FRONT DESK OPERATION

Introduction

Front desk operation of a hotel covers a wide range of activities, such as checking-in and checking-out of guests, allocation and upgrading of rooms, extension of check-out time, money exchange, and handling of credit card payments by hotel guests. The common abuses associated with front desk activities include favouritism in allocating and upgrading rooms, collusion with the house-keeping staff to misuse vacant rooms for unauthorized activities, pocketing of cash through manipulation in money exchange, and capturing customers' credit card data for use by counterfeit credit card syndicates.

In this chapter, the recommended measures aim to assist the hotel managers to reduce the risk of abuse by corrupt or colluding staff at the front desk.

Control over Allocation and Utilization of Rooms

To enhance control over the front desk activities, the following safeguards are recommended:

- The hotel should issue guidelines on the **policy and procedures** for the upgrading of rooms, making of complimentary offers, extension of check-out time (e.g. requirements for justifications, approval authorities and proper documentation).

- A **computer allocation system** with restricted access to authorized users could help reduce the risk of manipulation associated with a manual system.

- House-keeping staff should be required to conduct **daily checks on the vacant rooms** and report any misuse to the management.

- **Supervisory random checks** on vacant rooms against the hotel records should be conducted to detect and deter any unauthorized use.

- The hotel management should periodically review the **consumption of toiletries** etc. against room utilization to detect any irregularities.

- **Surveys** to collect feedback on hotel services and staff performance could be conducted.

Handling of Credit Card Information

The handling of customers' credit cards is an area vulnerable to malpractice. Some unscrupulous hotel staff may accept bribes from criminal syndicates as a reward for capturing customers' credit card information for the production of counterfeit cards. Such illicit activities are not easy to detect but if there is strong suspicion of any malpractice, the hotel management should seek the assistance of the ICAC or Police as appropriate.

The following control measures to mitigate the risk of malpractice are recommended:

- **Briefing sessions** should be arranged for the staff to enhance their **awareness of the law and the hotel's disciplinary system** with regard to any illicit activities such as corruption and fraud.

- **Clear guidelines** should be issued on the handling of credit card transactions, e.g. assigning staff of specific ranks to handle credit card payments, and requiring them to sign on the credit card payment slips to hold them accountable for the transaction.

- **Effective security measures** should be adopted, e.g. credit card payment slips should be kept at a secure place; and the position and height of the cashier counter should be appropriate and properly lit to facilitate supervision.

- Staff should be encouraged to **report approaches by a criminal syndicate and malpractice of other staff**.

- The hotel management should take ***disciplinary action*** if a staff member is found to have been involved in such illicit activities.

- The hotel management should maintain regular liaison with the banks and law enforcement agencies to keep abreast of the ***crime prevention methods***.

Handling of Money Exchanges

To enhance control over money exchanges handled by the hotel staff, the following measures are recommended:

- The hotel should adopt ***good accounting practices***, such as safekeeping of cash, daily reconciliation of cash collection and accounting records, etc. Reference could be made to the recommended accounting safeguards in Chapter 5 of this Module.

- A ***CCTV system*** with a video recording function could be installed at the counter to facilitate monitoring if necessary.

- The staff should be ***prohibited from carrying their own money*** while performing cashier duty where practicable.