

ENHANCING THE COMMUNICATION SKILLS AMONG HOTEL EMPLOYEES: THE INTRODUCTION OF MIND MAP TECHNIQUE

Efin Shu^{1*)}

¹⁾Universitas Pelita Harapan, Medan

e-mail: efin.shu@uph.edu

ABSTRACT

Communication skills are essential in the Hospitality industry as the industry mainly deals with people. When communication is handled properly, it will develop guests' loyalty toward the hotel brand. However, communication is usually challenging, especially during busy operational hours. Messages might not be delivered comprehensively at the right time due to employees' forgetfulness. Therefore, this community service aims to introduce the mind map technique to the Hotel employees, to enhance remembering, and to assist in organizing their daily tasks better. The method used in this community service is providing training to explain the technique, continuing with a mind map exercise, and ending with group presentations. From the training, the employees had gained more understanding about the technique. They felt that the technique was able to answer their needs related to effective communication and had a real and positive impact on them. The mind map technique is expected to be implemented daily by the Hotel employees so that the communication process will be improved.

Keywords: Communication Skills, Training, Mind Map Technique, Hospitality industry

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry in the industry requires people skills. These skills are also known as soft skills, which consist of various attributes and competencies that will help an individual to get along well with others, as mentioned by David Parnell, a legal consultant, communication coach, and author (*Parnell & Co.*, n.d.). People skills are always associated with having a good personality, empathy, tonality, etc. They also often come down in the form of excellent and effective communication skills. Communication skills determine the way people interact with each other, whether verbally, non-verbally, or in writing.

In the hospitality industry, the importance of effective communication skills cannot be underestimated. When guests receive complete information on time, or when their complaints are handled appropriately, they tend to develop a loyalty towards the hotel brand. They will not easily switch to the competitors due to the favorable location, lower prices, or great amenities. Communication that is conducted properly will also create an emotional connection between the hotel employees and guests. On the internal of the organization, employees who are being communicated well will be motivated and more productive in performing their jobs. Overall, it will improve the employees' well-being.

Based on the research by Sayin (2019) on 35 front office managers of five-star hotels in Alanya, Turkey where a high degree of tourism activities happened, there are some common communication problems in the front office department. The problems such as messages are not delivered comprehensively and at the right time; differences in languages and cultures; poor product knowledge; misunderstanding due to technical factors; and distance due to status.

Among all the problems mentioned previously, the problem that occurred the most was not delivering messages comprehensively and at the right time (54%). A similar problem is also experienced by one of the four-star Hotels in North Sumatera, Indonesia. Employees were not delivering the complete information at the right time, and this resulted in failure to fulfill guests' requests. There were times when information had been delivered completely in written form to another party, however, failure in fulfilling guests' requests still occurred. Most of the time, the reason behind this was the employee concerned forgot about the information or forgot to deliver the information on time, especially during busy hours.

There are some solutions given to prevent forgetting from happening. Ali (n.d.) emphasized the importance of written communication. In the era of technology nowadays, a piece of information or a message is mostly typed on a gadget like a smartphone or a laptop. However, handwritten notes are proven to recall information better than note-taking on a gadget. Note-taking in bullet points will also assist in remembering. In addition, just like the quote “A picture is worth a thousand words”, drawing notes will be the best way to remember information. However, this might not be possible during busy operational hours. Therefore, visualizing or imagining the information in our mind could be done instead.

One of the popular techniques in information visualization is the mind map technique. The term “mind map” was first introduced by Tony Buzan in 1974 through his BBC TV series called “Use Your Head”. This technique helps the mind to understand a piece of information in a meaningful and simple way (Buzan & Buzan, 2010).

This technique is useful for both personal and group and is more effective than written communication (Buzan & Buzan, 2010) and enhances remembering of written information (Farrand et al., 2002). In education field, this technique develops student knowledge; increases creativity and motivation in studying; and helps in analysis and brainstorming ideas that are not bound by rigid order and structure (Buzan & Buzan, 2010). It encourages active learning (Farrand et al., 2002).

Previous research by Wickramasinghe et al. (2011) on 34 students found that the mind map technique helps memorize and summarize information in an orderly manner compared to their previous self-study techniques. They planned to learn more about this technique and implement it in their future studies.

