose random guests and bring a gift to the room, or if its someone's birthday and things like that. You know, do special things for the guests.
What can you do today that is not something I would expect form you, and the guest doesn't expect, but what would make the guest happy. Should we go and knock on the room and bring them something, or the like. I will always empower them to do this little extra. I have never said "why did you the children an ice-cream today, that costed us x-amount of money" I would say "what a great idea" or anything like that.

Do you have a budget for these extras, e.g. giving ice-cream to children?
No *laughs* it's good my general manager is on holiday ☺
No but I mean, a lot of things doesn't cost a lot. What the guest often appreciate is little things, like a handwritten card, a bottle of water. Or sometimes in the reception two of the receptionists or very good at making animals out of towels – things like that. We are a big hotel so we cannot – and it is difficult for me because I love service and that's why I am here – but you cannot do it with 391 rooms per day but what I tell them is "what *can* you do then". And I know that on Tuesdays with 350 check-ins you cannot do the same as you can on a Sunday with 100 check-ins. But what *can* you do on the days – and maybe in 3 hours they don't have time for the guests but they can now when they are 4 people working. They have a lot of time if the guest come. Can they help them up with the suitcase, can they do something like asking the child if it wants to come have an ice-cream – what can they do. For example, when its hot outside we make sure to have water in the reception for the guests. Okay, so that's money we are then not earning in the shop or in the restaurants but

it's a service. It's something which you can expect if you come tomorrow but it's the same on Fridays… One of my supervisors are handing out free coffee from 7-9. Its not something which we have written down but its something that I see is fine in the schedule, I'm asking her or one of the other receptionist to do it. And the guests love it but they can't expect it – we don't write it anywhere, we don't promise anything.

What if the guests end up expecting it anyway?
We try to do it not on the same time and different offering, but this is problem. For example, on Tuesday night where we have wine and snacks for the regular guests, we started out many years ago with it also including a dinner. And we still hear for that even though we stopped with that 5 years ago: *mimics guest* "do you remember that 5 years ago you did that…". "yeah I do remember that". This is a very dangerous path, exactly, what if they end up expecting it. And I would like to do much more for the guests but you have to careful because of this. And I think that's a shame – but again, that's people today and I am amazed, people wants, wants, wants, wants. Take the breakfast for instance, I can't go through the breakfast room sometimes because I can't handle to see how much, especially the tourists, put on their plates and throw out just because they can. But it's like a generation, its '2018: me, me, me', as much as possible. But I can't change the world.

Do the rules help you make decisions in your everyday work? Do you have rules which you have follow?
Yes, I do. And I must say that this is like, I don't know the English word for It, but in Denmark it is something like to balance on the edge of the knife. One of the things that I have been 15 years in Scandic for, is that I love that we have our concepts and our standards. I think it is great that we don't all the time have to make up a new thing – I love these kinds of things, that this is the way you do it. For example, now with the new data law, we have an introduction video, we have a "how do to it" when it comes" and things like that. I love that. And the biggest part of me thinks "this is great" because I love rules, I love that you have something to follow. With *everything* I love that. The only thing I don't love it with *chuckles* is what is a big part of my job – is service. Because for me it is so individual. But I do have, and I think it it's a good thing to be able to lean upon when I have decision to make about budgets, about guests and so on. But of course, it can also annoy me. Because sometimes, of course, I think I have a better solution myself than Scandic has. But then, and this is what I really like about Scandic, is that then I make sure that I tell this to the right person that "this is really not a good idea" and sometimes I am told "you are right, let's see if we can change it" and sometimes I am told "shut up and do what you are told". But then I know that I have tried, because I didn't think this or that was a good idea. But I have tried.

