Managing employee customer service interpersonal exchanges in the hospitality industry:

A New Zealand hotel case study

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Attestation of Authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

Signed: _____

Warren Goodsir

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Confidential Material

The hotel group that participated in this research has retained the right to have its identity kept confidential. To maintain anonymity, all references to the hotel group, including acknowledgements, have been replaced with the term 'Hotel Group'. Names and locations that may identify the Hotel Group have also been replaced with the symbol 'XXX' or removed from this document and the participants names have been replaced by pseudonyms.

Abstract

The continued growth of service industries and the development of the experience economy has highlighted the need for employees to have extensive social and interpersonal skills. The need for employee interpersonal skills is further emphasised by the extensive interaction between employees and customers, during the provision of customer service, in full service hotels. Despite the heterogeneous nature of the customer service environment, management expect that a consistent level of service will be maintained, while customers desire a unique experience that meets or exceeds their individual expectations. To ensure that both the needs of the organisation and customers are consistently met, management control of employee actions and behaviours is required.

The aim of this study was to identify how hotel organisations and managers control employee interpersonal interactions with customers. The research also sought to identify the interpersonal and emotional capabilities employers require from employees to meet the needs of customers and present the desired corporate image.

A qualitative, case study, research methodology was applied to understand the expectations of managers, the issues concerning managing employee interactions with customers, perceptions of employee capabilities, and beliefs about current management control strategies in a hotel environment. The research was conducted at four hotel properties belonging to one international hotel group. The data gathering methods included semi-structured interviews, documentation review and field notes.

The research concluded that effective alignment of employee and management goal congruence first requires the alignment of managers' goals to the organisation. To ensure management's expectations, customers' expectations and employee actions and behaviours are aligned, management must also have a sound understanding of the organisation's brand and desired image. Cultural and social control mechanisms were found to be important, as they provided a consistent method of aligning employees' behaviour with the goals and expectations of management. The development of social cohesion and norms, through serial and investiture socialisation mechanisms, also helped to create self-managing teams that reinforced the goals of management. The study suggests that, due to the increasing diversity of the stakeholders' views and goals, some of the traditional management perspectives of hospitality may need to change to meet the needs of contemporary employees.

1   Chapter One: Introduction

The problem of organisation is the problem of obtaining cooperation among a collection of individuals or units who share only partially congruent objectives (Ouchi, 1979, p. 833).

1.1   Background and Context

In the realm of private hospitality, being a host involves welcoming guests into the home. The completion of a hospitality encounter often involves the host disclosing something about themselves, their behaviour and character, all of which are reflected in their surroundings and intimate interactions. As hosts, it is common to offer a place to sit and rest, sustenance and at times even a bed for the night. Hospitality in the commercial hotel environment has many similarities to private hospitality. However, there are two distinct differences that change the hospitality dynamic. Firstly, in commercial hospitality the guest becomes a customer due to the exchange of money for services and secondly, in many instances, the host is represented by an employee who is paid to be friendly and to take care of the customers' needs (Telfer, 2000). Significant management issues arise from these two aspects of commercial hospitality. As commercial organisations are business enterprises, their responsibilities include, not only caring for and meeting customer needs, but also generating a profit for the owners and managing employees to carry out organisational goals (Medlik & Ingram, 2000).

Interaction between employees and customers is a central aspect of the hotel product and the hospitality it seeks to provide (Nickson, Warhurst, & Dutton, 2005). Customers' perception of quality, and to a large extent, their view of the hotel product, are influenced by the behaviour and capabilities of the employees they interact with (Farrell, Souchon, & Durden, 2001). Employees are entrusted with providing hospitality to customers in the manner that reflects the character the organisation wants to portray. However, as service employees are often required to act on their own, in immediate contact with customers, it is difficult for managers to have direct control over employee behaviour (Yagil, 2002). Additionally, the complex, sophisticated and subjective nature of interpersonal interactions between

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employees and customers (Baum, 2006) further complicates the management process. Riley, (2007) portrays a service exchange as 'reserved intimacy', suggesting that the employee restrains their personal characteristics and views, in order to display hospitableness that is inline with the image and goals of the organisation. Eisenberg (1990) uses a musical (jazz) metaphor to illustrate this type of encounter, stressing;

> … coordination of action over alignment of cognitions, trust over empathy, diversity over homogeneity, mutual respect over agreement, loose over tight coupling, strategic communication over unrestricted candour (p. 160).

The metaphor highlights the multiplicity of possible tension and compromise within interactions and reveals fragility from which service failure can easily occur unless managed carefully.

Adding to the heterogeneous nature of customer service, service interactions in hotel environments are labour intensive activities that require coordination and teamwork between employees. As Simons (1995) states:

> … organisations are multifaceted. They are also social systems, collections of individuals bound together to meet personal and social needs. Group norms and patterns of power and influence affect internal decision processes. Organisations are also sets of relationships among self-interested participants, each of whom is balancing personal well-being and organisational needs. (p. 13).

Despite the complexity, heterogeneity, fragility, and labour intensity of service interactions, management expects that a consistent level and type of customer service will be maintained. To manage groups of self interested individuals requires management to establish congruence between employee behaviour and the goals of the organisation (Yagil, 2002). Yet, customers also desire a unique experience and expect that their individual needs will be met. Therefore, management needs to find a balance between too much control and too little control, between the standardisation of services and flexibility within them (Herath, 2007). Management control of employee actions and behaviours is required to ensure that both the needs of the organisation and customers are met.

1.2 Aim of the Research

The aim of this study was to identify how management and managers govern employee interpersonal interactions with customers. The research sought to identify the interpersonal and emotional capabilities management requires from employees to meet the needs of customers and present the desired corporate image. To meet these aims, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Do customer service employees display the interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes that are needed to complete successful customer service interactions?
2. How do managers communicate interpersonal skill, and emotional attributes requirements to employees?
3. How, if at all, do managers develop interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes within employees?
4. How are employee interpersonal interactions and emotional displays managed?

1.3 Justification for the Research

There has been considerable research and attention directed toward evaluating service encounters, understanding the components of service quality and employee behaviours that lead to customer satisfaction (Farrell et al., 2001; Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000; Lee-Ross & Pryce, 2005; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991; Winsted, 2000). However, there has been only limited research directed toward management control of service interactions between customer service employees and their customers. Due to the pivotal roles that customer service employees play in hospitality and within hotel environments, the study of management control over the exchanges between service employees and customers is particularly valuable to hospitality managers (Lashley, 2007).

1.4 Methods

A qualitative, case study research methodology was applied to this research. The research sought to understand the expectations of managers, the issues concerning managing employee interactions with customers, perceptions of employee capabilities, and beliefs about current management control strategies in a hotel environment. Case study methodology was chosen as it provides an opportunity to explore and understand the participants' beliefs and perceptions within contemporary customer service hotel contexts (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003).

The sample group of this research is representative of subjects who have had experiences relating to the management of customer service employees in four star hotels in the New Zealand. The research was conducted at four hotel properties belonging to one international hotel group. The data gathering methods included semi-structured interviews, documentation review and field notes.

1.5 Overview of the Thesis

The thesis is organised as follows:

Chapter Two provides a review of literature to inform the study and cover the scope of the research questions. The review begins with a definition of hospitality and the hotel industry. It then discusses literature from a number of disciplines to ensure that the theoretical background for each aspect of the study was explored. Discussion includes customer service strategies and alignment of customer service interactions to the brand of the organisation. Furthermore, customer service competencies and skills required for successful completion of service interactions are examined and an overview of management control theories is presented. Strategies for controlling employee behaviour and actions are also examined. As the study is situated in the hospitality industry, hospitality journals and texts were reviewed. Additionally, as a wider understanding of relevant theory was required, the literature search included marketing, management, managerial psychology, and service industry journals along with management texts. The theoretical framework informed by Jaworski's (1988) seminal work on management control, is also outlined.

Chapter Three outlines the research design and methods used to answer the research questions. An exploratory strategy was used within the interview questions. Exploratory questions enable the participants' beliefs and perceptions to be explored and provide the opportunity to understand how the participants' beliefs and perceptions shape and influence their actions and behaviour. Qualitative case study research was used as it enables a naturalistic interpretive research approach to be adopted. Interpretive research supports the construction of meaning through an understanding of the participants' theories or experiences and helps to understand the complex nature of experienced life from the perspective of participants. The Chapter presents the data collection procedures including the use of semi-structured interviews, documents and field observations. Data analysis procedures are described and the limitations of the study are discussed.

In Chapter Four, the findings from the research are presented. The findings are classified according to the coding themes outlined in the theoretical framework and developed from the data. The significant classification includes a description of the operating environment the Hotel Group operates within, and the control mechanisms, both formal and informal, that management uses to govern employee behaviour and actions. The term 'Hotel Group' is used throughout to maintain confidentiality for the hotel chain. The intention in this chapter was to summarise and categorise the findings under each theme and to identify results that inform the study and answer the research questions.

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the central themes presented in the findings. To begin, the environment the Hotel Group operates in is discussed, as the environment shapes the control systems that are used and impacts on the effectiveness of management control. Customer service in the hotel environment involves carrying out many standardised tasks while engaging in complex interpersonal interactions that require flexibility. The impact of labour shortages, low pay rates for customer service employees, along with management and employee views of the customer service position were all seen to influence the operating environment. Following this, the discussion is arranged under four sections that are aligned with each research question. These sections cover customer

service skills, communicating expectations, development of interpersonal competencies and managing customer service. The importance of both informal and formal control mechanisms are discussed along with the alignment of employee image and personality to that of the Hotel Group's image and personality.

Finally, Chapter Six draws conclusions and outlines four significant implications of the research. The implications of the research include discussion of the importance of congruence between the brand image, employee image and management; mechanisms for communicating customer-orientated behaviour requirements to employees; the importance of department managers and supervisors; and the types of control mechanisms that are effective for customer service interactions. The final chapter also discusses limitations of the research and examines future research directions.

2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review examines research and literature relating to customer service interactions. The objectives of the review are to identify customer service skills required for the hospitality industry, and to explore strategies for managing employee interactions with customers.

The review includes a brief definition of the hospitality and hotel industry in which the study is situated. It then discusses customer service strategies that impact on the types of control required in the organisation and the alignment of customer service interactions to the brand of the organisation. Following this, aspects of customer service and the skills that employees require to complete successful customer service interactions are discussed. An overview of management control theory is presented and strategies for controlling employee behaviour are examined. While the literature review includes aspects of emotional labour, social learning theory, and organisational citizenship behaviour, an in-depth discussion of these theories is not presented as they are outside the primary aims of the study.

The literature was chosen to provide a detailed analysis of research and theories concerning customer service and the management of employee behaviour to meet organisational goals. As the study is situated in the hospitality industry, hospitality journals and texts were reviewed. However, to gain a broader understanding of relevant issues the literature search included marketing, managerial psychology, and service industry journals along with management texts. The chapter concludes with a summary of significant issues raised in the literature, general conclusions that can be drawn and questions that this study seeks to answer.

2.2 Definition of the Hospitality and Hotel Industry

The commercial hospitality industry consists of a diverse range of organisations from cafés and bars through to multi-national hotels. The concept of hospitality itself may be defined as a simultaneous, shared, positive emotional experience that is dependant on mutually enhancing social interaction involving the provision of one or more of the following; food, drink, entertainment and accommodation (Brotherton & Wood, 2000). Within the hospitality industry this exchange includes a market driven relationship (Lashley, 2000) that is provided by an organisation. An organisation may be viewed as "any stable pattern of transactions between individuals or aggregations of individuals" (Ouchi, 1980, p. 140). This study focuses on hotel organisations, their management and the hospitality interaction between the customer service employee and the customer.

A hotel is defined by Medlik and Ingram (2000, p. 13) as "an institution of commercial hospitality, which offers its facilities and services for sale." These services and facilities include rooms and beds, and depending on the type of hotel an assortment of other services such as food and beverage, meeting rooms, function rooms, and entertainment facilities (Medlik & Ingram, 2000). The supply of services in the hotel environment often requires the provision of customer service involving interaction between employees and customers.

2.3 Customer Service

The view that excellent customer service is one of the principal factors influencing guest satisfaction is well established in research literature (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1991; Paraduraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1991; Bei & Chiao, 2006). The growth of the modern service society has seen the customer service function become increasingly important to the success of many organisations (Zeithamel, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006). This is especially true in hospitality as customers are seeking memorable experiences that develop positive feelings (Baum, 2006). Customers want to feel special, to be treated as an individual and have their unique needs met during customer service interactions (Korczynski, 2002).

Customer service is defined by Lovelock, Patterson, & Walker (2007) as:

> … task-oriented activities that involve interactions with customers in person, by telecommunications or by mail for the purposes of service delivery and service support. This function should be designed, performed and communicated with two functions in mind: customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. (p. 321).

Zeithamel et al. (2006, p. 5) provide the following definition "Customer service is the service provided in support of a company's core products. Companies typically do not charge for customer service. Customer service can occur on-site, or it can occur over the phone or via the Internet." It is interesting to note in these definitions the potential for role conflict resulting from the dual focus of meeting both the customers' needs through, often customised, interpersonal interaction and meeting the, generally standardised, operational requirements of the organisation (Yagil, 2002). Equally important, is that often, in the hospitality industry, the act of providing a service is viewed as a support to the core product and, therefore, not associated with payment by customers, as generally, payment is made for the product consumed (e.g., meal), or experienced (e.g., hotel room).

The dual focus of customer satisfaction and operational efficiency in customer service is a result of a number of different service dimensions. Customer service involves both technical processes and the manner in which the service is delivered (Tyler & Taylor, 2001). Gronroos (2001) refers to these dimensions as technical and functional quality dimensions. In Gronroos's (2001) model, technical quality refers to the tangible aspects of service, while functional quality includes the intangible aspects of service, 'the manner in which the service is delivered'. Similar to this, Lehtinen & Lehtinen, (1991) present the dimensions of physical, corporate, and interactive quality. Physical quality refers to the tangible aspects of the service including, products and facilities, corporate quality results from how customers view the company's image or brand; and interactive quality is defined as the interaction between the contact personnel and customers.

In this study, Gronroos's (2001) 'technical quality' and Lehtinen & Lehtinen's (1991) 'interactive quality' will be used to describe the dual tasks of customer service employees and corporate quality will be discussed in relation to brand personality (see section 2.5 Brand and Employee Congruence). Technical quality will refer to the process of carrying out a service that requires technical skills, for example, using a computer to check in a guest, or setting a dinning room table and taking an order. Whereas, the term 'Interactive quality' provides a better description of the interaction between the employee and customer in comparison to Gronroos's (2001) 'functional quality' (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Technical, Interactive, and Corporate Quality
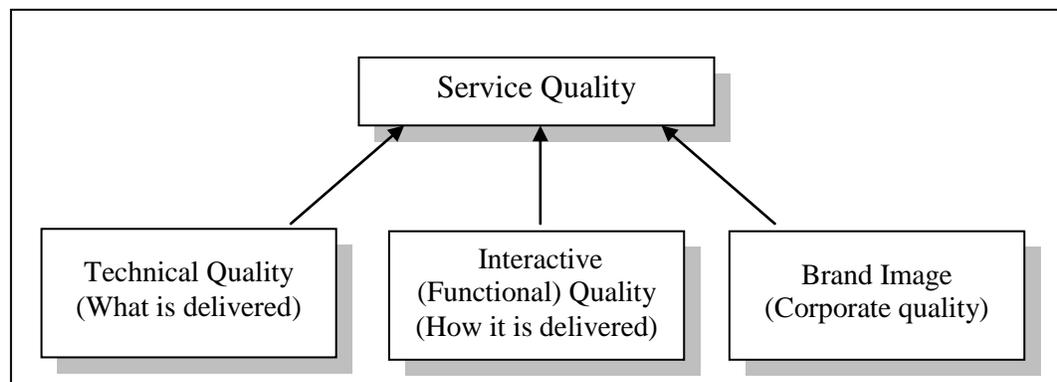
Adapted from Gronroos (2001, p. 40)

In hospitality customer service employees play a significant role in shaping the customer's experiences and overall evaluation of the organisation. To be successful, service employees must have a mix of skills and capabilities, as customer service is primarily an interpersonal experience (Burns, 1997). As this study focuses on the management of interpersonal interactions between employees and customers, of particular interest are the skills and competencies required for successful 'interactive quality'.

2.3.1 Customer Service Skills and Competencies

There is some debate over the meaning and characteristics of terms used to describe the abilities required to provide customer service. A number of expressions are often used interchangeably in reference to an individual's attitudes, communication, interpersonal and team work abilities. Burns, (1997) uses the term 'soft-skills' although admits that it does not capture the concept entirely satisfactorily. Cran (1994, p. 36) puts forward 'customer service orientation' to describe the "set of basic individual predispositions and an inclination to provide service." Core skills are discussed by Callan, (2004) while Bolton (2004) refers to 'emotion work' and recognises that many aspects of customer service work "may not be acknowledge as 'skilled' work at all" and "remains a shadowy and ill-defined form of knowledge work" (p. 20).

Perhaps the clearest classification of the skills and competencies required for customer service work is present by Spencer & Spencer (1993). Here competencies are defined as an individuals underlying characteristics. The term 'underlying' is used to describe competency as an enduring aspect of an individual's personality that can predict behaviour. Competencies are further divided into five competency characteristics:

- Skills; the ability to perform a certain physical or mental task
- Knowledge; information a person has in specific content areas
- Self-concept; a person's attitudes, values, or self-image
- Traits; including physical characteristics and consistent psychological responses to situations or information, for example self-control
- Motives; the drive that causes an individual to act or think in a certain way, for example concern or success (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

An important distinction here is that types of competencies occur on different levels of an individual's characteristics as illustrated in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Central and Surface Competencies
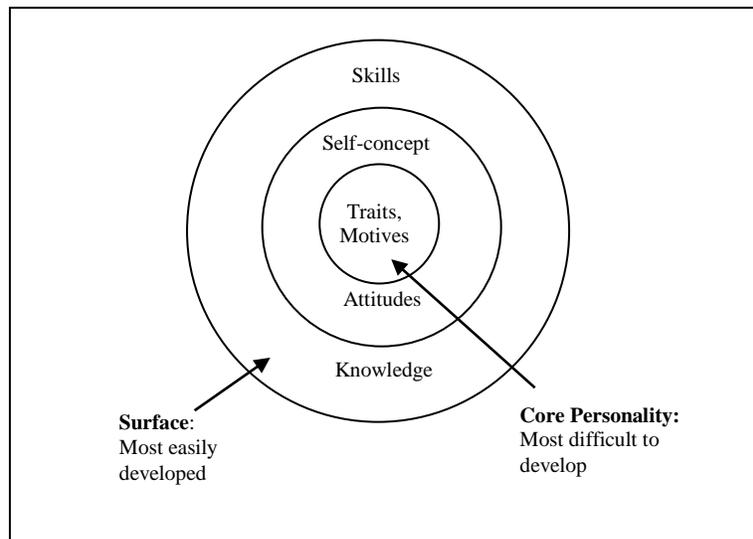
Source: Spencer and Spencer (1993, p. 11)

Skills and knowledge are viewed as surface level characteristics that are relatively visible to others and more easily developed through training. Self-concept, traits, and motives are more central to an individual's personality and less visible or hidden characteristics and as such are more difficult to develop (Cran, 1994; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

2.3.2 Required Customer Service Competencies

The competencies required to complete customer service interactions successfully are many and varied. There is, however, general consensus in the service literature that the following competencies are important: neat appearance (Parasuraman et al., 1991), promptness; timeliness; willingness to help; friendliness; courteousness; empathy; process knowledge; adaptability; self-efficacy and internal locus of control; communication; conscientiousness; resilience; social ability; (Bell & Anderson, 1992; Cran, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1991; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Winsted, 2000), interpersonal skills (Stauser & Ketz, 2002). Furthermore, Nickson, Warhurst & Dutton, (2005, p. 202) discuss the importance of "right personality and right appearance" while Baum, (2006, p. 129) argues that customer service employees are required to be "positive, joyful and even playful." Given the complex and sophisticated nature of customer service it is not

surprising the variety of terms used to identify customer service competencies is extensive. Many of these competencies and skills are also captured in the organisational psychology literature describing personality traits, social skills and interpersonal competencies (IpC).

2.3.3 Personality

Personality is of particular importance to customer service as an employee's affective functioning is closely related to job performance (LeBreton, Binning, Adorno, & Melcher, 2004). Personality encompasses an individual's natural and developed behaviours, beliefs, thoughts and emotional impulses that are displayed moreover, they are reasonably stable and enduring characteristics that enable employers to predict future employee behaviour (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Ehrhart, (2006) discusses specifically, the personality dimensions of extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability as being strongly associated with successful customer service interaction. However, the dimension of conscientiousness is also significant as it is one of the most important personality dimensions related to predicting job performance (Witt & Ferris, 2003).

Individuals who have a high extraversion characteristic are seen as people-oriented and outgoing with friendly, sociable, and cooperative traits (Ehrhart, 2006). Agreeableness refers to a propensity toward helping others and is positively related to cooperation and sociability, whereas, individuals who are emotionally stable tend to be composed, self-confident and energetic. It is generally believed that people who display high levels of these traits are suited to jobs that involve a greater quality and quantity of interpersonal interactions and include helping and serving customers (Ehrhart, 2006). Conscientious individuals are characterised by being dependable, thorough, efficient, responsible, self-controlled, and reliable. They also are seen as people who follow rules, respect social protocol, and follow-up on issues (Witt & Ferris, 2003). Using the four personality dimensions of extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness, Table 2.1 categorises, chronologically, several customer service skills and competency typologies.

Although the list of required customer skills is extensive Baum, (2006) argues that there is a common belief expressed by academic literature and the popular hospitality press that service work is 'low skilled'. The majority of customer service skills are also classified as basic skills by the New Zealand Qualifications Framework and are incorporated in lower levels of the education curriculum (NZQA, 1993). The defining of these skills as 'Basic Skills' may result in the assumption that most people should have developed them and therefore they do not require rewarding in an employment context.

Table 2.1: Typology of Personality Traits Compared to Customer Service Skills

Personality traits (James & Mazerolle, 2002)	Parasuraman, (1991)	Bell & Anderson, (1992)	Spencer & Spencer, (1993)	Winsted, (2000)	Ehrhart, (2006)
Extraversion • People-oriented • Outgoing • Friendly • Sociable • Energetic		• Friendly and courteous • The ability to create positive interpersonal experiences		• Friendliness • Authenticity	• Extraversion • Friendliness
Agreeableness • Helping others • Sympathetic • Generous • Kind • Cooperation • Sociability	Responsiveness • Willing to help • Responsive to requests Assurance • Consistently courteous Empathy • Provide personal attention • Understand customer needs	• Ability to respond with confidence & empathy not callous indifference or passive weakness • The ability to get along well with others	• Courteous and attentive • Takes personal responsibility for customer service problems • Tailoring language & action to the audience • Ability to identify needs of customers, • Understand and interpret customer concerns & feelings	• Promptness • Empathy (caring) • Courtesy • Personalisation of service	• Responsiveness • Courtesy • Pleasant communication • Agreeableness • Perceptiveness • Consideration
Emotional stability • Composed • Self-confident • Calm • Self-reliant		• The ability to withstand irate attack without wanting to retaliate or feeling personally affronted • Creative problem solving • Resilience and tenacity to deal with problems	• Establishes credibility, develops trust • Acts un-defensively • Employee confidence in own ability	• Perceived control	
Conscientiousness • Dependable • Thorough • Efficient • Responsible • Self-controlled • Reliable • Follow rules • Respect social protocol • Follow up	Reliable • Complete tasks fully Responsiveness • Prompt & timely	• Strong need to see things to their end	• Prompt	• Formality	• Accurate communication

2.3.4 Social Skills

Witt and Ferris, (2003) argue that the level of an employee's social skills provides an important indicator of job performance in contemporary service orientated environments. Social skills are different from personality – while personality is a stable and enduring characteristic, social skills can be learnt and therefore are able to be trained. It is believed that social skills facilitate the demonstration of a person's positive personality traits (Witt & Ferris, 2003). Social skills are described as the capability to identify and understand the feelings and behaviours of individuals, including one-self, in social situations and to respond appropriately to these understandings. Social skills refer to the ability and knowledge of what to do and when to display different behaviours. They provide the capacity to alter behaviour to different situations and to successfully influence the responses of others (Witt & Ferris, 2003). However, Witt & Ferris, (2003) argue that the personality trait, conscientiousness, and social skills need to act together as moderators of each other since conscientious people without social skills can be inflexible, demanding, and overly fastidious with a tendency to micromanage people and situations.

2.3.5 Interpersonal Competencies

Employees involved in customer service are required to apply a range of abilities to meet the individual needs of customers and provide them with a satisfactory experience. The concept that employees require interpersonal competencies (IpC), including empathy, authenticity, self control, behavioural control, courtesy, formality and friendliness to provide customer satisfaction, is generally accepted (Coye, 2004; Nickson et al., 2005; Winsted, 2000). Holland and Baird (1968), in their seminal work, established that IpC refer to the acquired ability by individuals for effective interaction with others.

IpC have also been linked to personal soundness and personality integration. People high in personal soundness are emotionally stable and socially responsive. Personality integration refers to the ability to express one's feelings tactfully, to keep an open mind and to deal with tension. IpC are positively correlated with social self-confidence, public speaking ability, cheerfulness, sensitivity to others' needs and social competency. Furthermore, traits associated

with IpC are similar to factors described as necessary for effective social relations in small groups (Holland & Baird, 1968).

The typology of customer service skills and competencies, presented in Table 2.2, reveals that many customer service qualities emphasised in the literature are associated with the personality trait of agreeableness. The personality trait of agreeableness is also closely related to the attributes of social skills (Witt & Ferris, 2003). Given that the literature has already highlighted the importance of social skills in interpersonal interactions, these traits are especially significant to customer service. The link between social skills and conscientiousness as moderators of each other has previously been discussed. However, it is interesting to note that, conscientiousness traits are seldom referred to as important to customer service skills in the literature. On the contrary, the traits of extraversion and emotional stability are consistently referred to as desirable.