Another research by Parikh (2016) on class-8th students whom were taught through mind mapping technique was proven to be more effective than the traditional method. It is efficacious for both experimental group of boys and girls and they viewed it as positive.

While this technique is commonly used in education field and is proven to be effective, the writer is interested in introducing the mind map technique to the hospitality employees at one of the four-star hotels in Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia; since they are experiencing failure in delivering messages comprehensively at the right time due to being forgetful. Therefore, the writer had the urge to introduce the mind map technique to them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Communication

According to Sayin (2019), communication is “the process of information, message exchange, and meaning transfer between source and target”. It is an essential element of relationships among individuals, therefore, it has to exist to support organizational activities.

The flow of communication at workplace is divided into three (Robbins et al., 2013), they are:

1. Downward communication

This type of communication flows from the higher to the lower level. This flow of communication is usually performed by the superior to the subordinates in the forms of assigned goals, instructions, policies and procedures, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and feedbacks. This type of communication can be a problem when it is performed one-way only.

2. Upward communication

This type of communication flows from the lower to the higher level. This flow of communication is usually performed by the subordinates to the superior in the forms of providing feedbacks, updating work progress, and relaying current problems.

3. Lateral communication

This type of communication flows horizontally among individuals of the same level and work group. This flow of communication can help facilitate coordination; however, may create dysfunctional conflicts.

2.2. The Mind-Map Technique

The mind-map technique is the technique where information is visualized as an “image in the brain” in a rational and illusory manner. It started from the main idea and expanded into branches with keywords for each branch. Attractive images might be added to increase visualization and attention. The usage of three colors or more is good for stimulating memory and creativity. Overall, the utilization of keywords, images, and colors represent an association with the main idea (Buzan & Buzan, 2010).

According to Farrand et al. (2002), with the mind map technique, ideas are created through the power of association and it is useful for memory retention. Davies (2011) also supports the idea of memory retention, saying that “it is generally easier to remember a diagram than to remember a description.” This is reasonable since a mind map can transform lengthy and tedious information into a colorful, memorable, and very systematic diagram which is in line with how brain works naturally (Buzan & Buzan, 2010).

3. METHODS

The method of implementing this service learning is by conducting training for the Hotel employees which ends with a mind-map practice. Due to busy operational, the training was conducted only for the supervisor and managerial level positions as a start, such as the General Manager, Assistant Director of Sales, Sales Coordinator, Sales Manager, Financial Controller, Purchasing Manager, IT Supervisor, Chief Engineer, Chef de Partie, Steward Supervisor, Food and Beverage Manager, Front Office Manager, Guest Service Supervisor,

Duty Manager, Executive Housekeeper, Human Resource Manager, Chief Security, etc. Most of them were the leaders of Front of the House and Back of the House departments. It is expected that they will relay the training to their front area staff in the future.

Before deciding on the training day, the writer had a discussion with the Human Resources Manager on the specific communication problem they are facing. After identifying and analyzing the situations based on the Human Resources Manager's observation in the past, they have agreed on the problem of failure to deliver messages comprehensively at the right time which is due to being forgetful, especially in busy hours. Therefore, the writer proposed the mind map memory technique training to help solve this problem and to improve the communication process among the employees.

The training session covers: (1) the essence of communication process; (2) the importance of good communication skills in the Hospitality industry; (3) common communication problems in hospitality industry; (4) sources of communication problems; (5) ways to remembering information; (6) the mind map technique; (7) tips to improve memory; and (8) the mind map practice session. The training partners are the employees of one of the four-star Hotels in Medan, North Sumatra, focusing on the supervisor and managerial level positions as a start.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The training took place at one of the Hotel's meeting room, with round table setting equipped with a white paperboard and 3 different colors of marker pens on each table. The writer first started the training by emphasizing the core process of communication which not only information was transferred but the meaning as well. Then, she went on to explain the importance of communication and continued to common communication problem which went into the core problem of failure in delivering messages comprehensively at the right time. The writer then proposed some solutions such as taking handwritten notes, and using bullet points, until visualizing the information which led to the mind map memory technique. The technique was new to the participants but they were eager and enthusiastic to learn. The writer displayed some mind maps related to planning a birthday party and personal productivity to help participants understand how to draw the mind map. The writer also drew her example of mind map related to planning for a training session.