Do you believe that your employees are following the rules?
Thinks they are following the rules BUT what happens for example now when I have a lot of new people that have started, I can see that it is not so much that they don't *want* to follow the rules. But the someone is

coming from another hotel who then maybe has a little bit different way of doing things and then suddenly I hear “this is the way we do it” and I’m like “no, this is for sure not that way we are doing it”. So, it’s not something that they chose like “we want to go against the rules” but when one has said it, and then number 10 is saying the same. You know how rumours and things like that goes. So, sometimes I come out, and I see like “why are you doing that?” “oh, but this one told me that” “okay…” And for me, it can be a little strange because they have these things written down, how you do it. But because you’re new, and you believe in the person who tells you that then…
But in the big picture they are following the rules. But sometimes, because we are busy… For example, they have to fill out a registration card every time a guest checks in. Let’s be honest, I am not sure they are doing it when we have 350 check-ins. I am trying to come out and check that they are doing it, and maybe they do it when I am here but let’s be honest, if there is a big line, they maybe only do it with 2 or of 3 guests. I don’t know. [a registration card is something you have to fill out every time you check in. Its law]

But I think that’s a natural thing. Sometimes you skip things, you know it’s wrong but you do it to provide a better service. And sometimes it can be difficult for me to be upset about that because I can see exactly why they did it. Or sometimes, if they haven’t followed a rule, and I’m asking why, they telling “it was because of this and that” and then I say “okay, let’s not talk about that anymore”.

Is it our overall impression that they understand the rules you have?
Yes, yes, yes.
I would say it’s a choice if they don’t follow them, not because they don’t understand them.

Do you think you have many rules which you have to follow? Not only thinking about actual laws but also rules form Scandic?
It a little difficult because you call them rules, but if you call them procedures… Then I say yes, yes, we do have many. You cannot decide what to charge for the rooms, we cannot decide what to serve on the breakfast buffet because that’s decided by someone else.
Yes, we do. That’s what we are known for that’s what we know how to do in Scandic. That is our products, our concepts and our standards. That’s what our guests expect.

If a guest has a special request for a breakfast item, you cannot provide this on a day to day basis?
Of course, we have done that. And there have also been times in the restaurant in the evening where we have fulfilled some wish for a guest. Again, you cannot do it when we have 800 people for breakfast but maybe one morning where we have the time, yes.

But since we already have more than 130 items on our breakfast I would say, then we would tell the guest "there must be something you can eat".

Do you find your procedures simple to follow?
Yes, I do.

What channels to you use to obtain or give information to your employees? FUSE, Facebook, emails? How to you inform employees what is going to happen?
In the future, in the nearest future it is Scandic's wish that what we use is FUSE. We are going to close down our intranet because FUSE will be the place to communicate, to give information, to find information, to write together in forums – that is FUSE. This is where you are supposed to find everything, all material we have, about staff, about best practice.

What is FUSE? Is it a kind of intranet?
It's kind of an intranet but much more complicated and knows much more things. It is like an intranet that if I log in I have access to other things than the receptionist does. If you're F&B manager, you come in to the F&B community and things like that. So, it is much more complex than and much better than [the intranet]. It is something we have been working with for a long time and we're almost there now.
It is a place where you can find for example everything you need to know, what the receptionists will need to know. There will be a Q&A section where they can ask about for example meetings, how do you perform certain procedures. Later on, they will be able to have their own forum just for Scandic Sydhavnen where they can cat/write together. And because this system is so, so important, the app is already here. We have asked the staff, of course we can't force them because it is on their own telephone, but we have them to try and download it to their telephone. I would say that I am the one, not me, but in my position, we are the ones who has it the easiest because communicating with the receptionist who are working in the front of the computer who has access to the email all the time during work and a lot of them also access them from home – then it is not difficult for me to give them information.
Where we have a lot of information problem is of course with people who doesn't work in front of a computer, like house-keeping and things like that. And this is where we really hope that FUSE will have a big impact for them to feel a more part and that they have the information. My receptionist they will get the information from me via email.

How about verbally?
No, I prefer not to talk with them *laughs*.

No, I mean like, of course… For example, we have staff meetings, receptionist meetings. We had last week for 3 hours. There is something that even though they, of course get it in written form because you need to be able to find it again, but we talk about it and discuss it. If you have any questions after reading it we go through things.

