

RESTAURANT OS

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Restaurant OS

The restaurant as a system.
2026 – 2029

EGOR NEGRUTA

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Restaurant OS

The Restaurant as a System. 2026–2029

An operational breakdown for HoReCa entrepreneurs: where the money leaks, why a restaurant fails to become a business, and what gets fixed first.

About the author

Egor Negruta — operations manager, HoReCa.

Got his service training at **Novikov Restaurant Group** (Moscow): from waiter to senior waiter, then manager.

Bar training came from **BAF** and **Bulvar** (Chişinău): from bar-back to bar manager. Beyond those two, he went through four more bar projects in Chişinău — names withheld under NDA.

In Moldova, moved from floor host to General Manager across **Atypic**, **Daily Dose**, **Brut** — and several other restaurant projects over recent years, names withheld for the same reason.

Currently working with **Group MIMI** on two active properties — **Castel Mimi** and **Hotel Mimi** — and leading the launch of a new restaurant, **DIVA**.



Roughly 20,000 hours on the operations side: the floor, the kitchen viewed from management (not the burners), and the back office. In this industry, experience is measured in hours rather than years — because one New Year's Eve shift for 200 guests costs three regular workdays, and one project opening costs a year of stable operations. I was never a cook. But I spent hours upon hours next to chefs — briefs, specs, plate reviews, stop-list audits. That's a different competence: not "how to cook it" but "how to make it repeat every day." What's written in this document is distilled from those hours, not from books.

Areas of competence: diagnosing operational defects, rebuilding processes, financial control, shift discipline, new project openings.

Specific numbers on specific places are under NDA. This document contains no exact figures for revenue, margin, or payroll of any particular project. It contains industry benchmarks, directions of change, and timelines — enough for the method to be usable.

Why this document exists

This text is free, and that is a deliberate decision. It's not a funnel, not a lead magnet, not an invitation to a consultation. The Moldovan HoReCa market has no public, systemic breakdown of how a restaurant becomes a business — or how it dies as one. I've been in this industry long enough to see the patterns repeat, and young enough not to pretend they "resolve themselves with experience."

If you're an operator with a restaurant already running and something here feels uncomfortably familiar — that's the right mode for reading. If you read this to confirm "we're already doing fine" — there's no point going further.

Who this is for

- Active owners of restaurants, cafés, and bars in Moldova.
- Those opening their first or second venue who want to see the defect map *before*, not after.
- General managers who want a systemic language for the conversation with the owner.

Who this is not for

- Those looking for "inspiration" and "stories about the magic of hospitality."
- Those looking for "5 steps to a successful restaurant" templates.
- Those not ready to look at numbers, discipline, and conflict.

01

PART ONE

The Method

The six layers of Restaurant OS, the typology of the entrepreneur's weakness, the metrics that manage, and the reality of the Moldovan market.



I

Frame: what a restaurant is as a business

1.1. When a restaurant is the owner's job, not a business

From the outside, a restaurant looks like a business: a till, guests, a team, a kitchen, deliveries, stories. From the inside, it's often just an expensive form of self-employment for the owner.

A business begins where **repeatability without your personal presence** appears. If everything falls apart in two weeks without you — it's not a business, it's a project that feeds you with work.

In the first 1–3 years that's normal. After year 3, if you still can't disappear from the floor for two weeks without a measurable drop in quality and revenue, you don't have a business. You have a self-employed habit that costs as much as a business and pays back like a job.

1.2. The economy is not the till

Revenue is a habit. Margin is a decision. Cash is a discipline. These three things look similar from the outside and are completely different from the inside.

You can have a tense Friday night with packed tables — and lose money. You can have a half-empty Wednesday lunch — and make money. The till tells you about flow, not about health.

A healthy operating system holds three things simultaneously: 1. **Gross profit** in the corridor of your model (this corridor is different for fine dining, casual, bar, café — not "a number" but a range). 2. **Cash gap** under control: you know how many days of "no revenue" you can survive without breaking obligations. 3. **Repeatability of result** across shifts: variance between best and worst shift narrows over time.

A full breakdown of "the till is there, the money isn't" — see Case A in Part XII.

1.3. The root almost always isn't in the kitchen or service

Kitchen and service are the visible part. In my practice across dozens of projects, the root is almost always in three places:

1. **A blurry model.** Who you exist for, what you're paid for, what your contract with the guest is.
2. **No rules of the game.** Standards aren't written. Boundaries aren't defended.
3. **Blindness to causality.** You treat the symptom without changing the system. *A quick reality check — Diagnostic Scorecard in Appendix A.*



The till's full. The cash isn't.

STANDARD SCENARIO OF THE MOLDOVAN RESTAURANT WITHOUT SYSTEM ·
PART I

II

Who shouldn't run HoReCa

HoReCa is almost always chosen not because it's rational, but because it delivers fast emotions: guests, movement, the feeling of "I made a place." The problem is that this industry isn't about the owner's emotions. HoReCa is about discipline, rhythm, and consequences.

This business breaks people who need any one of the following six things.

SILENCE AND CONTROL WITHOUT PEOPLE

In a restaurant, you manage people and their moods every single day. Team fatigue and guest fatigue are part of the product. If you can't stand the daily human noise — choose a different business.

QUICK "CLEAN" MONEY

The money here is dirty: discounts, write-offs, mis-sorts, turnover, breakage. If you're not willing to dig into causes, profit will be an accident.

RECOGNITION AND LOVE

If it's important to you that guests and staff love you, you'll start buying that love through concessions. The system will eat this in 6–12 months.

COMFORT WITHOUT CONFLICT

A restaurant demands unpleasant conversations: firings, prices, discipline, guest complaints, suppliers. Conflict avoidance equals debt accumulation — and you'll pay it anyway, just more expensively.

BEAUTY AS THE GOAL

A beautiful interior is not a business model. The moment revenue dips, the interior doesn't pay rent.

FREEDOM TO "DO AS I LIKE"

In a restaurant, freedom only appears after the system is built — not before. If you want "do as I like" from day one, what you get isn't freedom — it's chaos: menus by mood, prices for friends, shifts for the

inner circle, discounts on phone calls. Within a year this isn't a business — it's a reactive service window for your impulses.