Before going to the practice session, the writer provided some tips for improving memory such as taking care of one's health which covers getting enough sleep; conducting physical and brain exercises regularly; eating healthily; and taking breaks for some relaxations. Other tips are: avoiding multitasking and being organized.

For the practice session, participants were asked to form groups of 5 to 6 members according to their departments or closely related departments. They had to draw a mind map related to a particular activity or a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of their department. The purpose of the mind map is to assist in remembering the activity or SOP in their day-to-day operation. The mind map is expected to be displayed on the notice board of the back area of each department so that it is visible to all employees of the department. Employees can also refer to the mind map whenever they are in doubt. This is in line with Davies (2011) who supports the idea of memory retention through a diagram rather than a description.

They had to start with a draft and then put the final mind map on the white paperboard upon the group consensus. They were encouraged to add pictures and use different colors to

improve visualization. The usage of three colors or more is good to stimulate memory and creativity and this is in line with (Buzan & Buzan, 2010). Upon finishing the mind map, each group had to present their mind map to the class. The best mind map was chosen based on the creativity and benefit to the department and was entitled to a gift. All groups participated actively and enthusiastically during the process of drawing the mind map until group presentation. By the end of the training session, the participants were asked to fill in an online survey for some feedbacks.

From the results of the online survey, participants stated that the material presented was able to answer their needs and broadened their knowledge. They also stated that the training activity had a real and positive impact on them. They also had fun with the training and mind map activity.

5. CONCLUSION

This activity results in understanding that the most common communication problem during the operation is not being able to deliver the message completely at the right time, and it is usually due to being forgetful, especially during busy hours. To help remember the tasks and activities during operational hours, the mind map technique was introduced to the Hotel employees. The technique has been implemented successfully in the education field and has proven to be effective in enhancing remembering and analytical skills. Therefore, this technique is expected to the present the same benefits to the Hotel employees as well.

Despite a new technique, the participants were eager and enthusiastic to learn and practice it. All groups participated actively during the process of drawing the mind map until group presentation. The training had broadened their knowledge and they had gained more understanding about the technique. They felt that the technique was able to answer their needs related to effective communication. In addition, the training activity had a real and positive impact on them, besides the fun it provided.

Finally, the mind map technique is expected to be implemented on daily basis by the Hotel employees so that the communication process will be improved, as well as assisting in organizing their daily tasks better.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer extends her deepest gratitude to the Hotel management for allowing her to conduct the training for the Hotel employees. She is also thankful to the Faculty of Economics and Business University of Pelita Harapan for all the supports to perform this community service.

REFERENCES

Ali, T. (n.d.). *5 Memory Exercises For Busy Executives* | by Tansel Ali | Medium. 2017.
Retrieved August 23, 2023, from <https://medium.com/@tanselali/5-memory-exercises-for-busy-executives-c0fe74684b98>

Buzan, T., & Buzan, B. (2010). *Mind Map Book, 1/e*. Rajpal & Sons.

Davies, M. (2011). Concept mapping, mind mapping and argument mapping: what are the

differences and do they matter? *Higher Education*, 62(3), 279–301.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9387-6>

Farrand, P., Hussain, F., & Hennessy, E. (2002). The efficacy of the mind map study technique. *Medical Education*, 36(5), 426–431.

Parikh, N. D. (2016). Effectiveness of teaching through mind mapping technique. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 3(3), 148–156.

Parnell & Co. (n.d.). 2014. Retrieved August 23, 2023, from <https://davidjparnell.com/>
Robbins, S., Judge, T. A., Millett, B., & Boyle, M. (2013). *Organisational behaviour*. Pearson Higher Education AU.

Sayin, K. (2019). The Effect of Communication Problems on Productivity in Hotel Operations: A Qualitative Application. *Mednarodno Inovativno Poslovanje = Journal of Innovative Business and Management*, 11(2), 51–58.

Wickramasinghe, A., Widanapathirana, N., Kuruppu, O., Liyanage, I., & Karunathilake, I. M. K. (2011). *Effectiveness of mind maps as a learning tool for medical students*.