

Summary

OPPORTUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Optimise existing manpower through multi-skilling employees from two different teams ▪ Provide employees with wider exposure and skill sets ▪ Provide management with more flexibility of teams while enhancing overall guest service
ACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Merged the Room Service and Stewarding departments to increase workforce flexibility by leveraging internal talent and complementary peak and lull periods ▪ Quick facts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Rollout period of 6 months ✓ Estimated project cost limited to minimal training
RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 9% ↓ in combined required manpower ▪ Estimated savings of more than S\$100,000 per year; 10-15% ↑ in employee wages ▪ ↑ Guest satisfaction for Room Service and Coffee House (76% to 90%, and 75% to 80.7%, respectively) ▪ Received 2013 Productivity Idea Award, presented by the Food, Drinks and Allied Workers Union (FDAWU), National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), and the Singapore Hotel Association (SHA)

OPPORTUNITY

F&B: A DEMANDING DEPARTMENT WITH SCOPE FOR MULTI-SKILLING

Typically, the Coffee House at Holiday Inn Orchard City Centre (*Photo 1*), serves breakfast buffet to an average of 300 to 400 guests each day (peak hours: 7:30-10:00am). Its back-of-house had been served by the Stewarding team (*Fig. 1*) of 15 employees, including Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), carrying out tasks such as washing crockery, filling the dishwasher, polishing silverware and cleaning the kitchen after meals.

The Room Service team, with 7 employees (*Fig. 1*), would take guest requests, pick up orders from the coffee house kitchen for delivery to rooms, and remove used dishes. The peak hours for Room Service and Stewarding offset each other's; Room Service was particularly busy during meal times, while Stewarding's work increased after meal-serving was completed. There was scope to **optimise the lull periods** through multi-skilling.

The hotel is focused on enhancing productivity and strengthening service quality, amidst manpower challenges. One such solution lies in **identifying skills and capabilities that can be leveraged across job roles within its F&B department.**



Photo 1: Coffee House at Holiday Inn City Centre Orchard

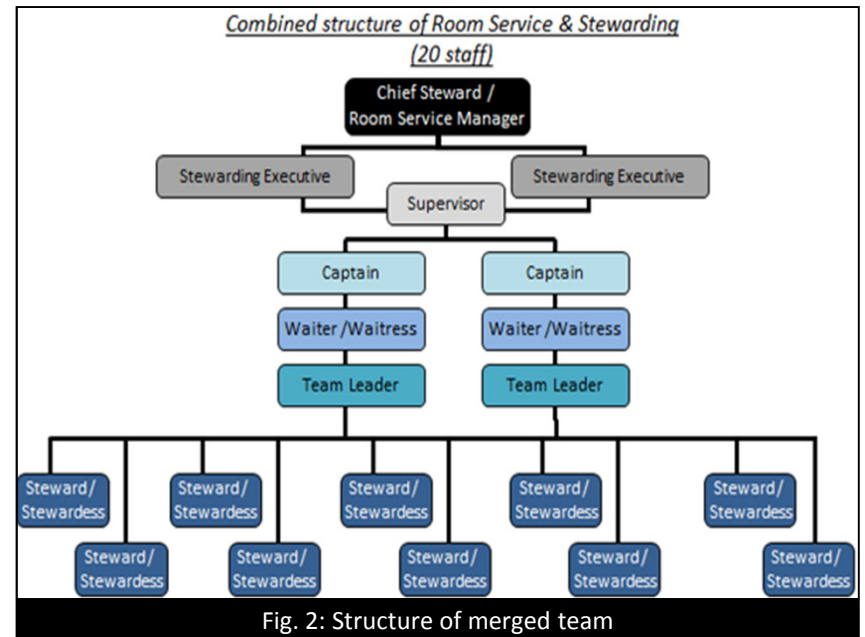
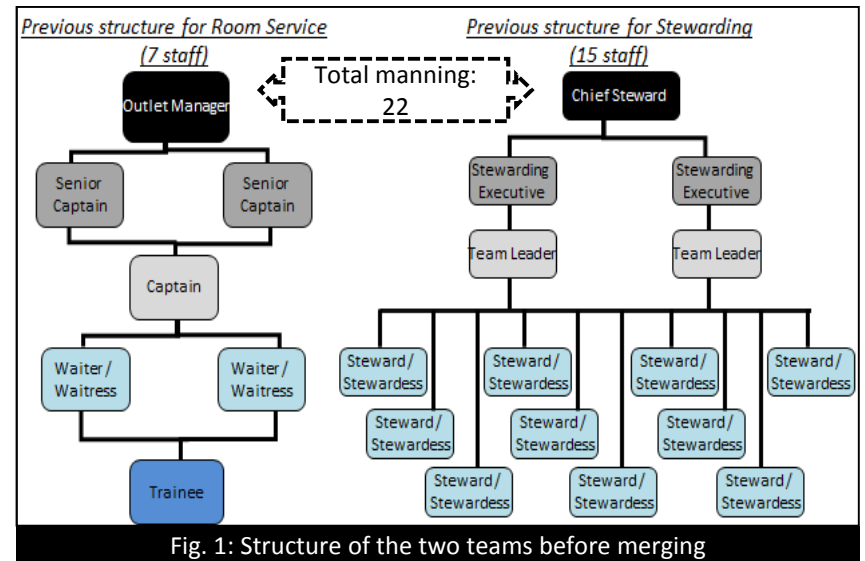
In 2012, as a part of this ongoing commitment, the hotel’s GM, Jagdeep Thakral, identified an opportunity to optimise existing manpower by combining and multi-skilling the Stewarding and Room Service teams (Fig. 2). The departments’ complementary peak periods, close proximity (they were stationed physically close by in the kitchen), and complementary skills made it suitable to create a unified team with synergies.