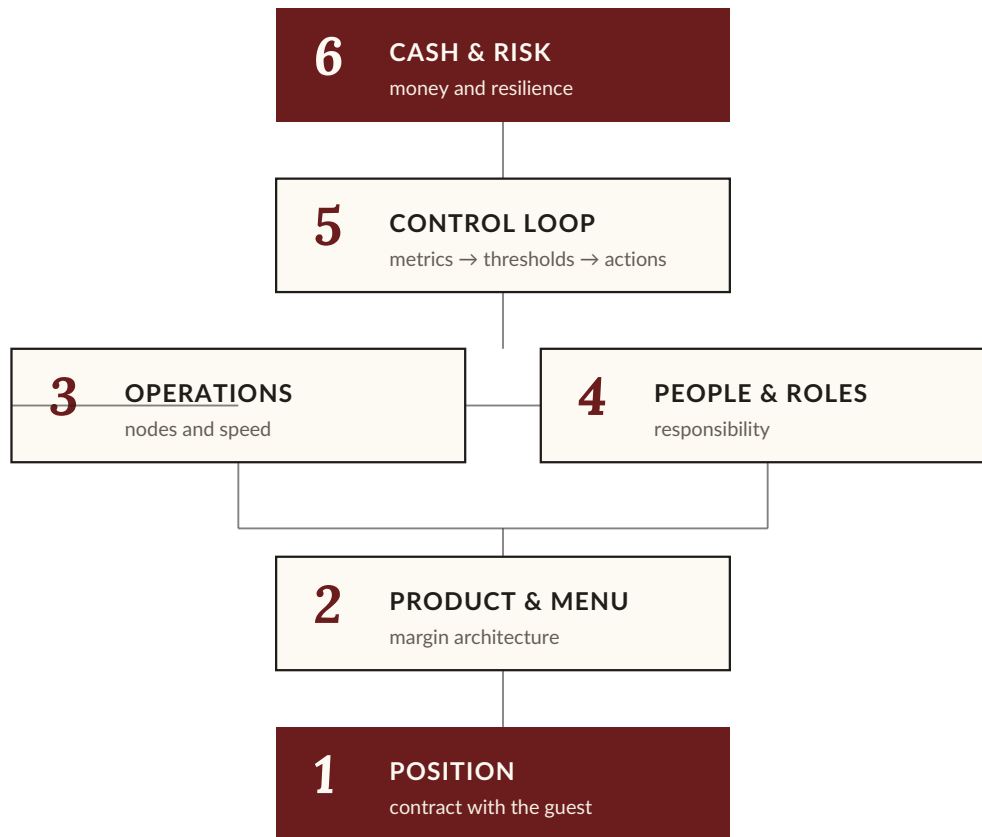
Freedom in HoReCa is **the freedom of absence**: you can leave for two weeks and quality doesn't slip, numbers don't drift, the team doesn't fall apart. That's a different kind of freedom than it appears from outside. If you want the first kind — pick a business where the result doesn't depend on thirty pairs of working hands operating simultaneously seven days a week.

III

Restaurant OS – the method

What I describe below is not "clever text." It is a system you can work with. I call it **Restaurant OS** – the operating system of a restaurant. Six layers that, together, produce repeatability of result. If even one layer is undescribed and uncontrolled, the other five start compensating for its malfunction at your expense.

3.1. The six layers of Restaurant OS



1. Position – the contract with the guest. Who your guest is, what they're paying for, why they come back. Without this layer, all the others become art for art's sake.

2. Product & Menu – margin architecture. How the menu earns: structure, anchors, simplicity of execution, contribution margin per item, not "food cost percent."

3. Operations – nodes of speed and quality. Where "the shift holds": kitchen pace, ticket pass, seating, bar, delivery. Each node either has speed, or the shift pays for its absence in delays, discounts, and stress.

4. People & Roles – responsibility. Who's responsible for what, who makes decisions, where the bottleneck is. Not the staffing roster – a description of the decisive roles and points of responsibility.

5. Control Loop – metrics, thresholds, actions. Not reports for the sake of reports – management triggers: number → alert threshold → action → owner.

6. Cash & Risk – money and resilience. Cash gap, rent, CAPEX/OPEX, debt discipline. The layer that becomes visible last and kills first.

*All six layers are read by the same formula: **layer** → **symptoms** → **diagnosis** → **lever** → **metric**. This is the frame structuring every chapter that follows, and it's the frame you can apply to any new defect you encounter.*

3.2. Five terms of the method

The document works as a method, not a collection of opinions. Five terms recur throughout — this is the working vocabulary.



PRODUCT × OS · plating as output of the system

Restaurant as OS — viewing the restaurant as an operating system, not "a place with food." If you can't describe your restaurant as a layered system with inputs, outputs, and control points, you don't manage it.

Money Leakage Map — the leakage map. Where money disappears without a single "big mistake." Not one hole, but 6–10 small ones, each costing 0.5–2% of revenue and together adding up to 8–15%. See Appendix B.

Node Speed — the speed of nodes. The time it takes a shift to pass through key points: entry, seating, first plate, check, farewell. This is the foundation of impression and a proxy indicator of discipline.

Exceptions Kill Standards — exceptions kill standards. Every "let's do it differently this time" turns tomorrow's shift into a lottery. The standard isn't broken by an order; it's broken by concessions.

Repeatability Machine — the machine of repeatability. A system that produces quality and money with any composition of the shift. The goal of Restaurant OS is to assemble this machine; everything else is means to that end.



IV

Hospitality ≠ smile

2026 is the point where the guest has less time, the market has more choice, and the owner has less room for "trying hard." Hospitality in this reality stops being about emotion and starts being about predictability.

4.1. Control of impression

A smile is an interface. Hospitality is **control of impression**.

Control of impression means: you design in advance which moments in the guest's experience must be strong, and which must be neutral; where you are obliged to surprise, and where you are obliged to be stable.

"Trying hard" is not a unit of measurement. The guest doesn't know how hard you tried. The guest knows whether their coffee was hot, whether they were greeted in the first 60 seconds, whether they had to wave for the check, and what you did when something went wrong.

4.2. Emotion vs function

A restaurant is bought not with the eyes or with the food. It's bought with **the body**: temperature, noise, seating, speed, clarity. Emotion arises as a byproduct of correct function.

If function fails, emotion can't save it. Any "we tried hard" in that situation reads as "we couldn't handle it."

4.3. Emotional capital and its protection

People genuinely forgive mistakes by the kitchen and service **if they love the place**. But they don't love the interface. They love a recognizable tone, the feeling of being a regular, a human energy that doesn't "perform" — it just is.

What matters is this: emotional capital doesn't appear from inspiration. It's built like a system — otherwise it becomes the owner's accidental charisma, which doesn't scale and doesn't survive your fatigue.

How this looks in real projects (anonymously, no specific names):

- A small wine bar that regularly stumbled on kitchen issues during peak (waits, stop-lists) but held loyalty because **the tone and care on errors were consistently grown-up**: honest explanations, immediate solutions, no trading with comps, dignity preserved.
- A neighbourhood café where functionally everything was "average," but the guest felt **remembered as a person, not as a ticket**: the same greeting, the same calm, the same rhythm. People came back not for wow-food but for routine.
- A high-end downtown restaurant with expensive design and "European" positioning that never built a recognizable character. Six months later, two new places replaced it — no renovation, but **with strong team energy and a simple product**.

MANAGING "MAGIC" AS A SYSTEM

No esoterics. Four practical elements:

- **Tone of communication as a standard**. Which words, which pace, what counts as the norm and what counts as rude. A one-page document, not "you'll figure it out."

- **Moments of strength.** 3–5 points where you must be strong every day: entry, first minute, care on error, farewell. See Appendix D — 7 service scenarios.
- **Team rituals.** Short, repeatable, not "team-building": pre-shift brief, tasting, one focus of the day.
- **Right to err + duty to fix.** A guest forgives mistakes. A guest doesn't forgive indifference.

