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ANALYSIS OF FACTORS, TYPES, AND STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS BY FRONT OFFICE EMPLOYEES OF HOTEL SIBAYAK INTERNATIONAL BERASTAGI

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Abstract

Guest complaints regarding hotel front office operations remain a significant issue that affects service quality and guest satisfaction. However, previous studies have tended to focus solely on the descriptive identification of complaint types without providing an empirical explanation of the relationship between complaint handling strategies and improvements in service quality and guest satisfaction. This study aims to analyze the factors, types, and complaint handling strategies implemented by front office staff at Hotel Sibayak Internasional Berastagi, while also explaining how structured handling procedures contribute to improved service outcomes. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach based on the author's observations and work experience in the Front Office Department. The results of the study indicate that guest complaints stem from internal factors (service performance, professionalism, and communication) as well as external factors (facilities, room readiness, and operational constraints). There are five main categories of complaints: reservations, service, facilities, billing, and security. Key analytical findings indicate that the implementation of the ILEAD mechanism Identify, Listen, Empathize, Apologize, and Deliver Solution serves as a structured service recovery process to reduce guest dissatisfaction and support service consistency in accordance with operational standards. Theoretically, this study contributes to the hospitality service literature by demonstrating the role of structured complaint handling as a mechanism linking operational performance to guest satisfaction. Practically, the research findings provide managerial implications for hotel management to strengthen front-office training, standardize complaint-handling procedures, and improve service responsiveness to enhance guest satisfaction and the hotel's reputation.

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INTRODUCTION

A hotel is a facility where people pay to stay. Typically, hotels offer a variety of rooms with private beds and bathrooms, as well as amenities such as restaurants, swimming pools, fitness centers, bars, and room service. Those who use these facilities pay to use them and expect clean, comfortable, and safe service. Hotels vary in class, from budget guesthouses to five-star luxury establishments. The distinction typically lies in the comfort, amenities, and services provided to guests. In both definitions, a hotel's vision is always to provide affordable accommodation with a variety of amenities and services to meet customer needs and preferences.

Service is a system consisting of two main parts, according to Fandy Tjiptono (2012:4): service operations, which are usually invisible or unknown to customers (back office or backstage), and service delivery, which is usually visible or known to customers (front office or frontstage). The quality of guest service will affect the company's reputation; if the service is not satisfactory, guests will complain, and if good service is provided, guests will be more satisfied and improve the company's reputation. According to Tjiptono (2005), quoted from the Darmajaya Business Journal, complaints can mean dissatisfaction or disappointment. Not understanding the habits of travelers about their needs and desires leads to complaints. Some reasons why guests are dissatisfied during their stay are as follows: facilities or services do not meet expectations, employee behavior is unpleasant or annoying, and hotel advertising and offers

does not correspond to reality. Understanding tourist behavior is important. Managers and employees must pay attention to tourist behavior. According to Morrisan (2007: 64; Dainn Suherlan, 2014: 18), visitor behavior includes searching for, discarding, selecting, and evaluating goods and services to meet their needs. According to Bell and Luddington (2006, in Judge, 2018: 12), customer complaints typically consist of negative responses, both verbally and in writing. Informing management directly about the problem is the most common way to file a direct complaint. Social media is commonly used to convey indirect complaints.

The Front Office is the center of all guest activities at the hotel and handles the check-in and check-out process. According to the author, it is the first impression when entering the hotel andWelcoming guests, the front office reflects the quality of the hotel and leaves a positive or slightly negative impression on guests.

Using the company's standard operating procedures and using the ILEAD method are two actions that customer service employees can take when handling guest complaints. According to Collier (2012), some of the approaches used by ILEAD are Identify (identifying guests), Listen (listening to guest complaints), Empathize (understanding guest disappointment and feeling what they feel), Apologize (apologizing to guests), and Deciliver Solutions (finding solutions to problems). Standard operating procedures (SOPs), according to Susilowati (2017), are procedures carried out to ensure work is carried out correctly, accurately, and consistently, resulting in products that meet established standards. Broadly speaking, SOPs typically refer to all documents, such as worksheets and work instructions, that regulate a work activity.

According to Purmasari (Faradis, 2018), the purpose and objective of SOPs are to ensure that company work and activity guidelines can be managed. Other things include: 1. Providing practical notes on activities and operations; 2. Understanding in detail the positions and job descriptions according to each position; 3. Creating discipline for all participants in the organization, including those in organizational institutions and companies; 4. Maintaining the same level of performance across all divisions; and 5. Helping employees perform their own tasks and work.

