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## **Radisson Blu Hotel Lietuva: First line staff engagement and empowerment, strong teamwork, fun and ongoing organisational learning**

### **What does this case study demonstrate?**

UAB Hotel “Lietuva” in Vilnius – an effective team of hospitality specialists that outperforms even new hotels on the market is their signature for returning customer. An innovative and creative middle-management initiative in the area of organisational learning and reflection enables continuous improvement of hotels’ daily business routines through high involvement innovation relying on their middle management and first line staff to enhance shared organisational knowledge of the company and showing the directions to go to enhance an overall customer experience in hotel business.

**Workplace innovation elements:** learning and reflection; enabling continuous improvement; high involvement innovation; enhancing shared knowledge & experience.

### **Context**

The building of today’s hotel “Radisson Blu Hotel Lietuva” was erected on the right hand side of the river Neris in Vilnius in 1982. After major repairs in 2002, in 2003-2007 the hotel was part of the Reval Hotel Lietuva Group, joining the global Radisson Blu Hotel chain since 2010. There are 291 guest rooms, a Restaurant called “Riverside”, a Lobby bar, 17 conference halls and a “Sky Bar”. There are 150 employees in 7 company divisions employed in this hotel. Clients include individual clients (30%), business groups (19%), corporate clients (18%), tourist groups (18%) and others (15%). A so called *Think Guest Feedback* initiative is unique to the Radisson Blu Hotel Lietuva and was introduced in the company in spring 2014. The initiative is about an open discussion and immediate action forum of company’s middle managers originally initiated and developed by the company’s Front Office to provide an adequate and timely reaction and (most importantly) action in relation to daily guest experience and the growing importance of social media in hotel business.

### **Workplace innovation practices: *Think Guest Feedback* initiative**

Along the middle managers’ meetings, the *Think Guest Feedback* initiative combines direct communication channels with the organisation’s first line staff and a regular feedback to top managers of the company. The practice consists of regular (on average, every two weeks) middle management meetings from all departments (including the Front Office, Reservations, Conference Hall, Lobby, Riverside and Sky Restaurants, Room Service, Marketing and others) come together and regularly discuss particular guest feedback cases and joint actions to address them to improve guest experience and guest feedback as a result.

The Group also regularly reviews Hotel's ratings in specialised social media platforms, together brainstorms on how guest feedback shall be stimulated further and more effectively addressed, takes important messages back to their teams for further action, produces minutes of their observations and recommendations to the top management and in overall share their experience with each other. According to the Director General of the company, the initiative is still very new, but the hotel management was already brainstorming for some time on how to address the presence of the hotel in social media more effectively (information about the hotel, and especially feedback of the guests in specialised hotel search websites as Trip Advisor and similar) and, most importantly, to be able to increase more positive experience of their guests.

In this case this meant not to observe or monitor the guest feedback passively (which is already de facto and very often too late to change anything, if anything went wrong), but be pro-active in providing guests with maximum positive stay experience upfront. This involved many aspects to work on, such as, for example, prompt reaction to guest feedback (especially negative, if they have any observations in this respect) before they leave the hotel, constant organisational learning from any mistakes made, staff empowerment not only that they could solve arising problems straight away, but that each of them could feel as owners of the business by being pro-active in preventing negative guest stay experience. Also mutual trust, goodwill and respect across all departments (not to solve your own issues at other's expenses) and between all levels of organisational management. It seems that *Think Guest Feedback* practice came along as a very good solution for the purpose. It has been introduced early spring 2014, but after a few months only, it is already showing both tangible and intangible benefits.

### **How did they do it?**

Empowerment of the middle management and trust in first line staff combined with smart and supportive top management of the company are the key components for the success of such initiative and the organisation in general. The practice does not require much time or financial resources; it just needs creativity, fun and passion in the work done.

### **So who benefits?**

The main beneficiary is their client either they came for an important business meeting, a holiday break or a business lunch at the Sky Restaurant, to use one of the conference halls or just to watch a basketball or football match in the Lobby. Better customer service, attention to details and the ability to solve issues straight away are the key features of the work organisation that the client may observe in this company. Empowered first line staff and the middle management of the organisational layer result in creative ways, prompt and coordinated action that boost organisational performance as a whole. Top management then has more knowledge about the actual needs of company's clients and more time to engage in strategic decision-making.

### **Prognosis**

When the practice is well embedded within the working process of the organisation, all employees despite their position in the organisational structure, start feeling an ownership of what is going on in the company. Moreover, they also feel the ownership of where the company is going and see themselves as important contributors in these processes.