Every time, for example now when the time will be quarter to 3, we will have a handover, we go to the back office, there's only one in the reception, we go out there and have 15 minutes where the night shift and the day shift talk together. I will also be there *if* I have something. Sometimes I couldn't care less and sometimes I have some things for them. Maybe it can be more of a general information because they will often be 7-8 people there but it can also be something like "please remember tonight we have this big group and its very important for me bla bla bla …" something like that.

But of course, for example in the conference where they are sitting 1 manager and 3 employees they can easily have a staff meeting and just talk about things. Whereas in the housekeeping where they have maybe 40 persons hired and they don't speak the language…. So, this is where we hope that FUSE will also be made in more languages so that we make sure that everyone feels a part of Scandic. That is very important.

How is the information flow in this organisation?

It goes up, this way, that way *gestures different directions*. In the future, there will be less and less emails because they would expect us to go to FUSE and send it. For example, we got an email that all the information about the new data law is in FUSE. But in the future, they are not supposed to send an email. We are supposed to go in every day to see if there are any new things. But now it is so much in the beginning so we are still told "please go in and read this because this is very important" but maybe in one year they will not send emails anymore about these kinds of things. It is my hope, let's see…

So yeah, I mean like, there is a lot of emails and a lot of information back and forth and CC mails and blind copy mails and sometimes I am getting crazy you know – because someone sends you an email and 3 others forward the same to you. It is a balance you know, because I want the receptionist to have all the information but again you also have to be careful you don't give them overload. Because I see it sometimes that they come and ask me things, and then I say "but I just sent you an email about that last week" and they reply "oh but I don't remember" – Okay, but then you expect *me* to remember? So sometimes you have to be careful.

Do you use all the information sent to you?

thinks Øhhhh…. No... No. It's different because on one side you want to know everything, to feel 'best dressed' but sometimes I'm just sort of sitting like, "delete"," delete", "delete", "delete". So, sometimes, and I've also said this to the receptionists, because sometimes they say like "why did you send this to me" – and

I'm saying "okay, sometimes that has nothing to do with me – delete it. But if you are interested or if you wanted the information you could read it and if you think it has nothing to do with you - delete it".

How do you decide what information you are passing on to the receptionists and what information you don't want to give them?
Decide more, like, is it towards that department, is it something to do with the guest we need to know. Sometimes we get information that "this is soon going to come" but then we sometimes wait to share that information until we know more precisely what's to come.
I heard about the new uniform because 2 years before it came so I didn't say to them "what size do you want" because maybe next year or maybe the year after we have a new uniform. I try to see "now is now".
I didn't tell them about the new data law before last week because they material from Scandic was not ready so I didn't want them to start before we knew we had the training because there is no reason for that. Most of them have heard about it anyway but there is no reason for me to say "okay, be prepared, now its starting" because I couldn't tell them what they needed to know. They would have started asking questions that I couldn't answer before I had taken the training myself.

Do you feel that you get the information from HQ that you need to go your job?
Yes. If I agree upon is another thing, but I do get the information. And of course, sometimes there is the question "do you get it in time". I think we got the information about the training to the data law yesterday and everyone has to have taken it by Friday. That's going to be a little tight. But we'll manage.

Is the information delivered in a consistent manner? Language? Channel? Is the information always delivered to you in the same way?
Yeah.

What is the same way? Email?
It was until FUSE.

When you don't agree on information, can you go back to them and say you don't agree to it?
Yes. And it has happened. I have been here many years and of course it has happened that... Okay, they listen to what I say and sometimes I've been told "forget it, shut up and do what I ask you" and sometimes they have told me "you're right" and sometimes I've been told "okay, I see what you mean but it is not possible" due to maybe a law I didn't know about. I don't see it from that kind of way. I see it from the staff and from the guest side so it's not always... I have not looked into, so is there a law that says I can do this or that. I don't know all these boring things.

So yes, as I said a little earlier, for me it is very important to have spoken up because otherwise I can't look myself in my eyes and I cannot tell the receptionists "okay, I understand what you mean and I tried to do something about it but this is the way". For me it is easier to back the things up then. Maybe I don't agree about it but if I have tried to change it and been told "there is nothing to do" well okay. And I will make sure to back up on decisions.