Table 2.2: Social Skills as Facilitator and Moderator of Personality and IpC

Personality	Social skills as Facilitator and Moderator	Interpersonal Competencies (IpC)
Extraversion • People-oriented • Outgoing • Friendly • Sociable Agreeableness • Helping others • Cooperation • Sociability Emotional stability • Composed • Self-confident • Energetic Conscientiousness • Dependable • Thorough • Efficient • Responsible • Self-controlled • Reliable • Follow rules • Respect social protocol • Follow up	• Identify & understand feelings & behaviours of others and self • Respond appropriately • Know how to behave • Ability to effectively influence response of others	• Emotional stability • Socially responsive • Tactful • Open minded • Ability to deal with tension • Self confident • Speaking ability • Cheerfulness • Sensitivity to others • Social competency

Successful customer service interaction

2.4 Customer Service Strategies

The level of standardisation or customisation in service interactions is an important strategic decision that impacts on the hospitality organisation, employees and customers (Kelly, Longfellow, & Malehorn, 1996). As Simons (2005) states;

> Structure is not merely a passive reflection of strategy. […] organisation design affects people – how they relate to each other and how they question assumptions, experiment, and learn. If a design doesn't recognise this tension – between allocating resources to implement today's strategies and creating pressures for people to adapt for tomorrow – then the scarcest resource of any organisation – its people, knowledge, and information processing capabilities – cannot be leveraged effectively. (p. 253).

The purpose of standardisation strategies is the controlling of employee outputs to provide consistent service quality (Sandoff, 2005). Service standardisation helps to minimise variation in human behaviour and provides advantages to the organisation of improved productivity, and reduced costs (Kelly et al., 1996; Sandoff, 2005). Customisation involves tailoring services to meet the unique needs of individual customers and consequently, requires employees to use discretion over the type, nature and length of service interactions with customers. As a result, customisation of services has higher operational costs and is more difficult for management to control (Kelly et al., 1996; Sandoff, 2005). Much of the discussion in the academic literature on standardisation and customisation concerns the choice between which strategy management will adopt. Korczynski, (2001, p. 80) describes this view as "a spectrum that has at one end the standardisation of services and, at the other, customisation of services" (see Figure 2.3). Following this model, higher levels of customisation would result in corresponding lower levels of standardisation.

Figure 2.3: Service Standardisation or Customisation
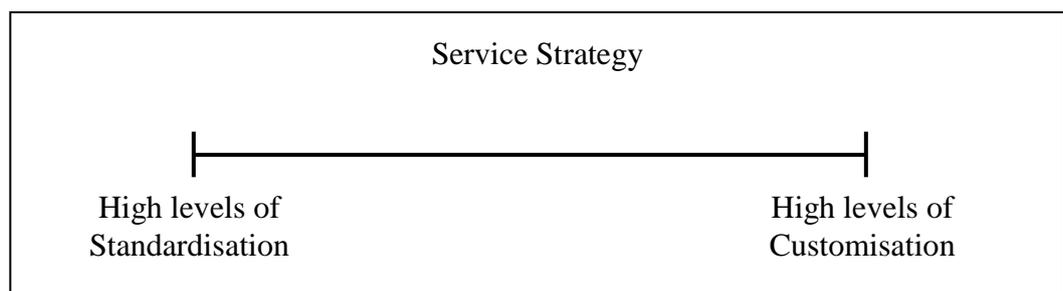
As an alternative to organisations having to choose between strategies, Korczynski, (2001) suggests that both strategies may co-exist in the model of "customer-orientated bureaucracy" (p. 81). In this model the customisation of services is represented through customer-orientation, and standardisation of services is captured by the concept of bureaucracy. The importance of bureaucracy in customer service can be seen in the manuals, policies, and procedures that guide employees, establish standards, and help to produce consistency. Indeed, consistency and the reassurance provided by knowing expected standards will be met are important to not only the organisation, but also customers. Simultaneously, providing for customer-orientation (the ability to customise services) within the standardised 'bureaucratic' process allows the individual needs of the customer to be met (Korczynski, 2001). Korczynski's (2001) customer-orientated bureaucracy can thus be presented as a matrix (see Figure 2.4). In this model the levels of standardisation and customisation may be determined depending on the strategic direction of the organisation and the levels of control required. For instance, an organisation could have high levels of standardisation, to ensure required technical procedures are followed and basic interactions are completed, while also maintaining high levels of customisation by allowing employees to tailor interactions and processes.

Figure 2.4: Customer-orientated Bureaucracy
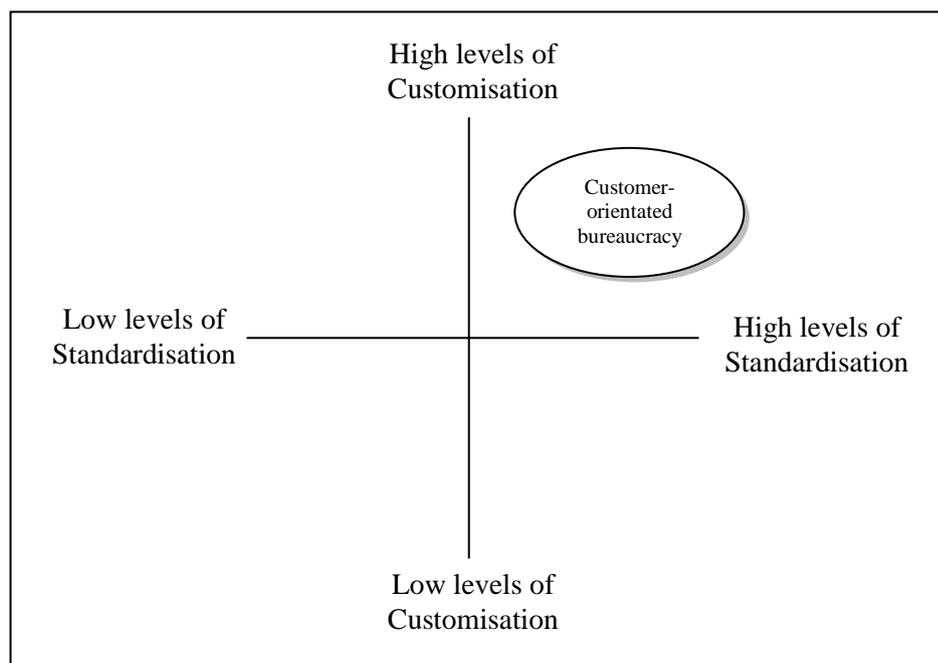
2.5 Brand and Employee Congruence

Within the hospitality industry, every action the customer service employee takes influences the customer's perception of the organisation. It is therefore, critical to align employee behaviour with the image and personality of the organisation (Harris & Fleming, 2005). The images and symbols portrayed by the product and services, and the meanings that customers attribute to them are considered very important to organisations (Davies, Chun, Vinhas da Silva, & Roper, 2003).

Research on brand personality has suggested that the personality traits of the people associated with the brand are transferred directly to the brand (Aaker, 1997). Brand personality is anthropomorphic and is thus defined as "a set of human characteristics associated with a brand" and like the measurement of human personality characteristics, the personality of a brand may also be measured (Aaker, 1997, p. 347) (see Table 2.3). It is suggested that the customer's image of an organisation is influenced, in part, by their interaction with employees. In these instances the behaviours exhibited by employees are seen as equal, if not more important, in influencing the customer's perception of the brand, than physical design and ambiance (Davies et al., 2003). It is, therefore, critical that the behaviour of employees and their exhibited personality is aligned with the brand personality of the organisation. If the desired service personality is not established and clearly communicated to employees then it is difficult for the employees to deliver a consistent service that is aligned with the vision of the organisation (Harris & Fleming, 2005). To successfully compete in the service economy requires the integration of branding and experiences as much as product. Hospitality organisations therefore, should seek employees who are able to personify the image of the company and provide the customer with the desired experience (Riley, 2007; Westwood, 2004).

Table 2.3: Brand Personality Scale

Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
Down-to-earth	Daring	Reliable	Upper class	Outdoorsy
Family	Trendy	Hard working	Glamorous	Masculine
Small	Exciting	Secure	Good looking	Tough
Honest	Spirited	Intelligent	Charming	Rugged
Sincere	Cool	Technical	Feminine	Alpine
Real	Young	Corporate	Smooth	Exploration
Wholesome	Imaginative	Successful		
Original	Unique	Leader		
Cheerful	Up-to-date	Confident		
Sentimental	Independent			
Friendly	Contemporary			

Adapted from Aaker (1997, p. 352).

Despite the clear logic of aligning brand and employee personality, Davies et al., (2003) state that many organisations address the rational systems and procedures that direct employee behaviour but rarely the feelings and emotions the employees have toward the organisation. Merely training and telling employees to act as the organisation would like will not have the same effect as when they have the personality or emotional attachment that predisposes them to act in the desired way (Davies et al., 2003).

2.6 Control

As service work has continued to grow the need for control over the exchange between employee and customer has also increased (Sturdy, 2001). Aligned to this is the belief by management that employee interactions require close supervision to achieve consistent service quality (Tyler & Taylor, 2001). It is widely understood in the business literature that control is a fundamental management activity, thus it continues to be a central theme of organisational theory (see Anderson & Oliver, 1987; Hartline, Maxham III, & McKee, 2000; Mayrhofer, 1998; Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007; Zeithamel, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988) The typical assumption of control theory is that an employee would not deliver the expected performance and achieve the desired organisational outcomes unless controls were established (Hartline et al., 2000; Ouchi, 1980; Sisaye, 2005). Herath, (2007) describes the expected outcomes of managerial control as organisational growth and survival, along with employee satisfaction and development.

Although there are a number of definitions of management control, they all contain common elements, and in their broadest sense state that management control is the process used to influence employee behaviour to achieve organisational objectives (Anderson & Oliver, 1987; Anthony & Govindarajan, 2007; Cravens, Lassk, Low, Marshall, & Moncrief, 2004; Jaworski, 1988; Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007). Thus, organisations require the cooperation of employees to meet company objectives.

According to Ouchi, (1980) the problem with cooperation between parties is that they often have different goals and their efforts are not united. He therefore suggests that aligning employee and organisational goals is a central control strategy. Merchant and Van der Stede (2007) also identify goal congruity as important:

> Management control involves addressing the general question: Are our employees likely to behave appropriately? This question can be decomposed into several parts. First, do our employees understand what we expect of them? Second, will they work consistently hard and try to do what is expected of them; that is, will they implement the organisation's strategy as intended? Third, are they capable of doing a good job? (p. 7).

Subsequently, a strategic decision for managers is to decide how they wish employees to behave and then create the necessary environment for them to act in the desired way (Simons, 2005). Understanding the nature of people and what motivates them to behave appropriately and comply with organisational objective is an important aspect of establishing management control. Simons (2005) provides discussion on human nature from the two distinct view points of economists and sociologists. The economist view of employee motivation is based on the functioning of economic markets and assumes that employees act in their own self-interest motivated by increasing their financial well-being. As Simons (2005) states, put plainly, "Only-Money-Matters" (p. 12). Conversely, sociologists believe that employee's are primarily motivated by job satisfaction based on an intrinsic desire to do a good job. While recognising there is some truth in the views held by economists and sociologist, Simons (2005) believes that employees' will adapt their behaviour according to how organisational

conditions are designed. Through these, managers are able to influence how employees are motivated.

2.6.1 Control Theories

In one of its earliest and most simple forms, control theory is based on cybernetic systems involving the setting of standards, the measurement of performance, comparison of measurements against the standard and, when required, the implementation of corrective action (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007). This simple type of control system is presented as a model in current hospitality literature including restaurant management (Ninemeier & Hayes, 2005), service management texts (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2006) and in accounting and cost management literature (Hansen & Mowen, 2006). The characteristics of cybernetic control are closely aligned to market control mechanisms in Ouchi's (1979) classic contribution to control theory. Market mechanisms of control are viewed as suitable when there are clear standards and precise methods available to assess performance. Moreover, market control mechanisms are fundamentally suited to the control of transactions involving products, as decision making is based primarily on price and well defined quality criteria that may be effectively tested (Ouchi, 1979). Due to these characteristics a number of limitations become apparent when implementing cybernetic or market mechanisms for effective control in service transactions.

The intangible nature of services makes it difficult to define service performance measures, and the simultaneous production and consumption of a service hinders the direct observation or measurement of service performance. Furthermore, because services are performances rather than objects, the precise specifications for uniform quality are difficult to establish and enforce by organisations (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2006; Ouchi, 1979). Thus, due to the complex and heterogeneous nature of customer service interactions more bureaucratic mechanisms of control are required to direct employee behaviour (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2003).

2.6.2 Formal Control

Formal controls are bureaucratic mechanisms which overcome many heterogenetic issues through the setting of rules and standards, while also involving close personal monitoring, and directing of employees by management (Ouchi, 1980). Jaworski (1988) defines formal controls as "management-initiated mechanisms that influence the probability that employees or groups will behave in ways that support the stated marketing objectives" (p. 56). Managerial authority to exercise control is gained through formal limits provided by organisational structure and rational legal processes. This enables managers to provide guidance and advice on how employees may complete interactions more effectively. Compensation for submitting to this authority is provided through norms of reciprocity based on the belief of equitable payment for service rendered, "an honest day's work for an honest day's pay" (Ouchi, 1979, p. 838). The characteristics of bureaucratic control are closely aligned to Jaworski's (1988) formal control measures.

Jaworski's (1998) theory of marketing control provides the conceptual framework which situates organisational control in the context of environment, controls, and consequences (see Figure 2.5). In this framework the environment shapes the control systems that are likely to be implemented within an organisation and influences the resulting consequences. Encapsulated under the banner of environment are the macro and operating environments that the organisation operates within and the internal environment of the organisation (Jaworski, 1998). Organisational controls are further divided into formal and informal categories.

Formal controls include input, process, and output classifications. Input controls are defined as "measurable actions taken by the firm prior to implementation of an activity" (Jaworski, 1988, p. 26). Examples of input controls are recruitment and training activities and formal policies that direct process and behaviour. Process control includes activities such as coaching and mentoring and is undertaken to influence activities and behaviours to achieve desired results. Output control involves the setting of performance strategies, and reward and recognition of performance (Jaworski, Stathakopoulos, & Shanker Krishnan, 1993).

Many customer service processes need to be standardised to maintain consistency. Customers often want to have a unique experience or receive a 'personal-touch' to their encounter. Therefore, the standardised routines must often be obscured or concealed from the customers view. If standard routines, learnt behaviours, and contrived emotions become too overt the customer can react negatively (Edvardsson & Gustavsson, 2003).

Figure 2.5: Control Framework; Environment, Controls, and Consequences
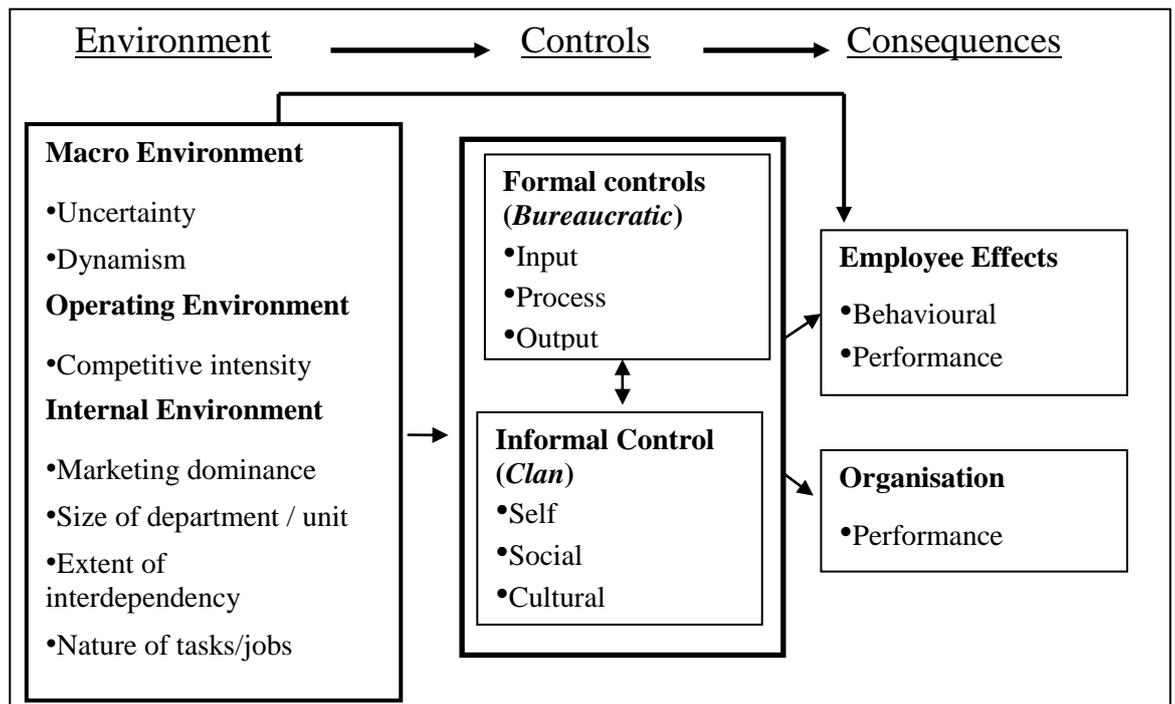
Adapted from Jaworski (1988, p. 25).

2.6.3 Informal Control

Jaworski, (1988) describes informal controls as characteristically unwritten mechanisms that may be formed through interpretation of written documents and are seen to have a strong influence over shaping individual and group behaviour. Within informal control Jaworski (1988) identifies further divisions of culture, social, and self control as significant. Cultural control involves the organisation's values, beliefs and operating norms that guide employee behaviour. Social control is established by subgroups and departments within the organisation and self control is defined as the individual's ability to adjust behaviour to meet personal objectives (Jaworski, 1988). Ouchi's (1979) conceptual framework for designing organisational control mechanisms also discussed employee socialisation as an important control mechanism however, his study focused on

the importance of clans. Ouchi made the distinction between culture and clan by describing culture as "socialisation process referring to citizens of a political unit" and a clan as when socialisation "refers to the properties of a unique organisation (Ouchi, 1979, p. 837). The characteristics of Ouchi's (1979) clan mechanism are very close to those described in Jaworski's (1988) discussion on cultural and social controls and therefore, the term clan is seen, in this study, to be interchangeable with culture.

The concepts of cultural control are also captured in Sisaye's (2005) model of organisational development where 'concertive' control is discussed. Concertive control is described as "team based control systems that shift control from management to workers." Here, concertive control uses "symbolic rewards", symbols of prestige, such as titles and badges, and the use of "rituals and norms to facilitate positive response" (Sisaye, 2005, p. 173). Under concertive control, employees discuss strategies and reach team goals through consensus. Individual and team performance is monitored and controlled through peer review and democratic control systems (Sisaye, 2005). Given the significance of informal control to customer service interactions, Jaworski's (1988) three divisions of culture, social, and self control are discussed in more detail below.

2.6.3.1   Cultural Control

It is widely accepted that organisational cultures are developed through the slow accumulation of shared stories, rituals and traditions that develop strong feelings of community in participants (Jaworski, 1988; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Ouchi, 1979; Wood, Zeffane, Fromholtz, & Fitzgerald, 2006). According to Wooldridge & Minsky, (2002, p. 33) "culture is the pivotal component of organisational sharing of information, since culture is comprised of the attitudes and beliefs that steer the actions of the individual in an organisation."

Ouchi, (1979) suggest the following advantages of cultural control;

- It is beneficial in the heterogenetic hospitality environment as it is difficult to determine individual employee contribution and performance.
- It may be more directive than market or bureaucratic controls.
- IT helps to provide goal congruence between employees and the organisation by establishing common values and beliefs.

What is more, cultural controls encourage mutual supervision of peers through group pressure on individuals who depart from the group norms (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007). However, limitations of cultural control are evident in that effective cultural control requires a high level of agreement on what comprises acceptable behaviour. It also calls for a strong commitment by each employee to these behavioural norms. Since attitudes, values, and beliefs are developed in employees over time, to be successful cultural control mechanisms require a stable workforce (Ouchi, 1979). High employee turnover therefore, undermines the effect of cultural control as communal trust is not established and employee goal congruence is unable to be developed (Ouchi, 1979).

2.6.3.2 Social Control

Organisational socialisation is a control mechanism as it helps to ensure that employees follow organisational values by learning which behaviours, emotions, and feelings should be displayed and which ought to be hidden (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). According to Cooper-Thomas & Anderson (2006, p. 492) "organisational socialisation is the process through which a new organisational employee adapts from outsider to integrated and effective insider." Wooldridge & Minsky (2002, p. 34) state this as "the process in which one learns 'the ropes'." Social control is established through separate sub-groups that operate in the organisation's culture, but they also have their own established social norms and patterns of interpersonal interactions that guide and direct the behaviour of employees (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). Through socialisation into the group, employees learn the behaviours and attitudes of others and are then subject to social controls generated from the acceptance of values and shared commitment toward common goals and behaviours (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Jaworski, 1988; Ouchi, 1979; Wooldridge & Minsky, 2002). Socialisation strategies include;

- Formal socialisation takes place when new employees are separated from existing employees to undertake a prescribed socialisation experience, for example organisational orientation (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006).

- Serial socialisation takes place during the course of a normal working routine through the mentoring and role modelling of employees by supervisors and co-workers (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Young, 2003).

- Investiture socialisation involves the provision of positive support by co-workers to employees for their actions and behaviours (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Young, 2003).

Serial and investiture socialisation are seen as important control mechanisms as existing employees are often more useful sources of information, role models and support than more formal methods. Effective socialisation also helps to build social cohesion which links the individual with others in the organisation. Social cohesion promotes fundamental attitudes, values and behaviours that support a communal understanding of organisational goals (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). On the other hand, positive influences of the socialisation process can be nullified when a gap exists between what managers say and what their actions communicate (Wooldridge & Minsky, 2002).

2.6.3.3 Self Control

"A professional acts as they must, not as they feel" (Pugh, 2001, p. 1018).

Customer service is performed in direct contact with customers and regularly requires the use of a sophisticated range of interpersonal and emotional skills to meet the often unique needs of the customers (Baum, 2006). As direct control by management is not possible during many of these exchanges, employees frequently need to exercise a considerable amount of self control to maintain the environment and atmosphere required by the organisation (Jaworski, 1988; Simons, 2005). Moreover, Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990) provide evidence that customers are more satisfied with service interactions when employees have the ability and willingness to overcome problems and adapt to customer needs. The ability of employees to provide effective self control is closely linked to the concepts of self-efficacy and locus of control (Silvester, Anderson-Gough, Anderson, & Mohamed, 2002).

According to Strauser and Ketz, (2002) the terms self-efficacy and locus of control are often used interchangeably but they are two distinct concepts. Self efficacy refers to a person's belief about his or her own ability to act competently and perform a task or, put simply, a belief in one-self and self confidence. Conversely, locus of control concerns a person's perception of control. Employees with an external locus of control are more likely to blame others or environmental factors for their inability to carry out tasks whereas employees

with an internal locus of control are more likely to accept responsibility, show initiative to problem solve and learn from their mistakes (Silvester et al., 2002; Strauser & Ketz, 2002).

Whether the terms self-efficacy and locus of control are interchangeable, research results indicate that employees with high self efficacy and an internal locus of control perform better in service situations and are more persistent (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Silvester et al., 2002; Strauser & Ketz, 2002). Employee persistence is important as it refers to the "ability to stay on task without prompting, work steadily throughout the entire work period and work at routine jobs without resistance" (Strauser & Ketz, 2002, p. 24). In brief, employees who display high levels of self-control are able to work more independently and better meet the needs of customers. The exercising of an employees' self control during a customer service interaction is also closely related to the concept of emotional labour.

Emotional labour is defined as "the effort expended to manage or regulate one's emotional interactions at work" (LeBreton et al., 2004, p. 307). Customer service employees' are increasingly hired to exhibit a range of positive emotions (for example sincerity, empathy, and concern) while often suppressing the display of behaviour that customers or the organisation find unacceptable. These positive displays of emotion often require employees to carry out emotional labour (LeBreton et al., 2004; Sturdy & Fineman, 2001). Not only are employees expected to display positive emotions as a part of the service, the rules of interpersonal interactions with customers are often unequal. Customers are able to display anger, dissatisfaction, and frustration or rudeness toward employees while in return employees are expected to be pleasant, understanding, sympathetic or apologetic (Bolton, 2004). Moreover, organisations generally expect that employees will be able to provide displays of genuine emotion. When an employee's inner feelings do not match the expected positive emotions, displays of 'fake' emotions (acting) is required to meet customer and organisational expectations. The disparity between felt emotions and expected displays can lead to person-role conflict and become a threat to an employee's well-being (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

Emotional labour and the issues surrounding this concept have led to considerable debate over the institutionalisation and control of employees' emotions. The organisations ownership and use of employee emotions and feelings to meet organisational goals raises ethical and moral issues (Sturdy & Fineman, 2001) which are not addressed in this study. Nevertheless, it is important to identify that customer service can lead to emotional duress, stress, anxiety, burnout and job dissatisfaction (LeBreton et al., 2004).

Due to the often subjective nature of social interaction, self control, emotional labour, and displays of sociably accepted norms, the interactions between employee and customer are difficult for management to assess. Therefore, formal assessment is often carried out through 'mystery shoppers' either in person or by telephone while informal assessment occurs though peer or management observation (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000). Given the complexity of human interaction it is not surprising that a number of varying approaches to organisational control have been identified. For comparison, several control typologies used to inform this study are presented in Table 2.4. Using Jaworski's (1998) framework of three formal and three informal controls, a comparison of the different terminology used to describe similar control mechanisms and brief comments on the nature of the control theories are presented.

Table 2.4: Typology of Organisational Control

Jaworski (1988)	Ouchi (1979; 1980)	Hartline & Ferrell (1996)	Sisaye (2005)	Merchant &Van der Stede (2007)
Formal	----	-----	Coercive	----
Input	----	Behaviour	----	Proactive Recruitment Direction Restriction Prevention Automation
Process	Market Bureaucratic	----	Mechanistic versus Organic	Behavioural Detection
Output	Output		Remunerative	Results
Informal	----	----	Concertive	----
Culture	Clan	Empowerment	Normative	Culture
Social		----	----	----
Self	Professional	Self-efficacy	----	----
Comments:				
Distinguishes between formal & informal control. Recognises differences between management directed input, process & Output control. discusses cultural, social & self control influences & significance Recommends a blend of measures	Distinguishes market, bureaucratic and clan controls. Discusses characteristics of each mechanism, suitable applications, and determinants of control success & failure	Examine the attitudinal and behavioural responses, the relationships among these responses, and three formal managerial control mechanisms (empowerment, behaviour-based employee evaluation, and management commitment to service quality)	Discusses concertive, coercive, & remunerative control attributes, advantages & disadvantages. Importance of contextualising control structures. Need to utilise more than one control mechanism Identifies remunerative & normative as the most successful blend	Focus on management control to influence employee behaviour Takes a broad view of control including proactive input control, aspects of process control, and measurement of outcomes. Discusses cultural control but does make distinction between formal and informal controls

Adapted from Jaworski (1988, p. 31)

In conclusion, Ouchi in 1979, raised significant questions concerning control in modern society when he stated:

> The problem of organisation design is to discover that the balance of socialisation and measurement which most efficiently permits a particular organisation to achieve cooperation among its members. In the longer run, the problem is to understand how, in a society that is increasingly pluralistic and thus goal-incongruent, in which interest groups become more distinct and in which a sense of community seems remote, the control of organisations can be achieved without recourse to an unthinking

bureaucratisation which is at odds with the increasing interdependence and ambiguity which characterise economic organisations. (p. 846).

