

## Summary

### OPPORTUNITY

- Availability of existing linen chute infrastructure which could be easily repaired
- Significant potential to reduce bottlenecks in the Laundry department, as well as time and effort spent collecting and delivering soiled linen by Housekeeping
- Opportunity to reallocate employees to perform room servicing in Housekeeping instead

### ACTION

- Repaired, tested, and re-implemented the use of an existing linen chute system with carefully designed schedule
- Quick facts:
  - ✓ Rollout period of 9 months
  - ✓ Estimated project cost limited to repair expenses of S\$90,000

### RESULTS

- Shortened total time to remove and feed soiled linen into the cleaning process; expediting entire linen cycle
- Annual labour savings of **6,600 man-hours** (~3 headcount, saving the hotel S\$44,100)
- Improved employee morale with the removal of time wasted due to previous inefficient process
- Greatly reduced usage of service elevators, alleviating bottlenecks for other departments using the elevators as well.

## OPPORTUNITY

## DIRTY LINEN COLLECTION – A TIME-CONSUMING AND MANUAL PROCESS

Prior to re-activating the linen chute system, the previous process for collecting and delivering soiled linens at the Fairmont Singapore was a time- and labour-intensive process. The hotel has an existing vacuum laundry chute system installed but it had not been used for two years due to its air vacuum mechanism being overloaded that led to the last shutdown. The hotel had to fall back on a manual process instead.

As Housekeeping attendants made their way across rooms, floor to floor, they would collect and drop soiled linen off at a collection area on each floor. Approximately every 2 hours, a Linen Runner would collect the soiled linen to drop off at the Laundry department for sorting.

This highly manual process created a number of **immediate inefficiencies** for both Housekeeping and Laundry departments.

**For Housekeeping:** On average, Housekeepers spent about 4 hours waiting at the elevator and sorting areas daily, and 6.25 hours were spent daily on travelling from floor to floor for linen collection. This **time wasted could have been used to service guest rooms**, indirectly speeding up the turnaround of dirty rooms for new guests.

**For Laundry:** Productivity of the team was not maximised—idle periods arose while waiting for soiled linen to be delivered by Housekeeping (inconsistent frequency). Ironically, **bottleneck situations** were a common problem too as Laundry was at times swamped by large volumes when Linen Runners happen to make deliveries at the same time.

Clearly, there was scope to make the process less manual and more structured by **evening out idle and peak periods**.

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 more details).

The idea to reactivate the laundry chute came from Han How Kiong, Director of Laundry. He proposed reinstating its use as a means of coping with the time-consuming process and led a team to implement this change. With the new process, Housekeeping staff no longer have to manually bring down the soiled linen; rather, they can just feed the linen into the chute, which connects directly to the Laundry work area. The hotel worked out processes to optimise linen load and the frequency and timing of linen delivery through the chute, to avoid previous problems of overloading; this involved coordination with sister hotel Swissôtel The Stamford, which uses a connecting chute system.

## Key Steps

- **Obtaining more granular data for informed decision-making:**
  1. The team first calculated how long Linen Runners took to drop off soiled linen at the Laundry department, including time spent waiting for elevators and queuing at Laundry.
  2. They also evaluated the time taken to unload soiled linens from the chute, and discussed with Swissôtel The Stamford's Housekeeping team their experience using the chute and how often they faced overloading situations.
- **Devising a sustainable schedule and running trials:** Armed with data, the team devised a schedule for both hotels to use the chutes, in order to prevent the system from being overloaded while still meeting their operational needs on time. Learning from the previous breakdown, both hotels tested the system comprehensively over a period of approximately 2 months.
- **Refining schedule with Engineering's input:** After reviewing the trial results with both hotels, the team adjusted the schedule for smoother operations. Looking ahead, the team also held discussions with the Engineering team to seek their advice on loading capacity and preventive maintenance, and to pre-emptively put in place plans to troubleshoot effectively if issues cropped up with the chute.
- **Running an extended trial for thorough testing:** The two hotels then carried out an extended trial over a 1-month period. This allowed them to validate the new schedule, as well as determine if using the chute system caused any damage to the soiled linens over a longer term. Finally, after thorough testing, Fairmont Singapore began using the linen chutes for the North tower and subsequently for the South Tower as well.

***"Take a step back from what you do everyday and find different, better ways to deliver quality service. Sometimes it won't even cost you much but the improvements can be fundamentally drastic, and most importantly they benefit our guests, directly and indirectly."***

-- Yash Bhanage  
Quality Manager  
Fairmont Singapore

## Key Success Factors

- **Making informed changes through data:** Previously, data collected from daily operations were not utilised for analysis. To make an informed decision in changing processes, the hotel channelled efforts to collect data on various sub-parts of the whole process to analyse the situation (e.g. bottlenecks, magnitude of time wasted) and estimate possible improvements.
- **A systematic validation process with a phased approach:** The thorough analysis helped design the schedule for the two hotels to minimise risk of overloads and conflicts. The hotel also took a strategic phased approach in kick-starting the use of the chute to iron out teething problems before full implementation. By having the North Tower start 2 weeks before the South Tower, Fairmont Singapore was able to better monitor and perform any needed damage control or refinement.
- **Early employee buy-in and involvement in trial periods:** Laundry and Housekeeping department heads shared with colleagues candidly how much time was wasted on the manual processes and explained how their workflow can be improved, albeit with some changes and effort on their part. This helped secure colleagues' participation and support in collecting the data for analysis. Colleagues were also understanding when operations were affected temporarily during trial periods, as they appreciated the larger long-term benefit.

**Project period:** Fairmont Singapore fully tested and re-implemented the linen chute system over a **9-month period**.

**Estimated cost:** The effort required **approximately S\$90,000** from the hotel, covered by Fairmont Singapore and Swissôtel The Stamford.

## ACTION

## REALLOCATING RESOURCE AND RAISING MORALE

- **Reduced manpower needs by eliminating time previously wasted on traveling and waiting:** By removing time spent waiting at the lifts and going floor to floor, the hotel saved 6,600 man-hours (translating to S\$44,100) in a year. This allowed 3 colleagues to be reassigned to clean and service guest rooms.
- **Faster room turnarounds:** With additional headcount to service rooms, the hotel was able to turn rooms over faster. The overall linen cycle also improved — while the direct improvement lay in getting dirty linen to Laundry faster, the downstream benefit was that laundry is cleaned and returned to rooms faster with heightened productivity in the Laundry team.
- **Improved employee morale and reduced conflicts:** The use of the linen chutes raised colleagues' morale amongst both Housekeeping and Laundry colleagues. Housekeepers no longer spent long periods of time manually delivering linen and waiting for lifts, while Laundry attendants benefitted from a more evenly-spaced workload, rather than the previous peaks and troughs. This improved system also enabled more productive use of the lift system and reduced conflicts among the hotel's different departments.