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GK Sreenivasan
Assistant Professor, Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management, Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Lal Bahadur Prajapati
Masters in Hotel Management and Catering Technology, Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management, Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author:
GK Sreenivasan
Assistant Professor, Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management, Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Does the technological development pave the way to reduce the communication problems in the kitchen? A qualitative approach

GK Sreenivasan and Lal Bahadur Prajapati

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Abstract

Effective communication in the kitchen is crucial for maintaining efficiency, ensuring safety, and delivering high-quality culinary results. However, miscommunication is a common issue that can lead to significant breakdowns in this fast-paced environment. This abstract analyzes the causes, effects, and potential solutions for communication breakdowns in the kitchen, emphasizing their impact on operations and overall workplace dynamics. Miscommunication in the kitchen often arises from unclear instructions, language barriers, high noise levels, and the intense pressure of the culinary environment. These factors can lead to errors in food preparation, delays in service, and even accidents, compromising both the quality of the dining experience and the safety of kitchen staff. For instance, a misunderstood cooking time or ingredient can result in dishes that are improperly prepared or served late, directly affecting customer satisfaction and the restaurant's reputation. The effects of miscommunication extend beyond immediate operational issues. They contribute to increased stress among kitchen staff, creating a tense and sometimes hostile work environment. Persistent communication problems can erode trust and collaboration, leading to a decline in team morale and efficiency. Furthermore, unresolved miscommunications can result in higher staff turnover, as employees may seek work in more cohesive and supportive environments. To mitigate these issues, it is essential to implement clear communication protocols and training programs that emphasize precise, concise, and consistent communication. Regular team meetings, visual aids like charts and labels, and the use of technology such as kitchen display systems can enhance clarity and reduce misunderstandings. Encouraging a culture of open communication and feedback also helps in identifying and addressing communication gaps promptly. In conclusion, addressing communication breakdowns in the kitchen is vital for operational success and employee well-being. By fostering an environment that prioritizes effective communication, kitchens can enhance efficiency, improve safety, and maintain high standards of service, ultimately leading to a more positive dining experience for customers and a more harmonious workplace for staff.

Keywords: Communication, miscommunication, kitchen, efficiency, safety

Introduction

The kitchen, a high-pressure environment where efficiency and precision are paramount, relies heavily on effective communication to function smoothly. In this dynamic setting, any communication breakdown can lead to a cascade of issues, affecting not only the operational efficiency but also the safety and morale of the staff. This paper explores the multifaceted nature of communication breakdowns in the kitchen, delving into their causes, consequences, and potential solutions.

Communication in the kitchen is challenged by several factors, including the fast-paced nature of culinary operations, high noise levels, language barriers, and the stress associated with meeting tight deadlines and maintaining high standards. Unclear instructions and misunderstandings can result in significant errors, from incorrect dish preparation to safety hazards, which can compromise both the quality of the food served and the well-being of kitchen personnel.

The impact of miscommunication extends beyond immediate operational inefficiencies. It can lead to a tense and stressful work environment, contributing to lower staff morale and higher turnover rates. Additionally, errors in food preparation directly affect customer satisfaction, potentially damaging the restaurant's reputation and financial performance.

By examining real-life case studies and existing literature, this research aims to identify the

primary causes of communication breakdowns in the kitchen and analyze their effects on various aspects of kitchen operations. The study will also explore effective communication strategies and tools that can be implemented to mitigate these issues, such as standardized communication protocols, training programs, and technological aids. Therefore, improving communication in the kitchen is critical for maintaining efficiency, ensuring safety, and fostering a positive work environment. This research highlights the importance of addressing communication challenges in culinary settings and provides actionable recommendations to enhance communication and operational performance. Through these improvements, kitchens can better meet the demands of a high-pressure environment, ensuring a more seamless and productive operation.

Review of Literature

Even though different communication models were discussed previously, such models cannot be independently applied to maintain a harmony in the kitchen, as the kitchen is expected to be operational throughout the day without any break and handled by different experts from time to time. Therefore, miscommunication or poor communication taking place among the kitchen staffs working in different shifts or at interdepartmental level would attract negative impacts such as decreased efficiency, poor quality control, employee immoral.

Communication breakdowns in the kitchen are a significant issue that can lead to various operational inefficiencies, safety hazards, and decreased employee morale. This overview examines the primary causes of these breakdowns and their effects, drawing from various studies and industry analyses. Introduce the concept of communication in the kitchen and its importance. The scope of the current study are identified to be spotting out the causes of miscommunication, hierarchical barriers, cultural and language differences, evaluation of safety concerns, and Implementation of communication training programs.