While these observations were made 28 years ago they remain remarkably prophetic and signal a need for a new approach to achieving organisational goals in hospitality.

2.7   Conclusions from the Literature Review

Employees who provide customer service in a hotel environment are often involved in the simultaneous provision of technical, interactive and corporate quality to customers (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1991). Each of these dimensions is important to the overall product offering a customer experiences, yet, it is generally, only the technical or physical dimension, for example, the meal, glass of wine or room, which is charged for. The interactive dimension is often viewed as a service that is carried out in support of a company's core products (Zeithamel et al., 2006) and as such it is not attributed any monitory value.

The literature highlights considerable debate over the terms used to describe customer service skills and the value that is attributed to these skills. There is however, general agreement that employees require knowledge and skills to carry out the technical dimensions of customer service, for example, operating a computer or making a cocktail. These skill are viewed as more easily developed in employees (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Conversely, interactive dimensions of customer service require employees to have interpersonal and emotional capabilities to undertake complex and sophisticated interactions with customers (Baum, 2006). These capabilities involve the employees attitudes, traits and motives and are believed to be quite difficult to develop in employees in the work place (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Much of the hospitality literature concerning employee traits that are required to provide customer service, emphasise personality traits that are associated with extraversion and agreeableness. Ehrhart (2006) found the personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability were strongly associated with person-job fit in customer service. On the other hand, Witt and Ferris (2003) argue that the personality trait agreeableness moderated by conscientiousness was the strongest predictor of job performance. It would appear that employees

who display extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability traits are preferred by hospitality organisations. Meanwhile, the importance of conscientious traits such as, dependability, self-control, reliability, and efficiency are overlooked by employers in the desire for friendly, outgoing, energetic, sympathetic, kind and composed employees. The literature reviewed within this study would indicate that what is required for consistent customer service interactions are employees' who display a blend of agreeableness (social skills) and conscientiousness traits. Furthermore, what is missing from the literature reviewed is discussion concerning the negative aspects of people with high extraversion traits.

The importance of employee personality is also highlighted by Aaker's (1997) argument that an organisation's brand can also have a personality. Harris and Fleming (2005) state that it is critical to align employee behaviour and personality to the brand. The concept of congruence between employee and brand personality is also evident in Lehtinen and Lehtinen's (1991) discussion of corporate quality. Yet, there is very little evidence in the hospitality literature to suggest that congruence is sought between the image and personality that customer service employees' display and brand personality.

Much of the hospitality literature has focused on the use of standardisation or customisation strategies to achieve organisational goals. However, Korczynski (2002) argues that these strategies are implemented together, in the 'customer-orientated bureaucracy' as both standardisation and customisation strategies are important to completing successful customer service. Simons (2005) states that the strategy chosen by management will determine how management want employees to behave and, therefore, the control mechanisms required.

The management control literature outlines a number of control strategies and mechanisms that are used by different organisations. Cybernetic systems are primarily suited to manufacturing and accounting (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007). Market mechanisms of control are best suited to organisations where clear standards and precise methods are available to measure performance, for example in sales orientated organisations. The literature highlightes the intangible, complex and heterogeneous nature of customer service in hospitality

environments (Kotler et al., 2003) and thus, the need for more informal control mechanisms.

Jaworski's (1998) work on marketing control provides the theoretical framework for this study. The framework has been used to develop the initial coding themes and provided the structure for presenting and analysing the research findings. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2.5: Control Framework Linking Environment, Controls, and Consequences. Ouchi's (1979) seminal study of organisational control also informs the study and supports the work of Jaworski (1998). A typology of significant control studies that have been synthesised in the literature review is presented in Table 2.4.

3 Chapter Three: Research Design

All our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds then to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason.

Immanuel Kant, 18th Century philosopher

3.1 Introduction

The research design chapter provides an outline of the qualitative, case study research design used in this study. To begin, an overview of the study, as presented in chapter one, is provided. Following this, the selection of a qualitative research paradigm is discussed and more specifically, the rational for adopting a constructive-interpretive paradigm is explained. The use of a case study research strategy is then introduced and the procedures, sample, and research questions used in the study are outlined. The data analysis procedures are presented and the development and presentation of the final coding themes is discussed. Finally, the limitations of the study, as well as validity, reliability and ethical considerations are presented.

3.2 Overview of the Study

The aim of this study was to identify how hotel managers govern employee interpersonal interactions with customers. The research sought to identify the interpersonal and emotional skills employers require from employees to meet the needs of customers and present the desired corporate image. Furthermore, it sought to identify how employers are communicating interpersonal interaction requirements and emotional display rules to employees and how these interactions are being supported by the organisation.

3.2.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were derived from the above research purpose:

- Do customer service employees display the interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes that are needed to complete successful customer service interactions?
- How do managers communicate interpersonal skill, and emotional attributes requirements to employees?
- How, if at all, do managers develop interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes within employees?
- How are employee interpersonal interactions and emotional displays managed?

3.3 Theoretical Paradigm and Perspective

The research focused on determining how managers govern employee interactions with guests. It sought to identify the interpersonal and emotional skills managers require of employees to meet the emotional needs of customers while presenting the desired corporate image. A qualitative research method was applied as the research sought to understand the expectations of managers, the issues around governing employee interactions with customers, perceptions of employee capabilities, and beliefs about current management strategies. Qualitative research enables a naturalistic interpretive research approach to be adopted (Cohen et al., 2003) allowing rich descriptions and experiences to be gathered from individuals (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Furthermore, it facilitates the in-depth and detailed study of issues through the use of open how and why questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Scientific enquiry and theory development generally stem from two major approaches, deductive theory testing and inductive theory building. Deductive theory testing is primarily the domain of quantitative research methods employing a positivist paradigm that seeks to be objective. Conversely, inductive approaches to research are typically used by qualitative researches. Inductive models allow the development of theories about the collective reality of the people who experience the aspects of the phenomenon being studied, to be developed directly from the data that is collected (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). More precisely, a constructivist-interpretive paradigm is used in the study.

A paradigm is a set of concepts, values, and basic beliefs concerning an individual's place and relationship to the world or environment and their view of the world. "Inquiry paradigms define for the inquirers what it is they are about, and what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). A constructive-interpretive paradigm consists of an ontology that accepts there is more than one way of constructing knowledge, a subjective epistemology where understanding is co-created by the interviewer and respondent, and a methodology that is dialectical (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Each of these issues will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Interpretive research is concerned with constructing meaning through an understanding of the participants' theories or experiences of an environment, or to understand the complex nature of experienced life from the perspective of participants. Constructivists assume that socially constructed reality and knowledge are acts of interpretation achieved through social constructions and shared meanings. Constructivism is one of four major paradigms of the interpretive persuasion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Those that follow a constructivist framework argue that knowledge and truth are created through context or perspective and are therefore, not discovered. As Schwandt (1994) states:

> …human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experiences (p. 125).

The constructivist paradigm that is followed in this study is derived from Guba and Lincoln's (1994) constructivist philosophy.

3.3.1 Paradigm Ontology

Paradigm ontology refers to the nature and form of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) assume that reality is created in the minds of individuals' resulting in a pluralist and relativist approach to reality. Pluralism is defined as multiple and often different interpretations where each interpretation is significant. Relativism holds that truth is not absolute but that it is relative to the individual or group and context that created it. Constructivism is thus

concerned with subjective meaning based on how members of organisations understand and make sense of events and information (Schwandt, 1994).

3.3.2 Paradigm Epistemology

Paradigm epistemology seeks to understand knowledge and how is it acquired (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In the constructivist paradigm, knowledge is acquired through transactional partnership between the researcher and the participants. Knowledge is created by the researcher and participants as a result of the enquiry and is thus subjective by nature (Schwandt, 1994).

3.3.3 Paradigm Methodology

The paradigm methodology provides the process of finding knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The method of finding knowledge in the constructivist paradigm is dialectical. Dialectical refers to practice of analysis that uses continuous reiteration and reanalysis of the subject to ultimately construct knowledge about the subject of enquiry (Schwandt, 1994).

3.4 Research Strategy

The strategies used within qualitative research are diverse and include: ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, and action research to name only a few (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is through the selection of an appropriate method, that a theory is developed for how the research should proceed (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). As Denzin and Lincoln (2005; p. 25) state, "A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical materials". With this in mind, a qualitative case study strategy of inquiry has been chosen for this research.

Generally, research seeks to answer, 'who', 'what', 'where', 'how', and 'why' types of questions. These types of questions may be answered by quantitative or qualitative methods and a variety of research strategies. However, a case study strategy of enquiry is favoured when 'how' or 'why' questions are being asked and when the investigator has little control over events in a contemporary, real-life context (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, to answer the research questions, both an exploratory and explanatory strategy have been used within the interview

questions. Questions that ask 'What' are exploratory and may be suited to qualitative or quantitative research methods. However, 'What' type questions that are used to develop propositions for further study are more suited to case study methodology (Yin, 2003).

Qualitative case study methodology provides the opportunity to explore and understand the participants' beliefs and perceptions within the contemporary customer service context situated in the hotel environment. Furthermore, the study seeks to explain how interpersonal skill requirements are being communicated to employees. Case study research provides the opportunity for full, rich and deep descriptions of the participants' perceptions, for example, the views of managers concerning the management of employee – guest interactions. Through these descriptions, relevant events can be highlighted, enabling detailed analysis and understanding that other more analytic strategies are unable to provide (Cohen et al., 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). A case study methodology also offers advantages of identifying the complexity of individual and organisational beliefs while recognising incongruity or conflicts between opinions held by participants (Cohen et al., 2003).

3.4.1 Sample

Case study research includes both single and multiple cases. As Patton (2002) points out,

> Cases can be individuals, groups, neighbourhoods, programmes, organisations or cultures… [They] can also be critical incidents, stages in the life of a person or programme, or anything that can be defined as a specific, unique, bounded system. Cases are units of analysis. (p. 447).

Patton (2002) further suggests that within the evaluation of a single organisation, case studies may be carried out on several participants. This provides the opportunity for cross-case comparisons and analysis of individual cases to become part of the data for the organisational case study. Yin (2003, p. 42) refers to this strategy as an "embedded case study". Embedded cases enable a larger case to be developed from multiple smaller cases.

Qualitative methods of enquiry focus on obtaining information from a small sample, on a chosen topic, in great depth. It is interested in the detail, context and subtle differences of the issues being studied. Obtaining the depth and detail of information required for case study analysis requires careful selection of participants. Patton (2002, p. 230) refers to this selection technique as "purposeful sampling". Purposeful sampling allows cases to be selected that are 'information rich' providing insights and understandings to be gained about the issues being studied, rather than the empirical generalizations that randomly selected samples provide (Patton, 2002).

The sample chosen for this study is representative of those who have had experiences relating to managing customer service employees within four star hotels in the New Zealand hospitality industry. Embedded case studies were conducted in four hotel sites with a total of 16 participants.

'Four Star' hotels were selected as it was anticipated that these hotels would provide an opportunity to gather data from participants who manage customer service interactions, with a significant level of customisation of services, in a variety of contexts. Furthermore, 'Four Star' Hotels are used by both corporate and leisure guests representing two distinct groups with differing needs. There are 152 hotels in New Zealand registered on 'Qualmark, New Zealand's official quality tourism web site'. Of these, 52 are 'Four Star' Hotels representing 34.2 percent of the total (Qualmark, 2007). The 'Four Star' Hotel category includes accommodation providers with at least one licensed bar and restaurant on the premises. The hotel provides breakfast, lunch and dinner in a restaurant and via room service. Hotels within this segment have conference, banqueting and recreation facilities. All rooms include ensuite bathroom and are serviced daily (Qualmark, 2007).

Due to time and resource limitations the decision was made to approach one hotel corporation to seek access to four hotels that met the selection criteria within their hotel group. Snowball sampling was used to identify suitable participants for the study. This method allowed the sample to be expanded through the recommendations of knowledgeable experts from within the hotel group (Groenewald, 2003), provided the opportunity for introductions and endorsements to be made to other potential participants (Cohen et al., 2003). The

Regional Human Resource Manager (HRM) for one of the largest hotel chains in New Zealand was contacted, and the scope of the study was outlined. The Regional HRM recommended four hotels that would be suitable for the study and provided contact details for each Hotel property HRM.

Access to two hotels from Auckland and two hotels from the central North Island was obtained. In order to maintain confidentiality, the details of the Hotel Group and exact location of these hotels are not disclosed. Each selected hotel from within the group constitutes an embedded case study and the individual participant from each embedded case represents a "unit of analysis" (Yin, 2003, p. 22) (see Figure 3.1). Four individuals were interviewed at each site: the Human Resource Manager (HRM), Food and Beverage Manager (F&B Manager), Front Office Manager (FO Manager), and a supervisor who carried out customer service duties (see Table 3.1). The units of analysis are consistent with the purpose of the research, which was to determine how managers govern employee interactions with guests.

Figure 3.1: Embedded Case Studies and Units of Analysis

Case study	Embedded Case studies	Units of Analysis			
Hotel Corporation	Hotel 1	HR Manager	Head of Dept.	Head of Dept.	Supervisor
	Hotel 2	HR Manager	Head of Dept.	Head of Dept.	Supervisor
	Hotel 3	HR Manager	Head of Dept.	Head of Dept.	Supervisor
	Hotel 4	HR Manager	Head of Dept.	Head of Dept.	Supervisor
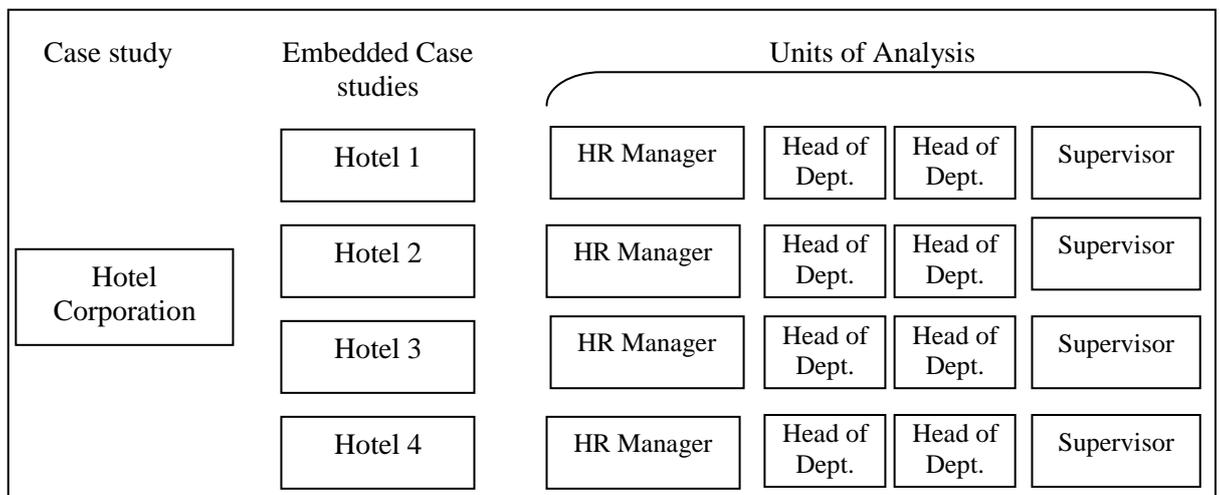
A letter of support for the research was sent by the Regional HRM, along with an invitation to participate in the research (see Appendix 1), to the HR Managers in each of the four hotels. The individual hotel HRM became the 'key informant' for each of the hotel properties. Once the contact details of each hotel HRM was obtained, they were contacted by telephone to again introduce the researcher, answer any initial questions, request contact details for suitable staff to interview within the HRM's property and request an interview date and time with the

HRM. The telephone contact was followed by an email confirming the interview arrangements and providing the hotel HRM with a participant information sheet (see Appendix 2), a copy of the research consent form (see Appendix 3) and a brief outline of the research themes and types of questions that would be asked (see Appendix 4). The HRM for each hotel property briefed the management team about the research and informed them that they may be asked to participate. Contact was made by telephone with the F&B and FO Managers in each hotel property. Again confirmation of interview details and a participant information sheet, a copy of the research consent form and a brief outline of the research themes and types of questions that would be asked were sent to these participants. The F&B and FO Managers were asked to recommend and provide contact details of a supervisor that would be suitable for participation in the research. Contact was made with a supervisor from each hotel property and the aforementioned research details were sent by email.

A letter introducing the researcher and outlining the aims and purpose of the study was sent to each of the hotel Managers. All participants were informed that participation in the research was voluntary.

Table 3.1: Participant Pseudonym and Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Function	Age	Gender	Years in Current Position	Qualifications
Glenda	HR Manager	25-30	F	0.5	Diploma
Kathy	FO Manager	31-35	F	0.5	Bachelor degree
Jill	F&B Manager	31-35	F	1	Bachelor degree
Sam	Supervisor	25-30	F	0.2	---
Helen	HR Manager	30-35	F	2	
Kay	FO Manager	31-35	F	0.6	---
Alan	F&B Manager	26-30	M	0.1	---
Jake	Assistant manager	20-25	M	0.3	Bachelor degree
Tracy	HR Manager	26-30	F	2.5	---
Rachel	FO Manager	26-30	F	1.2	Diploma
Bob	F&B Manger	35+	M	5	---
Kate	Trainee Manager	20-25	F	1	Bachelor degree
David	HR Manager	35+	M	3	Bachelor degree
Mark	FO Manager	31-35	M	3.5	Diploma
Hamish	F&B Manager	35+	M	2.5	Trade qual.
Lorna	Supervisor	31-35	F	.3	Diploma

3.5   Case Study Procedures

3.5.1   Data Collection

The range of case study data gathering methods used in the study included semi-structured interviews, review of available documentation and field notes. The use of three data collection strategies allows data triangulation to be achieved and adds strength to the study by increasing construct validity (Yin, 2003). Each of the data gathering methods is discussed below.

3.5.1.1   Semi-structured Interviews.

Interviews are an important source of case study information as they provide an opportunity to explore participants' experiences and perceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Yin, 2003). Semi-structured interviews are used as they allow "conversational rather than structured queries" (Yin, 2003, p. 89). In this type of interviewing the topics and questions are determined in advance. All interviews begin with the same question, however, the sequence and wording of subsequent questions is determined by the course of the interview. This style of questioning provides a somewhat systematic approach while increasing the breadth of data (Patton, 2002). However, caution needs to be taken as interviewer bias may influence participant responses and important issues may be overlooked (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003).

The interviews were conducted, by the researcher, in a setting that was convenient for the participants. Each interview was between 45 to 60 minutes in duration. All of the participants chose to conduct the interviews on the hotel premises and granted permission for the interviews to be audio recorded. A copy of the interview questions is attached in Appendix 5.

3.5.1.2   Written Documentation

Document review is important to case study research as the information may differ or may not be available in spoken form and because texts discuss policies, procedures or events (Hodder, 1994; Yin, 2003). Document review is used with interviews and field notes to help understand and compare the characteristics of each data collection method. However, even documents may present a biased perspective of an event or organisation as the original meaning of text is bound

within a historical, social and cultural context (Hodder, 1994). As Hodder, (1994) explains,

> …there is often a tension between the concrete nature of the written word, its enduring nature, and the continuous potential for rereading meanings in new contexts, undermining the authority of the word. Text and context are in a continual state of tension, each defining and redefining the other, saying and doing things differently through time. (p. 394).

The documents made available and collected for analysis in this research included; company mission and values statements, customer service job descriptions, job advertisements, applicant evaluation forms, interview notes, induction checklists, customer service training material, guest comment data, and mystery shopper reports (see Appendix 6).

3.5.1.3 Field Observations

Field observations are an important aspect of case study research as they help to understand nuances of meanings, capture participants' feelings and interactions, and reveal organisational culture. Moreover, observations help the researcher to gain a holistic perspective by placing the study in context (Patton, 2002). Field notes were made immediately after on-site visits and interaction with the participants of the study. Reflections on observations and experiences were captured and notes were taken to describe the setting and activities that took place including basic information such as, dates, participant information and other relevant observations (Patton, 2002).

3.5.2 Research Questions

In case study research the questions are developed for the interviewer, not the participant. The questions act as reminders regarding the purpose and aim of the research and act as prompts for the interviewer to ensure that focus is maintained. The interview guide was designed to attain the participants' perceptions, feelings and beliefs. Open-ended questions are asked to ensure the participants respond in their own words. This allows respondents to use words and descriptions they are comfortable with and to add information to the data that other more restrictive questions may eliminate (Patton, 2002).

Probing questions were also used to help deepen, elaborate on, or clarify the response to a question. Detail-oriented probes provide the opportunity to gather more information and understanding about a response. An elaboration probe encourages the interviewee to expand further on the topic. Clarification probes may be used when the meaning of a term or statement is unclear (Patton, 2002). The interview questions were reviewed by a hospitality industry expert during a pre-test of the research questions. Feedback was obtained and slight adjustments were made prior to the first interview.

On completion of the interview the participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to add or if they thought that there were questions that they thought should have been asked. Finally, background demographic questions were asked to help position the respondent in relation to other participants (Patton, 2002).

3.5.3   Pre-test of Research Questions

A pre-test of the research questions was conducted to help refine data collection procedures and to develop important issues and lines of questions. Pre-tests provide the opportunity to approach issues and different phenomenon from a variety of angles and to try different approaches. The pre-test was conducted at a site were the participant has extensive experience in the hospitality industry and is involved in an advisory capacity with hospitality associations and educational facilities. Feedback was obtained on the interview questions resulting in minor alterations to questions. Furthermore, on the recommendation of the industry expert, the following question was added to the interview instrument: What is the most difficult situation that employees have to deal with?

The pre-test also provided an opportunity to test data recording techniques. This resulted in two important findings. Firstly, it was found that during the interview when handwritten notes were taken, the interviewee appeared to be distracted and would slow down or stop talking altogether. Maintaining eye contact with the participant helped to draw out in-depth description and ensured the conversational nature of the interview was maintained. Secondly, it was discovered that the voice recording was difficult to hear due to background noise interference as the digital recording devise was placed on the table in front of the

interviewee. These issues were addressed prior to conducting the first interview by hanging the digital recorder around the interviewee's neck to ensure clear recordings were captured, consequently eliminating the need for written notes.

3.6   Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis of interview transcriptions was conducted using 'QSR NVivo 7' (NVivo) qualitative research software to assign sections of interview transcriptions to relevant codes. NVivo also allows for statistical analysis of qualitative research data however, this function was not required for this study. Jaworski's, (1988) control theory framework was used to provide the initial coding themes for data analysis, as according to Yin, (2003) the use of theoretical propositions benefits case study inquiry. Once the main themes were established the interview transcriptions were analysed and relevant sections of each interview were assigned to the coding themes. As new sub-themes emerged during analysis of interview transcripts, new codes, or sub-codes under existing codes, were established. On completion of the initial coding, the data was again analysed and data reduction undertaken to reveal the themes that expressed the character and essence of each cluster (Hycner, 1985). The use of NVivo provided for effective management of interview data by allowing one interview section to be assigned to multiple codes as required and the addition of new codes to be established when they emerged. Furthermore, NVivo provided easy access between coded sections of interview transcription and the original full transcription. This proved to be an invaluable function as it allowed checking the context of coded sections for accurate interpretation. As data analysis progressed, some sub-themes were collapsed and merged with others when it became apparent the same issues were being discussed. See Table 3.2 for final coding themes.

Table 3.2: Data Analysis Coding Themes

Major themes	Themes and sub-themes
Environment	• Operating environment • Labour market • Internal environment

Control	• Formal control
	  o Input control
	    ▪ Recruitment
	    ▪ Training
	  o Process control
	    ▪ Coaching & mentoring
	    ▪ Empowerment
	    ▪ Standard operating procedures
	  o Output control
	    ▪ Performance standards
	    ▪ Performance evaluation
	    ▪ Correction & discipline
	    ▪ Rewards & recognition
	• Informal control
	  o Cultural control
	    ▪ Organisational credos
	    ▪ Codes of conduct
	    ▪ Values statements
	    ▪ Customer & employee focus
	    ▪ Employee development
	    ▪ Support & maintenance of culture
	  o Social control
	    ▪ Serial socialisation
	    ▪ Investiture socialisation
	    ▪ Social cohesion
	    ▪ Extra role performance
	  o Self control

3.7 Limitations of the Study

It is recognised that qualitative research relies on the involvement, abilities and insights of the researcher. Qualitative research is seen as a "creative process" (Patton, 2002) that may be influenced by opinions, attitude and perspectives that contribute to subjectivity and bias. As Denzin and Lincoln, (2005) state:

> There is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions, all they can offer is accounts, or

stories, about what they have done and why. No single method can grasp
all the subtle variations in ongoing human experience (p. 21).

These attributes may be seen to impact negatively on the trustworthiness and
validity of qualitative research, however, these attributes also contribute to the
meaning that participants give to the data and are important aspects of the design
(Cohen et al., 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The issues of trustworthiness
and validity are addressed through the following stages.

3.7.1 Internal Validity and Trustworthiness

Internal validity is achieved through recording data that accurately describes the
phenomenon being researched. This study sought to address this issue through
exploring different ways of reviewing the data in order to assess alternative
findings. These findings were documented allowing any lack of conflicting
evidence to provide additional support to the original analysis. 'Peer debriefing'
with an experienced researcher was also utilised to test the integrity and honesty
of the emerging core themes. Furthermore, the participants were provided with
the opportunity to validate the interview summaries and extracted themes or
make changes to the findings in order to ensure factual clarity of the data (Cohen
et al., 2003). Accurate records of audio recordings, transcripts and gathered
documents have been labelled, dated and securely filed for future reference or
auditing.