Merging the teams effectively rested on the ability to multi-skill the employees to take on a wider scope of new tasks. The Stewarding team, which usually never met with guests, can now assume room service tasks that involve guest interactions; conversely, the Room Service team can assist with stewarding tasks.

This flexibility from the combined team also allowed Room Service captains to be deployed to front-of-house positions at the Coffee House. The hotel is now able to optimize these Captains’ years of experience in critical front-facing jobs where guest service is more demanding.

Key Steps

- **Garnering employee buy-in:** The first step before actual implementation was to garner the support of all relevant employees. Senior management committed to being as transparent as possible from the start, articulating the benefits and implications of the merger on both an employee- and hotel-wide level. They highlighted everything from expected wage adjustments and career progression to improved business performance. This clear communication was key in getting employees to accept the changes with the merger.



Key Steps (cont'd)

- **Tailoring training:** Before training began, management examined the learning abilities and needs of employees on each team. This allowed them to create a tailored training programme that could be rolled out in phases, allocating time to provide a hands-on learning experience. This ensured all staff, including the PwDs, fully understood their new tasks. Training took place during existing lull times and spanned 6 months, without additional staffing for support. Training was also done on-the-job, with little impact to operations.
- **Advancing support for PwDs:** Throughout the process, management prioritised the needs of the PwDs on the original Stewarding team to ensure the integration will be beneficial for the employees involved. This was a continuation of the hotel's focus on advancing the personal and professional needs of PwDs, who make up more than 15% of the hotel's overall staff. The personalised training, expanded skill sets, and increased guest interactions are beneficial to developing their long-term careers.

Key Success Factors

- **Full employee support:** The merger's success was fueled by the fact that participating employees were convinced of its benefits and were therefore willing to take on new roles. This was accomplished through a series of briefings that alleviated concerns over job security and promoted relevant benefits. The education process went beyond employees to incorporate parents of PwDs, providing as much transparency throughout the transition as possible. These parents supported the effort and were grateful for the development opportunity.
- **Phased training facilitated by senior management support:** Management understood the merger's success would stem from equipping the employees sufficiently with operational knowledge before commencing their new roles. As a result, they focused on understanding employees' learning aptitude, motivation and development. Management commitment facilitated phased training of all employees involved (e.g. making sure employees have time and are supported during the training). This allowed employees to obtain full training and become comfortable with their new roles, contributing towards a positive experience in the merged team.

"The true key to our success was understanding the strengths, weaknesses and learning abilities of our employees in the Stewarding and Room Service departments... helping them to truly understand each new task expected of them allowed them to truly shine."

-- Michael Vincent
IHG Area Hygiene Manager
InterContinental Hotel Group

Project period: The multi-skilling programme was **implemented over 6 months**, between April 2012 and October 2012.

Estimated cost: The programme **required minimal down-time and investment** on the part of the hotel, requiring only employees to take on the training.

This demonstration of business innovation – and commitment to human capital development in the face of industry manpower challenges – led to several positive outcomes for the hotel, its guests, and its employees.

- **Improved guest satisfaction:** Since the merge, guest satisfaction scores for Room Service and the Coffee House increased. The hotel attributes the rise to increased employee attentiveness, and the quality of work that rose from shared experience and expertise.
 - The Coffee House Service score increased to 80.7% guest satisfaction (Dec 2013) from 75% (Mar 2012)
 - Room Service score increased to 90% guest satisfaction (Dec 2013) from 76% (Mar 2012)
- **Higher manpower productivity:** With greater workforce flexibility within the merged team, required manpower decreased by 9% (from 22 staff across 2 teams to a combined team of 20 staff)—roughly translating to savings of 4,576 hours per year, with operational costs being cut by as much as S\$100,000 per annum.
- **Industry recognition:** This initiative won the Productivity Idea Award in 2013, presented by the Food, Drinks and Allied Workers Union (FDAWU), National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), and the Singapore Hotel Association (SHA).
- **Enhanced career prospects:** Employees in the merged team (*Photo 2*) enjoyed new skillsets and career opportunities, empowering their professional growth. For example, the PwDs in the previous Stewarding team are now exposed to a wider range of jobs beyond back-of-house operations. The resulting productivity gains enjoyed by the company were shared with the staff, affording them 10-15% increases in wages.
- **Spin-off productivity solutions:** The success of the Stewarding-Room Service merger led the hotel to implement additional multi-skilling programmes outside of Food & Beverage, such as concierge. One PwD employee, who was trained in the programme and now works at the Front Desk, was nominated for the ‘Employee of the Year’ Award (2013), presented by the FDAWU, NTUC, and SHA.



Photo 2: Combined Stewarding and Room Service team