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An Assessment of Maintenance Challenges Facing Small Scale Hotels: A Case Study of Taraba Hotel, Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was carried out to assess maintenance challenges facing Taraba Hotel; a one star rated hotel located in Jalingo, the state capital. The hotel was established in 1992. Multi methods of data collection was used in the study including questionnaire, interview and observation. A total of 27 respondents was selected as the sample size for the study by stratifying them into segments of top, middle and junior staff, then selecting 50 percent from each segment resulting in 5 staff from top management (50% of 10), 9 staff from middle management (50% of 18) and 13 staff from junior rank staff (50% of 25). Simple random blindfold selection method was used to select each of the respondents from each segment. Result and findings from the study revealed that poor management commitment and lack of finance were the major challenges to effective maintenance operation in the hotel. It was concluded that the maintenance culture of the hotel was generally poor and facilities were in bad condition due to lack of regular maintenance. The study recommended more proactive maintenance strategies for the hotel, like preventive and routine maintenance and a maintenance overhaul of current facilities in the hotel to prevent further breakdown.

Key words: Maintenance Management, Taraba Hotel, Maintenance Challenges, Hotel Facilities.

1.0 Introduction

Generally, hotels are complex and costly when it comes to maintenance with various uses of spaces that have different schedules and uses for guest rooms" restaurants, health club, swimming pool, retail store and each has a functional engineering system required for its maintenance. Maintenance therefore has to be done throughout the year, requiring competent staff to undertake building services, operation and maintenance, supplemented by outsourced contractors. (Chan, 2003). In the tourism and hospitality industry the maintenance of the engineering systems is important despite its complex processes as its

effectiveness will directly affect the quality of hotel service, food, and beverage which have direct and significant effect on guests' impression of the hotel. (Chan, 2001)

As such, the development of a suitable maintenance strategy is gaining publicity, greater reliance is placed on it to keep high system availability and achieve acceptable environmental conditions for the occupants (Chan, 2001). Powell and Watson (2006) confirmed that most hotel rooms are accommodation led because most revenue comes from sales of these rooms of the three core consumer products in the hotel, accommodation, food and beverage, accommodation standard significantly affect the customer satisfaction and inclination to return.

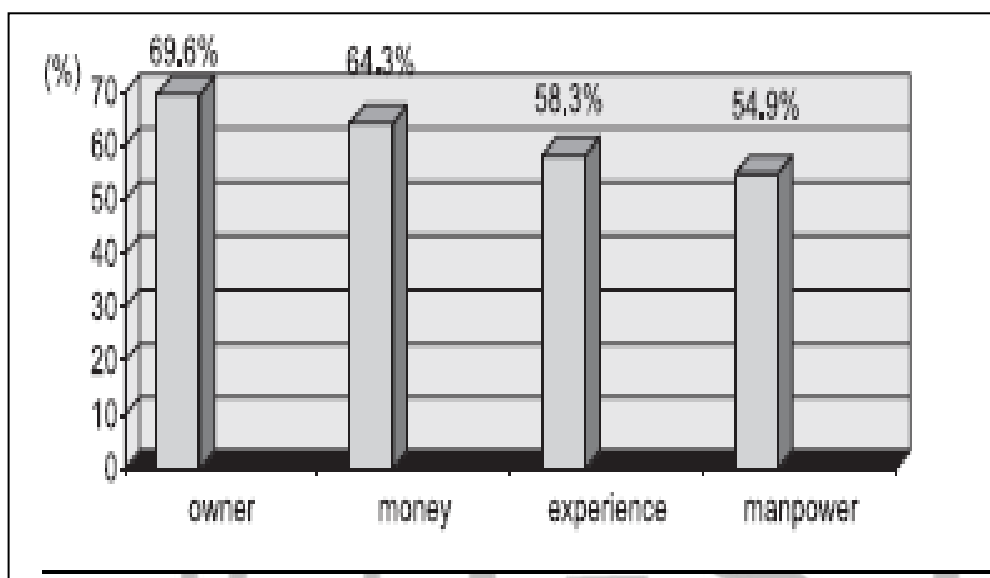
Maintenance management also plays a main role in improving energy efficiency and keeping the total costs optimal. The costs of operating and maintaining the engineering systems, in particular the in-house manpower, out-source contractors, energy consumption and equipment deterioration, must be properly monitored and controlled. Among the commonly adopted strategy in the hotel industry is outsourcing, which managers use to squeeze operating costs in a tough business environment. The purpose of such a strategy is to improve productivity, increase revenues; lower operating costs, and reduces risk. It allows hotel to focus efforts on its core competency and strengthen its ability to adapt in the ever-changing business environment. The main operational functions that are outsourced are normally related to accounting, maintenance, security, promotion and storage (Burt and Pinkerton, 1996 cited in Lam & Han (2005).