3.7.2 External Validity and Generalisability

External validity has been achieved through the use of triangulation methods.
Triangulation results from the use of multiple data collection methods involving
comparing and crosschecking the consistency of the recorded information.
Participant triangulation is achieved through data collection from supervisors,
heads of departments and human resource managers at individual hotel
properties (Patton, 2002). Generalisability is addressed through detailed and in-
depth descriptions of the research process, context and interviews within the
written report. This provides the opportunity for readers of the research to
determine the level of comparability and transferability between the study and
other settings (Cohen et al., 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The different
human resource management strategies that are implemented from country to

country, culture to culture and organisation to organisation also impact on the generalisability of the research results (Burns, 1997).

3.8   Ethical Considerations

As all research using human participation carries potential risks for the participants, ethics approval for this research was gained from Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). While the information sought by this study is not believed to be contentious or controversial, there is always the potential for ethical risks associated with in-depth interviews. To minimise any risk, the interviewees were not exposed to humiliation, fatigue or exploitation. Participation in the interview process was voluntary and the interviewees had the choice and control over what they divulged. The interviewees' confidentiality was maintained at all times, and information has been presented in way that ensures the participants cannot be identified.

3.8.1   Participant Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Informed consent has been provided by all participants in the study. This was sought initially in person by telephone. Once verbal consent was gained, a consent form was sent electronically to the participants and written consent was gained prior to the interview taking place. The consent form used for research participation is attached in Appendix 3.

Participant confidentiality has been upheld throughout the research. This has been achieved by:

- Assigning participants with a numerical code to protect their identity
- Assigning participating hotel properties with a numerical code.
- Assigning aliases to people that are identified or discussed by the participants.
- All documentation, transcripts, audiotapes and computer files are stored in a secure environment limiting access to only the researcher.

3.8.2   Participant Information Sheet

A participant information sheet was provided to all participants prior to the interview (see Appendix 2). The information sheet was designed to provide a brief introduction to the research aims and purpose. It was made known to the participants that the research would be used for completion of a Masters Degree

and that their participation was voluntary. Furthermore, participants were informed that there was no compensation for involvement in the study other than their time being offset by the experience of participating and sharing of their perceptions and experiences. The research supervisors and AUTEC contact details were provided to the participants to answer any concern that they may have about the research.

3.8.3 Data Storage

A master index has been used to record and track all forms of data used in the study. The index will contain records of the types of data and dates on which it was gathered, the methods used and the location of the stored data. All transcripts and interview summaries will be entered on to computer files. Computer files will be backed up weekly to an external drive and securely stored separately from the location of the computer. The data will be stored in a secure office, in a locked steel filing cabinet.

3.9 Conclusion

Access to four hotels in the hotel group was enthusiastically supported by the area Human Resource Manager, and the managers and supervisors in each hotel were happy to participate in the study. The inclusion of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field notes was effective in exploring, in-depth, the phenomenon of customer service interactions in four star hotels. The use of the theoretical framework presented in chapter two provided for effective clustering and categorising of data and enabled valuable insights concerning customer service management to be obtained. The use of qualitative, case study, research may limit the ability to generalise the study to other locations, nevertheless, a conscientious attempt has been made to gain a better understanding of the issues concerning the management of customer service employees. Chapter four presents the organisational context and the data collected from interviews, hotel documents, and field notes.

4 Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings of the semi-structured interviews, hotel documents, and field notes are presented. Considerable thought was given as to how the data should be presented. As specific areas of the data provide answers for more than one research question, it seemed logical to present the findings according to the coding themes outlined in the theoretical framework and detailed in Chapter Three. To begin, a description of the organisational context and the general environment that the Hotel Group operates in is presented. This is followed by findings presented under the headings of Formal Control and Informal Control. Formal Control includes the sub-themes Input Control, Process Control, and Output Control, while Informal Control includes the sub-themes Cultural Control, Social Control and Self Control.

The four questions that the research sought to answer were:

1. Do customer service employees display the interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes that are needed to complete successful customer service interactions?
2. How do managers communicate interpersonal skill, and emotional attributes requirements to employees?
3. How, if at all, do managers develop interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes within employees?
4. How are employee interpersonal interactions and emotional displays managed?

The relationship between each research question and the findings that specifically explore these questions is displayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Findings Related to Research Questions

Research Question	Findings Headings and Subheadings
Research Question #1: Do customer service employees display the interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes that are needed to complete successful customer service interactions?	• Internal environment o Customer service skill requirements

Research Question #2:
How do managers communicate interpersonal skill, and emotional attributes requirements to employees?
	Formal Control
	• Input Control
	   o Job advertisement
	   o Job description
	   o Employee induction
	   o Training
	• Process Control
	   o Coaching and mentoring
	   o Standard operating procedures
	• Output Control
	   o Performance standards
	   o Correction and discipline
	Informal Control
	• Cultural Control
	• Social Control

Research Question #3:
How, if at all, do managers develop interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes within employees?
	Formal Control
	• Input Control
	   o Training
	• Process Control
	   o Coaching and mentoring
	• Output Control
	   o Correction and discipline
	   o Rewards and recognition

Research Question #4:
How are employee interpersonal interactions and emotional displays managed?
	Formal Control
	• Process Control
	   o Coaching and mentoring
	   o Empowerment
	   o Standard operating procedures
	• Output Control
	   o Performance standards
	   o Output performance evaluation
	   o Correction and discipline
	   o Rewards and recognition
	Informal Control
	• Cultural Control
	• Social Control
	• Self Control

Quotations taken from the interview transcripts are presented in the findings with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. The brand name of the hotel group and individual hotels participating in the study are also omitted from the presented findings and, where required, are referred to as the 'Hotel Group'. To maintain the confidential and sensitive nature of many of the documents obtained from the Hotel Group, a summary or generalisation of the meaning extracted from these documents is presented where required.

Interview participants included Human Resource Managers, Food and Beverage Managers, Front Office Managers, and Supervisors. These participants were selected to provide a cross section of people who manage employee interactions with hotel guests. These selected quotes obtained from these participants and presented under each theme provide the clearest evidence and are representative of many of the interviewees' opinions.

4.2 Environment

> *"And that is the problem in New Zealand, it is still not recognised as a skill, it is still seen as a second-class job really to work in hospitality"*
> (from interview transcript)

The environment that the hotel group operates within influences the type of control systems that develop, while also moderating the use of these controls (Jaworski, 1988). As the purpose of the study is to identify the interpersonal and emotional skills employers require from employees, while also investigating the management of customer service interactions, the environmental issues presented focus primarily on human based resources and the matching of these resources to the organisation's brand requirements.

4.2.1 Hotel Description

The hotels within the study are four star business class hotels representative of those that are predominately found in large urban city centres. The hotels range from 147 rooms through to 199 rooms capacity. Each of the properties has a contemporary design and use natural wood, earthy tones, glass, and a mix of tiled floors and carpet throughout the public areas. Reception staff are dressed in fashionable charcoal grey/black uniforms. The customer service staff are predominantly young, well groomed (with those who had long hair having it

pulled back and neatly tied) providing a professional and competent appearance. Hotel facilities includes a 24 hour front desk, concierge, 24 hour room service, one restaurant and a bar that features a flat screen television playing sports, a business centre, meeting rooms, banquet rooms and spacious public areas. The hotels cater for predominantly corporate travellers, however, leisure guests were also an important part of the business, especially on weekends. When undertaking the research each of the hotels gave an impression of charm and sophistication and, while the staff appearance matched the hotel image, they also appeared to be friendly and sincere.

The interview transcripts also revealed key words that help to describe the hotel group image and brand personality. The interviewees used words such as polite, formal, upmarket, and professional to describe their expectations of employee behaviour, while their appearance is required to be "impeccably groomed" as one manager described it. Moreover, it was thought that the hotel was a "very professional sort of environment" that could be seen as "quite stuffy". These expressions, when compared to Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale (see Table 2.3), provide an image of the hotel brand as sophisticated (upper-class), competent (reliable and corporate) and sincere (friendly and honest).

4.3 Operating Environment

The operating environment refers to the setting the organisation operates in and resources that are available to the organisation.

4.3.1 Labour Market

> *[Is there a problem employing staff with the required skills?] Helen: Employing staff full stop!*

The labour market concerns the availability of employees to meet the needs of the organisation (Rudman, 1999). Two reports, the Draft New Zealand Tourism Strategy to 2015, and the Hospitality Standards Institute Liaise Report 2007, highlight an increasing shortage of skilled labour as being a significant issue for the hospitality industry (HSI, 2007; NZTS, 2007). Many of the interviewees also commented on difficulties concerning staff recruitment and especially the recruitment of staff with the required skills:

> *Glenda: The level of employee interpersonal skills is quite varied at the moment to be honest and everybody is so different that is coming through, particularly through our doors, and we need to sharpen up their skills or our expectations in this particular establishment, but it is also enabling them to get the confidence in their roles, because the skill level is quite low and sometimes we have to take that leap of faith.*

> *Glenda: ... we have a lot of young personnel who have come straight out of high school particularly in the food and beverage outlets, so they are green and quite young so they don't have a huge amount of life experience or experience with such a variety of people as well.*

> *Kathy: I will try to look for the right person but sometimes you just go with the best from what is there, unfortunately, it is very hard to find the complete package, it is quite difficult.*

> *Helen: The people who do keep going are the people who have the passion for the industry and they are a dying breed. I do not know [what is going to happen] because it is not getting better, it is getting worse.*

The tight labour market and staff shortages were of considerable concern to many of the managers interviewed:

> *Kim: It is very difficult finding new staff at the moment. We have four receptionists to cover 28 shifts.*

> *Helen: I think it is the labour market in general, you know, and the right people are out there but we are competing against a lot better paying industries, as you know, a lot more exciting industries, even within the hospitality industry.*

> *Alison: Sometimes it is difficult to find customer service staff, we get periods where we get a few applicants and others where we would not get very many at all.*

> *Helen: I don't know if that is why they do not tackle them [staff performance issues], I think the reason that they are not tackled is, "how the hell am I going to replace this person", [...] I think the biggest thing is that there is nobody else to replace them, so I want them to stay otherwise I am going to be [short staffed].*

To help overcome recruitment issues caused by the tight labour market there has been an increase in the number of international staff employed for customer service positions:

> *Kim: There are international employees, because we just can't get enough local employees.*

> *Alison: At the moment a lot of our food and beverage attendants, for example, our waiters and waitresses, do come from other countries and*

> *a lot of them are on a six month (sic) contract, or others are on the extended contracts and have possibly to extend. They are very good employees because they are so willing to learn, they have chosen hospitality for their career already and are here to work and to experience everything that hospitality has offer.*

> *Jill: The challenge we have is basically the same as all hotels which are staff that we are getting through are either very young and we have a lot of international staff, a lot of Asian staff, the challenge there is the different cultures basically so you have to teach them how to be 'Kiwi', how to interact with the customers and relax and be friendly with them…*

Staff shortages and difficulties with attracting employees with the desired skills were also attributed to the nature of the hospitality industry and the hotel sector in particular, as the next comment illustrates:

> *Helen: … and you wanted a part-time job, are you going to come and work in a hotel restaurant where you spend a lot of time polishing cutlery, resetting tables and cleaning and so on, and you have to be very impeccably groomed […] I guess, it is a very professional sort of environment, or would you go and work in 'Wogamama' or a funky little café somewhere, where you can have your nose piercing in, and you can show your belly button, and you can relax and have fun and you can just cruise into work and do your thing, and then go off, and you get paid more. You know, that is the sort of thing that we battling against. Hotels are perceived to be, and probably are to a certain extent quite stuffy, so that people, the personalities that we want in here, probably are not going to be attracted to us. The outgoing, easy-going, sort of people, but then the problem is, when you have the people that are too easy-going, you are constantly working with them to be professional.*

The low pay rates mentioned in the above extract were seen as a significant factor concerning the recruitment and retention of skilled employees.

> *Mark: I have always told my staff if you are in it to make the money you are not going to be happy and in a year's time you are going to be thinking "I don't get paid enough for this" it is a stressful job you are dealing with people all the time. I am a strong believer that if you paid your staff a little bit more your retention is a lot better, turnover in hospitality is huge.*

There was a general perception that new employees, especially those entering the labour market, needed to lower their expectations of the reward gained for effort. It was believed that an employee needed to invest first in the job to prove their ability and commitment.

> *Mark: The number-one skill that they are lacking is probably patience, and in understanding of the workforce, for example, that you work and you need to prove yourself to be rewarded, not expect to be rewarded, I like to call it reality.*

Overall, it was apparent that there is both a shortage of employees in general and especially employees with the desired skills. There was a belief that the formal hotel working environment and restriction placed on employee behaviour to conform to expectations may be seen by employees as dull and thus making hotel work unattractive.

4.3.2 Hotel Brand

Communicating to employees the hotel brand requirements and expectations that are created by the brand is important to the organisation as evident in the following interview extracts:

> *Glenda: Each brand has different customer service training that is tailored for the brand so the [brand 1], the [brand 2], and the [brand 3] hotels will have different customer service training. We have tailored it to suit the brand and what we want the brand to be about.*

> *Alison: [our brand] has certain brand standards that need to be exactly the same all around the world and that is something that we certainly strive towards and I feel that we do this fairly well.*

There was an underlying assumption that the level of personal service is determined by the price paid for the product. Managers felt that customers paid a premium price for the brand and that, in return, customers expect professional service, or perhaps even servitude.

> *Rachel: ...upmarket, you pay a decent rate to stay, customers have a certain expectation, they want to have a little more of a personal touch, to have help with their baggage, our staff to be professional, [...] Staff appearance has to be professional and tidy nicely groomed, to be proud of themselves.*

It is also apparent that within the parameters of the brand there is some flexibility to tailor guest service to the local market. The interviews provided some evidence that the type of relationship and levels of formality or familiarity required in the customer service interaction was being examined.

> *Helen: I think that one of the challenges is identifying what we actually want in terms of guest service. So what we feel is appropriate, and what is important, is it important that people refer to the guests as Sir*

and Madam, is that what we want? Or do we want them to be able to be relaxed and a little bit more informal.

Comments reveal that at times management had tested the parameters of the brand by trialling employees with more outgoing personalities. Although some customers responded well to the different style of customer service, there was evidence that when the personality of the staff member did not match the image of the brand it resulted in expectations not being meet. These issues are highlighted in the following account:

> *Helen: ... a good example is, umm… a girl that we employed for the bar last year, who came in with stripy hair and piercing all over her face and so on, but a great personality, we talked about it for quite a while before we decided to employ her because she had the personality, [...], we wanted a female behind the bar to engage with our, you know, middle age corporate male guests, which is the majority of our guests, and who also had the strength to, sort of not let them go too far and that kind of thing. So she had all of that, but we knew she was going to be… difficult to manage. So do we, don't be, do we, don't we, we employed her. People loved her, but then some people hated her, and the highest number of negative comments about her, about her language being inappropriate and so on, came from our own management staff, not from the guests, and that was quite interesting because, you know, she was, she was cheeky, she was quite rude, and she said some of the stupidest things sometimes, you know, our regional general manager for the country came in and ordered a coffee and she said, "Oh can you have something else, I don't like making coffee."*

The above extract suggests that there may be no clearly defined image of the hotel brand available to managers or employees. While the interviewees used similar terms to describe the image of the hotel and the required behaviour of employees, a cohesive, all encompassing definition of the brand is not provided by any one interviewee. However, a compilation of the phrases used by the interviewees to describe expected customer service interactions, the hotel product, and employee behaviour, provided when compared with Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale, perhaps, the best indication of the brand image, (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Comparison of Brand Personality and Hotel Group Brand Image

Brand Personality Traits Aaker (1997)	Interviewees' descriptions of brand image
Sincerity	
• Honest	
• Sincere	Polite
• Friendly	Friendly
Excitement	
• Daring	
• Trendy	
• Cool	
• Unique	
Competence	
• Reliable	Consistency
• Corporate	Corporate
• Confident	Confident
Sophistication	
• Upper class	Upmarket
• Good looking	Well groomed staff
• Smooth	Professional staff appearance
Ruggedness	
• Outdoorsy	
• Tough	
• Alpine	

This comparison reveals that the hotel group's image is correlated with the brand personality traits of Sincerity, Competence, and Sophistication. In contrast, the findings provided no evidence of employee or brand image characteristics that could be correlated to the brand personality traits of Excitement or Ruggedness.

4.3.3 Customer Service Skills

It is clear that customer service skills, including interpersonal capabilities, are an essential aspect of hotel work. Nevertheless, there is an underlying belief that these qualities should be intrinsic in people with the right personality. On the one hand, the interviewees were aware of the complexity of skills and capabilities required to carry out commercial interpersonal interactions, yet it was recognised that these skills are often not valued by management or in the wider New Zealand hospitality culture. Not surprisingly, this lack of value for these skills results in a belief that even the employees do not see interpersonal/social skills as a talent or capability worthy of recognition:

> *Helen: I guess there is a certain school of thought that thinks all of this should still come naturally, and it comes down to recruiting the right people, and I guess, one of the challenges is the fact that we don't actually have the luxury of recruiting the right people, we need to work with what we've got, and if we don't actually do something about it, then we are not going to see any change or improvement at all.*

> *Jill: Everybody seems to undervalue the customer service staff from the customers to the employees themselves. It is a culture and that's also why we struggle to get the right staff in New Zealand because you get people who don't see it as a profession, they perhaps do it for a little while because they can't think of something else to do.*

This perceived intrinsic nature of customer service skills was also captured in the belief that friendly and caring social interaction cannot be taught. For example:

> *Kim: ... we cannot train them to be able to interact with the guests, their personality their smiling, the working shift work, and that's what can be really hard to find. [...] they may know how to do everything in terms of the checklist, but if they don't have any real personality, they can't interact with anyone and that is a really hard thing to find.*

Managers' comments also revealed an expectation that people who have a customer service orientation will obtain satisfaction from pleasing customers. This suggests that part of the reward for carrying out customer service is based on personal satisfaction in pleasing others:

> *Mark: You are looking for staff who feel satisfied when the guest is happy. It makes them feel good that they have done something for somebody else, I think that is what we need more of and that is what we are looking for, and they are hard to find and hard to keep.*

On the other hand, it was recognised that successful customer service requires the use of a complex range of skills:

> *Jill: Customer service skills are not easy skills to learn, it is a very difficult skill. Customer service staff are underrated a lot. For instance to be a waiter it's not just customer service, they have a lot of organisation to do and be able to think on their feet, you have to know the customers, and you have to think fast and move fast to be at the top end of customer service to be very professional, you have to be highly skilled.*

The interviews revealed that customer service skills required by the hotels are very similar to those outlined in the customer service literature (see Table 2.1 Typologies of Customer Service Skills and Competencies, Chapter Two). These similarities are also evident when a comparison is made between the required skills discussed by the interviewees and the four personality dimensions of,

extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness, (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Comparison of Customer Service and Personality Traits

Personality traits	Customer service traits from research findings
Extraversion	
• People-oriented	• People-oriented "people-people"
• Outgoing	• Outgoing
• Friendly	• Friendly
• Sociable	• People skills
• Energetic	• Talkative 'schmoozer'
Agreeableness	
• Helping others	• Customer focus
• Sympathetic	• Socially adaptable
• Generous	• Social skills
• Kind	• Cultural awareness
• Cooperation	• Great smile
• Sociability	• Appropriate language
Emotional stability	
• Composed	• Self-confident
• Self-confident	• Easy going sort of people
• Calm	
• Self-reliant	
Conscientiousness	
• Dependable	• Mature
• Thorough	• Professional attitude
• Efficient	
• Responsible	
• Self-controlled	
• Reliable	
• Follow rules	
• Respect social protocol	
• Follow up	

The desire for employees with, primarily, extraversion and agreeableness traits were also apparent in the interviewees' desire for employees with good communication skills and "social skills", which includes the ability to be able to tailor interaction styles to, and know when each style is appropriate for, different customers. However, managers recognised that these skills are not easy to find and that they are more often found in people who have maturity:

> Helen: ... staff to be able to read the guests, and to adapt their service style to that particular person, and to what is going to be appropriate, but I think that is the challenge in terms of recruitment, it is the people with maturity and the life experience and the cultural awareness.

These findings highlight the belief that the ability to perform customer service interactions is a talent that people either have or lack. It is generally thought that if people with an outgoing and sociable personality were hired then friendly caring human interaction should come naturally. Moreover, it is believed that the social awareness required to carry out customer service interactions comes from maturity, indicating that it may develop over time. This is in keeping with the perception held by some interviewees that customer service abilities cannot be taught in the hotel environment. Even though finding people with these capabilities is difficult, there remains a general perception that the capabilities required for customer service interactions are undervalued.

4.4 Control

The following formal and informal control findings sections correlate with the research questions illustrated in Table 4.1.

Having confidence in employees and believing that they are going to behave in a manner that matches organisational goals and enhances the image of the organisation is central to management control. The recruitment of people who are able to reach the required standards is critical to achieving this objective. Moreover, achieving organisational goals requires clear communication of expectations to employees, and the management of employee work to maintain consistent effort in implementing organisational strategy (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007).

4.5 Formal Control

Formal controls are written, management-initiated measures that communicate expectations and influence employees to behave in ways that support organisational and management goals (Jaworski, 1988).

4.5.1 Input Control

Input controls are activities taken by the organisation and management prior to carrying out a task. In this section input controls include; job advertisements, job descriptions, employee induction, and training.

4.5.1.1 Job Advertisement

A review of ten job advertisements for the Hotel Group's customer service staff, including cashier, concierge, porter, receptionist, and food and beverage attendant positions, revealed that a number of required interpersonal and emotional attributes were communicated to potential employees (see Table 4.4). While people skills, customer focus, great smile, positive approach, communication skills, presentation, and customer service skills were listed as desirable traits, these attributes were not consistently listed for all customer service roles. Furthermore, the advertisements included a small photo of a smiling 'professional' person, providing implicit messages of professionalism and friendliness. Nevertheless, it was surprising that the job advertisements for the roles of Cashier, Concierge, and Receptionist communicated requirement for only one interpersonal or emotional attribute. Moreover, the advertisement for the role of Porter did not suggest any customer service attributes were required. Perhaps it is assumed that the people applying for these roles have a good understanding of the job requirements or that people should naturally have these skills; however, within these advertisements there is no clear consistent message of the customer service skills required for the positions.

Table 4.4: Required Skills within Job Advertisement

Interpersonal and emotional attributes sought within job advertisement	F&B supervisor	F&B attendant	Cashier	Concierge	Porter	Receptionist
Excellent people skills	X					
Great smile and passion for serving customers		X				
Customer focused		X				
Positive approach to service		X				
Mature and professional attitude		X				
Excellent communication skills		X	X			
Excellent presentation & grooming		X				
Excellent customer service skills	X	X		X		X

4.5.1.2 Job Description

A summary of job descriptions for the positions of receptionist, porter, and food and beverage attendant (Hotel Group, 2007) revealed that guidelines outlined in the 'Brand Standards Manual' and 'Departmental Service Procedures Manual' should be followed. Furthermore, the 'Key Tasks' required of a customer service representative included the provision of efficient, friendly and professional service to all guests and that staff should take initiative to ensure that interactions with customers are positive and productive and that a positive problem solving approach is adopted. Unfortunately, the Brand Standards Manual is not available to view by employees prior to the commencement of employment.

4.5.1.3 Employee Induction

All new employees attend a formal induction training session run by the Hotel Human Resource Department. According to one manager, the induction training has recently been changed from the delivery of general workplace functional information such as procedures and policies, to incorporate customer service information:

> *Tracy ...standard induction training consists of four modules, this also includes training on the company philosophy and it all relates back to service, the way we treat our customers and our internal customers.*

According to the interviewee, it was decided to include customer service training in the induction sessions as it was found that employees were not receiving this information until formal customer service training was scheduled, which could result in a two to three month delay. However, as formal induction is also scheduled for one day in each month it may also result in employees commencing work without any formal customer service instruction.

4.5.1.4 Training

Training of customer service employees involves both technical and interactive quality (Grönroos, 1984). Technical quality refers to the tangible aspect of what the customer receives, whereas interactive quality refers to the intangible aspects of how the customer receives and interacts with the product and service. A common belief among the interviewees was that the technical skills required by customer service staff could be easily taught.

> *Kim: ... we can train [technical skills] anyone how to do the job.*

> *Helen: ... the technical side of the job is easy to teach people and it is easy to manage as well because it is fairly clear that you did this or you didn't, and the interpersonal side is where we have the opportunity to provide excellent service as opposed to good service.*

While the technical aspects of customer service are seen as easily taught, they remain very important to the overall customer service experience. As indicated by the following interview responses, without a good understanding of the technical requirements and the skills to carry out these activities, employees lack the confidence to deliver functional aspects of service:

> *Glenda: ... it is also enabling them to get the confidence in their roles, because the skill level is quite low and sometimes we have to take that leap of faith that they will pick the technical aspects up really quickly and sometimes if they don't have that skill their confidence factor is not that great, so their interpersonal skills with our guests can be a bit nerve racking for them and you can sort of see that nervous factor when they are dealing with the guests because there are still trying to learn their job and be confident in the product and be confident that they're not going to make any mistakes.*

It was also generally believed that customer service and interpersonal competencies could be developed within most employees if they had the right personality to begin with:

> *Mark: Customer service skills can be developed, most definitely, some people have a knack for it and others understand it and it is something that they can work on slowly. Developing their skills by giving them different techniques that they can work on, giving them the tools to use and putting them on training courses, for example, dealing with conflict, customer satisfaction, we run all these courses internally, giving them values that the hotel is wanting to focus on.*

> *Kathy: It [customer service skills] can absolutely, be developed, it is easier when it is in the personality because it makes it more natural, you don't want people to be fake either, you want them to mean it, you can tell straight away when somebody is fake and they don't mean it, like a fake smile. So I think it can, up to a certain way it can probably be developed, like maybe as an etiquette that's how you should behave or when guests walk in the door this is what you should do, but I think mostly it would be personality.*

> *Kate: For sure, for sure, I think if you have got it [social skills] then you can develop it. Some people just aren't people-people, and you cannot force them either.*

However, the belief that the required functional aspects of customer service could not be taught if employees did not have a happy disposition or the desired personality was clearly stated by some interviewees:

> *Glenda: I can't teach people to smile, I just can't.*

> *Kim: … we cannot train them to be able to interact with the guests, their personality, their smiling, the working shift work, and that's what can be really hard to find.*

> *Jill: The staff do not get any formal training as to the language they should use, it is by example and by getting the right people, it is by getting people who are relaxed and professional.*

> *Rachel: I look for the personality first, you can train people to do things, if you don't have the right personality to give good customer service it probably is not ever going to come.*

4.5.1.5 Types of Training

Interviews revealed that a considerable amount of training referred to as 'on the job training' is received during the course of the employees' working day, however, a number of formal training sessions are provided for employees within the first three months of employment. It was stated that formal training sessions consist of:

- Induction day training
- Occupational health and safety training
- Employment law course
- Customer service training
- Host responsibility training for food and beverage customer service staff

Of these formal training sessions, only the customer service training provides employees with information on functional intangible aspects of service. A document analysis of the four customer service training PowerPoint presentations revealed that employees are introduced to, and discuss a number of customer service and interpersonal competencies (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Summary of Hotel Group, Customer Service Training Content

- Negative and positive attitudes
- The difference between being reactive and proactive
- Taking control over choices and responses
- Developing personal influence
- Overcoming everyday problems
- Understanding and identifying customer needs
- Identifying the difference between procedures and personal interactions
- The importance of both procedures and personal interactions in customer service
- Anticipating and strategies for responding to customer needs
- Market segments of the hotel and the needs of customers within each market segment
- Communication styles
    - Body language
    - Tone of voice
    - Choice of words
    - Attitudes
- Appearance and presentation
- Listening skills
- Empathy
- Preconceptions and different perceptions of customers and individuals
- Dealing with upset customers
- Problem solving

Source: Customer Service Training (n.d.)

