

Summary

OPPORTUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Previous process saw 7% of guests not having rooms immediately ready ▪ Potential for hotel to improve existing communication and processes to turn rooms around faster after guest check-outs (reduce waiting time for incoming guests)
ACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Modified key processes involved in readying a “Dirty, Vacated” room for a new guest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prioritised attention to the most commonly-occurring engineering defects found in guest room facilities ▪ Devised new workflow for housekeeping attendants, enabling them to prioritise room cleaning ▪ Quick facts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Rollout period of 4 months ✓ No additional costs involved, beyond minimal internal training hours
RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 20% ↓ in number of guests who have to wait more than one hour for a room ▪ 27% ↓ in average waiting time for queue rooms ▪ 14 % ↑ improvement in guest satisfaction, stemming from reduced waiting time for rooms at check-in

OPPORTUNITY

PROVIDING ENOUGH CLEAN ROOMS ON TIME – A MULTI-STEP PROCESS

Based on data from ongoing guest feedback surveys, Fairmont Singapore realised in mid-2010 that there was a frequent shortage of clean, vacant rooms available to the Front Office at 2pm, which was the official check-in time for incoming guests.

As such, 7% of incoming guests did not have clean, vacant rooms at check-in. On average, they had to wait 66 minutes for their room, with 56% of guests waiting more than an hour. The hotel knew they had to improve the situation quick.

One of the reasons for this shortage: departing guests often used the key drop, or simply left without checking out at all. Accordingly, their rooms – despite having been vacated – continued to be reflected as ‘occupied due-out’ rooms on the hotel’s Property Management System (PMS). In turn, this meant the Housekeeping department was not activated to clean and ready these vacated rooms for new guests, leaving the hotel with **vacant and dirty** rooms when the 2pm check-in cycle came around. Also, when readying the rooms for release, Housekeeping often needed the help of Engineering to perform repair work for some rooms to ensure that only rooms of good condition are released for check-ins. All this led to an intense rush to ensure check-in guests are not kept waiting too long for rooms.

The hotel saw the opportunity to review the work processes involved in readying rooms for new guests, through **better collaboration between departments involved** (e.g. Housekeeping, Engineering).

In 2010, Fairmont Singapore embarked on a company-wide project to improve service consistency and reduce operational wastage; the hotel customised quality methodologies to adapt to the context of hospitality, Fairmont's unique culture, and organisational needs, and named it the "Fairmont Improvement & Innovation Programme" (Fii—please see Fairmont Fii case for details).

In this case, the solution was driven by the hotel's Quality team. Upon realising that waiting times at check-in was an issue (based on collected data), the team analysed the contributing factors and from there, identified the three main areas for improvement.

Key Steps

1. Identifying and fixing common defects, as well as optimising operating tempo

- The Housekeeping team studied data collected over 2 years to identify the top 8 engineering defects (e.g. spoilt toilet flushes) most commonly faced when turning over a room. Working with the Engineering team, they established the amount of time necessary to rectify each defect.
- Then, Housekeeping outlined a new process for Room Attendants (RAs): upon entering a dirty room, they would **first check against the list of top 8 common defects before starting to clean**. They would immediately alert Engineering of found defects, so that they could start fixing the defect while the RA concurrently cleans the room. Also, the hotel found 3 of the defects **could actually be rectified by RAs themselves**, given some training—this reduced the load on Engineering.
- In turn, the Engineering team **raised the internal priority** placed on fixing these top defects for urgent rooms. Where previously all requests to Engineering were handled on a first-come-first-served basis, the hotel now established a system to help them prioritise requests. Furthermore, the hotel also realised that engineering requests routinely spiked around late morning to early afternoon as the Room Attendants made their rounds and reported defects. In response, the Engineering team increased the staffing at those times to reduce bottlenecks.