Despite the importance of maintenance in this industry it is characterized by the personal ownership and management structure. There is a division in a hotel where one party owns the physical assets of the hotel (the owner), and an independent second party manages the hotel (the operator) (Guilding, 2003). The writer further mentioned that it is interesting to note, that operator's need to maintain brand image can also be a source of owner/operator conflict, as brand image maintenance may compete with profit maximisation. This study therefore addresses these questions: What maintenance strategies do hotel operators adopt for efficient delivery of services and what difficulty do they encounter in implementation? What influential factors are considered in making decision on hotel maintenance?

In the light of this principal-agent problem some hotel operators have been successful at keeping standards and maintenance management strategies in their hotels and to keep up in this competitive industry. The secret of their success must be learnt and derived from answers in this study as a motivation to investors and other actors who are into hotel development and management.

Hassanien & Looseket (2002) in conducting a survey in the hotel market in Egypt observed that almost 70% of respondents stated that owners are the main barriers to

renovation in both limited and full service hotels. This is followed by lack of money, lack of appropriate in house experience and lack of suitable manpower to renovate respectively. This is graphically shown in Figure 1 below:



(Source: Hassaniien & Looseket, 2002)

2.0 Material and Method

This study uses Multi-method data collection. The study objectives revealed that this research study is primarily a descriptive analytical study with qualitative and quantitative approaches. This research also has an exploratory aspect which included interviews with top management of the hotel. Furthermore, this study used deductive approach, since it develops a theory and then designs an analytical research approach to achieve this. It moves from the more general to the specific (this call a top-down approach). Therefore, a descriptive study of this nature will include the measurements, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation of the data that would be collected. Data was collected through the use of structured questionnaires, observation and a document analysis

The study population includes all the staff segment of Taraba hotel. Accordingly, a list of staff sourced from the hotel revealed that there were three segments of staff in the hotel, these includes ; 10 top management staff, 18 middle management staff and 25 junior staff, making a total of 53 persons as the total population. A simple percentage approach of selecting sample size from small population was used. Accordingly, 50 percent of staff was selected from each of the staff segment of the hotel. This result in the following; 5 staff from top management, 9 staff from middle management staff and 13 from junior staff, making a total of 27 respondents representing the sample size for this study. A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select those that were administered with questionnaires.

2.1 Method

Two types of data was used for this study, the primary (Field Survey) and secondary data (Desk survey).

The field survey involves the collection of empirical data. Fieldwork can be associated with three practical approaches; the survey approach, the case study approach and the problem-solving approach (action research) (Sakaramen U, Bougie R, 2013). To achieve research objectives, a written survey questionnaire was chosen as the primary method of quantitative data collection to investigate maintenance management practices through assessing the importance level of practices and barriers. The researcher used surveys because according to Robson (2002), surveys are used for relatively large number of respondents within a limited time frame. This appears to be the most convenient way to obtain highest participation as people would be able to fill in the questionnaire during free time. Questionnaire survey enhances consistency of observations and improves replication due to its inherent standardized measurement and sampling techniques (Naoum SG, 2007). The need for generalization in the findings across the hotel buildings influenced the choice of questionnaire survey.