The central themes communicated by formal customer service training are that employees are important in providing good customer experiences and that this is achieved by showing empathy, being welcoming through smiling, eye contact and providing customer recognition. Each of the training sessions emphasises the importance of eye contact and smiling:

> *Glenda: ... we look at an area of reacting versus responding to customers…, teaching them to look at each situation as much as possible to see how they could have done things differently or if they would have liked to have done things differently. Staff have to be able to change their delivery style to the wide variety of customers that we have staying in the hotel.*

One interviewee thought that while formal customer service training is provided, it is reasonably general in nature and is limited to a one day session:

> *Alan: I received two training… [sessions], very good ideas but not detailed enough, we should teach, how do you talk to the customer and even how do you deal with your colleagues, how do you deal with your managers, it must be detailed.*

Furthermore, though it was unavoidable, concern was expressed that training was only provided on a periodic basis resulting in many staff beginning work before attending a training session and with only limited skills and instruction. This is highlighted in the following comment concerning difficult situations that employees face:

> *Glenda: ... being thrown in the deep end, because quite often we see people in the hotel who start and you know they don't get two weeks solid training like other industries might be able to do, so being thrown in the busy deep end and having to learn things quite quickly […] if you're the right person then you know how to ask questions and recognise mistakes and things like that, it is not a problem, but unfortunately some of the really good staff can't do that and so we might lose them a bit too early on in the piece. It is really hard when they are on the floor for the first time on their own and the risk of spilling the drink. It is more the daunting factor [being overwhelmed] that is quite difficult for the front-line staff.*

As a result of the limited access to formal training and the general nature of that training, a significant amount of instruction is conducted during an employees' working day, evident in the following interviewee responses:

> *Jill: A lot of training is on the job and that's when I rely on my supervisors to actually be there with the staff and to be developing them […] I expect them to be helping them the whole time and pointing out what's happening with each table pointing out the little things because it's not just talking to the customer, it's picking up those little signals of body language and again as culturally something that you and I might pick up a mile away others might not pick up at all.*

> *Kate: ... because there are people coming and going all the time and you are always training someone new.*

> *Rachel: We spend a lot of time on training, a lot of time on training, a lot of time on communicating things, we have handover at the end of every shift, we have communication logs, we have a daily operations sheet so we know what is going on, we know who the VIP's are, what groups are arriving.*

> *Hamish: We spent a bit of time training her and how to address the table, go through the menu, go through the sequence of service […] We don't give them a script as such, because ultimately that becomes very robotic and that pulls away from their natural personality. What we give them is suggestions, obviously, the major one is smiling.*

Furthermore, the low skill levels of some staff combined with limited training opportunities and the significant amount of on the job training may result in customers participating in the training of employees as the following comment indicates:

> *Alison: Sometimes when staff come in they are a little bit apprehensive about their level of English, they don't feel confident. Then in most cases we would start them on breakfast […] they would work on the buffet and they would talk and schmooze with the customers which is then improving their English […] and improving all the general duties and finding out the way our business works and the running of their department and when, once they get a little but more confident with themselves and their English, then they will progress on to dinners. The dinners are full a la carte service so therefore, they will need to speak with the guests constantly.*

There was also an expectation that employees should have an intrinsic ability to carry out social interaction with customers while providing the required service:

> *Alison: ... in our customer service programme we give employees a little bit of training on what they should say, but also the people that come into this environment, to a certain extent, it should come naturally to them. […] But in regards to just schmoozing, no, it is up to the individual it is what they want to say and we encourage them to bring their personality into it and generally just go out there and talk to the guests, there is definitely no specifics about what they have to talk about.*

As 'on the job training' of new staff that have generally low skills and confidence is ongoing, there is a need for well trained and capable supervisory and management staff to provide clear instruction and direction to new employees. However, the data indicates that further training of management is required to ensure successful training of front line customer service employees. For example:

> *Glenda: The key area is definitely the middle management and that is what we are focusing on… this is possibly where we are not as strong as we need to be at the moment, in that middle management. There could be more training in this area, and that is something that we are currently working on at the moment.*

It is also apparent in the following remark that there is a need to improve the training of middle managers:

> *Helen: There seems to be a little bit of the opinion sometimes that, Oh well, we will just send somebody for training and that will fix the issue, and they go and listen to me talk to them for a day or half a day and they should come back and be perfect, and again coming back to the supervisors and managers, I believe that it is more about coaching and performance management and measurement, to back up the training,*

This comment suggests a potential for middle managers to be hesitant or to not participate in providing interpersonal competency training to employees due to their own lack of knowledge and/or the subjective nature of social skill training. For example:

> *Helen: Well that is what we are working on at the moment and it is not a quick fix, I think fundamentally a lot of the managers don't actually believe that [value of caring customer service], because they are technical managers and, you know, that is the role that they do.*

> *Glenda: There is a really big gap for them [employees] to step up to the next role and we can only do that by developing them in the areas such as about social skills, social dealings, interpersonal skills, it is the people orientated skills whether they are managing the guests or the staff. It is very difficult to say to employees you need to improve on people management skills.*

This implies that unless management have the required skills, desire and ability to communicate service requirements to their staff then there is a potential for 'on the job training' to be ineffective. The ability and desire to train staff is also compounded by the role conflict that managers experience. Furthermore, the perception that while management may acknowledge the importance of training and have the desire to train staff, there is little accountability to ensure rhetoric is consistently put into action. This view is expressed in the following comment:

> *[Regarding training of employees] Helen: The reason for that is because it was not…, the managers were not accountable. They just didn't do it, nothing happened.*

Reasons for this lack of action are alluded to, though the tension between multiple task requirements appeared to be a significant contributor to this issue.

4.5.1.6 Role Conflict

Role conflict is apparent when incongruity exists between the roles and expectations within an employee's job description, resulting in the sacrifice of one role for the benefit of the other (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Yagil, 2002). The interviewees highlighted a tension between the efficient completion of the technical aspects of the job and providing caring attentive service. Moreover, the interviewees suggested that there is a consistent pressure to minimise wage costs at the expense of personalised and attentive customer service.

For example:

> Alan: They have had a focus on the technical aspects, which is great because they get that right but, we need to draw our staff out of their little shells and get them to start talking with the guests.

> Kim: Sometimes the employees don't understand or see the importance of it, or they get focused on checklist, checklist, checklist, it must be completed, so that is where their focus is instead of realising that you can mix up both and still get all your work done and still have that interaction is well.

> Helen: I had a conversation with one of our food and beverage supervisors last week who was getting very frustrated because he was saying, "I am getting two messages and I cannot make them work together, on one hand I am getting told make sure that you have staff in the areas to look after the guests at all times, don't have staff out the back polishing cutlery and so on, they need to be visible they need to be in the bar etc, etc. On the other hand, I am getting told your wage cost is too high and you need to cut down your hours", and he said [the senior food and beverage supervisor], "I do not know how to make those two things work together", and ultimately, I think at the end of the day the wage cost thing becomes the stronger message, and while that is the case, I think I do not want to sound too pessimistic, however, it is almost like we are fighting a battle we are never going to win, because at the end of the day if the wage cost is the most important thing then you know it does make it really hard, particularly for the supervisors, they are the ones that get caught in the middle because they are getting told they are expected to be all things to all people, I suppose, and it is really hard for them.

> Helen: ... you know, the food and beverage supervisor is going to be evaluated on how well they manage the wage cost on a shift, you know, how they manage the team during their shift and so on, there is not a huge focus on the service aspect of it really.

The underlying message in the interview transcripts indicates managers are primarily evaluated on how well they managed operational costs and the completion of tasks by employees. While the importance of individual interaction with customers by employees was discussed, the interviewees gave the overall impression that cost and task management would always take priority. The customer service employees are encouraged to spend time with customers, to be friendly and caring, yet it is apparent that there is stronger, more urgent and consistent message emphasising efficiency and task completion to minimise wage costs.

4.5.2 Process Control

Process control is undertaken when the organisation seeks to influence the activity or behaviour of employees during the normal working day. It involves monitoring employee actions and behaviour, comparing these actions and behaviours to standards, and the correction of actions and behaviour when required (Jaworski, 1988).

The data reveals that process control is essential to the management of customer service interactions. Process control is applied when the organisation seeks to influence the behaviour and activities of employees (Jaworski, 1988). The primary process control mechanisms used by the hotel group include standard operating procedures, coaching and mentoring, and empowerment strategies.

4.5.2.1 Standard Operating Procedures

Standard operating procedures are often applied to the tangible aspects of service, for example the process of setting a dining room table, however, standard procedures are also seen as important control measures that guide employees to achieve minimum standards, for example:

> *Glenda: I am a strong believer that we need to have the standard procedures there as a resource.*

> *Glenda: There are certainly standard phrases that they can fall back on however, we encourage them not to necessarily use a standard phrase, however, there is information that they must obtain like finding out what their room number was, and their credit card details, did they use anything from the mini-bar, these are things that employees must find out. We try to give them flexibility so long as they are getting the*

information but rather than making guests feel like another head that has just come through we try to make them feel like individuals.

Rachel: There are a lot of standards and procedures of basic things we need to do, so that is like a minimum, above that is what we do to make it a great stay.

Kathy: ... so we do allow employees to bring in their own personality and own style in there however, we do have the standard procedures for reception that need to be followed, for example helping guests with luggage.

Analysis of the Hotel Group's documented brand standards further reinforces the use of these standard operating procedures that underpin the service experience (Hotel Brand Standards). The brand standards make a distinction between facilities 'technical' and service 'interactional' standards. Within this context, facilities, or technical aspect, refer to the facilities, equipment and tools and the manner in which employees use and interact with them. For example, this may be seen in the way a food and beverage attendant sets a dining table, carries and delivers plates and pours wine. The service, or the interactional aspect, relates to the employee's attitude and the way they behave and interact with customers. The service standards are evident in the following extract from the brand standards (Brand Standards, n.d.) for answering a telephone call:

- Incoming calls are answered within three rings
- Calls are clearly answered, for example:
  a. Thank you for calling (insert name of hotel). This is (insert name of person)
  b. Voice conveys a warm and friendly tone
  c. Staff listen attentively and promptly respond to all requests in a friendly and helpful manner
- Always request permission to place the customer on hold

There is evidence within the interview transcripts of opposing views on the use of standard operating processes. This is evident in the following interview excerpt:

> *Helen: ... that is the reason for, I guess, us looking for… some robust actual targets and actions, rather than, we can sit around and talk about it for a very long time, and absolutely nothing happens, and I guess, myself personally, I believe in systems, and I believe in performance management, and I believe in measurement…, my general manager on the other hand, just about had a heart attack when I said "we actually need more systems not less."*

The underlying implication in this excerpt is that some management believe systems and standards are essential for achieving consistent service quality, whereas, others believe standard operating procedures may not be the answer to service quality. The rational for standardisation and process control is emphasised in the following comment that presents the benefits of standard procedures as a support and platform from which employees can provide customer satisfaction:

> *Helen: ... one example could be a situation where a guest comes to check in and they don't have a reservation, now if we had a really good system and we trained people on exactly what steps to follow in that situation, then they can follow those steps and they can deal with that without letting the guest in front of them know that there is not a reservation.*

Countering this argument is the recognition that while procedures may provide strong benefits, human nature is such that often they are not followed: For example:

> *Helen: ... every hotel has standard operating procedures, what happens is that they get written, they get put on somebody's shelf, and they get dusty, and forgotten about, and then a couple of years later there is a new person who comes along and they rewrite them and they make them all pretty and they sit on the shelf.*

4.5.2.2 Coaching and Mentoring

The importance of coaching and mentoring customer service staff to communicate, develop, and train for the desired skills was evident within many of the respondents' comments. For example:

> *Hamish: It is vital the restaurant manager actually spends a lot of time developing the younger members of the team…*

> *Kim: … but requires that constant monitoring, and developing, and pushing, and mentoring and saying ok, this is what you can say, but this is how perhaps you can re-word it and rephrase it, to then come across for a corporate interaction.*

> *Jill: … making sure you have got the right supervisors and the right manager there on the floor because if you don't have that team right, then the staff are never going to follow their example, so it's leading from the front as a supervisor, leading by example being there with the customers and actually encouraging the staff. You can't hold a classroom and say this is how to speak to a customer and really just encourage them to relax. If they can see that you are doing out there doing it, they feel a lot more comfortable as well.*

> *Kathy: There are many times the staff are not going to deal with situations as I would like them to, I think, wow you could have dealt with this much easier, why make such a big deal out of it if you can fix it so easily. If this happens generally I would sit with them, or take them aside afterwards and ask them why they handled in such a way and asked them to think about what they could have done differently, so that next time they might try a different approach.*

> *Helen: I believe that it is more about coaching and performance management and measurement, to back up the training, and that's, I think, where we lack a little bit as well. It just keeps coming back to the managers, and to the managers accepting responsibility that, that is part of their role as managers and to spend the time in developing that in their team.*

> *Tracy: Customer service skills can be developed often through their supervisors or manager helping them along the way showing them a better way sometimes or just saying "why don't you try saying it like this next time.*

> *Alison: I may say to the staff "right this is what we are going to do, this is the language we are going to use, so if you would like to listen to me, I will give you an example" and I would go and serve the first customer and they would listen in.*

In conjunction with management conducting coaching and mentoring, respondents also identified peer mentoring as an important influence on customer service interactions. Peer mentors may be assigned by management or self selected by the employees as the following examples illustrate:

> Tracy: ... people will pick up how others around them work as well, they will find someone that they like who is their mentor and they will follow them and pick up on what they do and pick up on their style for themselves.

> Alison: For the rest of the time we would use what we call a buddy system and they would follow either myself around or someone around and they would learn off that person, especially if they are being exposed to the industry for the first time, then what they are hearing will hopefully be impressed on them, so they will learn from us and that is the way that they will do it.

Furthermore, as one respondent indicated, the mentoring and coaching of staff by management and peers helps to develop a supportive team culture of shared learning:

> Hamish: I do like the fact that we are all human, we do make mistakes, let's learn from it and move on.

The training and development benefits of mentoring and coaching were also recognised by management, however, it did require considerable time and commitment from management as outlined in the following comment:

> Glenda: We have seen some developments in the social skills of employees but this is the result of some really strong management from the outlet managers and through some one-on-one mentoring.

Managers saw the importance of spending time on coaching and mentoring staff to improve performance and provide support. However, when the management enthusiasm for coaching and mentoring was further discussed with managers, a number of issues were identified. For example:

> Helen: It doesn't translate [leading by example]. And I think part of that is due to workload, part of that is due to, that conflict in priorities. It has been too easy for the managers to just say, "oh no, I haven't got time to do that [training]" and they get away with it, there is no consequence. And an example of that would be our… on-the-job training linked into national qualifications, now that was implemented six years ago, and it just never worked.

What became apparent throughout the interviews was that those interviewed are well versed in the rhetoric of 'best management practice'. Although, it was obvious that consistent implementation of these strategies is not as easily obtained. As previously discussed, the demanding workload and role conflict experienced by managers may prevent their best intentions from being consistently practiced. Moreover, the subjectivity of interpersonal interaction and difficulty of telling staff that they need to improve their social skills may provide barriers to carrying through with this objective.

4.5.2.3 Empowerment

The intangible and subjective characteristics of customer service make it difficult to control every variable, customer preference and employee/customer interaction. Analysis of the interview data suggests that management uses employee empowerment strategies to manage service interactions.

> *Glenda: we want to empower employees as much as we can to deal with it, but also we have a supervisory team there to take on that responsibility.*

> *Hamish: We don't give them a script as such, because ultimately that becomes very robotic and that pulls away from their natural personality. What we give them is suggestions, obviously, the major one is smiling, we find that it is an issue sometimes with people just not having that comfort to smile, it is quite sad really, but we give them suggestions.*

> *Alison: ...in regards to just schmoozing, no, it is up to the individual it is what they want to say and we encourage them to bring their personality in to it and generally just go out there and talk to the guests, there is definitely no specifics about what they have to talk about.*

> *Helen: ... you want, I guess, the staff to be able to read the guests, and to adapt their service style to that particular person, and to what are going to be appropriate.*

The above managerial intentions are closely related to Lashley's, (1996, p. 337) classification of empowerment as "empowering through participation". Empowering through participation is characterised by enabling employees to meet unpredictable service interactions through limited authority to make independent decisions. The authority is limited in that there is a need for empowered decisions to be educated, restricted and monitored by management.

For example:

> *Helen: ... there is no point, also, in empowering people if you have not given them the knowledge, or if they don't have the skill to be able to do anything with that empowerment, they are just going to flounder, and then the manager is going to get frustrated because they are going to say "well I have empowered them and they are still not doing it, what is wrong.*

> *Glenda: I like to see it balanced out, as long as the freedom side of it is managed and the supervisor who was on the floor at that time is really keeping their finger on the pulse and is knowing what is going on, and if the employee becomes too free that the supervisor pulls that back in that they manage the situation. I have seen some great staff come through that have been given that freedom but it needs to be given to the right people and managed effectively, because if it is not managed and the manager says, just go for it that's when everything falls apart.*

> *Glenda: What we say to the employee is that we are never going to override what you have said however, you know we will support you in that, but however, we may discuss it with you afterwards and suggest other ways that it could have been handled. It is important that we have limitations as to how much discretion the employees have because we don't want to be just giving out rooms for free, breakfast for free as ultimately that is not what it is about.*

Although empowerment strategies could be seen as undermining management control, in these instances it is clear that the decision making ability given to employees is limited and closely monitored. As management are unable to directly control every interaction, giving some responsibility for meeting customer demands to employees helps to overcome this issue and, therefore, empowering employees is a process that management engages in.

4.5.3   Output Control

Output control is a traditional management control method that measures the output of an employee against a specified standard (Jaworski, 1988). Analysis of the data suggests that there are four significant output controls used within the hotels in this study. These control measures have been coded as performance standards, output performance evaluation, correction and discipline, and rewards and recognition.

4.5.3.1 Performance Standards

The development of performance standards can assist in formalising training as well as establishing criteria for the measurement of employee performance (Ingram, 1997). Performance standards are closely linked to standard operating procedures as discussed previously. The standards include both technical and functional (service orientated) expectations. Technical standards may be seen as easily defined and objective in nature whereas the service orientated expectations are more difficult to define and are open to interpretation. Often within a service exchange there is a mix of both technical and functional interactions. It is apparent from analysis of the brand standards documentation and interview transcripts that performance standards are very important to the hotel corporation:

> *Tracy: Standardisation is very important within the hotel, from a company perspective it is very important, we get audited on it.*

Performance standards are clearly set out in the brand standards documentation and are communicated to employees through a variety of channels including:

Procedural Checklists; at or close to the work station:

> *[Commenting on reservations] Kate: They do a massive check list and it is a form, a format that you go through and you have to ask these questions in a certain order. […] there is a check list behind reception to be followed.*

The communication and reinforcement of rules at departmental meetings:

> *Kay: we have the two meter rule, which means that as soon as those doors open somebody has to look up and smile at the guest from two meters.*

The communication and reinforcement of rules through the documented brand standards, as the following extracts indicate:

- We make our customers feel immediately valued by extending a warm and friendly welcome on their arrival to the hotel
- A front office staff member is available to assist with luggage 24 hours
- Even during busy check-in-periods reception staff acknowledge every waiting guest with eye contact and a smile
- Luggage is delivered within a maximum time of 10 minutes following check in (Brand Standards, n.d.)

The expectations of management:

> *Alison: ... employees may have to switch on a smile if they are having a bad day.*

> *[Commenting on the ability to handle pressure] Glenda: ... you used to be to be able to quite clearly see that he was under a large amount of pressure.*

The implications of these expectations is that employees need to be able to mask their own feelings to present to the customer a friendly, composed, and capable demeanour. This message is also reinforced by the brand standards.

4.5.3.2 Output Performance Evaluation

Output performance assessment includes the following external monitoring initiatives:

- 'Reza-vision': assessment of hotel telephone reservation etiquette.

  Kate: "'Reza-vision' when you're taking reservations, which is very strictly monitored ..."

- 'Medallia': feedback solutions: provides assessment and feedback on customer service performance with recommended solutions to solve issues.
- Brand audits: formal assessment of hotel compliance to brand standards
- Mystery shopper reports: Assessment of the customer experience is conducted by anonymous guests who complete a standard assessment form:

  Helen: ... mystery shopper reports that show us the technical side is usually okay but the interpersonal side is where things can be improved.

In conjunction with an external assessment of standards the interviews identified a number of formal internal strategies used to evaluate employee and work group performance against the expected standards. For example:

Guest comment cards and feedback:

> *Glenda: We find that sharing the comment cards and the guest feedback is a very big tool [...] So they can see that if it is good feedback or horrendous feedback and then we can work out together what to do to improve.*

> *Kathy: A lot of our comment cards come through with staff name mentioned on it.*

Formal employee appraisals:

> *[Referring to employees] Kay: We do three-month appraisals ...*

> *[Referring to the effectiveness of appraisals] Helen: ... we are looking at formalising monthly catch ups, which [laughter] I think that might create at bit of a mutiny.*

Assessment of performance:

> *Jill: After about a month I do a practical service test [on new staff]. It's really an assessment as part of a development tool where I sit there and they come and serve me. We will look at the sequence of service and also look at those other extra little details. It's looking at not only how they carry the plate, but at how they can make that service better, I also look at how they manage the whole section.*

> *Mark: ... doing assessments, constantly giving them feedback.*

Senior management monitoring:

> *Bob: If he [the hotel manager] sees at the end of the month that the figures are all looking good, and complaints or comments is at a good ratio to the number of customers that we have done, then he is happy.*

Further to these formal evaluation measures, informal evaluation continues to build a profile of employees and work group competency and performance. For example:

Informal employee feedback based on observation:

> *Helen: ... our restaurant and bar manager went there [to another hotel] a while ago and she came back and said it was the worst experience she had ever had in her life, customer service was appalling, the staff in the restaurant were terribly groomed, really bad impression, and that is the sort of story that I hear.*

> *Glenda: ... you used to be to be able to quite clearly see that he was under a large amount of pressure.*

The findings indicate that technical aspects of service are evaluated extensively and primarily through formal measures, whereas the interactional service orientated aspects are assessed using more informal, observational and subjective measures. Nevertheless, the range of evaluation methods commented on by the interviewees suggests that a reasonably clear indication of employee and work group ability and performance is able to be gained. Yet, the weaknesses within the current evaluation strategies are evident in the following comments:

> *Helen: I think that with a more effective, and more stringent, and more integrated performance evaluation system we could actually really make quite a big impact on lot of areas, umm… and at the moment it is very much, "right you have to do our performance evaluation… Oh crap, sit down, rah, rah, rah, done".*

> *Helen: … if you look at the performance evaluations and what people are measured on, you know, the food and beverage supervisor is going to be evaluated on how well they manage the wage cost on a shift, you know, how they manage the team during their shift and so on, there is not a huge focus on the service aspect of it really.*

These comments suggest that the assessment of functional interactions and subjective employee performance may be taken less seriously by department managers and given less priority than the more objective assessment of technical tasks.

4.5.3.3 Correction and Discipline

> *Kate: You do make errors, but there's always going to be errors wherever there are people there are always errors, and there are always human errors.*

As the above comment suggests, face-to-face customer service in hospitality is a heterogeneous interaction between numbers of employees coming into contact with large numbers of customers (Nickson, Warhurst, Witz, & Cullen, 2001). Ultimately this work environment results in errors being made. Moreover, employees working within this environment are often young and inexperienced. They are being trained 'on the job', and developing and practicing their skills while performing complex and sophisticated interpersonal interactions with customers (Baum, 2006). It is not surprising then, that 100 percent customer satisfaction is not able to be achieved on a consistent basis. However, the Hotel Group takes discipline seriously as underperformance in customer service has a direct impact on the guest, as evident in the following comment:

> *Kathy: If I have two people at the desk and one person is not performing properly or is not that friendly, that means pretty much 50% of all the people who have checked out or checked in that day would have had a bad first impression, or last impression from our hotel, so we do take that very seriously.*

This section of the findings focuses on discipline in the context of actions taken to ensure consistent compliance with procedures, rules and expectations. The use of positive discipline to reinforce the appropriate performance and conduct of employees is commented on, followed by issues that have been raised concerning employee discipline. Finally, examples of negative or punitive discipline are presented.