4.4. The case of "two breakfasts"

A restaurant has a rule: breakfast served until a certain hour.



THE MODERN GUEST · documents the impression

The first table arrives wanting breakfast — about 30 minutes before the window closes. The waiter politely declines, offers alternatives. Everything looks grown-up.

A few minutes later, the owner sits down in the dining room, drinks coffee. A second table arrives — his friends. They also want breakfast. The waiter repeats the rule. At which point the owner says, "Make them breakfast." The manager goes to the kitchen, argues with the cooks, the kitchen breaks its production flow, and breakfast is made.

The first table sees all of this and reaches a simple conclusion: **the rules don't apply to everyone**. They leave, never return, and often write a review not about the food but about the unfairness.

What happened in 4 minutes:

- The owner devalued, in one sentence, the standard he himself had set.
- Devalued the waiter who correctly refused.
- Devalued the manager who was forced to override the kitchen.
- Devalued the cooks who were forced to break tempo and principles.
- Destroyed the trust of a guest who trusted the rules.

Food is sometimes forgiven by guests. Double standards almost never are.

4.5. Why "kindness" without structure destroys

When a team has no rules and no boundaries, kindness becomes:

- **uneven** — one guest gets it, another doesn't;
- **expensive** — comps instead of solutions;
- **toxic** — anger and cynicism build up inside the team.

Real hospitality always rests on hard boundaries:

- what we do **always**,
- what we **never do**,
- what we do **only under conditions**.

Without these three categories, "hospitality" becomes management by mood.

V

Service 2026: precision instead of smiles

The 2026 market does not reward trying hard. It rewards predictability. Fewer people — higher expectations — less patience from the guest. The "rely on people" service model doesn't scale and doesn't survive turnover.

5.1. The unit of service in 2026 is a scenario, not a person

Not "we hire talented servers." Instead: **we have 7 scenarios, and every person on shift runs them the same way.**



SERVICE · the table as a scenario before the guest arrives

- The arrival scenario.
- The waiting scenario.
- The seating scenario.
- The first-course scenario.
- The error scenario.
- The check-and-payment scenario.
- The farewell scenario.

Detailed step-by-step in Appendix D — with triggers, lines, branching for typical situations.

MINI-CHECKLIST FOR EVERY SHIFT

This is baseline hygiene. If even one item isn't closed, the shift starts with a defect.

- Time to first contact ≤ 60 seconds.
- A shift lead is assigned and accountable for pace. Not "all together."
- Stop-list reviewed before opening. Reasons recorded.
- Discounts and comps policy known: who, what limits, what reason codes.
- Every typical error has a scenario: what we say, what we do, who decides.

5.2. Case: "the star server left and the floor collapsed"

Before. The floor depended on one or two "stars." On their shifts, guests were happy. On the other shifts, delays, conflicts, and discounts "to soothe" began.

Diagnosis. Service was built **on people, not on nodes**. There was no stability because there were no scenarios for errors, waiting, and kitchen control.

What changed. 7 scenarios written down. A shift lead assigned, accountable for pace. A short pre-shift brief introduced (7 minutes).

Result in 4–6 weeks. The shift became predictable: fewer comps, fewer "improvisations," less variance between days. When the "star" went on vacation, the shift's metrics held.

5.3. Personalization without a CRM call center

"Remembering the guest by hand" no longer works: turnover, different shifts, different people. Personalization in 2026 either has data behind it or becomes an accident.

You don't need to turn the restaurant into a call center. You need to know four things:

- who returns;
- what exactly they buy;
- on which days you lose them;
- at which step the impression falls.

Those four answers are enough to make service precise rather than "warm-hearted." If you don't have them, what you have isn't personalization — it's guesswork.

5.4. Where automation amplifies and where it kills

Amplifies where it removes friction. Booking, waiting, payment, feedback, stop-list control — all of this should work without a human or with minimal human input.

Kills the atmosphere where it replaces human meaning. Greeting, explanation, care on error, tone of communication. If a robot says "hello," that's not service, that's an interface. And the guest reads it in half a second.

SERVICE MODELS THAT WILL DIE BY 2027

- **Service "on charisma"** — a strong server holds the floor; a weak one breaks everything.
- **Service "on promises"** — "I'll check," "just a minute," "almost ready" without actual kitchen control.
- **Service "everyone gets everything"** — trying to retain the guest with concessions instead of a clear policy.



The unit of service in 2026 — *a scenario*, not a person.

SERVICE 2026 · PRECISION INSTEAD OF SMILES · PART V

VI

The entrepreneur — the main node

The most underestimated source of defects in a restaurant is the owner. Not staff, not the chef, not the rent. The owner who doesn't understand that he is part of the system — and usually its most unstable part.

6.1. A typology of weakness

This isn't an accusation. It's anatomy. Every entrepreneur has one of four patterns, and recognizing your own is half the solution.

The do-it-all entrepreneur. Replaces the system with himself. From outside it looks like "he works hardest." In reality, he's investing his life to avoid building structure. The most common model in Moldova.

The love-seeking entrepreneur. He needs the team and guests to love him. Buys this love with discounts, concessions, conflict avoidance. The business pays for his emotional comfort.

The conflict-avoiding entrepreneur. Dodges hard decisions: firings, price increases, killing losing menu items, replacing a chef, negotiating with the landlord. Chooses calm today and the bill tomorrow.

The no-numbers entrepreneur. "Feels." His feelings usually match his anxiety, not reality.

6.2. The case of devaluing contribution

The owner wants recognition and "being the good guy" for everyone. While regularly devaluing the work of key people without noticing it. Roles aren't defined: floor lead, bar, dining room, purchasing — all blurred together because "everyone should help."

A toxic mechanic kicks in. An employee starts doing more than required to prove their value. Not because they're heroic — because the system failed to give them **a role and a success criterion**. And at

the moment they pick up someone else's slack, the owner makes one gesture: walks onto the floor, takes over a chunk of the work, and publicly tells various people: "Here, I'm doing his job."

Formally, the owner "helped." Effectively, he:

- took away the person's sense of role and result;
- showed the team that any contribution can be devalued with one sentence;
- turned initiative into a risk — better not take anything on, to avoid being humiliated;
- strengthened the business's dependence on himself, not on structure.

From outside this looks like "the owner is great, saving the shift." Inside it means: leadership is replaced with the demonstration of importance, and the system is replaced with a competition for recognition. A restaurant like this can run on emotion, but it will always be unstable and will always lose strong people.

6.3. How to fire: hygiene of the system, not drama

Most HoReCa owners don't know how to fire. And it's not about "toughness." It's about management maturity.

THREE TYPICAL ERROR PATTERNS

All three create a toxic zone.

Passive squeezing-out. The owner starts devaluing the person, cooling the relationship, spreading rumors, "highlighting mistakes" in hopes the employee leaves on his own. Looks like conflict avoidance. In fact, destroys the trust of the entire team: everyone understands the same will happen to them tomorrow.