The desk survey (literature review) forms an essential aspect of the research since it sets the pace for the development of field survey instruments using questionnaires, and

interview. Secondary sources of information were identified and collected in books, articles, and professional periodicals, journals and databases on the subject of the study (Rechard C, et al., 2000)

The questionnaire was the main survey instrument for this study. It was developed based on the scale development procedures outlined by Hinkin for developing reliable and valid measurement instruments in any hospitality industry field research setting. Hinkin have provided a seven step process guide for scale development and analysis in the hopes that hospitality researchers will utilize a systematic approach to item and scale creation (Patton M Q, 2002)

The data collected from the respondents were sorted and edited for analysis. The questionnaires were organized and classified according to the patterns given by the respondents and the responses from the questionnaires was organised in line with the research questions.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics was used in the analysis of the data. Descriptive statistics included frequencies and their percentages. The analysed data was summarised and findings reported as a description of the total population of the study. In this descriptive analysis, data retrieved was presented in the form of frequencies, mean, graphs (line graphs and bar charts) and percentages were used to highlight the respondent's perception on the research topic. Data was recorded with Microsoft Excel and analysed by the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

3.1 Result and Discussion

3.1 Distribution of Respondents

Figure 1 below displayed how respondents for this study were distributed across the different segment of the organization. Accordingly, it can be gathered that 18.5 percent of the respondents were made up of top management, 33.3 percent were middle

management cadre, like line and departmental heads, while the remaining 48.1 percent of the staff were of the junior staff category.

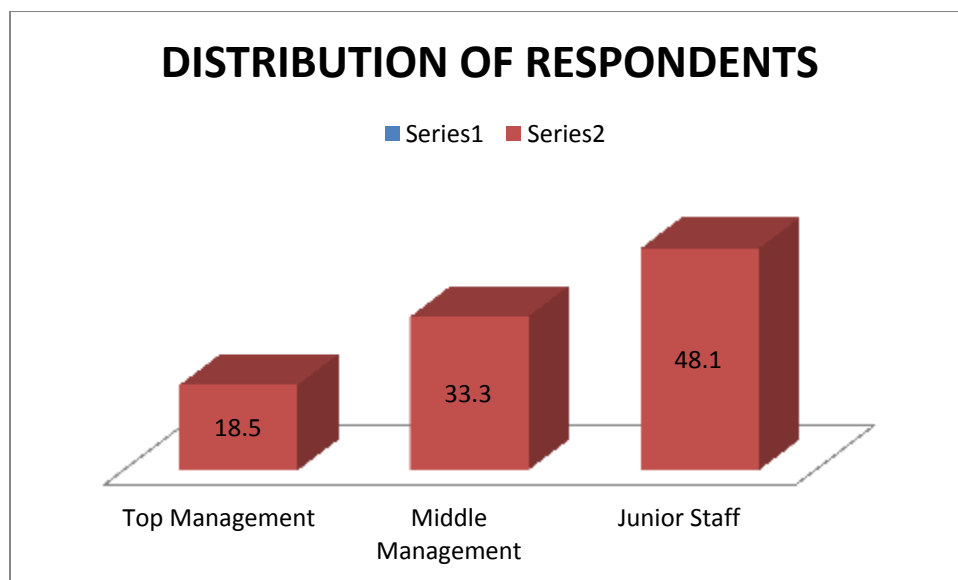


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents

(Source: Field survey, 2019)

3.2 Sex of Respondents

Data on figure 2 displayed the sex of the respondents involved in the study. According, it can also be gathered that 39 percent of the respondents were of the male gender while 61 percent were of the female gender.