There are three types of problems of communication such as, technical, semantic, and effectiveness problems. They focus on the technical level, which concerns the problem of how to use a signal to accurately reproduce a message from one location to another location. The difficulty in this regard is that noise may distort the signal. They discuss redundancy as a solution to this problem, if the original message is redundant then the distortions can be detected, which makes it possible to reconstruct the source's original intention. (Fedagi S.A., 2012) ^[2]. Clear and concise instructions given by the chefs and kitchen managers should provide clear, concise, and unambiguous instructions to avoid misunderstandings, use of standardized recipes and procedures helps ensure consistency and clarity.

Clear communication helps streamline kitchen operations, ensuring that tasks are completed promptly and efficiently. It reduces confusion and prevents delays, which is essential in a fast-paced environment. Open and respectful communication contributes to a positive work environment, boosting staff morale and reducing workplace conflicts. It helps create a supportive atmosphere where staffs feel valued and heard.

Team Dynamics, playing a crucial role in an organization, decides how communication impacts team members and their morale. Collaboration effective communication fosters

teamwork. It ensures that everyone is aware of their roles, responsibilities, and the status of various tasks, which is crucial during peak service times. The hierarchical nature of kitchens, where there is a clear chain of command from executive chefs to line cooks, can create barriers to open and effective communication. Lower-level staff may feel intimidated and reluctant to speak up. A strict hierarchy can discourage lower-level employees from offering feedback or asking for clarification. According to Baker & Gentry (2007) ^[4], "there are also some cultural differences to Look into how cultural diversity and language barriers contribute to miscommunication". When communication fails, tasks can be duplicated, essential steps can be missed, and overall workflow can be disrupted, leading to decreased efficiency incorrect or misunderstood orders can lead to wasted food and time as dishes are remade. Miscommunication can cause delays, slowing down service and increasing wait times for customers. Effective communication is essential for maintaining the consistency and quality of dishes. Breakdown in communication can lead to variations in food quality and presentation. It would further explore a negative impact on staff morale, job satisfaction, and turnover. This emphasizes a study on how miscommunication affects the quality of service and customer satisfaction.

Providing comprehensive training on communication skills and kitchen protocols can help improve overall communication of the kitchen and all member of the organisation. An open communication culture, in hand with the current communication tools and technologies used in the kitchen provides a massive knowledge to the staff in taking a prompt decision depending upon the situation. It is supported and explained by Kwornik & Thopson (2009) & Kivunja (2015) ^[15] in their article using case studies.

The case studies show different communication problems in kitchen. In a fine dining restaurant, unclear and rushed instructions from the head chef can led to mistakes in orders, by which customers may be left with the feeling of unhappiness and delays in service. The restaurant started using clear and detailed instructions and held on the daily basis for regular meetings before each shift to discuss the menu and special instructions. In a multicultural kitchen, language barriers caused mix-ups with ingredients, safety rules, and allergens. These problems can be solved by using bilingual training materials, visual aids, and teaching basic culinary terms in the main kitchen language. In a high-volume catering company may be issues with unclear communication about order amounts, event schedules, dietary needs, and staff roles. They fixed these problems by using a kitchen display system (KDS) that showed real-time order updates and detailed instructions, which improved efficiency, accuracy, and customer satisfaction.

Communication issues in the kitchens comes from many types of causes like unclear instructions, language barriers among the multicultural workforce, high noise levels, the stress and pressure of a fast-paced environment, strict hierarchy and power dynamics, and inadequate training on communication protocols and equipment. Addressing these factors through better training, clearer communication protocols, and fostering an open communication culture can significantly improve kitchen operations, enhance efficiency, and create a safer, more cohesive work environment. (Baker & Gentry, 2007) ^[4].

Miscommunication in the kitchen leads to significant negative consequences, including operational inefficiencies,

safety hazards, diminished customer satisfaction, decreased staff morale, and disrupted team dynamics. Errors in food preparation and order fulfilment slow down service, while misunderstandings about safety protocols can cause accidents and injuries. Poor communication affects the quality and accuracy of orders, leading to customer complaints and a damaged reputation. Additionally, frequent miscommunication fosters a stressful work environment, lowering staff morale and increasing turnover rates. It also undermines teamwork and collaboration, creating conflicts and further impacting productivity. (Harris & Reid, 2018) [12]. Addressing these issues through improved communication strategies is crucial for maintaining an efficient, safe, and harmonious kitchen environment, enhancing both the dining experience for customers and the working conditions for staff.