Positive discipline is exercised when problems arise by seeking to resolve the issue through coaching and counselling. This approach is seen as educative and developmental (Miller, Walker, & Drummond, 2007). Examples from the interview data of positive discipline are:

> *Hamish: ... there are two ways of managing, you can manage with the carrot or the stick. I have always gone the way of the carrot rather than the stick.*
>
> *Mark: I am a strong believer that unless it is detrimental to the hotel there is no need to go down that constructive, as they call it disciplinary process. I believe you work them through it.*
>
> *Kay: One month ago we had a three-month appraisal and said, like, base skills you're doing a very good job, very thorough, but, you need to be developing your interaction you need to be smiling, and it is a hard thing to do, it does not come naturally for a lot of people. So we came up with some game plans...*
>
> *Alan: At the end of the day, everyone wants to do a good job, at least when they first start in the job they do, even if it is not their chosen career, job satisfaction comes from doing a job well. If you aren't given an opportunity to do that well, if you have insufficient training, you do not have the right equipment, you are understaffed, all those things, the person is going to go home and they are not going to be happy with the job that they did at work, they are going to start looking elsewhere.*

The above comments reflect the belief that employees are generally good, they want to be successful, and given the right environment, training and tools they are willing to work toward meeting expectations. This view was generally held and referred to by many of the interviewees. However, one interviewee raised a number of issues concerning a reluctance for managers to address performance related issues:

> *Helen: I think the reason they are not tackled is, "how the hell am I going to replace this person", as in it is better the devil we know than the devil we don't, I think that is probably the biggest one, another one is, I guess, a lack of management experience and confidence of, "I don't really know how to work with this person" or "I am scared to say this in case they leave straight away.*

> *Helen: … the biggest issue there is that the manager of that person avoids it, or does not have the skills to do it, or does not have the desire to do it… I think a lot of times it is the manager, not, for whatever reason, putting in the time and the effort that requires.*

What is interesting here is that while it has been previously recognised that underperforming staff have a direct influence on the customers' perception of quality, the above comments suggest that some managers may not be acting on all instances of underperformance. The reasons provided for this lack of management action are difficulty in finding replacement staff, inexperienced management, and management avoidance. While these reasons were based on the interviewees' speculation, they were a recurring theme within the interviews. This indecisive action and inconsistency in tolerated standards may send mixed messages to employees as to the expected and required performance standards. For example:

> *Helen: There are certainly a couple of people who know that, you know, they are getting away with a substandard performance.*

There is evidence that negative or punitive discipline action is used to ensure the desired standard of customer service is achieved as indicated by the following interview comments:

Removal of employee from offending situation:

> *Glenda: I have had somebody who has not coped well, particularly with dealing with complaints and caused us a lot of stress with the way that he did deal with that, and we have actually moved him in to a different department*

Using the initiation of the formal discipline process as a threat to motivate change within the employee:

> *Helen: … we sit down with people and say look, "you are coasting at the moment, these are the issues that we have and unless they are addressed we will be starting a disciplinary process and work improvement plan, you need to think about what you want to do."*

Initiation of the formal discipline process to remove an underperforming employee:

Kathy: You normally get some feedback on their performance, then sit with the employee and just go through the normal steps, perhaps give them a warning, or tell them first nicely if it happens again then we just go through a normal procedure, those are the type of people we just cannot have around because they bring the team down.

4.5.3.4 Rewards and Recognition

Mark: I have always told my staff if you are in it to make the money you are not going to be happy and in a year's time you are going to be thinking "I don't get paid enough for this.

The above comment reflects the widely believed perception, as discussed in the literature review, that hospitality does not provide significant financial reward to its employees. Rewards and recognition are viewed as control measures in that they provide incentives for employees to achieve the desired results. Moreover, in order to meet the needs of customers and the organisation, the needs of employees must also be met (Simons, 2005). Furthermore, while pay rates in hospitality are generally accepted as being low, the interviews also revealed that pay rates within the researched hotel corporation were considered to be lower than some other hospitality organisations. For example:

Hamish: ... you tend to find a lot of people are here just for the money, which I can understand, [...] and then they will move on if somebody offers them $13 down the road. But what we have found is if you find a good one [employee] it is a challenge for you to keep a hold of them first of all.

It is a challenge to retain staff and, since base pay rates are not seen as sufficient employee incentive, to resolve this imbalance management has engaged a range of alternative reward and recognition strategies to motivate staff. For example:

Bob: ... we actually, we got some of our key staff together and we sat down and said look we are trying to set up some sort of framework and boundaries for our reward and recognition, what do you think of the ideas that we came up with? Money was the bottom of their list, career development was at the top, they wanted to move on, they wanted their pay to reflect that obviously, but they didn't want financial bonuses, the biggest one at the time was petrol vouchers. But they wanted things like the movie tickets, they wanted things like the T-shirts, the caps and all those sorts of things. I did not realise how much they actually enjoyed the fact that I shouted them dinner here once a month.

A number of incentive ideas have been adopted by the hotels within this study. According to Simons (2005) incentives can be categorised into four general classifications;

- The desire to acquire wealth and status, for example, pay that reflects position, or gift vouchers;
- The desire for inclusion and connection;
- The desire to develop and advance;
- The desire for lifestyle and self esteem.

Looking at rewards and recognition, the interview results are presented and discussed under each of these headings:

2. The desire to acquire wealth and status: this reflects the interest of individuals working for personal gain (Simons, 2005)

> *Glenda: There is a section on our comment cards that enables the guests to write employee's name down, it is a good recognition for the employees, the general manager can go to the staff member and say 'well done' and he might give them a $20 shopping voucher, but it is a very personal and it is coming from the GM.*

> *Alan: We are lucky, you do a good job and somebody [the guest] will leave money, that is something that means something to everybody, and you know, it doesn't cost me anything it costs the guest.*

> *Mark: you have to give them that drive, so you offer them benefits, for example, cheaper rates to stay in the hotel, other incentives through up selling, for example if you were selling a wine of the month the top salesperson gets a bonus or gets some fuel voucher.*

> *Mark: The hotel here has just moved to performance-based pay for the wage staff. Every year you used to just go up the consumer price index three percent now it is based on the level that you have been assessed on, so if you start work and after three months you have been assessed at a new level then we will move you up to that pay packet bracket [...] I think that performance based pay will help [motivate] staff to increase their skills so that they move up to the next pay rate.*

Interviewee comments provide examples of how management are able to circumnavigate the restrictions of centrally controlled pay rates. Many of the rewards mentioned in the interviews are based on subjective assessment of an individual's performance and are provided at management discretion, with the exception of performance based pay which is objectively based on training and knowledge acquisition.

3. The desire for inclusion and connection: This reflects the social nature of humans, it includes the desire for support through relationship, friendship and a sense of shared belonging (Simons, 2005). The following exhibit these values:

Kate: I was so scared that when I came here I would not have the friends like I had at [previous employment], and now I look back and all the people at [previous employment] have gone now. Now I look back and laugh, because I have made friends for life here as I think you would most places you work.

Kate: It is hard to keep a happy team when you don't know your team members very well. [...] I think you just have to constantly try and think of new ways to keep them happy. For example, here the HR manager does stuff with the team, like, they will go bowling, they go out heaps on famils [industry visits] and things like that, everyone is pretty chummy over here. The whole team right down to the porters, I think they all respect one another and know what they do, [...] everyone is involved.

Glenda: It is the spontaneity of it, that is really, really important, still continuing with the standard recognition systems, but really important that management bring to management meetings any spontaneous thank you(s) or achievements that have happened in their department so that other managers when they walk past the employees can congratulate them or say 'well done' and that seems to go a really long way.

4. The desire to develop and advance:

Alan: I am very much a believer that if you teach someone something every day they will stay, it does not matter that if we pay less rates than say if it wanted to work somewhere in town, as long as they are learning something here and they are moving forward, they will stay here, as soon as they stop, they are gone, if not body then certainly in mind.

Kay: ... saying to them, "look, I value you as an employee, I wanted to develop you and I want to invest in you, so I am giving you these opportunities.

Bob: assist them on their career path, the career development… That is purely by rewarding them, recognising their efforts and focusing on developing them, and that seems to be the biggest pay off to be honest with you and they are the ones that stick around.

Mark: I have got strong assistant managers and supervisors underneath me and we'd sit down on a regular basis to find out who needs what, to discuss who is doing well and needs more training to develop them to the next level, this is something that [hotel corporation] does very well, they will put you on training because you have proven yourself that you are worthwhile, they will ask where you want to go, what you want to

do, and then see what they can do to help you get there, develop action plans and training to get underway.

Although the interviewees discussed the benefits of staff development and advancement as an effective reward and motivational strategy, the emphasis of this development may be focused inward on organisational technical and management skills rather than an outward focus on the customer. This issue is raised in the following comment:

> *Helen: But thinking back to how people get promoted, I guess, if you think about that first step from front line into a supervisory role, what is it that gets them promoted? It is not their guest service, you know, you don't promote the person that the guests love, because quite often they don't have the ability or the skills, or they are not showing them to be a supervisor or a manager, you promote the person I guess that has more of the leadership attributes.*

5. The desire for lifestyle: this includes work/life balance and the desire for the protection of personal values and relationships (Simons, 2005). The interviews revealed little evidence of this area being addressed for employees. On the contrary, problems are created as the lifestyle of working in hospitality is often in conflict with external, social, and family commitments, and desires. For example:

> *Helen: The problem that I am seeing more of now is people leaving the industry. I had our senior food and beverage supervisor whom I referred to earlier, I had a chat with him last week and he's looking at leaving, and it is just such a bloody waste. [...] he has only been in the role for eight months [...] But, if there was a manager's role, I said to him if we created a bar manager's role would that be what you're looking for, he said no, it is the hours and it is the pay. Umm, and that is just going to continue to be a problem. Probably, our two highest potential people in the hotel are both leaving, and there is absolutely nothing we can do to stop them, you know, we could create all the titles on the world and everything, but at the end of the day they don't want to work shifts.*

While work/life balance issues, including long working hours and shift work requirements, are recognised by the interviewees, there is little evidence in this study that these issues are being addressed by management.

Table 4.6: Summary of Reward and Recognition Strategies in the Hotel Group

Incentive
1. Desire to acquire wealth & status
• Little rewards
• $20 shopping voucher
• Petrol vouchers
• Bottle of wine
• Movie ticket
• Dinner in the restaurant
• Performance based pay
• Customer tips
2. Desire for inclusion & connection
• Employee of the month
• Recognition of employee performance through guest feedback
• Recognition of employee performance by general manager
• Spontaneous thank you from management
• Letter of thanks from general manager
3. Desire to develop & advance
• Access to advancement opportunities
• Career development opportunities
4. Desire for lifestyle
• Nil

Overall, while a number of reward and recognition strategies are discussed and the interviewees report that employees respond to these incentives, there remains an underlying feeling of despair concerning rewards and recognition within the hotel industry. This is evident in the following comment:

> *Helen: I think people are talking about the fact that we need to attract people to the industry, and retain people in the industry, and develop them within the industry, but we have not quite got our heads around how to do that and, umm… I guess, yeah, how that actually happens. There is a lot of talk about it but not a huge amount of action, and I think ultimately a lot of it does come down to what we pay.*

And in response to the question, do rewards improve with promotion?

> *Helen: Umm, do they ever? [laughter]. I don't know, I don't think there is necessarily a point that you can say right, when you get to this point, all of a sudden you're going to get all this money and it is going to be great.*

All interviewees recognised that the hotel industry offers few financial rewards. To compensate for the low pay, managers emphasised the natural rewards that are gained from interaction with others and making customers happy, while also promoting training and future promotion opportunities to staff that were committed. Additionally, the comments indicate that informal control measures, including organisational culture and strong social groups, are important to maintaining employee and organisational goal congruence.

4.6 Informal Control

Informal controls are established through organisational culture (large social units), social norms (small groups), and employee self management abilities (individuals). These controls are characteristically unwritten or formed through interpretation of written documents, and yet, they influence and shape individual and group behaviour (Jaworski, 1988).

4.6.1 Cultural Control

Organisational cultures are developed through the shared norms, beliefs, values and behaviours of the participants within and organisation. The cultural norms are embodied in the written and unwritten rules, stories, and rituals that guide the actions and behaviours of employees. Cultural controls encourage mutual supervision of peers through group pressure on individuals who depart from the group norms (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007).

Not surprisingly, a review of available documentation and analysis of the interview transcripts found evidence and a number of references to organisational control. The written documentation viewed concerning customer service interactions revealed clear messages concerning organisational credos, values statements and codes of conduct.

4.6.1.1 Organisational Credo

'Building Smiles' This message is a central aspect to the customer service training programme and was a clear message in the interview transcripts, for example:

> *Kate: ... you always have to greet guests, we have a smile rule as well.*

Individual hotel properties and departments also supplement this message with other mottos to further develop customer focus:

> *Hamish: ... about etiquette, professional etiquette, [...] I have a saying to these guys that, "it is nice to be important but it is important to be nice", sometimes they don't actually listen and understand what I'm trying to say to them, so I actually write it down in places and they understand, and there is that active reinforcement all the time as well.*

4.6.1.2 Codes of Conduct

The Hotel Group has well documented employee codes of conduct that are intended to set and maintain brand standards. The ensuing statements summarised from the documented brand standards capture the intent and spirit of these codes of conduct:

- Being welcoming and valuing customers
- Being friendly, courteous, and professional
- Providing prompt assistance to guests and colleagues
- Acknowledging guests even when busy
- Taking responsibility for actions (Brand Standards, n.d.)

The interview transcriptions provided further evidence to these statements being communicated:

> *Alan: ... she needs to learn the art of performance, and welcome and smile, she is a lovely person that she needs to let the guest see that. So it is not just about service.*

> *Tracy: When staff are not performing to standard we talk to them fairly quickly and remind them of why they are here and what it means to be professional.*

> *Glenda: ... our duty log is very transparent, we really encourage them [employees] to place it [problem] there, even if there is a slight chance that there was a problem they need to put it in the log, so that everybody is aware of it so that we can try and make sure that it does not happen again or more importantly follow-up with the guests involved.*

> *Alison: ... we train them on whatever's happened at home, unfortunately, it is not to be brought to work, you know, you need to leave your personal problems at home.*

These messages were understood by all interviewees and it was clear that they were embedded in the culture of the hotel group.

4.6.1.3 Values Statements

Values statements have been developed and posted in each hotel department (Values Statement, n.d.). While the statements are unique to individual departments, each statement includes the identical headings of respect, innovation, performance, trust, and spirit of conquest. The statements are posted in a prominent space for staff to view. Typical messages on the values statements include:

Respect: Respect statements include respect for guest and colleagues

Respect for guest is encapsulated in statements such as:

- We offer all our guests the [Hotel Group] level of service
- We use our initiative to acknowledge every single guest's issues, and always follow up

Respect for colleagues is encapsulated in statements such as:

- We help each other without waiting to be asked
- We practice what we preach and lead by example

Innovation:

- We are not afraid to challenge the standard operating procedures if we feel there is a better way
- We value all questions asked, don't judge other's questions and treat all questions with importance

Performance:

- We listen to our guests so we can improve our performance
- We understand that the key to performance is working as a team

Trust:

- We understand that our managers and supervisors are making the decisions that are best for all of us
- We participate in daily briefings before commencing each shift

Spirit of Conquest:

- We learn from our mistakes and take action to prevent them from recurring

- We go the extra mile to make our guests happy

- We will embrace the behaviours that show our values by being strong role models, praising each other and encouraging our peers to do the same (Values Statement, n.d.).

4.6.1.4 Customer and Employee Focus

The physical environment including the architecture, interior design, and working spaces, influences organisational culture and employee behaviour (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007). In the hotel environment this principle applies to both the guest areas and staff areas:

> *Hamish: ... the North Island Regional Manager has got the saying, "if we can make our staff happy and proud to be here and they are going to perform at their best" which just makes so much, so basic that it is not funny. I really took that on board two years ago when we were talking about it and we were talking about the decor of the staff areas downstairs. I said a coat of paint would actually go a long way, and when you think about it if they [employees] are working in a nice tidy environment they are more likely to be nice and tidy themselves, it makes sense. Like I say, I have really taken that on board and that is something that we have really run with… we're just trying to create a nice happy atmosphere, a safe atmosphere for our staff to be in and what we have found that it is actually paying dividends the other side because our customers are going away happy as well, and the bottom line is looking pretty okay. So it has all been beneficial.*

The recognition that the working environment helps to shape the behaviour of employees is evident in this statement. The concept that happy employees are better able to provide quality service is also prevalent within many of the interviews. Moreover, it is clear that the management and supervisors interviewed express a customer focused approach to managing service interactions:

> *Kate: I think if you keep the team happy then they are usually happy with guests as well, I mean if you're not happy with the job, and that goes for any industry, you are not going to be happy doing it, and people can tell when you are faking it.*

> *Tracy: Our industry is all about the customer, the customer has to come first and we have to look after our staff to make sure that they are happy*

so that they are able to provide the customer with good service. If our staff aren't happy then they are not going to provide good service.

Mark: ... we run all these courses internally, giving them values that the hotel is wanting to focus on, for example, explaining what the hotel is and providing the best guest satisfaction, what do we mean by that and giving them the tools of how they can do that and achieve it.

There is further evidence that the development and maintenance of a customer focus is achieved through encouraging employee participation in decision making activities, encouraging creative input, and supporting problem solving initiatives:

Rachel: We talk a lot, I might be in my office and have a good idea and I will go out to the guys on the front desk and say "hey what do you think about this?" or I might think this [problem] has been happening a bit lately and ask myself what are we going to do about this? And so I will go to the guys [staff] and say you tell me how you'd fix it, or what is going to work for you. We will just play around with things, we are always trying new stuff, and I mean no way is it always going to be the right way, it is just getting them involved as well, because if I get the staff involved they take a lot more interest in it because it is something they have thought of.

Rachel: We have just changed recently the way we answer the phone, you used to answer the phone "Kia Ora welcome to XXX how can I help you" and straight away the customer would start to tell you everything that they were wanting which could take awhile and we could not interrupt them as that would be rude [...] one of our staff said I think we should answer it like this and she answered the phone "Kia Ora welcome to XXX how may I direct your call" so they know they need to go somewhere else [be directed to someone else] and that has cottoned on, everyone says this now, it saves us a lot of time.

It is evident that the retelling of these stories and instances of success along with other employee achievements are seen to help reinforce a sense of pride for employees while communicating expectations and requirements to others:

Glenda: ... really important that management bring to management meetings any spontaneous thank you(s) or achievements that have happened in their department so that other managers when they walk past the employees can congratulate them or say 'well done' and that seems to go a really long way.

4.6.1.5 Employee Development

Many of the interviewees commented on the importance of employee training and career development.

> *Mark: [The Hotel Group] has done a good job of developing a culture that is not about one job, it is about the career aspects and the ability, they pushed training, they pushed transferring people up to other hotels, and giving them the opportunity to expand.*

The interview comments also suggest that providing training and career development helps to control the actions of employees:

> *Hamish: When I interview people I basically interview on three key words to me. One is commitment and that is not just the commitment to themselves but the team, their dedication, their dedication is to their moving forward because I am not employing somebody who was going to treat the place like a job by what them to treat it like a career and the biggest one to me is loyalty, if they can be loyal to me then they will get it back in buckets.*

> *Alan: I am very much a believer that if you teach someone something every day they will stay, it does not matter that if we pay less [...] as long as they are learning something here and they are moving forward, they will stay here, as soon as they stop, they are gone if not in body then certainly in mind.*

Furthermore, the incentive of advancement and future reward helps motivate employees to build loyalty and conform to organisational goals:

> *Kim ... saying to them, "look, I value you as a employee, I wanted to develop you and I want to invest in you, so I am giving you these opportunities" but I also tell them that "I want you to be straight up with me, that if you intend leaving I want you to come and see me first, because I want to be given the opportunity to try and progress you further without you leaving because I do not want to lose you from this hotel and from this company, and this is very much what the company wants as well, so I will be honest with you and I will do as much as I can for you but you need to give me back to the same."*

The expectations conveyed by these comments suggest that as the Hotel Group is providing employees with training and opportunities to advance, the employee should reciprocate by being loyal. It is implied that the employees are receiving a favour and therefore they are in some way indebted to the hotel.

4.6.1.6   Support and Maintenance of Culture

The fact that there is an existing customer focus culture embedded in the hotel group is evident. There was, however, commentary suggesting that this culture may be weakened if not supported by management:

> *Helen: ... it has to start from the top, you have to have your managers truly believe that looking after the guest is the reason for us being here. Managers need to be seen to walk the talk.*

Furthermore, high employee turnover in the hospitality industry increases the importance of establishing an appropriate organisational culture:

> *Helen: ... 12 months for the project is a hell of a long time in this industry, and you could look at almost 100 percent [staff and management] turnover in that time [...] if I was to leave it needs to still happen, if the general manager was to leave it needs to still happen, and that is what I mean, I guess when I said before, it is about creating a culture, it is not just a quick fix sort of thing.*

The need for a strong, well designed corporate culture is apparent in these statements as it not only guides the current employees but also future managers and employees who may bring their own beliefs and values to the service interaction.

4.6.2   Social Control

Within the hotel environment, separate sub-groups or departments take care of the specific technical and functional tasks associated with meeting customer needs. These departments operate within the organisation's culture but also have their own established social norms and patterns of interpersonal interactions that guide and direct the behaviour of employees (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). Employees entering these departments learn the behaviours and attitudes of others through socialisation into the group and are then subject to social controls generated from the acceptance of values and shared commitment toward common group goals (Jaworski, 1988; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). The socialisation of employees is an important means of communicating interpersonal and emotional requirements to employees and managing these interactions with customers. Within the context of social control, analysis of the interview transcripts identified four themes of formal socialisation, social cohesion, serial socialisation, and investiture socialisation.

4.6.2.1 Formal Socialisation

Formal socialisation occurs when employees are separated from work group members (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). Each of the hotels undertakes formal socialisation with employees during the formal induction process:

> *Kathy: Employees go through an induction and there is some very good training that they do. One of the first things we do is to introduce staff to everybody in the hotel to get a bit of a feel for the property, we try to get to know the person as well.*

At these induction sessions employees are formally introduced to the management team and other hotel employees. The manner, language and tone that are used during this process provide important clues to staff as to how they should act and speak. Also at this time, hotel values and codes of conduct are introduced and explained and socially acceptable norms are reinforced.

4.6.2.2 Serial Socialisation

Serial socialisation takes place during the course of a normal working routine through the mentoring of and role modelling for employees by supervisors and co-workers (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Young, 2003). During this time employees' attitudes are shaped and acceptable ways of behaving and communicating are learnt and reinforced. Evidence of this can be seen in the following extracts:

> *Kate: ... it depends who they put in the front office manager position or a manager position because, however they behave or whatever kind of team they run is how you are going to operate.*

> *Mark: ... a supervisor who is a good mentor and the staff look up to, they [employees] then try to copy the techniques that supervisor uses.*

> *Tracy: ... people will pick up how others around them work as well, they will find someone that they like who is their mentor and they will follow them and pick up on what they do and pick up on their style for themselves.*

> *Rachel: We will knock the slang out of them pretty quickly, I don't mind how they talk out in back office. I must say they are all very polite and they don't swear around me which is fantastic. But when they walk out the front I think they know the expectation and it is passed on pretty fast about what you can and cannot say and the tone in which you say it.*

> *Kim: There are a couple of other new staff members who are very eager to learn and to do well, so they are driving everyone else as they are getting a lot of comment cards and other staff members think that they may have to lift their game, it is a bit of friendly competition, a good motivator.*

The importance of having the correct manager leading the team is obvious in these statements, as the behaviours and attitudes of employees are influenced by the manager and then perpetuated by co-workers.

4.6.2.3 Investiture Socialisation

Investiture socialisation involves the provision of positive support by co-workers to employees for their actions and behaviours. These actions and behaviours may result from the socialisation process or be capabilities that the employee has previously developed and brought to the workplace (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Young, 2003).

> *Kate: She was comforted by the duty manager, and she got brought a chocolate cake and she was fine within 15 minutes, and I said to her look, don't worry about it, it was not your fault, there is nothing you could have done.*

> *Kate: I guess if you have got good peers or people that you work with that are supportive of you, then I think you would do fine, […] I think if you have got a team that understands people, especially if they are learning, then you can get through it fine, and also having people around you that are motivated to be in that industry as well.*

These instances suggest that the learning process is strengthened and difficulties are able to be more easily overcome through peer support.

4.6.2.4 Social Cohesion

The development of team cohesiveness within the workplace further promotes shared attitudes, values and behaviours that support organisational goals (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). Social cohesion is developed in the hotel group by:

Increasing homogeneity between team members;

> *Kate: I think you just have to constantly try and think of new ways to keep them happy. For example, here the HR manager does stuff with the team like, they will go bowling, they go out heaps on 'famils' [industry visits] and things like that, everyone is pretty chummy over here.*

Establishing team goals and obtaining agreement between participants;

> *Kim: Just continual reminders and updates in our front-office meetings and giving feedback and making them drive it as well, by saying, "how do you think we should approach this?" What are your thoughts?" "How are we going to make this work?"…*

Carefully structuring team membership;

> *Kim: I have got a lot of staff that weren't team-fit, that have been moved on now, which is… you can notice in the staff that they are a lot more relaxed, and I think that is potentially what is helping as well, because I will now try and base my employment on a team fit.*

Although these approaches build team cohesiveness, the high mobility of hospitality employees may work against team cohesion:

> *Kate: It is hard to keep a happy team when you don't know your team members very well because they started last week [laughter], but that is always going to be like that in hospitality, I think you just have to constantly try and think of new ways to keep them happy.*

The development of team spirit and support within the hotels is obviously an important aspect of the operational dynamic and was commented upon by the majority of the interviewees.

4.6.2.5 Extra Role Performance

Extra role performance concerns the giving, by employees, of effort and labour beyond the specific role requirements (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). This helpful behaviour may add to organisational productivity or team spirit. For example:

> *Kim: … we all help in work as a team, and that is something that the staff are noticing. For example, I will notice, like before, if they were supposed to finish at 3.30 but finished at four o'clock because of cash up, they would put down four o'clock on their time sheets, whereas now they might be finishing at four o'clock but they will put down 3.30 on the time sheets, and that is not something that I have ever said to them, but they are willing to put in those hours and they don't mind about doing a few extra minutes at the end of each day.*

The giving of extra time at the end of the shift shows a dedication to the team or department that might otherwise be withheld if effective socialisation is not achieved. Moreover, it could be interpreted as illustrating the power of social control in this instance.