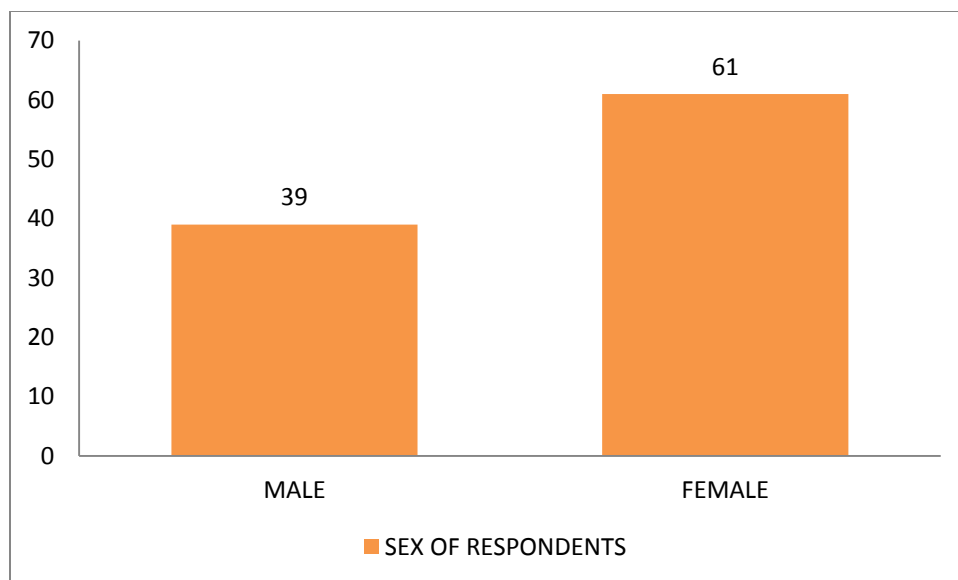


Figure 2, Sex of Respondents

(Source: Field survey, 2019)

3.3 Level of Respondents Education.

Furthermore, from table 3 below, data on respondents level of education are displayed and it shows that none of the respondents had a post-graduate degree, 5 percent of the respondents had at least a university degree, 59 percent of them are holders of secondary school certificate, another 26percent of them had only primary school certificate and 10 percent were under those with any other certificate or education that were not classified among the above mentioned.

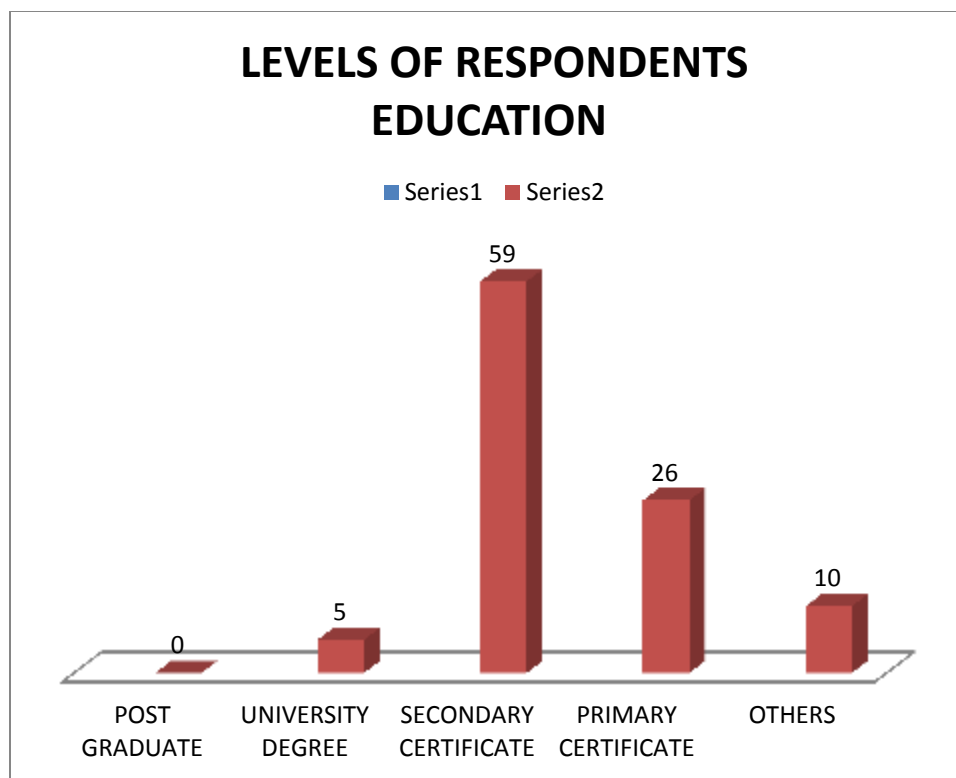


Figure 3 Level of Respondents Education

(Source: Field survey, 2019)

3.4 Age of Respondents

Figure 4 below displayed the age of the respondents for the study and revealed that 65 percent of them were between the age brackets of 20 – 40years, 30 Percent of them were between the age bracket of 51 – 60 years while 5 percent were between the age bracket of 61 and above.