Delegating the firing to staff. Asking a manager, shift lead, or even peers to "have a word and clear them out." Removes responsibility from the owner but leaves filth in the team: the firing becomes gossip and intra-group score-settling.

A scandal on emotion. Strong, energetic owners who tolerate for long stretches and then fire at the peak, publicly, on adrenaline. Gives a sense of control, leaves scorched earth behind.

THE RIGHT EXIT (ESPECIALLY IF THE PERSON GENUINELY INVESTED)

One principle: **a firing should be short, specific, and respectful.** Not "why you're bad" but "what role, what expectations, what wasn't delivered, what decision is made and from what date."

Six steps:

1. **The decision is made outside emotion.** Decision first, then the conversation. Not the other way around.

2. **One conversation, one message.** No "warnings through third parties" and no justifications.
3. **Contribution is acknowledged.** If the person carried the opening or held the project a long time, that has to be named aloud. Not to "soften," but to avoid devaluing the history of the project.
4. **Clear date and conditions.** Last day, payout, leave balances, accesses, keys, financial responsibility. No loose ends.
5. **Handover and closure.** Who takes the tasks, where the knowledge lives, what needs to be written up. In a restaurant, a departure without handover equals mini-sabotage.
6. **Team communication without dirt.** Not "he was bad" but "we're changing the role/format, the decision is made." Anything else is poison.

If you want a strong team, you must know how to part ways like an adult. This is not a "soft skill." It's an operational requirement.

6.4. The owner's blindness

The owner inside the system almost always **rationalizes defects**. Not because he's weak. Because he pays for them every day — in discounts, leaks, turnover, stress, "personal involvement" — and over time stops distinguishing what's normal from what's broken.

Inside, this feels like "well, restaurants are just like that." In fact it means: the system has already made the defect a habit.

6.5. Three demands the system makes on the owner

Any operating system demands three things from the owner:



THE OWNER'S ROLE • briefing the team

1. **Discipline.** Doing the same thing every day and every week, even when it's boring.
2. **Boundaries.** Defending standards, even when inconvenient.
3. **Unpleasant truth.** Admitting failures without excuses.

If the owner can't sustain these three, any team eventually adapts to his weakness. And then even the best Restaurant OS turns into decoration.

6.6. Discipline is not about power — it's about exchange

Otherwise you'll trip over the generation already in the market. In 2026, a significant share of line staff is under 28 — people who don't buy vertical hierarchy as motivation. "Because I said so" works for one day. Two weeks later, that person leaves for Bucharest or Warsaw — €1,100 instead of €500 and a manager who knows how to explain.

That's why discipline in Restaurant OS is **not control from above**; it is a **contract of exchange**. The employee sees on one page: - What **they give** (the standard, the pace, behaviour on the floor, attitude to the guest, shift discipline). - What **they get in return** (money, schedule, training, a real career corridor, protection from a chaotic owner).

Flexibility of the standard — zero. The service scenario is not up for discussion, food cost is not up for discussion, table response time is not up for discussion. **Flexibility of conditions — high.** A schedule can be moved, dress code can be negotiated, the bonus model can be adapted. This isn't "kindness," it's engineering: you separate what cannot move from what can — otherwise you lose people for trivial reasons. The exchange contract is not an HR document for seduction; it's an operational document for retention. If a person leaves and can't explain in words what exactly broke the exchange — the exchange was unspecified, and the fault is yours, not theirs.



VII

System vs talent

Talent is useful as an accelerator and ruinous as a foundation. Talented people leave, burn out, change motivations, start playing politics. The system remains.

7.1. The restaurant as a structure of roles, not people

As long as "we have Misha, he handles everything" appears in your management speak — you're not managing. You're praying.



BAR SYSTEM · precision as standard

7.2. The minimum set of roles

Not necessarily separate people. Necessarily — **described responsibilities**.

- **Shift management** — pace, discipline, till, decisions within the rules.
- **Kitchen** — quality, speed, stop-list, specs.
- **Purchasing & storage** — specs, receiving, inventory.
- **Service** — scenarios, training, feedback.
- **Financial control** — simple metrics, actual vs plan, reasons for variance.

In a small restaurant, roles can be combined. In a mid-size one, you usually can't combine shift management and kitchen. In a large one, you can't combine anything.

A minimum RACI table on one page — see Appendix E. This isn't bureaucracy. It's the map that allows the team to talk about work in the same language.

7.3. Scenarios without culture turn into bureaucracy

Scenarios, checklists, and control are the base. But if they are the **only** language of management, the system turns into formal shift closings and waiting for paychecks.

The carrot here is not in motivational speeches. The carrot is in **meaning and fairness**:

- **A clear contract.** What counts as good work and how it's measured.
- **Protection of the standard from above.** If you demand boundaries, you must defend them in front of the guest, the supplier, "the owner's friends."
- **Growth through mastery.** Training as a system — short, regular. Not "a training event once a year."
- **One idea that holds the team.** "We don't humiliate the guest and we don't humiliate ourselves," "we're honest with the portion," "we hold pace without hysteria." Any one — but one, and repeated.

Leadership in a restaurant is not charisma. It's the ability to hold tone, boundaries, and rhythm, even when it's uncomfortable.

7.4. Structure is not a folder of regulations

Structure is when a **new person can step into a shift and execute the standard within 7–14 days without heroics**. If your onboarding takes 2–3 months, you don't have structure. You have a cult.

VIII

Metrics that manage

Reports don't save you if they're not tied to action. A metric only has meaning when it has:

- **an owner** — who's responsible,
- **a rhythm** — how often you look,
- **a threshold** — what counts as an alarm,
- **an action** — what you do on deviation.

Anything without those four parameters is decoration, not a metric.

8.1. Seven metrics with target ranges

This isn't dogma. These are **industry baselines** for a mid-tier urban restaurant. Your specific numbers may differ, but if you're radically outside the range — it's a topic for review.



METRIC · number as decision

Metric	What it checks	Benchmark	When it's an alarm
Daily gross profit (actual)	Shift's ability to earn given write-offs and discounts	60–70% of revenue before fixed costs	Double-digit days below monthly average
Food cost (by category)	Kitchen/bar discipline, specs	Kitchen: 28–35%; bar: 18–25%; coffee: 8–15%	+3 pp above plan two weeks in a row
Payroll as % of revenue	Schedule efficiency	22–32% (model-dependent)	Growth while revenue is falling
Node speed	Foundation of impression	1st contact ≤ 60 sec; drinks ≤ 5 min; mains ≤ 20 min	Any stable degradation across shifts
Stop-list (count and causes)	Quality of planning and purchasing	0–2 items/day, explainable	Chronic repeats or hiding
Return rate (repeat visits)	Real quality without marketing self-delusion	Per your CRM/POS	Week-over-week drop while traffic grows
Cash gap (14 days)	Where you're actually vulnerable	Must be calculated and positive	Any negative forecast

Full Diagnostic Scorecard with interpretation and levers — see Appendix A.