2. Physically verifying guest check-outs

- Rather than rely on the status reflected on the PMS, RAs would conduct a physical check on rooms due to be vacated at 12pm (provided the 'Privacy' sign was not turned on). For vacated rooms, they would proceed to clean and update the PMS so the Front Desk has clean and vacant rooms to release and reduce guest waiting time (*Photo 1*).
- Housekeeping focused their efforts on turning around the rooms which would be needed imminently for incoming guests that same day. By creating a **priority list** of room types and numbers required based on reservations data, and having RAs focus on cleaning those rooms first, the Hotel was able to map the number of clean and vacant rooms available by 2pm to the room demand (as indicated in reservations).

3. Designing flexibility into the housekeeping workflow

- Previously, each RA was assigned a set of rooms to clean; now, more flexibility is introduced—if a certain section required more manpower to turnaround priority rooms, RAs from other sections could be easily redeployed to assist.

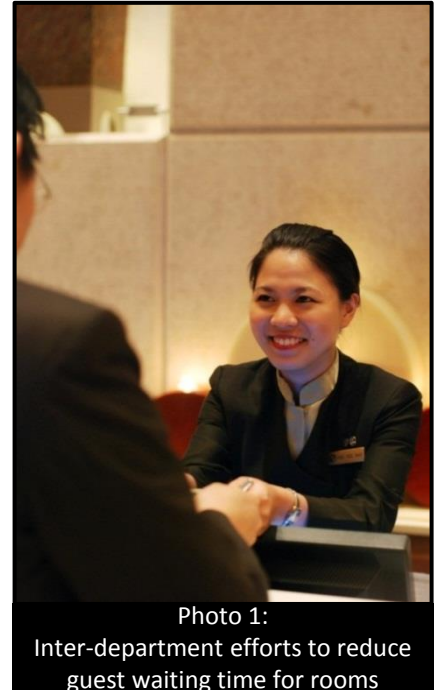


Photo 1:
Inter-department efforts to reduce
guest waiting time for rooms

Key Success Factors

- **Staff trained for new procedures:** Apart from redesigning the processes, the hotel provided training so that staff can cope with the changes, e.g., equipping supervisors with the skills to map out reservations against current inventory so they could prioritise and allocate resources for cleaning. RAs trained to perform basic Engineering repair work reduced the need to rely on Engineering, enabling rooms to be released faster.
- **Management coordination towards common goal:** Implementing these solutions involved a few departments – Housekeeping, Engineering, and Front Office. Each department not only refined its own operations to devise a more efficient process, but also worked with each other. This was only possible due to the coordination across the management of each department, which championed the improvements within their departments which were needed for the larger plan to work.
- **Flexibility in redesigning existing processes:** The hotel's willingness to redesign long-standing processes was at the core of the solution. The management and project team's openness to exploring change was instrumental in implementing the new processes. Additionally, many Housekeeping supervisors were former RAs, and they brought ground insight that guided the change.

Project period: The entire three-step process was fully **implemented over a 4-month period**, from problem identification through to roll-out.

Estimated cost: The programme involved **no costs**, apart from minimal internal training hours.

RESULTS

REDUCED WAITING TIME AND IMPROVED GUEST SATISFACTION

- **Significant improvement in internal workflow:** The improved communication between Housekeeping and Engineering greatly enhanced their workflow. By making a point of informing Engineering of any defects at the soonest juncture, the Engineering team could work in tandem with the housekeeper to turn the room around faster and lessened bottleneck situations.
- **Significant reduction in waiting times:** Of the guests who faced a wait upon check-in, the percentage that had to wait more than an hour decreased to 36% from 56%. The average waiting time also dropped to 48 minutes from 66 minutes, a 27% improvement.
- **Improved guest experience:** The Front Office saw a reduction in the number of complaints stemming from having to wait for their rooms, with an associated 14% improvement in guests' check-in experience.
- **Better employee morale:** RAs were happy the hotel had taken systematic steps to mitigate the previous problem of frequently having to rush to clean rooms due to urgent demand. By reviewing inter-department processes for better collaboration and support, this effort has reduced the colleagues' stress to meet demands within a short period of time and raised the quality of rooms cleaned and delivered.