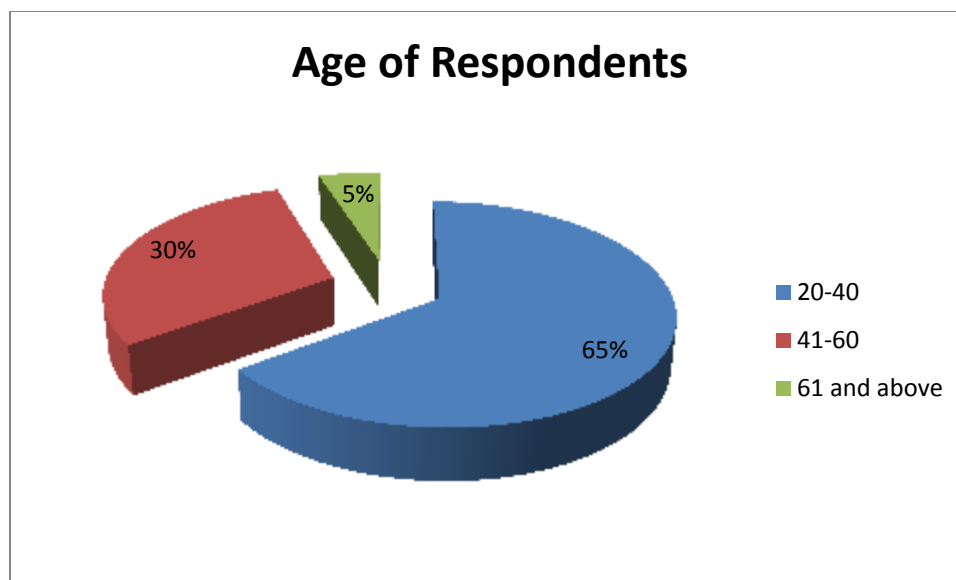


Figure 4 Age of Respondents

(Source: Field survey, 2019)

3.5 Years of Respondents Work Experience

Figure 5 below present data on respondent's years of working experience in the organization. Accordingly, it was revealed that 60 percent of the respondents only work for a period of 0 – 5 years, 22 percent of them have been working in the organization between 6-10 years period, 10 percent have worked for 11 – 15 years while 8 percent have been working in the organization for the period of 16 years and above.

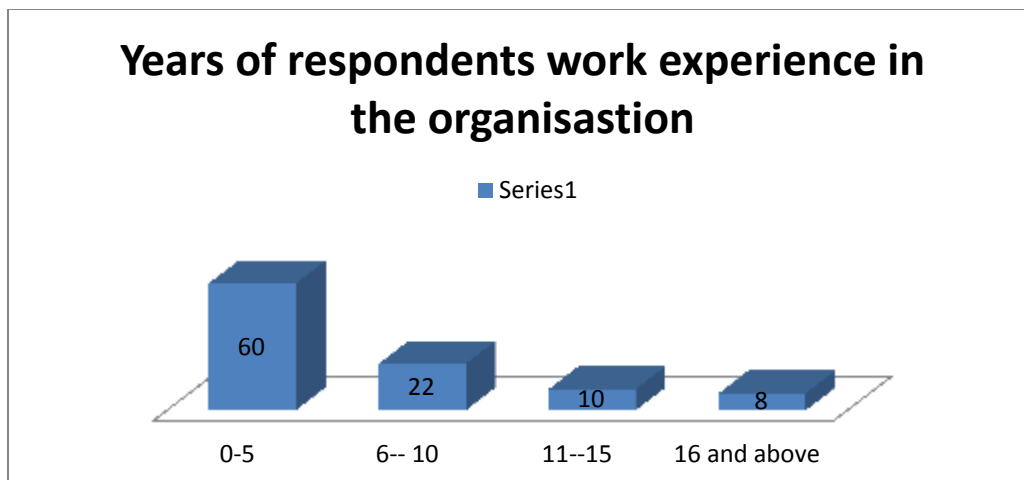


Figure 5 Years of Respondents Work Experience

(Source: Field survey, 2019)

3.6 Challenges to Maintenance Management

Figure 6 below present data on the challenges to maintenance management in the study area and it was revealed that poor management commitment contributed 37 percent of the challenges, lack of finance 22.2 percent, lack of man power 11.1 percent, while lack of experience and lack of cooperation from staff contributed 14.8 percent respectively.