8.2. Why restaurants die not from lack of numbers, but from the wrong ones

A typical mistake — staring at "average check" and being pleased. Average check grows from three causes:

1. Price increases.
2. Sales of expensive items.
3. Traffic decline (at constant revenue).

The third cause kills the business quietly: the floor empties out, while the owner thinks "we've gone premium."

8.3. Unit economics by channel

As long as you see only total revenue and total food cost, you manage an illusion. In reality, a restaurant runs several different businesses through one till: **dining room**, **takeaway**, **delivery**, sometimes **events and banquets**, sometimes **coffee-to-go** as a separate line.

The rule: each channel must have its own mini-P&L, at least at the level of logic. Template with a worked example — see Appendix C.

Five mandatory lines in a channel mini-P&L:

- Channel revenue.
- Direct discounts and promos specifically in the channel.
- Channel variable costs: packaging, aggregator commission, additional couriers, additional kitchen time.
- Contribution margin — what's left to cover fixed costs.
- Bottlenecks: speed, packaging, errors, returns.

CASE: "DELIVERY SAVES REVENUE AND KILLS THE RESTAURANT"

Before. The owner was pleased with delivery-driven revenue growth. Meanwhile, dining room delays grew, the team "couldn't keep up."

Diagnosis. Delivery had no mini-P&L: aggregator commission, packaging, returns, and kitchen load weren't counted. Peak-hour priorities weren't defined.

What changed. Introduced a window and limit on delivery during peak hours. Restructured part of the menu for delivery (shorter, faster, higher margin). Channel responsibility separated.

Result in 6–10 weeks. The dining room stopped collapsing on speed. Delivery stopped being a revenue illusion without cash. Channel contribution margin became visible and manageable.

8.4. Rent: math that will kill even a good menu

In Chişinău, too many projects die not because "the food's bad" or "the service is bad," but because **the lease makes them mathematically unviable**. And most often it doesn't look like a big mistake. It looks like a small "well, we kind of agreed."

THREE TYPICAL TRAPS

"Rent holiday like good people." A small café moved into a space after renovation. The landlord verbally promised 2–3 months of rent holiday "while you find your feet." In the contract this was worded loosely, with conditions easy to read against the tenant. When money ran out faster than plan (which happens in restaurants), the holiday "wasn't confirmed." The team closed not because there were no guests. They closed because the cash gap became inevitable.

"Indexation as surprise." A restaurant reached stable revenue, but the rent was tied to a currency and reviewed more often than the owner expected. Inside it felt like "expenses ticked up a bit." In fact it meant: break-even moved up, but the menu and payroll were never rebuilt.

"Restore the space as it was." A project closed and tried to exit cleanly. The lease had a "restore" clause, and the cost estimate for that "restoration" was such that it would have been cheaper to operate for another month at a loss. Closing became expensive.

WHAT MUST BE CLEAR BEFORE SIGNING

- **Indexation:** by what index, how often, with what cap.
- **Holiday:** amount, dates, conditions (no "we'll discuss").
- **Build-out and utilities:** who pays, who's responsible, what counts as "yours."
- **Exit:** dates, penalties, restoration, "debts."
- **Traffic-drop scenario:** does your model survive 2–3 months of reduced revenue at this rent.

If even one of these five points is fuzzy — don't sign. I've seen the cost of signing on verbal terms in Moldova more than once. A contract without these five points isn't a contract; it's a hope.

8.5. CAPEX vs OPEX

An opening doesn't devour money "in the renovation." It devours it in **confusion**: what's an investment asset, and what's operational burn.

Two rules:

- **CAPEX must have a useful life and a meaning in the model.** If an item doesn't improve speed, quality, safety, or repeatability — it's decoration paid for by you.
- **OPEX must be a manageable rhythm.** Without a payments calendar, you live till to till, and that always ends in a cash gap.

8.6. Marketing is a demand machine, not "creative"

In 2026–2029, demand doesn't "just happen." It's built. And built not with "creative" but with repeatability.

The minimum the owner must understand:

- **CAC** — cost of acquisition, in money or in discounts.
- **LTV** — what a guest gives over 6–12 months. Real, not "feels like."
- **Reputation as an operational metric.** Reviews reflect speed, discipline, and honesty of portion — not "guests' moods."
- **Partnerships and offline channels** are sometimes cheaper and more durable than paid targeting.

8.7. Tech stack — for control, not for modernity

POS, inventory, reports, aggregators, payment terminals — no longer "optional." But the point of the tech stack isn't to "be modern." The point is to close friction and **reduce the opportunity to lie to yourself.**

What's critical:

- unified reference tables (SKUs, recipes, modifiers);
- access control (who can apply discounts, returns, write-offs);
- discipline of cause codes (return, write-off, stop);
- protection of cash processes (acquiring, returns, "gray" schemes).

8.8. Compliance and safety

Not a "legal topic." This is operational stability.

- **Sanitation and HACCP principles** — not for inspections, but so no event can kill the brand in a week. In Moldova this is sharper: a small market, reputation spreads fast.
- **Labor discipline and schedules** — not "human kindness" but manageability and absence of chronic overwork.
- **Till and payment terminals** — a zone where mistakes are expensive and "small schemes" become the norm.

8.9. Crisis protocols

A strong system isn't one where mistakes don't happen. A strong system is one where **a mistake doesn't become a catastrophe.**

Minimum scenarios that must be written down and rehearsed at least once:

- guest conflict and refund;
- serious kitchen delay;

- suspected food safety incident;
- sudden no-show by key staff;
- equipment failure in peak;
- inspection.

"Rehearsed once" beats "discussed many times."



IX

Competitors and position

9.1. Analysis of position, not menu

The menu is decoration of position. Position is the answer to the question: **why should the guest choose you specifically**, when there are 30 places around?

A practical competitor breakdown — four questions:

1. **Where is their flow strongest** — morning, lunch, evening, weekends.
2. **What's their "sales machine"** — bar, breakfasts, delivery, events, community.
3. **Where do they earn** — 5–10 key items.

4. Where do they lose — speed, discipline, quality, traffic, people.

"Their menu's good" is not analysis. It's a statement of the obvious.

9.2. Competitors aren't where you're looking for them

In Chişinău, many "compete" with whoever's next door geographically, not by position. In reality, competitors can be:



COMPETITORS · the guest's field of choice

- a supermarket with ready-to-eat food;
- a coffee shop with a quick breakfast;
- delivery from the neighbouring district through an aggregator;
- home, when the restaurant offers no reason to step away from Netflix.

If you don't understand **which scenario in the guest's life you replace** — you don't understand who you compete with.

9.3. Refusing to play by someone else's rules

If you copy a strong player, you'll always be second and always cheaper. The only sustainable move is to build **your own value system**: rhythm, product, discipline, an experience you can repeat.

The Moldovan market is now in a phase where copying Russian/Ukrainian/European concepts has stopped working. The guest has seen enough, had enough. The winners are those who either have an authentic local product, or build a system rather than a "concept."



X

Moldova — the reality of the market

Everything above is the operational frame that works in any urban restaurant in the world. This chapter is about what's different here. If you've read management books written in Moscow, London, or New York, then 80% of the advice from there doesn't work here as written. Not because we are "different," but because Moldovan HoReCa has six structural features that must stay in mind at all times.