Research Gap

The current era enjoys the advantages of technology and internet in general. The infrastructure and operational efficiency of the kitchen is well enhanced with the use of Kitchen Order Tickets (KOTs), Kitchen Display Systems (KDSs) and Kitchen Stewarding (KST) etc. However, it is not evident as to whether these enhancements in the kitchen equip the line chefs efficiently to deliver the products upto the satisfaction of the guests particularly. The current study attempts to examine and come across possible and practical solutions and recommendations to the following research questions:

1. What are the common causes of communication breakdown in the kitchen in the technological era?
2. How does miscommunication affect kitchen operations and staff morale in the technological era?
3. What strategies can be implemented to improve communication in the kitchen?

Research Methodology

In order to investigate the research questions qualitatively, a focus group discussion was convened in the Jhansi district of Uttar Pradesh in the second week of June 2024. Line Chefs of 50 hotels and restaurants were randomly contacted for focus group discussion. Out of 50, about 22 chefs had straightaway refused to participate in the discussion. Out of 28 chefs agreed, only 21 chefs were present on the day of discussion. Content analysis method was utilized to conveniently arrive at the decision and conclusion for the research questions.

Jhansi district is located at the middle of India. It acts as a hub connecting National Highway 44 (North to South) and NH 27 (West to East). It also serves as a railway junction having trains to link different parts of India. Moreover, Jhansi is located in the Bundelkhand region, one of the socio-economically backward regions of India. Nevertheless, Jhansi is located close to Taj Mahel, one of the 7 wonders of the world, Khajuraho, a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists for architecture, culture and temples, and Shivpuri & Orchha, two well-known tourist villages in Madhya Pradesh. Jhansi district, unfortunately does not have any 5 star hotel. The entire Bundelkhand region particularly Jhansi district has people belonging to different religions including Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Jainism having their own principles and practices. Restaurants and Motels are in service not only

to International and national tourists, but also to domestic and / or regional tourists.

Profile of the respondents

The following table shows the profile of the 21 respondents took part in FGD.

Descriptions	In Numbers
Gender	
Male	21 (100%)
Female	0
Transgender	0
Age Group	
18 to 30	3 (14.3%)
31 to 45	12 (57.1%)
45 to 60	5 (23.8%)
Above 60	1 (4.8%)
Qualification	
UG / PG in Hotel Management	6 (28.6%)
Diploma in Hotel Management	8 (38.1%)
No qualification in HM but with experience as Chef	7 (33.3%)
Years of Experience as Chef	
0 to 10 Years	9 (42.8%)
11 to 20 Years	6 (28.6%)
20 to 30 Years	5 (23.8%)
Above 30 Years	1 (4.8%)
Currently working in	
4 Star Hotel	2 (9.5%)
3 Star Hotel	6 (28.6%)
2 Star Hotel	4 (19.0%)
1 Star Hotel	0 (0%)
Budget Hotels & Restaurants	6 (28.6%)
Motels	3 (14.3%)

Discussion

The discussion was fruitful and specific to the research questions placed before the members. The various sub-themes of the discussion were incidents of miscommunication, unclear instructions, language barriers, hierarchical dynamics, inadequate training, operational efficiency, employee morale and turnover, service quality, stress and work pressure etc.

Incidents of Miscommunication

Almost all the participants agreed that a lot of incidents of miscommunication take place at work place due to language barriers, stress and pressure on delivering prompt service, lack of knowledge of food and beverage service employees & kitchen stewards and unclear instructions etc. One of the participants interestingly narrated that

“.....F&B Associate was in a rush so much to deliver the service that he did not even check whether the plate has been ready or not.....”

While explaining the experience, another Chef shared that he prepared a wrong dish due to printer / technical error. Simple and common error that had taken place in the experience of the chefs is that Dal Tadka and Dal Fry are interchangeably used by the F&B Services employees, when they are in a hurry. So are the cases found with sugar-free and with-sugar desserts.

Unclear Instructions: The instructions of the guests taken by the F&B Services employee are passed on to the Kitchen staff. This enables the kitchen staff to prepare themselves in

such a way that they can meet out the special requirements of the guests. When the instructions given by the guests are unclear or if it is not received properly by the F&B Services employees, it would directly affect the performance of the kitchen staff as well. When the orders are not delivered by the waiter, in the sequence and manner, the guests want to enjoy, this would generate an unfriendly environment to the guests and create a bad image of the restaurant. Such scenarios would develop a communication gap and misunderstanding among the kitchen and services staff.