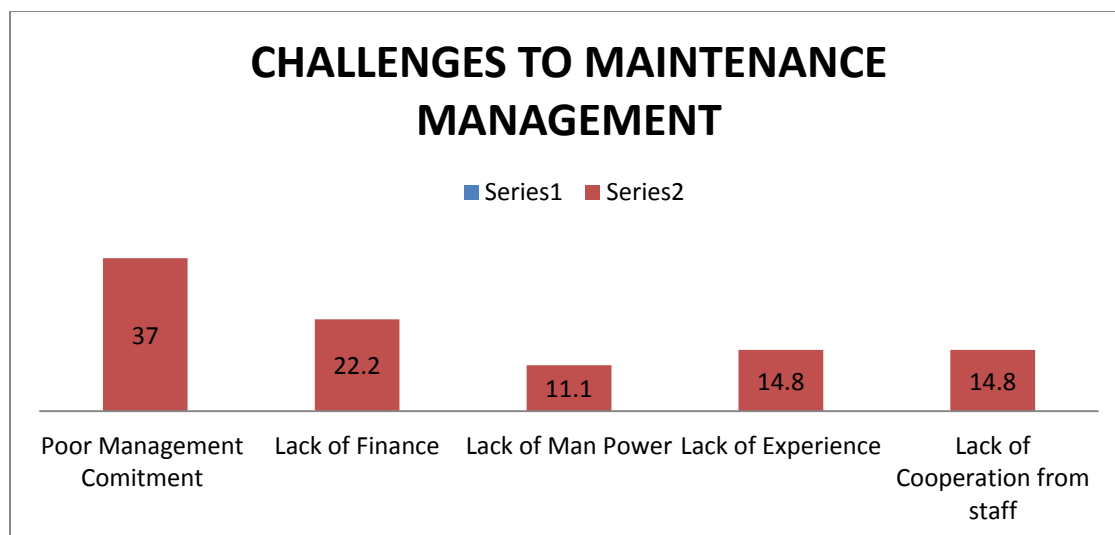


Figure 6 Challenges to Maintenance Management

(Source: Field survey, 2019)

3.7 Discussion

From the data presented and analyzed so far, it was found that many of the staff (48.1%) and (33.3%) were made up of junior and middle management staff respectively as against 18.5 percent of top management staff which means that the work force of the hotel is bottom heavy, and quite under stable for a hotel of this class. Being a low class of 1 star rating, the need for juniors staff always outweigh that for senior staff in this kind of work environment. The study also found that both male and female gender was employed in the hotel, though the female workers make the larger chunk (61%) of the workforce quite typical of this kind of organization.

Furthermore, the study revealed that most of the workers (59%) and (26%) had secondary and primary school certificates respectively and a lower (5%) had at least a university degree. Judging from the caliber of workers and the class of hotel, it is understandable that not much of higher education personnel will be working in this place.

The study found also that majority of the workers in the study area were between the age bracket of 20-40 years showing a young and somewhat moderately experience

workforce though a good percentage (30%) were between the age bracket of 41- 60 years. It is expected that this later group of workers can provide the needed guidance to the young workers. Another important finding which is quite related to the one above was the years of working experience in the hotel, where it was found that 60 percent of the staff only works in the place for 0-5 years with 22 percent having 6-10 years experience. It is either some of the workers must have gathered experience working somewhere else before coming to this present job or they do not have much experience.

Again the study found that poor management commitment as against lack of finance and others was the biggest challenge to good maintenance practices in the hotel. This means that even though other things may still form a challenge, management poor commitment was quite significant.

4.0 Conclusion

With the above summary, the study therefore draw a conclusion that proper and effective maintenance management practices was lacking in the hotel which could be the reason for low business output from the hotel in recent years as complained by the staff of the hotel during an interview session.

5.0 Recommendations

From the findings and conclusion made from the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. That most of the factors that could determine maintenance management strategies should be taken into consideration when making such decision.
2. Management should show serious commitment to maintenance management issues by carrying out necessary maintenance evaluation as when due and provide the needed finance for facilities maintenance in the hotel.
3. Instead of corrective and emergency maintenance strategies (i.e. waiting until something when wrong or there is a fault before maintenance actions are taken),

preventive and routine maintenance strategies should be adopted by the hotel.

4. There should be an orientation of the staff of the hotel on the importance of maintenance management to the hotel in particular and hospitality businesses generally. This can help change their current perception on the concept and therefore improve on the maintenance culture of the place.
5. Finally and as a matter of importance, the hotel should carry out a maintenance overhaul to fix those facilities that are faulty and prevent further breakdown of others.

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