10.1. People: the EU drain as a structural factor

The main risk for Moldovan HoReCa in 2026–2029 isn't rent and isn't ingredients. It's **the fact that your best people are leaving**. Not "thinking about leaving." Two cooks and a server have already left, and a fifth person is filing paperwork.

An open labour market with Romania, visa-free EU, simple logistics, familiar faces already in Bucharest, Prague, Berlin — this is the new constant. HoReCa wages in the EU are 2.5–4× higher than in Moldova in net terms, and 5–7× higher once you factor in the grocery basket and the rental economy.

A rough estimate of the differential for 2024: per Eurostat, average hourly labour cost in Bulgaria — €10.6, in Romania — €12.5, in Hungary — €14.1; the comparable figure for Moldova, depending on methodology, is around €3–4. This isn't a strict wage rate for a specific city's server — it's a range each owner can use to gauge how much more cheaply they're buying labour than their neighbours, and how much "relocation premium" their best people are looking at.

WHAT THIS MEANS OPERATIONALLY

- **Turnover has stopped being "bad management."** It's become the market structure. If you've built a process that requires "retaining a key person for 3 years," you've already lost.
- **Onboarding is a competitive advantage, not an HR function.** Whoever gets a new hire to standard in 7–14 days survives. Whoever runs a 2–3 month onboarding doesn't.
- **The wage race is unwinnable.** You can't pay Bucharest rates. But you can win on four other things: role clarity, no overtime, respect for the profession, room to grow internally.

WHAT TO DO TODAY

- Describe the role and the standard so a new hire delivers results in week two.
- Make onboarding a document and a checklist set, not a "team immersion."
- Stop building the restaurant around specific "stars." Stars leave. Structure stays.
- Bake **constant turnover** into the financial model as a fact, not an anomaly.

10.2. Diaspora as seasonality

The Moldovan restaurant year has two non-obvious peaks nobody counts in London or Moscow: **August and December — the diaspora returning.**

In August and at the end of December through early January, the city's composition visibly shifts. Those who left for Romania, Italy, Germany, Czech Republic, the UK come back. Their currency has different density. Their expectations are calibrated to different service standards. They don't go to restaurants "the way they used to."

Indirect confirmation: BNM publishes monthly remittance data to individuals. The monthly series consistently shows peaks in July–August and December. This isn't an "accounting fluke" — it's synchronised

with the diaspora returning for the summer and winter peaks. The same rhythm shows up in revenue at mid- and upper-segment venues.

WHAT THIS MEANS

- **August and December are micro-seasons.** They need to be planned in advance, not a week out.
- **The returning diaspora are the most demanding guests.** They've seen Europe. Standards that pass as "fine" in February will get hard reviews in August.
- **It's an open window for the average check.** But only if your restaurant holds European pace. If not — it's an open window for destroying your reputation.
- **Content marketing should land a month before the peak.** The diaspora plans "where to go" before they fly in.

WHAT TO DO

- In the manager's calendar, August and December should be **separate modes**. Reinforced rota, rehearsed scenarios, expanded stop-list limits.
- Make 1–2 product stories for the peak that people will talk about on social. Not a "special menu" — an event.
- Don't raise prices for the diaspora without reason. They read it in 3 minutes, and the offense lasts.

10.3. Delivery: Glovo, Wolt, Bolt Food — three economies

In Moldova, delivery lives across three aggregators simultaneously: **Glovo, Wolt, Bolt Food**. And many owners treat them as one channel. It's a mistake that costs margin.



PRODUCT · plating as proof

Each aggregator has its own commission, its own guest profile, its own order rhythm, its own payout speed, its own packaging logic, and its own level of control over the experience.

BASELINE DIFFERENCES (CURRENT MARKET STATE)

- **Glovo** — broadest reach, but the aggregator holds the most control over the guest. The guest sees themselves as Glovo's guest, not yours. Your brand inside the app is weak.
- **Wolt** — lower commission on packages, higher-quality visual content, higher average check.
- **Bolt Food** — growing, aggressive marketing, but less predictable flow.

Specific commissions and terms shift quarterly, and I don't quote numbers — they go stale in 3 months. But **the mini-P&L logic is one**: you can't count "delivery" as one channel. You have three different channels, and each needs its own line.

WHAT TO DO

- Run mini-P&L separately for each aggregator. Template in Appendix C.
- Compare net contribution margin for each. The gap can be 2–3×.
- Set limits — which aggregator to switch off during peak windows, which to keep always on.
- Adapt the aggregator menu to its guest profile, don't just paste "a copy of the dining room across three platforms."
- Count the cost of each refund and compare it across aggregators. Refunds are not evenly distributed.

10.4. The 2022–2024 energy shock as a teachable event

Between 2022 and 2024, the market went through a tariff shock: gas, electricity, heating jumped. Many projects closed or stalled in that period. Those who survived got an operating lesson at the price of life.

WHAT TO KEEP IN MIND

- **Energy is 6–12% of revenue** for a mid-segment restaurant, and it's volatile. It's not an "overhead" — it's a managed line item.
- **Energy efficiency of the kitchen and floor** is no longer "green rhetoric" — it's a financial parameter. Old fridges and old ventilation cost you money every day.
- **CAPEX into energy-efficient equipment** pays back faster than it did in 2019. Compare replacement cost against annual savings.

- The "tariffs up 40% in a quarter" scenario should be rehearsed. What do you do to the menu? The rota? The opening hours?

10.5. Regulation: ANSA, labelling, cash discipline

The Moldovan regulatory landscape in HoReCa is less rigid than the European one but more **unpredictable**. Rules change, enforcement comes in waves, and "working things out informally" works less and less.

THREE ZONES OF PERMANENT ATTENTION

- **ANSA (Moldovan food safety authority) and sanitary discipline.** HACCP, temperature logs, zoning, supplier traceability. Not for inspectors — so that a single food incident doesn't destroy your brand in a week. In the Moldovan social media segment, such stories spread in 24–48 hours.
- **Alcohol labelling and origin.** The zone where "small schemes" produce the biggest fines. If you sell wine — you must have documents for every batch, and they must be current, not "somewhere on file."
- **Cash discipline.** Acquiring, receipts, fiscalisation. Any "grey" zone here sooner or later turns into an expense 2–10× larger than what you saved.

WHAT TO DO

- One person on the team owns regulatory hygiene. Not "everyone together." A specific person, a specific role, a specific update calendar.
- Documents — in one place, current, accessible without a search.
- Once a quarter — a short audit: what changed in the law, what we updated, what we didn't get to.

10.6. Inputs and FX risk

A Moldovan restaurant imports most of its inputs: fish, seafood, spices, premium dairy, premium meat, anything Asian or Mediterranean. This means **FX exposure**.

When the leu slides 5–8%, food cost at an import-heavy restaurant rises 2–4 pp in a quarter. That's not a "price correction." That's margin erosion in real time.