If you have suggestions, ideas etc. do you know who you need to contact?
Yes. *firm yes*
I think it is difficult if you are new in Scandic because we have so many different departments and so many people. But for me, I know so many people after 15 years, so yes, I know who to contact.

But if you are new, what do you do then?
Yeah… Call me *laughs*
No, I think that is something that we can work upon, like where do you get the information if you are new. I think that is clearly something we can work with.

What do you do with recurring situations that are not written down in e.g. the staff handbook? Things that maybe only happens at this hotel? Do you write that down anywhere?
I understand what you are talking about and what I am going to answer now is probably not true as that but we have in all Scandic' what we call an incident report. It's a part of the safety, security and crisis management. If something happens here we have to send it in. But that can also be something that have happened at another place but we have to inform incidents to top management. We have to hand it in – what did we do, what there something that was lacking.
It is not so much something that have never happened before and that will never happen again, but it is more like, is this something which we can learn from or did we just follow the things we already have spot on – or did we find during the incident something which could be changed.

We have something in Scandic called 'crisis management team" so something happens we all have roles. I, for example, am in charge of making sure that the guests and the staff – that we maybe find a new hotel if there is a fire. There is a person who is in charge of writing everything down, someone is the technical responsibility. We have different roles if something happens. We do report it up in the system.
We do also talk about it. We have "arbejdsmiljø-meetings" where we have someone from the staff from every department and some of the managers sitting together and talking about these kinds of things. What happened, do we need any new equipment so we make sure that it doesn't happen again. For example, a chef who has

been cutting himself with a knife, okay there is not much to do, he should be a little bit more careful because we cannot not use knives in the kitchen.
But once someone fell in the kitchen and we had to look into whether we could make a new floor which wasn't that slippery. So, things like that.

Goals for the organisation and/or your department. Can you tell us a little bit about those?
We have in Scandic mission, vision and values told from above. And then of course, we have country specific and then we have hotel specific, and then we have department specific. In my department, it's like specific for service goals. So, we have to, when the year is over, get 'this' in service. How much do they need to make in upselling per month, how many people do they need to sign up for the Scandic Friends programme.
I've told them it is very specific because we have to many others and we have to follow our values and these kinds of things, so everyone who goes to a Scandic can feel that we live the values. So, we don't need that much more. What we need in my department is then the specific – to make sure that they specific goals.

Are those goals for the department or for per person?
It's both. We have departmental goals and then of course we have, what we call in Scandic the annual performance reviews, where we meet up with them every year and we speak about what they want. Then they all get specific goals. Most of them are of course linked up to what the departmental goals are, but it can also be a little different. It depends what you are here for and what you want. Some of them, if they have a goal to get my job, it is something a little different that we work with in their performance.

How about activities in your department, do you have competitions for instance?
Yes. We do competitions. That again like a part of the goals. Every month we have competitions; for example, how many can you sign up for the Scandic friends and the one who signs in the most get a prize. It can be tickets for the movies… I try to make sure it is a good prize. It can be something whatever the person – I try to see who is winning and then I buy the prize so it's not just something they don't want. I've given sometimes nail polish and I think they guys would be pretty upset if I gave that to them.
We also have competitions from the head office in Denmark. For example, for signing in Scandic friends. We do have that but I also have one more for here only. Of course, it would be nice to win for all of Denmark of course, but sometimes that goal can be too big. It has to be something you can see, you can obtain. And the same with upselling, maybe Scandic Denmark wants us to upsell 'this' much. But let's be honest, some of them [the staff] sucks at it. But to make sure that they also feel like a part of it, so they don't give up. I know that they will never win, because there is just someone of the other persons at the reception are just exceptional at it. And I know that the others, no matter what they do, will never be able to win. But to make sure that they just try a *little* bit, we make sure that there is also a common goal – so maybe that person wins this in a month,

but if we're all together makes this in 3 months, we can all go out together for a dinner, or go to the movies, or have an activity we'll do together. So maybe you make a 1000 in up sale per week – which is not very good – but please write it in the system and please make sure to do it because you can help. And maybe also feel that you also made the dinner happen.