Language Barriers: All the members present for the FGD unanimously agree that language creates a lot of misunderstanding and miscommunication not only among the staff but also with the guests as well. It extends to the poor performance, efficiency and management of the organization at inter and intra level. It is consented by all the members that language problems have to be meticulously handled.

Hierarchical Dynamics: One of the Chef expressed his problem regarding non-availability of CDP in his cabin, He went on describing the entire scene that due to the unavailability of CDP, the line chef is forced to leave the station and to make telephone calls to the restaurants with the aim of getting to know the clear-cut instructions on the items ordered by the guests. It vindicates that as the line chef leaves the station unattended, a situation of preparing a poor quality and poor-tasty dish is developed.

Inadequate training: Kitchen stewards are expected to assist line chefs. Most of the line chefs present in the group discussion agreed that they feel uneasy about the qualification, knowledge and skill of the kitchen stewards. They complained that the hotel property administration was not concerned with the qualification of the stewards, causing confusion and chaos while communicating to the appointed stewards. As these stewards are generally unfamiliar with the terminologies and techniques used in the hotel management industry generally and in the kitchen specifically, therefore, the Line chefs are unable to take assistance effectively and to meet out the requirements of the guests on time, thus, forcing them to compromise with the quality of the dishes produced and with the plate presentation.

Operational efficiency

All the line chefs in the FGD stated altogether that the technological advancements taken place in the kitchen enable the kitchen staff handle the day to day operations smoothly. However, they admitted the presence of communication gap among the kitchen employees and with the other departments, due to stress and pressure arising in completion of the tasks successfully on time.

Training on Technology & Development

With the introduction of new technology and development in the kitchen, a handful of training to the existing staff is essentially to be given, so as to improve the productivity. A couple of line-chefs strongly agreed that they face difficulty in handling some machines used in the kitchen. It is also stated by them that it propels their stress level negatively in completing the orders efficiently, effectively and successfully.

Employee Morale and Turnover: While some of the members were found to be strong enough in their morale in regards to the environment and culture prevailing in their hotel / motel / restaurant, some of them were not so. On interrogation with them, it is revealed that they were punished for no fault of them, as the authorities were more powerful and independent in taking the decisions. It is also realized that all the factors causing the scenario were not considered. One of the young line-chef recalled an incident of termination and / or deduction of salary taken place with him during his training and / or probation period.

Recommendation

To mitigate communication breakdowns and to reduce communication gap in the kitchen, it is essential to implement targeted strategies and practices that enhance clarity, efficiency, and team collaboration. The recommendations and solution given below may foster at reducing communication problems in the kitchen specifically, thus generating harmonious, healthy and friendly environment:

- Appointment of multilingual employees in the property would aid in handling the national and international guests reaching from other regions.
- A handful of comprehensive training programs on new technology and machines would enable the line chefs meet out the tasks and requirements easily.
- Implementation, development and maintenance of open and friendly organizational culture by the senior staff of the hotel property would avoid misunderstanding among the staff.
- Regular briefings regarding requirements & bookings, availability of resources and raw materials etc. before the start of the shift, and, feedback from previous shift staffs, subordinates and F&B Staffs would facilitate the kitchen staff handle the current situation smoothly as much as possible.
- More subordinates may have to be appointed for the assistance of the line chefs, so as not to leave the station unattended and to avoid wastage of raw materials, dishes etc.
- Dishes produced not meeting the requirements and conditions of the guests may be used for complementary marketing. Such surprise gifts to the guests would improve Word of Mouth Marketing (WOM).
- Implementation of Kiosk machines to place orders would somehow reduce miscommunication between the guests and the employees of the restaurant and hotels.

By implementing these solutions and recommendations, kitchens can enhance communication, improve operational efficiency, and create a safer and more positive work environment. These improvements not only benefit the staff but also lead to a better dining experience for customers, ultimately supporting the restaurant's success and reputation.

Conclusion

Communication breakdowns in the kitchen present significant challenges adversely affecting kitchen operations including efficiency, safety, staff morale and customer satisfaction. This research paper has highlighted the multifaceted causes of miscommunication in the kitchen,

addressing and eradication of these root causes is essential for mitigating their negative effects. The current study underscores the regular problems popping up from the critically knitted internal communication network & circumstances attached to the work of the line chefs. It is evident that even though the technological developments have improved operational efficiency, communication problems are not reduced and the dimension of the same has got transformed rather. Therefore a balanced and appropriate combination of manual and technological strategies might be beneficial to reduce communication errors and problems and to deliver a superior dining experience to the guests. A quantitative approach in this area of research might explore some statistically proven strategies as well.

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