4.6.3 Self Control

"My management style is that I like people to manage themselves." (From interview transcript)

The act of customer service requires employees to carry out process and performances that provide benefits to customers. These heterogeneous exchanges are often performed in direct contact with customers and regularly require the use of a sophisticated range of interpersonal and emotional skills to meet the often unique needs of the customers (Baum, 2006). As direct control by management is not possible during these exchanges, employees frequently need to exercise a considerable amount of self control to maintain the environment and atmosphere required by the hotel (Jaworski, 1988). The following remarks illustrate some instances when employees are required to show self control:

> *Kate: ... he [the customer] came to reception with full on yelling at me, just because the doors were locked. He asked me my name and told me I shouldn't be working here because I was useless, just because the doors were locked. I was calm with him I was just like, "I am really sorry it is a safety feature, if there was a fire they would be automatically unlocked, it is not a hazard," he was like, "I just want to get out," I think he was having a bad night. I mean stuff like that you cannot take it personally because it is not, it has nothing to do with me, at the end of the day I did not set up the doors, I just thought it was funny and went back to my work I did not really think about it again.*

> *Hamish: So that culture comes down to, I like to think, the way I manage, and I like people to be able to manage themselves, I am not going to get any more productivity out of them if I stand over them and we are certainly not going to develop and move forwards.*

> *Kathy: I feel that in this hotel and with staff that I work with, giving them that freedom, they take it upon themselves to work with that, and they do very well, [...] so far here I find they we are able to give more of that freedom to our staff especially when it comes to guest service, to allow a bit of that own personality comes through in the way that we handle that.*

> *Alan: I still want them to draw on their own experiences, their own thoughts, their own ideas, their own beliefs, and their own personality and to put that out there.*

> *Alison: ... it should be possible for them to realise, right I am at work, this is the type of language that I use at work, when I am outside of work I can speak in whichever way I want to and use what ever lingo that I choose to or casual talk that I preferred, but when I'm at work this is the way I speak.*

Although policies, processes, training, and mentoring may help to shape and guide the interaction between the employee and customer, the employee is required to be calm and polite when faced with angry and verbally intimidating customers, to choose the appropriate language, and to display the correct emotions even when they do not feel like it. When self control is not able to be exercised by employees, as in the following comments, management acts to ensure that the customer experience does not continue to be compromised:

> *Glenda: I have had somebody who has not coped well particularly with dealing with complaints and caused us a lot of stress with the way that he did deal with that, [...] you used to be to be able to quite clearly see that he was under a large amount of pressure and it did not send good feelings or a good atmosphere amongst the front office team or more importantly with our guests.*

> *Kate: ... I think that is where, it is not so much we fail but that is where it has to be probably a little bit more assessed and controlled, because some people don't have the skills and knowledge to know what to do in those situations, I think that is where and you can get into really, really bad situations.*

It is clear in the next statement that employees require a certain amount of emotional resilience to cope with some customer interactions and that maintaining a positive approach to customer service requires effort:

> *Kate: ... at the end of the day you come home and you think of all the cool people you have dealt with and I always laugh at the people who are really bad [difficult] because, it is always fun, I mean, you have to, you have to have a joke about it, even if it is serious, you have to of course follow protocol, but you cannot let it get to you because then you would not do this job for very long I think.*

The interviewees recognised that they were not able to be involved in every employee exchange and therefore employees needed to be able to manage themselves, to show initiative and to choose between a range of strategies to meet customer needs. All interviewees commented on the requirements for employees to demonstrate emotional labour in customer service roles. From the interviewees stories it was evident that at times some employees were not able to provide the appropriate message or display the desired image to customers.

4.7 Conclusion

The extracts of interviews, hotel documents and field notes in the findings demonstrate the complex nature of human interaction and customer service. The skills and competencies that customer service employees require are indeed many and varied, however, there is an underlying belief that interpersonal competencies are not fully appreciated or recognised. All interviewees expressed their concern over labour shortages and the growing skills gap, and yet, there was very little evidence that anyone had any real solutions to overcome the labour issues presented.

Managers focused on employing staff with the right personality as this was seen by all interviewees as a fundamental requirement for successful customer service interactions. A wide range of control measures are used to govern the interactions between employees and customers. The importance of standard operating procedures was commented on by many of the interviewees, while informal control measures including, cultural control, social control, and self control are also central to managing customer service interactions.

In summary, input control measures include an emphasis on selecting employees with the desired personality, 'on the job training' and formal training strategies. The importance of selection based on personality was commented on frequently and by most interviewees. The data suggests that unless employees have natural interpersonal and social ability then it is very difficult to instil or develop these competencies. However, it is also recognised that the labour market and calibre of candidates often mean that new employees lacked many of the ideal competencies.

The development of customer service skills is primarily achieved through 'on the job training'. 'On the job training' is seen by most interviewees as being critical to achieving service standards. Employee development is further enhanced by formal training of customer service skills. However, as these formal sessions are scheduled periodically, many employees commence work prior to attending a course. Furthermore, due to role conflict and the lack of ability, desire and/or time, the provision of effective and consistent 'on the job training' by middle management is problematic.

Overall, the hotel group has clearly defined standards and expectations, yet, there is evidence that within each hotel, managers are able to tailor their approach to managing and rewarding employee behaviour. These and other issues relevant to the findings and literature will be discussed in Chapter Five, Discussion.

5   Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1   Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis, synthesis, and discussion of the research findings. A discussion of the hotel environment is initially presented as this provides a context for the remaining discussion which is presented under each of the research questions. The discussion is situated against the literature on customer service and management control reviewed in Chapter Two.

The aim of this study was to identify how hotel organisations and managers govern employee interpersonal interactions with customers. The research also sought to identify the interpersonal and emotional capabilities employers require from employees to meet the needs of customers and present the desired corporate image. To meet these aims, a qualitative methodology was designed to explore the following research questions:

1. Do customer service employees display the interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes that are needed to complete successful customer service interactions?
2. How do managers communicate interpersonal skill, and emotional attributes requirements to employees?
3. How, if at all, do managers develop interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes within employees?
4. How are employee interpersonal interactions and emotional displays managed?

The Hotel Group's management were enthusiastic about the aims of the research topic and actively participated in providing access to the research sites and relevant documents. The interviewees were happy to participate in the study and expressive of their support for a study into the management of customer service interactions. Overall, there was considerable support for the study and the aims of the research were viewed by the participants, as relevant to current hospitality management issues.

The use of semi-structured interviews, document analysis and field notes provided an effective means of gathering relevant data for analysis. Jaworski's (1988) theoretical framework provided a clear structure for organising the data

for analysis. Informal control mechanisms emerged as very important methods for managing employee behaviour (Ouchi, 1980). However, formal control mechanisms provided clearly defined operational boundaries and provided a foundation from which informal control strategies could operate (Jaworski, 1988).

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 Hotel Environment

The provision of customer service in hotels requires extensive interaction between employees and customers. Despite the heterogeneous nature of the customer service environment, organisations expect that a consistent level of customer service will be maintained while customers desire a unique experience and expect their individual needs will be meet. Joworski (1988) states that the environment shapes the control systems that are likely to be used within an organisation. Thus, the discussion concerning the operating environment lays the foundation for discussion of the findings for each research question.

The hospitality sector operates in an environment that has both technical and interactive characteristics. In the Hotel Group studied, the technical components of the environment were highly formalised with well defined standards and processes, while, interactive encounters with customers required services to be adaptable and customised. The research findings confirmed this dyadic characteristic of the hotel customer service environment that results in conflicting demands between the organisation represented by employees and the individual customer. The interviewees acknowledging this dyad and were concerned with finding a balancing between maintaining the operational (e.g., budget or reservation process) demands of the Hotel, while also ensuring that individual customer needs were met. It was evident that the tensions created by this dyad are further challenged by the requirement to process, and serve effectively, the aggregated customers' needs while continuing to provide individual attention to each customer. The resulting role conflict is also often paradoxical as revealed by hotel customer service roles that are routine yet complex; standardised yet often customised; demanding yet accommodating; hectic yet appearing calm. These findings are closely correlated to Korczynski's

(2001) discussion on the customer-orientated bureaucracy and are discussed in more detail below.

Many of the tasks that are done in the hotel customer service environment are viewed as routine and often 'mundane' (e.g., polishing cutlery, processing reservations). The use of standard operating procedures provides the opportunity for management to maintain consistency and assess outputs against standards. In contrast, to meet the interactive requirements of customer service and make each service encounter unique, interviewees spoke extensively about the need for the customisation of services by empowered employees. However, it is also clear that the extent of employee empowerment is limited and closely monitored by a chain of command.

The interview respondents were all united in acknowledging that providing customer service is often a demanding, pressured and hectic activity. Yet, at the same time it was expected that employees will present a calm, controlled, professional image, and accommodate the needs and concerns of individual customers. When the interviewees were asked if the attributes required by employees to meet the demands of these dyadic and paradoxical characteristics, were recognised and valued as significant skills, managers' initial replies were that they are valuable skills and often difficult to find in people. However, as the interviewees gave further thought to this question it became apparent that the underlying perception is that customer service skills are seen as basic and easily taught. Moreover, it was expected that people should inherently have the deeper personality and attribute traits needed to carry out interpersonal interactions. This finding reflects Baum's (2006) assessment of the nature of skills in the service economy. Interviewees thought that the low value given to the customer service role is held by both top management and the customer service employees themselves. It could be argued that this perception is further reinforced by the low pay scales offered to customer service workers and moreover, accepted by employees.

In addition to low pay scales, customer service employees are required to work a variety of shifts and often long hours. This further emphasises the lack of compensation offered to employees' for the disruption to their lifestyle. Yet, the interviewees all held the view that these negative aspects were in some way,

offset by the fulfilment of the employees' own desire to interact with a variety of people when providing customer service and the personal satisfaction it was assumed they gained from pleasing others.

Overall, the findings reveal that customer service in the hotel environment involves carrying out many standardised, routine and often mundane tasks while also engaging in complex and frequently sophisticated interpersonal interactions which correlates with Baum's (2006) argument. It is apparent that being successful in the customer service role, therefore, requires employees to have a basic set of skills to carry out operational activities while also displaying sophisticated interpersonal capabilities to interact with customers.

5.2.2 Customer Service Skills

Research Question #1: Do customer service employees display the interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes that are needed to complete successful customer service interactions?

Initially, interviewees were quite positive and expressive in their satisfaction concerning the capabilities of many of their current customer service employees. Managers generally felt that their employees had a desire to provide quality service to customers and that if the employees were not already skilled, capable and competent in providing the required service, they were focused on developing the required competencies. However, a more in-depth analysis of the findings revealed that not all employees are able to consistently provide the required quality of customer service and that there were ongoing issues concerning finding sufficient staff with the required capabilities. This is not surprising as, the data confirms that the provision of customer service involves complex and, often, sophisticated interpersonal exchanges with customers during the simultaneous completion of technical tasks. This correlates with what is stated in the literature by Gronroos (2007) and Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991).

A number of other factors contributing to the lack of employee abilities are also revealed by the findings. These include the current competitive labour market in New Zealand and the inability of the hotels to attract suitable employees. Interviewees largely attributed this to low pay rates and the general perception of the hospitality industry as an inferior industry to work within. Moreover, it is

reasonable to deduce that the complexity of skills and capabilities required to successfully complete customer service interactions, in conjunction with the need for employees to match the required hotel image, further limits candidate selection.

The labour shortages and the inability to attract staff with the desired skills are of considerable concern to the managers interviewed. It often resulted in managers having to employee staff whose abilities were doubtful and as one manager (Kathy) stated, "you just have to go with the best from what is there." The current labour shortages were also attributed to, and aggravated by high employee turnover of hotel staff which creates a continual demand for new employees. Consequently, the hotels in the study are experiencing difficulty in finding and keeping sufficient staff with the desired skills.

A consequence of the difficulties of recruitment is that many of the staff employed in customer service roles are either young school levers or international students who are in New Zealand for tertiary study. Managers commented that both these groups of people lacked life experience and, in particular, many of the international employees needed to be taught how to be 'kiwi'. Witt and Ferris (2003) state that social skills (IpC) are able to be developed over time so it would appear that many of these young and international employees may not have had the opportunity to fully develop the required skills prior to commencing work.

It was widely accepted by the interviewees that customer service positions within the hotel group are on low pay rates. Some managers commented that they wanted to be able to pay employees more and saw higher pay as a means of rewarding and retaining capable employees. The fact that the pay scales were externally controlled was a point of frustration to many managers as it meant that the hotels were not only less competitive than other industries but also other hospitality organisations. The interviewees believed that the right type of people were generally available but they were often not attracted to the hotel industry due to the low pay rates and the perception that the hotel industry was not an exciting place to work.

Interviewees were very clear about what they believed were the right type of people for the Hotel Group. The characteristics they were primarily looking for included, people-oriented, outgoing and friendly individuals who had customer focused personalities and great smiles. As shown in the findings, these traits are closely matched with the personality traits of extroversion and agreeableness. What is interesting, is that the management psychology literature suggests that the personality traits of 'conscientiousness' and 'social skills' (or agreeableness) acting together, provide the strongest predictors of job performance (Witt & Ferris, 2003). Yet, in both the customer service literature and the findings 'conscientiousness' is given little attention.

One could surmise that management's search for employees with primarily extraversion traits is motivated by the belief that this is the most important aspect of customer service. Yet, when the customer service role is viewed in conjunction with the hotels brand personality and the technical requirements of the job, it is apparent that conscientiousness traits are essential to successful customer service in the hotel environment. The focus on extraversion may, in fact, be adding to the issue of employee turnover as there are often mundane tasks requiring completion and as one interviewee stated, 'you have to be impeccably groomed' in a 'very professional environment' that can be perceived as a 'quite stuffy'. Extroverts who are typically energetic, outgoing, and sociable, (James & Mazerolle, 2002) may not be content to remain in these roles for extended periods of time.

The idea that many of the traits required for customer service roles are intrinsic in certain people and that customer service comes naturally to them, is possibly another reason that 'extroverts' are sought. The strong emphasis on hiring people with the desired personality traits is also noticeable in the interviewees' belief that generally, unless people have natural extrovert and agreeableness traits, customer service capabilities including IpC can not be taught. This belief correlates with Spencer and Spencers's (1993) discussion of central and surface competencies, where central (traits and motives) are difficult to develop.

While the interviewed managers recognised that low pay, working conditions and labour turnover were significant factors effecting customer service quality, there was a general feeling that little could be done to resolve these issues. As

one manager pointed out, the current system of hiring staff, paying them minimum wages, and replacing them when they leave, is working. So there is little incentive for those who control pay rates to increase wages. In fact, increasing pay rates by itself may not attract or retain employees with the required capabilities. What may be required is changing the focus from employing young, extrovert and highly sociable people, to more mature and conscientious people who have strong social skills. All the interviewees recognised that what is needed and often discussed within the hospitality industry, are employees who will stay in customer service roles for extended periods of time.

5.2.3 Communicating Expectations

Research Question #2: How do managers communicate interpersonal skill, and emotional attributes requirements to employees?

It is apparent from the findings that when applying for a customer service job with the hotel group, interpersonal competencies and emotional attributes are neither clearly (with the exception of the F&B job advertisement) or consistently communicated to new employees. This could be attributed to the assumption that most people should inherently know how to provide effective customer service or that people will know what skills and attributes are required for customer service roles in a hotel environment. It would appear that employees receive the majority of messages concerning expected behaviour, through intrinsic messages and perhaps their own general understanding of the behaviour suitable for a hotel setting. As one interviewee indicated, many people hold the view that providing customer service should be "common sense". It could be argued that on arriving at the hotel for an interview the hotel architecture and interior design may signal to employees the hotel image and brand personality and, therefore, the type of behaviour that is expected, however, this is also subject to individual employee interpretation.

The need for employees to follow hotel brand standards is referred to in employee job descriptions and induction documentation. Employees, however, do not have access to the brand standard documents prior to commencing work and must rely on their own interpretation and management's verbal

communication of these requirements. It is evident that the hotel group's image and brand personality provide a strategic blueprint for customer service interactions (Kandampully, 2002) and for employees to meet the expected levels of service, it is important that employee actions and behaviours match the image of the hotel (Harris & Fleming, 2005). However, even once employees' have commenced work with the hotel group, there is limited evidence that the brand standards are actively or consistently communicated to employees by management. As one interviewee commented, often standard operating procedures are left on shelves and forgotten.

Once new recruits commence employment the findings reveal that job requirements and behavioural expectations are more clearly communicated through both formal and informal channels. Formal orientation sessions, which include customer service training, provide employees with a reasonably sound theoretical background of customer service and interpersonal communication requirements. However, as these sessions are held only periodically, new employees may not have immediate access to these formal sessions. As new employees are often, as one interviewee (Glenda) describes, 'thrown in the deep-end' with no prior training, management coaching, and the organisational culture and socialisation process are frequently the primary means of communicating behavioural requirements to new recruits. The interviewees acknowledged that the lack of training and orientation for individuals who were required to commence work immediately was problematic and often resulted in employee turnover. However, due to staff shortages and the hectic pace of the customer service environment, this practice was viewed as unavoidable.

It is evident that the organisation's culture is clearly communicated through credos, codes of conduct, and value statements displayed in each of the hotels. Furthermore, the development of close teams in each department enables both serial and investiture socialisation to take place. The findings suggest that the development of social cohesion and the socialisation process is one of the strongest and most consistent methods of communicating behavioural requirements to, not only new employees, but also existing employees. Social control mechanisms provide the opportunity for behavioural requirements to be communicated by peers, mentors and respected colleagues (Ouchi, 1979).

The interviewees highlighted the importance of establishing desirable social norms as employees are able to direct, correct and motivate each other to achieve management goals. The significance of social control mechanisms is evident in the interviewees' examples of employee camaraderie and extra role performance. Furthermore, the critical role that department managers and supervisors have in establishing and maintaining the desired social norms is also apparent. The importance placed on employee respect and trust for managers by the organisation is further emphasised by the hotel value statement that declares "we [employees] understand that our managers and supervisors are making the decisions that are best for us all" (Values Statement, n.d.). The statement also subtly implies trust should be given unreservedly by employees. However, the very need to declare that employees should trust managers indicates that, gaining and/or maintaining employee trust and respect may be an issue for some managers. The inference is that employees are responsible for giving trust and respect, rather than managers gaining employee trust and respect. The data suggests, if managers do not gain employee respect, the effect of social control mechanisms may be diminished.

5.2.4 Development of Interpersonal Competencies

Research Question #3: How, if at all, do employers develop interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes within employees?

The interviewees were clear in the belief that they could not teach people how to smile or be friendly. This claim correlates closely with the work of Spencer and Spencer (2003) who point out that attitudes and traits are difficult to develop. On the other hand, it is apparent that managers believe if they can identify, during the recruitment process, people who have the core traits required for successful interpersonal interaction, then they are able to draw out or further develop these skills in employees. The findings also indicate that people who are given the 'benefit-of-doubt' and are hired in the belief that sufficient IpC may be developed, but, do not respond to training and development strategies, are eventually moved to non-customer contact positions or encouraged to leave.

A number of strategies used to develop employee IpC are revealed in the findings. As previously noted, formal customer service training is an important

aspect of the hotel group's employee development strategy. To ensure this training takes place it is made clear to all managers that new employees need to attend training sessions within the first month of commencing employment. Yet, as also previously discussed, the interviewees recognised the limitations of this formal training. The employment of staff that require considerable development of IpC and the requirement for them to immediately commence work in customer service roles presents a significant issue for managers. It is obvious that, ideally, only staff that have had previous training and are competent would interact with customers, however, as this is not possible in the hotel environment, staff competencies are primarily developed on-the-job.

On-the-job training through the coaching and mentoring of employees by management and peers is seen as an important method of developing staff. On-the-job training provides employees with the ability to develop their IpC under the direct supervision of others and when situations are beyond the scope of their own ability, they are able to seek help from the more experienced staff around them. All of the interview respondents spoke of the importance of coaching and mentoring employees, however, it was also recognised that often on-the-job training is not carried out, either effectively, or at all. A number of reasons contributing to the lack of on-the-job training and, coaching and mentoring by management are revealed in the findings. These include: role conflict, lack of management skills, the subjective and complex nature of IpC, and a general lack of direct incentive for management to invest time and energy into the task.

As discussed in Chapter Four, role conflict refers to conflicting expectations in an employee's job description resulting in one role receiving priority over another role (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Yagil, 2002). The dyadic nature of customer service provides considerable opportunity for role conflict to occur. Interviewees recognise that role conflict is particularly evident between the organisational requirements to minimise costs and the customer needs for service. While there is clear evidence that the hotel group has a customer focus, the participants reveal that the strongest, and perhaps most urgent, message managers receive is to meet organisational demands. It is also clear that employees are largely rewarded for effective management of the technical and financial aspects of their roles. This is obvious in the belief by interviewees, that

it is the technical managers that receive promotion. This may also be attributed to the fact that technical functions are able to be measured and assessed more easily (Ouchi, 1979). Furthermore, looking to the work of Westwood (2004) provides some answers for technical and financial concerns to be the organisations first priority. Westwood, (2004, p. 43) argues that the reason organisations focus for the most part on technical and financial concerns is that investment in service-orientated skills provides "questionable financial returns".

In addition to the overriding messages provided by management for managers to focus their attention on operational issues, the findings reveal that there are few consequences for managers if they choose to ignore customer service training and development altogether. Operational concerns are the most pressing issue and success in managing these requirements provides managers with rewards and recognition. Furthermore, as there is a lack of consequences for ignoring employee development, it would appear that the development of IpC are often given low priority by management.

Another explanation provided for the managers' lack of participation in on-the-job training is their own lack of service orientated skills and IpC. Moreover, it was believed that the subjective nature of interpersonal interaction and the personal and sensitive nature of this interaction, made it particularly difficult for many managers to confidently instruct employees in this area. It was revealed that the training and development of managers and supervisors has largely been overlooked and is now seen as a priority and essential to the continued development of customer service employees.

A further interesting finding is the use of customers as the primary means of training and developing new employees. New staff are often placed immediately in customer service roles with little or no training. While this was seen as problematic and adding to employee turnover, it was also viewed as necessary due to the pressing need for staff to work already understaffed shifts. To help offset employee low skill levels, new recruits are started on shifts that require less interaction and technical knowledge. On these shifts employees are able to interact with customers, learn service-orientated skills, job requirements and even develop language skills. The findings do not indicate whether customers are informed that these employees are in training and while guest perceptions of

customer services are not the focus of this study, a review of 150 guest comment cards revealed that only one response concerned a customer's difficulty in communicating with an Asian receptionist. This provides some indication that there is little adverse reaction to the practice of using customers in the training of staff however, due to the limitations of this research, the impact this practice has on customer satisfaction is largely unknown.

While interactive rather than technical proficiency is the primary focus of this study, the findings suggest employees who are more confident in carrying out technical aspects of the job have greater freedom and confidence to provide quality customer interactions. Consequently, this finding adds weight to the argument for well established procedures and standards. It also suggests that standardised technical processes may help empower employees to meet individual customer needs. It is reasonable to suggest then, that the development of service-orientated competencies should be pursued in conjunction with technical training and supported by well established standards.

5.2.5   Managing Customer Service

Research Question #4: How are employee interpersonal interactions and emotional displays managed?

5.2.5.1   Formal Control

Formal control mechanisms used by the Hotel Group to manage customer service interactions include process and output control strategies. This is correlated to Jaworski's (1988) conceptual framework presented and discussed in Chapter Two. Additionally, under process control, the main control mechanisms used by the Hotel Group include; standard operating procedures, coaching and mentoring, and employee empowerment. While the use of standard operating procedures generally applies to technical functions, it is evident that standard procedures have also been developed for some interactions between employees and customers. Standard operating procedures are also referred to as bureaucratic mechanisms by Ouchi (1980) and are exercised in the hotels to direct employee behaviour. Bureaucratic mechanisms include the setting of rules concerning processes to be completed and standards to be met, while also involving close personal monitoring, and directing of employees by management (Ouchi, 1980).

These characteristics are all evident to varying degrees within the studied organisation.

The hotel group has a well established brand that should provide the foundation for formal control (Jaworski, 1988). However, the findings suggest that, in relation to customer service interactions, the brand standards are not always followed. This could be due to managers believing that providing quality service requires going beyond what the standards state or from a lack of understanding of the Hotel Group's brand image. Nevertheless, there is some evidence of incongruence between what image and personality employees have projected, and what the brand image and personality call for. As a result, the effectiveness of the brand as a standard and control measure may be diminished or at least obscured.

The standard procedures for both technical and interactive components are viewed by some managers as a significant resource that form the basis for customer interactions and consistency. This suggests that the management of interpersonal encounters between employees and customers should not be viewed separately from the control and management of technical functions. However, when many of the interviewees discussed standard procedures it is clear they often viewed standards as a minimum requirement and that quality service was achieved through both, going beyond the standards, and through customisation strategies.

It is evident that there are two conflicting views of the significance and value of standard operating procedures. On the one hand, some managers believe standard operating procedures provide employees with valuable resources that underpin and provide a platform from which empowered decisions may be made with confidence. Conversely, other managers convey the message and belief that standard processes inhibit employee empowerment and perhaps even suppress quality service interactions.

These two views may lead to the management team sending conflicting messages to departmental supervisors and customer service employees. One message emphasises the importance of bureaucracy and procedures, the other, emphasises empowerment strategies at the expense of standard operating processes. Korczynski (2001) referred to these contradicting strategies as either

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rationalisation, or a customer-orientated point of view. They are at opposite ends of a spectrum that has at one end, the standardisation of services and at the other, customisation of services. With this view, managers and employees in the hotel group may be forced to choose between adopting a production-line approach, or at the expense of standards, an approach that emphasises the customisation of services through empowerment of employees. Eisenberg (1990) provides a cautionary note concerning standardisation and customisation strategies when he argues that undue requirement for consensus and interdependence may result in problems from lack of adaptation, whereas, excessive autonomy can result in conflicting action and dispute, where nothing gets done.

Interviewees were expressive about the importance of coaching and mentoring to not only teach and instruct, but also monitor and direct the behaviour of employees. However, the interview findings also show that, while well intentioned, managers may not consistently implement coaching and mentoring strategies. It was believed factors hindering the management of employee interpersonal interactions with customers include the manager's own lack of experience and confidence in interpersonal interactions. Interestingly, this reason was also provided for management's lack of on-the-job training and coaching and mentoring of staff. A second reason provided for management's hesitation to control and correct employees was their concern over replacing staff if the employee left. This reason may also reflect the managers own lack of confidence and ability to manage employee interpersonal interactions.

5.2.5.2 Output Control

There is clear evidence that formal output controls are important to the management and control of customer service interactions. However, it is also apparent that the effectiveness of these types of controls are limited to service interactions that can be clearly observed, measured and compared to standards. This is primarily due to customer service interactions being complex, heterogeneous and subjective by nature (Kotler et al., 2003) and thus, they are not only very difficult to control, but it is difficult to establish the contribution of individual employees to the overall customer service function (Ouchi 1979). Significant output control measures identified in the findings include;

performance evaluation, correction and discipline, and rewards and recognition mechanisms.