In carrying out their duties as Front Office employees, they must provide the best possible service to maintain the hotel's reputation. The characteristics that Front Office employees must possess in carrying out their duties are:

1. Have a friendly spirit towards customers or guests (Friendly Service)
2. Resolving customer or guest requests (Handling Request)
3. Resolving complaints submitted by customers or guests (Proble Solving)

Hotel Sibayak Internasional Berastagi has several departments, one of which is the Front Office, in this department it is divided into a number of positions such as Bellboy, Guest Service Agent, Guest Relation Officer, Reservation Agent, and Telephone Operator. Based on my experience while working at the Front Office of Hotel Sibayak Internasional Berastagi, there are still frequent guest complaints. The cause of complaints is due to facility factors such as problematic Water Heaters, rooms that are still in an Empty, Dirty state and AC that is not cold enough. From the service factor side, such as errors in room key problems and errors in Check-in Room Types made by GRO Hotel Sibayak employe

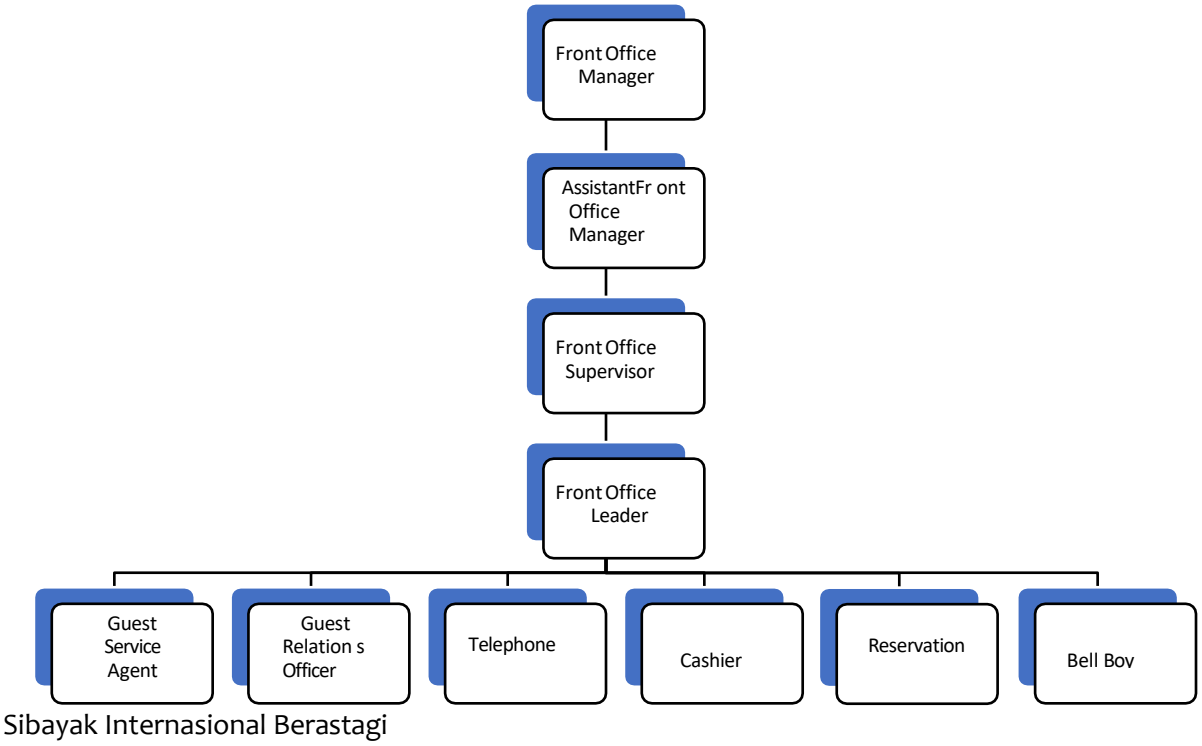
RESEARCH METHOD

Sugiono (2015) states that a research method is a scientific method for processing data with specific goals and benefits. Therefore, the essential elements of a research method are the research methodology, scientific approach, research objectives, research benefits, and the data to be used. Which is applied to analyze the factors, types, and strategies for handling complaints by employees of the Front Office Department of Hotel Sibayak Internasional Berastagi, namely the qualitative research method using descriptive analysis techniques. Qualitative research, such as descriptive research, aims to understand the phenomena that occur in the field, the types of complaints that occur, how employees behave when facing complaints, and how they handle complaints well. According to Linarwati (2016), descriptive research is a type of research that aims to describe the state of objects or subjects of natural or man-made phenomena. These phenomena can be in the form of forms, activities, characteristics, changes, relationships, similarities, and differences between phenomena. Compared to other types of research, researchers in descriptive research do not include, change, or change their subjects. Basic information about the phenomena being studied is provided

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hotel Sibayak Internasional (HIS) is a 4-star resort located 65 kilometers (90 minutes by road) from Medan, the capital of North Sumatra province. Hotel Sibayak Internasional occupies

a 3.6-hectare (8.9-acre) property at the foot of the secluded Gundaling hill, yet a stone's throw from the bustling local fruit and vegetable market. Temperatures range from a mild 18°C (65°F) to a sunny 26°C (80°F) year-round. Organizational Structure of Front Office Department of Hotel



Sibayak Internasional Berastagi

Figure 1. Structural of Hotel Organizational
Source: Hotel Sibayak Internasional Hotel Berastagi (2025)

Factors causing customer complaint behavior at the Front Office Department of the Sibayak International Hotel, Berastagi

Kotler (2011) mentions five main elements of customer satisfaction that must be considered:

1) High quality tourism products

   Consumers will be satisfied if their assessment results show that the product they are using is of high quality. A product is considered high quality if it can meet its requirements.