What about goals from your head questers? Numbers, room sales? Do you have organisations goals on how many room you have to sell and so on?
Yes, yes of course. My night receptionists make lists every night and send out "this is how the day is, this is what has happened" so we can see all the time what we need to sell more. So of course, that is also a kind of… I think it's like 50/50 – some of the receptionists couldn't care less and some of them find it very interesting: "okay, so we need to sell for 100.000 more this month to reach our goal".

So, the receptionists can see those numbers on a day to day basis?
No like, no... they cannot after we have been quoted. They cannot see it in that way but they are able to see things... they can see some things, if they are interested, they can see it also in the system. I also have limited possibility but I can more see in my own hotel and I do follow every day like, have I spent too many hours, how many rooms and things like that.

How about performance measurement of your employees? Can you monitor and evaluate their performance?
Yes. I can see how much they sell per person. I evaluate the staff on sales, service and of course we have this annual performance review. It is a whole schedule you need to go through on for example, "how has your year been", "do you have any suggestions", "what do you want to work with the next year".
We rate them through our values. For example, one of our values is "be caring" so I can ask them to give me some examples of how you think you are caring and I will maybe say "I think you're lacking a little in caring because you're always thinking about yourself" *laughs* okay, hopefully I will not say that because then they are probably not hired here *laughs*.

Can you tell us about the Scandic values? Be bold, be pro etc. How do you decide what is mean to "be bold" for instance?
That is written down – *suggestions* to what it means to "be bold" because to be bold is a lot of things. To be caring and to be these kinds of things. And that's what we talk with them about, "tell me a little bit, why do you think you are caring?", "why do you think you are being a pro?". We have these 4 values and we try to tell them "these 2 you are very good at, these 2 you are not so good at. Can you try and give me an example how you can be bolder?".

Many people find that specific one to be a little bit more difficult – to be bold. But it is not a big thing, you know, you maybe overthink it what it means to be bold. Maybe it is just getting out of the reception and talk with the guest, to think in another way than you did yesterday, or, instead of doing this with the guest, try suggest this instead. Its small things, you don't have to overthink it. So, we are trying to set some words to talk about that with them.

Who makes these words? HQ?
Yes. It is written – all is written down. Mission, vision, values. It is written down. But it is more like a guideline because you can't decide exactly what it is for you and me but otherwise it's too flurry if you don't give a guideline "what it is to be a pro".

What if they, the employees, don't follow the guideline?
I haven't tried that because I think that those four words makes *so* much sense – the four values. When we ask our staff about it they can see themselves… We have a very, very high rating in that they can understand them. I have seen many, and I have tried many values during my time at Scandic and these are for sure the most obvious and for sure the ones that makes the most sense when working in a service industry. And now we are hiring from this, you know.
You are asked about these kinds of things before you are entering a CV in our system, you'll have to go through a test where we can rank you on these things – not so much as the values as a service, but the values are a part of the service.

Daily reports, budgets – how do they look and how do you fill these out?
I don't have to do anything, the system does it all. Our system is fantastic.
For example, when I started in Scandic we had to send in budgets and such to headquarters. We had to scan them in and send them out. Some years ago, we bought this new system called Opera but called it Scorpio because we have a bought a lot of extra things for it.
I was pretty upset because I loved the old system and I still miss it for the check-in and the check-out but for the report part it is fantastic. It can email – we can it up in many ways. My general manager he likes in his email every morning to have an email with all the arrivals – I never want that because I go into the system and check it – but he is not very good at system so I can set the system up that every morning he gets these reports in his email. So, he can go in and see who is coming and things like that.
So, you can set it up for almost everything you like; "what do you want?" – and I can put a report together almost 'like that'. And you can send it to the whole group, to the whole hotel, you can send it to just one or two persons. When our F&B manager saw it he also wanted this report with the arrivals.
So, it is quite fantastic now, this system.