To evaluate employee performance, managers are involved in the complex tasks of assessing employee work quality through observation of activities, and deciphering from their behaviour, whether employees are competent or not. While, these assessments of employee behaviour are moderated and informed by customer feedback and mystery shopper reports, these forms of feedback are intermittent, hence may not provide managers with sufficient information about the individual performance of an employee. Moreover, as assessments by managers of interpersonal interactions are largely subjective interpretations of employee competence, there is the possibility for inconsistent standards to be applied at different times and with different people.

When deficient employee performance is identified, there is evidence that managers are able to implement a number of strategies to correct and discipline staff. All managers recognised that due to the nature of customer service, employees make mistakes and therefore, when appropriate, rather than negative discipline procedures being administered, it was best to apply positive discipline using strategies such as encouragement, coaching and development plans. Furthermore, if employees had significant personal issues that interfered with their ability to provide the required levels of service the Hotel Group provided employees with access to external counselling. These positive discipline strategies correlate with Simons' (2005) discussion of the sociologist's view of human nature and employee motivation, which argues that employees inherently want to do a good job. Nevertheless, there is also evidence that managers use negative discipline strategies which include, threats of formal discipline, redeployment of underperforming staff, and when required, the implementation of formal discipline procedures. It is also important to note that at times underperformance is overlooked by management thereby avoiding the need for correction and discipline.

The findings also highlight that rewards and recognition are viewed as control mechanisms as they are perceived to provide motivation for employees to achieve the desired results (Simons, 2005). The fact that the hotels offer low pay to customer service employees has already been established, consequently, the

findings reveal that managers look to alternative forms of rewarding and recognising employee efforts. Simons (2005) identifies four classifications of incentives including the desire; to acquire wealth, for inclusion and connection, to develop and advance, and for lifestyle. These classifications provide a useful framework from which to discuss the hotels employee incentives.

To try to meet the employees' desire for wealth managers engage in rewarding employees with small tokens of appreciation for delivery of quality service or reaching performance standards. When managers asked employees about their preferences concerning types of rewards, cash payments were not their first priority. Rather, petrol, shopping and entertainment vouchers were seen as more desirable. More importantly, managers actually asked employees' for their input. This practice links closely with socialisation mechanisms that are discussed in the informal control section. Nevertheless, while these little rewards provide some recognition of employee achievements, it is clear that the interviewees believe the lack of financial rewards are a significant issue that eventually results in employee disillusionment and often resignation. Furthermore, there was no evidence that lifestyle incentives were offered to employees. Perhaps one explanation for this is that the need for customer service employees to work shifts including evenings and weekends in the hotel environment is unavoidable. To compensate for the lack of financial reward and disrupted lifestyle, there is evidence that managers focus on meeting employees perceived desire for inclusion and connection, and in particular the offer of development and advancement to employees.

Interviewees were enthusiastic about the strategies used to create inclusion, connection and team spirit in employees. Social events and the development of friendships with colleagues are obviously viewed as beneficial to maintaining employee motivation and enthusiasm. In addition, interviewees believed using letters of thanks from managers, employee of the month tributes, and spontaneous statements of appreciation to recognise outstanding employee performance were of value. Conversely, they were also aware that these strategies were not always used as they were dependent of the motivation of management to implement and maintain them.

The findings suggest that overall, managers believe the most effective strategy to motivate, reward and inspire employees is the offer of employee development and promotion. While this strategy may have merits, as one manager (Alan) stated, "… if you teach someone something every day they will stay" it relies on the assumption that employees want to develop a career in hotels and seek advancement, which may not always be true. This perception is reinforced by one interview account of an employee who turned down promotion to a management position as the long and unsocial hours of working in hotels and low pay were the main reasons for leaving, and promotion was not going to resolve these issues.

Therefore, it is clear that formal control measures, including standard operating procedures and other bureaucratic mechanisms, are of benefit to managing interactions between employees and customers as they provide a basis for achieving consistency (Ouchi, 1980). However, the interviewees raise a number of issues concerning the weaknesses and capabilities of these mechanisms to maintain control in the hotel environment. These limitations include an inability of management to consistently control the customisation of service and cope with the complexity of customer service.

5.2.5.3 Informal Control

There is convincing evidence that cultural, social, and self control mechanisms are of particular importance to the hotel group. The importance of informal control mechanisms is supported by Ouchi (1980), who argues that organisational culture provides employees with consistent messages and establishes norms which are just as significant as the more bureaucratic mechanisms revealed in formal control.

The observable use of cultural control mechanisms within the Hotel Group include credos, codes of conduct and values statements. Both the documents analysed and the interviewee comments reveal a clear and consistent representation of the hotel group's culture. It is interesting to note that the majority of messages provided by the written documents analysed relate to employee behaviour. This observation could be attributed to the focus of the research hence researcher bias. However, it is evident that the use credos, codes

of conduct and values statements provide, an effective and inoffensive method of transmitting expected behaviour standards. Conversely, as previously identified, managers are hesitant to discuss directly with employees issues concerning their behaviour and particularly interpersonal interactions. These findings are congruent with Ouchi's (1979) argument that cultural controls may be more effective and directive than bureaucratic mechanisms.

A further benefit of cultural control is it's relatively stable and enduring nature (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007). It is this cultural stability that, most of all, helps to overcome the effects of transferring and promoting supervisory and management staff. As one interview respondent pointed out, the goals of the organisation need to be embedded in the culture as, within one year, there could be "almost 100 percent" employee turnover. However, achieving goal congruence between employees and the organisation is a slow process (Jaworski, 1988) so the effects of cultural control may be weakened if customer service staff only remain with the Hotel Group for a short time. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Hotel Group's culture is not only well defined and captured in the written documentation but also in beliefs and values of the interviewees.

All interviewees held the view that working in hotels, and indeed the hospitality industry, was a career choice and required a passion for service and hospitality. This is not surprising, as many of the interview respondents had invested considerable time and effort working in various hospitality organisations to obtain the positions they currently held. What was interesting was an underlying expectation that employees should share the same passion for hospitality work and commitment to the industry. Interlinked with the culture of commitment and dedication is the message that employees are expected to "help without being asked" and "go the extra mile to make our guests happy", put simply 'do what it takes' to ensure both colleagues and customers are cared for. The power of this type of control is evident in one interviewee's appreciation of staff who worked consistently beyond the end of their shift to ensure team success without claiming additional pay. On the other hand, many of the managers interviewed also recognise that employees with these characteristics are becoming harder to find.

The importance of work groups and teams in the hotel environment and the emphasis on commitment and dedication to the team provides the opportunity for strong social controls to be established (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). Interviewees spoke of the importance of developing and maintaining social cohesion within their departments. As managers cannot oversee every employee activity, it is clear that social control mechanisms are essential to the management of hotel customer service. The findings reveal that a considerable amount of employee training, development, encouragement and control is achieved by interaction between members of work teams. Managers spoke positively about teams and employees who participated in serial and investiture socialisation as they recognised the benefits provided by employee who hold common values and beliefs.

In conjunction with social control the findings illustrate that customer service employees need to exercise a considerable amount of self control. They are often faced with interacting with customers and making decisions without the support and direction of others. In the context of this study, self control refers to an employee's ability to direct, manage, and control themselves during customer service interactions. There is clear evidence throughout all sections of the findings that employees are expected to be able to exercise self control. These expectations are manifest in the customisation strategy adopted by the Hotel Group, in values statements that encourage employees to not be afraid to challenge the standard operating procedures and in the comments of interviewees who advocate employees use their own initiative and let their own personality come out. In contrast, it is also evident that customer service involves emotional labour requiring employees to maintain control over their own feelings (Sturdy & Fineman, 2001). The findings suggest that effective employee self control may break down if employees feel that they can 'get away' with substandard performance or if they are unable to sustain the demands of emotional labour. The cause for employees 'getting away' with substandard performance was primarily attributed to managers avoiding to initiate formal discipline procedures because of the possible consequences that employees would leave. The importance of controlling employees' emotional displays is also captured by the range of escalating measures available to managers, if employees are unable to

sustain self control. Initially, if employees show signs of not being able to cope, managers are able to send the employee to the HRM for additional support. If this is not sufficient an external counsellor is made available to the employee to help resolve the issue. However, it is clear that if employees are not able to control their emotional displays in the customer service role then they will be removed from areas that require customer contact.

5.2.6 Factors Disrupting Management Control

The findings identify that the lack of reward (especially low pay rates) offered to employees, and high employee turnover, have a significant impact on the ability of the organisation to constantly maintain the desired levels of control. These findings are consistent with Ouchi's (1980) argument that successful bureaucratic control depends on employees regarding the exchange of labour as fair in terms of compensation. It is evident that many of the managers believe that the exchange between the Hotel Group and employee is currently not equitable. Furthermore, there is high employee turnover, which at least in part is blamed on the low pay rates. As successful cultural control is reliant on a stable workforce to enable the long term socialisation period necessary for instilling values and beliefs (Ouchi, 1980), the high employee turnover may be causing considerable disruption to cultural control mechanisms.

5.3 Conclusion

Based on the outcomes of this study it is clear that both informal and formal control mechanisms are important to ensuring the desired levels of customer service are achieved by the organisation. Formal and more bureaucratic mechanisms are implemented primarily to control the technical functions of customer service. Additionally, there is evidence that bureaucratic measures are used successfully to manage interpersonal interactions over the telephone and when employees greet customers. Informal control is established through the organisational culture, social control measures and the requirement for employees to use self control. It is apparent that these mechanisms are largely used to align employees' values and goals to that of the organisation and to control their behaviour.

Finally, organisational standards, requirements and expectations can be established and known by management. However, knowing how to get employees to implement these standards is more difficult to achieve. While technical standards can be checked, measured, tested and, when required, corrected; interactive understanding, on the other hand, refers to subjective decision making. Can employees know how to conduct themselves during interpersonal interactions with customers, with the same certainty that they know how to carry out technical tasks? Can complex, sophisticated and unique interpersonal interactions be managed and controlled to the same extent as technical tasks?

6   Chapter Six: Conclusion

The research adopted both an exploratory approach to investigate what employee attributes and competencies are required to carry out customer service interactions and how managers govern employee interpersonal interactions with customers. There has been limited research directed toward management control of customer service interactions in hotels, hence this investigation adds to what is known as it connects management control theory to customer service interpersonal interactions in hospitality. The aim of this chapter is to draw conclusions from the findings and discussion of the study and discuss the implications of the research. Lastly, the limitations of the research are highlighted and recommendations for further research are made.

6.1   Implications of the Research

While a single case study cannot provide a sound basis for directing management practice, this study highlights a number of interesting findings relevant to the hotel and wider hospitality industry. Each of these finding and their implications are presented and discussed below.

6.1.1   The Importance of Congruence between the Brand Image, Employee Image and Management

There was clear evidence to suggest that many customer service employees display the competencies and attributes *required* to complete service interactions. However, there was considerable evidence to suggest that the Hotel Group was experiencing difficulty finding employees with the *desired* competencies and attributes that meet the brand image they want to convey to customers. In other words, the process of delivering customer service and interacting with customers was being carried out, yet, there were concerns expressed that the interactions were not consistently of sufficient standard or desired style. Examining the Hotel Group's brand image in comparison to the desired employee competencies and style of customer service, presented some interesting findings, particularly as they related to differences between brand image and personality, and employee image and personality. It is evident that when displays of an employee's personality and image do not meet the desired image and personality of the

organisation divergence between employee behaviour and management goals may arise.

The importance of management's understanding of the organisation's brand image and personality is also highlighted by the discussion. If managers are not familiar with, and aligned to the image and personality of the organisation then disparity between management's expectations, customers' expectations and employee actions and behaviours may occur. Effective alignment of employee and management goal congruence first requires the alignment of managers' goals to the organisation.

6.1.2 Mechanisms for Communicating Customer-Orientated Behaviour Requirements to Employees

The research suggests that customer-orientated behaviours are communicated to employees via a variety of channels. Nevertheless, the research indicates a pervading belief that employees should intrinsically know what customer-orientated behaviour is appropriate and expected of them. While to a certain extent this may have been true in the past, interviewee comments highlight that the diversity of employees and changing social norms are making it increasingly difficult to find people who hold similar views of hospitality to those desired by the organisation. Therefore, there is an increasing need to explicitly communicate behavioural requirements to employees and further develop customer service abilities in employees.

The data showed that it can be difficult for department managers to directly confront employees regarding their behaviour, social skills and emotional ability. The formal orientation and customer service training sessions provide an opportunity to communicate behavioural requirements to employees in a less offensive manner as the training and directives are focussed toward the collective rather than individual employee. Yet, for the messages provided by formal training to be effective, department managers must explicitly reiterate and reinforce these messages and behavioural requirements to employees while they are working on-the-job.

The informal control mechanisms evident in the findings also provide management with a consistent and less confrontational method of aligning employees' behaviour with the goals and expectations of management. Cultural and social control mechanisms provided the Hotel Group with a powerful means of directing, correcting and reinforcing behavioural requirements to employees.

6.1.3 The Importance of Department Managers and Supervisors

As new employees begin work often with little or no prior training, much of their learning and training is conducted while working on-the-job. This places considerable responsibility on managers and supervisors to ensure employees obtain and display the required behaviours and skills to complete customer service activities successfully. The skills, capabilities and motivation of managers and supervisors to carry out this training and develop strong social groups, are therefore, central to the consistent success of customer service interactions. For employees to be effective, managers need to be actively involved in employee training and development as well as coaching and mentoring. The role conflict managers face between cost control and operational needs taking preference over customer service must be resolved. It is imperative that recognition and rewards are provided equally for all management roles.

6.1.4 The Types of Control Mechanisms that are Effective for Customer Service Interactions

The findings also illustrate that the technical and interactive nature of customer service in the hotel environment requires the use of both formal and informal control mechanisms. Technical tasks are more suited to control through formal bureaucratic standards and processes. However, the effective standardisation of technical tasks may also instil confidence in employees allowing them greater opportunity for providing flexible and customised interpersonal interaction. Conversely, the control of interpersonal interactions and employee emotional displays are more effectively achieved through the informal mechanisms of cultural, social and self control.

The study offers considerable evidence that the Hotel Group works to establish and maintain an organisational culture that affects employee behaviour and shape customer service interactions. However, there is also evidence of, what may be a traditional hospitality culture, influencing management's approach to motivating employees. This is suggested by management's underlying belief, that people who work in hotels should be committed to and keenly interested in a career in hospitality. Moreover, the message implied by the findings is that people committed to hospitality are willing to put in the hard work for little financial reward to establish a career and gain advancement. There are also subtle signs of a belief that hospitality people will give quality customer service because that is what they love to do, as one interviewee (Helen) stated, they look for people who have a "passion for the industry", which provokes images of an artist, who is prepared to go without to fulfil their passion for painting. While it is difficult to ascertain the strength or consistency of these beliefs on the basis of this study alone, it would seem reasonable to deduce that, due to apparent high employee turnover, many customer service employees do not hold the same views. Managers commented that it was becoming more difficult to find people who had these traditional values and traits. This suggests that some of the traditional management perspectives of hospitality employees may need to change to meet the needs of contemporary society. This view is supported by Ouchi's (1979), view (presented in section 2.6.3.3. of this document) where he discusses the increasing diversity of peoples' views and goals resulting in a lack of commitment to community and social cohesion.

The development of social cohesion and norms, through serial and investiture socialisation mechanisms, helps to create self managing teams that reinforce the goals of management. Furthermore, cohesive, goal-congruent work groups are very important, as they enable social control mechanisms to govern interpersonal interaction and customisation strategies. Management's ability to develop and sustain social cohesion and goal congruence in employees is essential to the success of customisation strategies, which enable employees to tailor their interpersonal interactions to provide customers with an individual and unique experience.

If social cohesion and goal congruence among employees is not able to be established or sustained it may ultimately result in the need for the standardisation of interpersonal interactions through more bureaucratic control measures. This would enable customer service interactions to be delivered to a consistent standard by employees of varying abilities and capabilities. However, the consequence would be to remove the human phenomenon of unique interpersonal experience.

As customer service requires employees to carry out emotional labour, employee self control is also critical to successful interpersonal interactions. The importance of employee self control to customer service suggests that further development of this area in employees may improve their interpersonal interactions and provide additional support to help employees sustain emotional work.

6.2   Limitations of the Research

It is important to acknowledge that the conclusions of this investigation should not be interpreted beyond the parameters of this study. The qualitative case study research was conducted within a constructivist paradigm as a deep understanding of complex human interaction and cultural systems was sought (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research relies on the involvement, abilities and insights of the researcher and therefore, may be influenced by opinions, attitude and perspectives that contribute to subjectivity and bias (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the findings and discussion reflect the views and perceptions of the participants in a single embedded case study in New Zealand. A further limitation of the study is that the interview data was collected from managers and supervisors only. Although managers and supervisors apply and maintain many of the control mechanisms, it would be beneficial to understand the employees' views and beliefs concerning the management of their customer service interactions. Therefore, any generalisations beyond the study itself should be made prudently and readers of the study are cautioned to determine the level of comparability and transferability between the study and other settings.

6.3   Recommendations for Future Research

The investigation raises the need for more extensive research to be undertaken in the area of managing employee interpersonal interactions. Using the theoretical frameworks discussed, quantitative methods could be used to provide further insights from a broader base of participants. A number of other interesting issues are raised by the study would benefit from further investigation. For example, it could be beneficial to examine the trends in management strategies for governing customer service interactions in an ever increasing diverse work place. It would be interesting to investigate if the management of hotels were adopting more standardised bureaucratic strategies to control interpersonal interactions at the expense of customisation and unique customer experiences. An investigation could also seek to examine the levels of congruence between organisations, managers and employees pertaining to image, personality and behavioural expectations. Further research may also seek to find if the hospitality industry maintains traditional cultural values and norms that are incongruent with employees' contemporary goals and values, and if so, does this signal that the hospitality industry needs to change its methods of management?

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Appendix 1: Invitation to Participate in Research

Invitation to Participate in Hospitality Research

Project Title

Perceptions of employee interpersonal skills in the hospitality industry: A case study of Four Star hotels.

An Invitation

I would like to invite you to participate in research on the attitudes and interpersonal skills (also known as emotional or social intelligence) of employees who work under your supervision. Your expert opinion and experiences are valuable to this research.

Research Purpose and Aims

The aim of this study is to identify to what degree hospitality employers believe that front line service workers display the attitudes and interpersonal skills (also known as emotional or social intelligence) that are needed to manage successful customer interactions. Furthermore, it seeks to identify if and how employers are communicating interpersonal requirements and developing interpersonal skills within employees.

This research focuses on exploring employer's views and perceptions of the current levels of interpersonal skills within hospitality service staff of four star hotels. It seeks to identify the interpersonal and emotional skills employers require from employees to meet the emotional needs of customers while presenting the desired corporate image.

How do you participate in the Research?

I will be contacting you in the next few days to follow up on this invitation and to personally introduce myself, answer any initial questions that you may have and to provide you with more in-depth information on how you can take part in, and support this research.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Warren Goodsir
warren.goodsir@aut.ac.nz
Ph: 09 921 9999 ext 8374
School of Hospitality and Tourism
Faculty of Applied Humanities
Auckland University of Technology
Private Bag 92006

Participant Information Sheet

AUT
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Date Information Sheet Produced:

2007

Project Title

Perceptions of employee interpersonal skills in the hospitality industry: A case study of Auckland hotels.

An Invitation

Dear XXX

I would like to invite you to participate in research on the attitudes and interpersonal skills (also known as emotional or social intelligence) of employees who work under your supervision. My name is Warren Goodsir and I am undertaking research into the ability of customer service staff to relate successfully with customers and the management of these interactions. Your experience and knowledge of the hospitality industry and the people who work in customer service within the industry is important to this research. However, your participation in this research is voluntary and should you wish, you are able to withdraw from the research project at any stage.

What is the purpose of this research?

The aim of this study is to identify to what degree hospitality employers believe that front line service workers display the interpersonal / emotional attributes (often referred to as 'attitudes') that are needed to accomplish successful customer interactions. Furthermore, it seeks to identify how managers, govern these interactions by communicating interpersonal requirements and developing interpersonal skills within employees.

This research will be used:
- For further understanding of staff attitudes and emotional skills.
- For identify strategies to improve employee interpersonal and customer service skills.
- For the completion a thesis to meet the requirement for my Masters degree in International Hospitality Management.

It may also be used for publication of articles in hospitality magazines, academic journals and conference presentations.

How were you chosen for this invitation?

Selection for participation in this research is based on the following criteria:
- Participants are managers or supervisors of customer service employees within an Auckland Hotel
- Participants are over 20 years of age
- Your Human resource manager may have recommended you for participation in the research

What will happen in this research?

Your participation will involve one, one and one half hour interview that will be held at a time and location that is convenient to you. The interview will be recorded and then word processed. You will receive a copy of the transcript to look through and make adjustments to if required. Once this is complete this information will be used for the study.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The information sought in this research is not controversial, so you should not experience any discomfort, be exposed to any humiliation or face any repercussion or risk. Furthermore, your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. You will not be able to be identified from the results of the research.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The only cost to you should be one and one half hour of your time. It is my hope that this will be offset by the experience of participating and sharing your perceptions.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

It is important that you give consideration to your involvement in this research. If you have any further questions regarding your participation or the research please contact me (Warren Goodsir) on 921 9999 ext: 8374. Remember, you may withdraw from this study prior to 6 June 2007, without any adverse consequences, penalty or repercussions.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you wish to participate in the research please fill in and return the Consent Form within 7 days.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

On completion of the research a summary of the findings will be mailed to you if you wish (remember to mark this area of the consent form).

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Irene Ryan (see contact details below).

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEC, Madeline Banda, *madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Warren Goodsir
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Ph: 09 921 9999 ext 8374
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Faculty of Applied Humanities
Auckland University of Technology
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Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Irene Ryan
iryan@aut.ac.nz
Ph: 09 921 9999 ext 7852
Auckland University of Technology

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12 June *2007*, AUTEC Reference number 07/25

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Consent Form

Project title: **Perceptions of employee interpersonal skills in the hospitality industry: A case study of Auckland hotels**

Project Supervisors: **Irene Ryan and Michael Lück**

Researcher: **Warren Goodsir**

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 10 May 2007.

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○ I understand that the interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed.

○ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

○ I am 20 years of age or older.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

○ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes○   No○

Participant's signature: ....……………………………………………………

Participant's name: ....……………………………………………………

Participant's Contact Details:

Home Phone number : …………………………………………………………………………..

Mobile number :   …………………………………………………………………………..

Postal address :   …………………………………………………………………………..

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **12 June 2007;** *AUTEC Reference number 07/25*

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

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Appendix 4: Interview Information

Interview Information & Abbreviated Questions

Date:			Interview questions	
Time:			Consent form	
Code:			Participation forms	
Age 20-25 26-30 31-35 35+	How many hours a week do you spend supervising staff		How long have you been in this position?	
Male / Female	Do you have any formal qualifications? Polytechnic/university Certificate / diploma / bachelor degree / other…			
What were you doing before this?				

Levels of Employee Interpersonal Skills

1. Tell me about customer service in your hotel

2. What image is the hotel trying to project to the customers?

3. What skills do customer service staff require?

4. Are these skills difficult to find?

   - do you get a lot of people replying to adds? How many of these have the required skills?

   - What skills are lacking?

5. What prevents or gets in the way of employees providing good customer service?

6. What strategies does the hotel have for ensuring quality service is maintained?

7. How do you manage the interactions of customer service staff with guests?

8. What is the most difficult situation that empoyees have to deal with?

9. What issues have you encountered when managing customer service staff?

10. What would help employees to provide better customer service?

11. What happens if employees do not display the required interpersonal skills?

12. Can interpersonal competencies be developed in staff?

Appendix 5: Interview Questions and Documents Requested

Interview Questions

Opening question

1. What does providing customers with hospitality mean to you?

Employee ability to provide customer service

- *Do customer service employees display the interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes that are needed to complete successful customer service interactions?*
  2. How would you describe the current level of employee interpersonal (social) skills?
     - this question could be clarified as ability to relate to a variety of people in a variety of situations
  3. What interpersonal (social) skills are required by customer service employees?
     - Why are these skills important?

Management of Interpersonal skills

- *How are employee interpersonal interactions and emotional displays managed?*

  4. What managerial issues arise from the interpersonal (social) interaction between employees and customers
     - How are these issues being managed?
  5. How, in your opinion, do employees cope with handling customer complains?
     - What would you like them to do?
     - Can you think of any instances when employees don't interact appropriately?
     - What is the most difficult situation that empoyees have to deal with?
  6. How do you as a manager/supervisor, cope with employees who do not have the appropriate level of interpersonal skills?
  7. Are employees required to act in a certain way or to project a certain persona?
     - How are they directed to act?
  8. Do you have standardised scripts that employees are required to use in certain situations?
     - Why are they required to use these standard procedures?
     - What are some examples?
     - Do employees always use these scripts?

9. Thinking about the standardisatoin or customerisation of service processes:
   - How would you describe your customer service process?
   - How would you describe your prefference for these two styles of process?

Hiring and Training Employees

- *How, if at all, do managers develop interpersonal competencies, and emotional attributes within employees?*

   10. How are employees with the right attitudes and skills selected?
      - How difficult is it to find these employees?
   11. How are employees, who do not have the required interpersonal skills managed?
   12. How are interpersonal skills developed within employees?

Communication of Requirements

- *How do managers communicate interpersonal skill, and emotional attributes requirements to employees?*

   13. How are the required attitudes and interpersonal skill levels communicated to employees?
      - How could employee interpersonal skills be further improved/developed?

Questions for managers who Interview

   14. How are employee attitudes and interpersonal skills identified and evaluated prior to employees being hired?
      - How successful are attempts to identify employees with the required customer service orientation?

Appendix 6: Documents Requested for Analysis

Documentation for analysis:

Company mission/goals/values:

- Documentation of company Mission, values and goals
- Brand standards for Hotels

Job descriptions:

Job descriptions for the following positions:
- Food and beverage attendant
- Receptionist
- Porter

Interviewing:

- Copy of Interview questionnaire

Orientation:

- Copy of Orientation document used for induction of new staff

Training:

- Copy of Customer Service Training documents
- Copies of current customer service initiatives

Performance evaluations:

- Copy of blank performance evaluation form

Customer Feedback:

- Copies of recent Customer feedback