Types of guest complaints at the Front Office Department at Hotel Sibayak Internasional Berastagi

Based on observations and experiences during Casual, it can be concluded that there are 5

types of guest complaints, which include:

1. Complaints about room reservations
2. Such as rooms that do not match the order, rooms that are not available, or rooms that are not clean.
3. Service Complaints
4. Such as staff being unfriendly, unhelpful, or unresponsive
5. Complaints regarding facilities
6. Such as an AC that doesn't work, a broken TV, or an unclean bathroom.
7. Cost Issues
8. Such as incorrect invoices or charges that do not match what was promised.
9. Security Issues
10. Such as problems with room keys or security issues in the hotel environment.

Strategies for Handling Tourist Complaints at the Front Office Department of Hotel Sibayak Internasional Berastagi

Based on experience and observations during his time as a casual employee at the Front Office Department of the Sibayak International Hotel Berastagi, the strategy for handling tourist complaints at the Front Office applies the Identify, Listen, Empathize, Apologize, and Deliver Solution Method, abbreviated as ILEAD.

1. *Identify (Identify)*

   When handling customer complaints, front desk staff first determine what is causing the inconvenience. In this case, they must carefully and thoroughly identify the guest's primary concern to ensure their complaint is properly understood.

2. *Listen (Listen)*

   In the second stage, the front desk employee must listen carefully to the guest's explanation, maintain eye contact, and provide full attention. They must remain calm and unemotional, and continue to seek a solution to the problem. You can write down the core issue and repeat it to the guest without interrupting their conversation and giving them the opportunity to resolve their complaint.

3. *Empathize*

   In the third stage, front office staff are required to be sensitive to the guest's situation

and emotional state and must be able to sense or understand their feelings. It's important to express apologies, acknowledge the guest's concerns, and acknowledge that the guest's complaint is urgent and will be addressed promptly.

4. *Apologize*

   The fourth step is for someone at the front desk to apologize for the inconvenience and ensure the guest feels appreciated. In situations like this, to ensure the guest understands the situation, the apology should be delivered politely and logically.

5. *Deliver Solution*

   Resolving the issue is the final step. This requires approval from the front desk and is in accordance with hotel policy to foster harmony between hotel management and guests and provide satisfactory solutions to guest complaints. To ensure that guest complaints are handled appropriately, follow up.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that guest complaints in the Front Office Department of Hotel Sibayak Internasional Berastagi are primarily influenced by internal factors such as service performance, communication, and professionalism, as well as external factors including facility readiness and operational constraints. The key analytical finding indicates that structured complaint handling through the ILEAD approach functions as an operational planning mechanism that links service governance with tourism service outcomes, particularly guest satisfaction and service consistency. The implementation of Identify, Listen, Empathize, Apologize, and Deliver Solution enables systematic service recovery, reduces dissatisfaction, and strengthens front office performance in delivering quality hospitality services.

Theoretically, this study contributes to hospitality governance and service planning literature by highlighting that complaint handling is not merely a reactive operational activity, but a structured planning tool that supports service quality management and tourism experience outcomes. This finding reinforces the importance of integrating complaint management into institutional service planning and operational governance frameworks in the hospitality sector. From a policy perspective, hotel management should strengthen institutional coordination between Front Office, Housekeeping, Engineering, and Reservation departments to ensure faster complaint resolution. In addition, management should allocate dedicated training budgets for

service recovery competencies, standardize complaint handling protocols, and implement routine monitoring systems based on guest feedback data. Improving communication workflows and response authority at the front office level is also necessary to accelerate decision-making during service recovery. Overall, this study emphasizes that structured complaint handling planning plays a strategic role in improving service quality, enhancing tourist satisfaction, and strengthening hotel competitiveness, making it an essential component of sustainable hospitality service governance.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several specific and actionable recommendations are proposed to improve the effectiveness of guest complaint handling. First, hotel management should strengthen coordination among departments, particularly between Front Office, Housekeeping, Engineering, and Reservation, through structured communication mechanisms and clearly defined response times for handling guest complaints. Effective coordination will accelerate the service recovery process and minimize negative impacts on tourist satisfaction.

Second, management should allocate a dedicated budget for regular training programs for Front Office employees focusing on service competence, interpersonal communication, and consistent implementation of the ILEAD method. Structured training will enhance employees' ability to identify problems, respond professionally to complaints, and provide timely and appropriate solutions.

Third, the hotel is recommended to develop a monitoring and evaluation system based on guest complaint data, such as an integrated complaint log, trend analysis of recurring issues, and routine reporting to management. This mechanism can serve as a foundation for operational planning and decision-making to continuously improve service quality.

Fourth, complaint handling procedures should be standardized through updates to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), including clear resolution timelines, escalation pathways, and defined response authority for Front Office staff to make timely decisions in accordance with hotel policies. By implementing these recommendations, complaint handling can be conducted more systematically, improving service quality, strengthening tourist satisfaction, and supporting the long-term reputation and competitiveness of Hotel Sibayak Internasional Berastagi

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