WHAT TO DO

- Know **the share of imported inputs in food cost**. If above 40% — you have FX risk, and it has to be hedged through pricing or assortment.
- Hold **two sources for each key item**. One supplier — one risk.

- A portion of the menu has to run **on local inputs**. Not from patriotism, but from economics and independence.
- Twice a year — review specs and suppliers. Not "when something happens" — **on the calendar**.

10.7. Where Moldova lags badly, and where it can leapfrog

Moldovan HoReCa lags Europe on four things:

- **Operational discipline.** Standards exist on paper, not in rhythm.
- **Financial control.** Many confuse "the till" with "profit," don't track cash gap, don't separate channels.
- **Training infrastructure.** Training as an event, not a system.
- **Honesty of position.** Lots of "about everything" places, few "about one thing, done perfectly" places.

But a small market gives the inverse advantage: **less inertia, faster decisions, easier to roll standards out**. What takes 3 years and three consultants in Moscow or Bucharest can be done here in 6–9 months with one team.

WHAT MOLDOVA CAN LEAPFROG STRAIGHT TO 2028–2029

- **Service scenarios as standard, not as talent.** Build the restaurant without dependence on "stars" from day one — we have an advantage because we have fewer "stars," and they aren't our foundation.
- **Simple but honest analytics** — metrics tied to actions. No heavy BI systems, just a few tables linked to decisions.
- **Hybrid models without pretension** — food + content + community, if it strengthens position rather than distracting.
- **Transparency as a product.** Allergens, ingredients, origin, refund policy. Our market is small — every honest place gets recognised faster.

WHAT WILL ARRIVE WITH A 2–5 YEAR DELAY

- Rising transparency requirements (formal compliance on allergens, origin).
- Hard margin pressure from labour and input costs.
- Guest shift toward "shorter and sharper" — less time for restaurants, less tolerance for errors.
- Chain and semi-chain systemic projects dominating over single "author" venues.

If you're building a restaurant that has to live in 2028–2029, prepare for these four things now. Preparing six months out is too late.

10.8. Composite case: what changes in 90 days

This is a composite from three mid-segment projects in Moldova, 2023–2025. Not one specific restaurant – a collective image. Numbers are realistic ranges I've watched move, not exact P&L values. Each project is under separate NDA. This gives the reader a sense of the shift's magnitude without breaching obligations.

Starting point (day 0):

- Revenue: ~1.2–1.8m lei/month.
- Payroll: 32–36% of revenue.
- Share of discounts and comps: 7–10%.
- Write-offs "by total," no reason codes.
- Food cost: 33–38%, monitored "by eye," no weekly report.
- Average time-to-first-contact with guest: 90–150 seconds at peak.
- Line-staff turnover: ~70% annualised.

What was done (days 0–30):

- Reason codes for write-offs introduced (5 codes: receiving defect, expired, staff error, guest compensation, operational substitution). Daily "top-3 causes" review by the shift lead.
- Discount policy introduced: anything above 10% – only via manager pin code. "Guest compensation" limit – 2.5% of shift revenue.
- A shift lead emerged with a written pre-shift brief (5 lines).
- 3 key roles described on one page each: shift lead, hot-station sous-chef, head barista.

What was done (days 31–60):

- Mini-P&L by channel (dining room / Glovo / Wolt / Bolt / takeaway) – weekly.
- Stop-list with cause logging, review every three days.
- Seven service scenarios written on one page, walked through on shift with debrief.

What was done (days 61–90):

- Control Loop on 5 metrics: food cost, payroll, node speed, discount share, gross profit. Thresholds – actions – owner.
- Specs reviewed for the top 15 purchasing items. Second supplier for every key item.

Delta at day 90 (realistic range, not exact values):

- Payroll: 32–36% → 26–30%. Sources: removing overtime via shift scenario, dropping one "hero-utility" person who covered multiple roles at double rate.

- Discounts and comps: 7–10% → 3–5%. Source: manager pin as a gate + the discipline "compensation is the exception, not the norm."
- Food cost: 33–38% → 29–33%. Source: reason codes showed 40–60% of losses came from two-three specific items; spec review + one supplier swap delivered 2–3 pp.
- Time-to-first-contact: 90–150 sec → 45–70 sec. Source: an "entry" scenario, not "good morning however it lands."

What doesn't happen in 90 days:

- A radical revenue jump. None of the three cases produced this. Revenue stabilises, stops "bouncing," but no breakthrough. Breakthrough is a 6–9 month task.
- Turnover fully tamed. Departure rate slowed, didn't stop. That's separate work (the exchange contract, see section 6.6).
- "The owner exits operations." That's year 1–2 work, not a quarter.

The thing to grasp: with owner discipline, a 4–7 pp delta on payroll and food cost in 90 days is a **real number** I've watched three times. Without discipline — it's **zero**, and no consultant fixes that. The method is a tool, not magic.

10.9. Sources for chapter X

This document is built on personal operating practice, not research. But the key claims in this chapter on the Moldovan context have publicly available verification:

- **Statistica Moldova (statistica.gov.md)** — quarterly Labour Force Survey, demographic data, results from the 2024 census (migration component published August 2025). With this data, an owner can refine the size of the economically active HoReCa population and migration flow dynamics.
- **Banca Națională a Moldovei (bnm.md)** — monthly remittance data to individuals, quarterly balance of payments. These series give the seasonal picture of the diaspora's return and an indirect indicator of the actual money volume arriving in Moldova at the summer and winter peaks.
- **ANSA (ansa.gov.md)** — public reports on food safety incidents and scheduled inspections. A risk map to check against when building HACCP protocols.
- **Eurostat (ec.europa.eu/eurostat)** — labour cost and wage data for CEE countries. Useful for assessing the "leave vs. stay" differential from a Moldovan employee's point of view.

I don't cite exact figures from these sources in the text because they shift quarterly and the text would go stale faster than it should. The logic described in the chapter doesn't depend on a specific value for a specific quarter — it depends on **the direction** of these quantities, which has held steady for the past five years.



Turnover
stopped being
"bad
management." It
became the
structure of the
market.

XI

2026–2029: where HoReCa is going

Strip out the noise and the trends, and the vector is simple: **the market is buying predictability and meaning, not "atmosphere" and "effort."** This isn't philosophy. It's a consequence of how costs, people, expectations, and the price of error are changing.

In 2026–2029, the restaurant stops being a place and becomes an **interface**: between a person and the way they live — time, energy, sociability. Whoever becomes the best interface takes the repeat business.

11.1. Six drivers of pressure

1. PEOPLE SHORTAGE AS THE NEW NORMAL

Not "we'll find staff." But "how do we run service when people are scarce, unstable, and don't want to live at work." In Moldova this is especially sharp because of the EU drain (see Part X).

2. THE COST OF ERROR HAS RISEN

A kitchen or floor mistake is no longer absorbed by romance. The guest leaves faster for the next place because the choice is wide, and social media broadcasts the complaint in 2 hours.

3. TRAFFIC FRAGMENTS

A person doesn't "go to a restaurant." They allocate money across scenarios: fast, convenient, safe, social, tasty, an experience. Each venue competes not with other restaurants, but with life scenarios.

4. TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST ARE A PRODUCT

Ingredients, allergens, honest portions, origin, refund policy, communication ethics. By 2028 this will be part of the contract, not "something for foodies."

5. TECHNOLOGY BECOMES BACKGROUND

The winners aren't those who "rolled out IT" — they're those who **removed friction**: booking, waiting, payment, stop-list, feedback, quality control. Technology has to be invisible.

6. CAPITAL GETS TOUGHER

Money flows where there's a model, control, repeatability, and where the owner can hold discipline — not just taste and design.

11.2. Where capital and attention are going

The winners aren't "the prettiest" or "the most original." The winners are those with a **repeatability machine**.

Three structural shifts:

- **From format to system.** Not "restaurant / café / bar" but a system: position + scenarios + quality control + the rhythm of the numbers. Format is secondary.
- **From one venue to an ecosystem.** One brand, several channels: dining room + takeaway + delivery + events + partnerships. Not because "you have to be everywhere," but because it reduces dependence on a single flow of traffic.
- **From "menu" to product lines.** Items group into lines you can standardise, cost, and scale.

11.3. Which models die over 12–36 months

- **"Just a good restaurant."** Without a hard position and without a system, it can't absorb rising costs and isn't differentiated from neighbours.
- **Service as improvisation.** When the impression depends on the mood of the shift, you don't manage quality.
- **Business built on "guest love" instead of a contract.** Discounts, comps, concessions as strategy — that's not hospitality, it's leakage.
- **The menu "for everyone."** A wide menu becomes expensive: purchasing, stock, errors, speed, training.

11.4. What becomes standard

By 2028 the following will be "normal," not a competitive advantage:



EVENT 2026 · stage and observer

- **Service scenarios on 7 key nodes** — arrival, waiting, seating, first course, error, check, farewell.
- **Shift management as an operational role** — not "senior server," but a person who holds tempo, money, and standards.
- **Control rhythm**: day (operations) → week (margin and discipline) → month (cash resilience).
- **Hybrid models without pretension** — food × content × community, if it strengthens position rather than replacing product.

11.5. Signs of the point of no return

These are markers that the system is losing control, **before it shows in the till**:

- You can't name **3 reasons** why gross profit dropped today. Not "no time," but no model of causes.
- A lot of talk inside, few decisions. Meetings, chats, discussions — but no rhythm of action.
- People are afraid of the stop-list. Not because it's bad, but because it exposes purchasing failures. So the stop-list gets hidden, and the guest pays in irritation.
- Discounts and "comps" have become an operational tool — you use them to patch speed, quality, and discipline.
- Suppliers know your restaurant better than you do. They see the problems first — through delivery delays, chaotic orders, "today, urgent."
- The manager's role has been replaced by "the senior on the floor" — someone who puts out the shift's fires but doesn't build rhythm, training, or control.
- **The owner has become the main node.** Not the "inspiration," but the bottleneck: nothing important gets decided without them.

If you recognise at least three of seven — you have systemic debt that can't be "patched with enthusiasm." It has to be dismantled layer by layer.

XII

Anchor cases

Three stories that show the method in action. All three anonymised — no project names, no exact numbers. But the directions, the levers, and the timeframes are real.

The format of each: **inputs** → **diagnosis** → **rules** → **metrics** → **result**.

Case A: "There's turnover, no cash" (Money Leakage Map)

INPUTS

- Channels: dining room ~70% of revenue, delivery ~20%, takeaway ~10%.
- Discounts and comps were given "to avoid conflict," without limits, without reasons.
- Write-offs logged as a total, no causes (spoilage / overcooked / mixed-up / wrong order).
- Payroll grew "invisibly" through overtime and covering gaps with double shifts.

WHAT SURFACED

- "Margin on paper" looked normal, but cash leaked out: discounts, write-offs, drifting portions.
- Receiving was a formality: the supplier "signed off" on quality, the kitchen "signed off" on missing specs.
- Management was reactive: "sales dropped" got patched with promotions, not with a root-cause review.

RULES INTRODUCED

- **Policy on discounts, refunds, comps:** who can, in what cases, with a limit and a mandatory reason.
- **Write-offs only through reason codes** (4–6 codes) + daily "top-3 causes" review.
- **Specs and receiving:** minimum standard for portion and inputs + stop-list on stock.

METRICS STABILISED

- Discount and comp share of revenue — by shift and by person.
- Write-offs: amount and reasons daily, "top-3" weekly.
- Gross profit (week) with threshold and logged variances.
- Cash gap: 14-day forecast via payment calendar.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 60-90 DAYS

- "Unexplained" losses disappeared: reasons became visible, and actions attached to them.
- Discount and comp share moved from double-digit percent of revenue to a managed narrow band.
- Write-offs fell by more than half on average, because the reasons stopped hiding.
- Till and bank account began correlating with gross profit.

Case B: "Service collapses when the star leaves" (Repeatability Machine)

INPUTS

- The whole floor held on 1-2 strong people. On their days off, speed and reviews dropped.
- Service was "by talent": lots of improvisation, few scenarios.

WHAT SURFACED

- There was no role holding the shift as a system. No shift lead, the manager was "the senior on the floor."
- **Exceptions Kill Standards:** exceptions ("let's just do what they asked") destroyed the common tone and tempo.

WHAT WAS ROLLED OUT

- **7 service scenarios:** arrival, waiting, seating, first course, error, check/payment, farewell.
- The **shift lead** role: holds Node Speed, watches the stop-list, makes decisions within the rules.
- **Learning loop:** 7-minute pre-shift brief + one focus of the day + debrief on 3 real situations.

WHAT WAS MEASURED

- Time to first course and time to close the table.
- Negative review share by cause: speed / tone / error / resolution.
- Share of "no-star" shifts where metrics didn't drop below threshold.

RESULT IN 6-10 WEEKS

- Speed and reviews became predictable across shifts.
- Dependence on a specific person fell away: the "star" became an **amplifier, not a foundation**.
- When the "star" later left — speed and quality dropped a few percent, not tens of percent.

Case C: "Delivery is killing the dining room" (channel mini-P&L)

INPUTS

- Delivery was growing, but at peak it "ate" the kitchen: the dining room waited, quality dropped.
- The delivery menu was a copy of the dining room: complex, slow, low margin.

WHAT SURFACED

- No mini-P&L: the channel looked profitable on revenue, but it destroyed Node Speed and dining-room gross profit.
- No windows and no limits: the kitchen worked without "safety valves."
- No split by aggregator: Glovo, Wolt, Bolt Food were lumped as one channel, though each has its own economics.

WHAT WAS DONE

- Assembled a **mini-P&L per aggregator**: gross profit, packaging, write-offs, acquiring and commission, labour. See Appendix C.
- Introduced **windows and limits** on delivery during peak hours (threshold by order count and by handoff time).
- **Rebuilt the delivery menu**: short, fast, margin-bearing, with predictable assembly.
- Turned off one aggregator during peak hours — the one with the lowest channel contribution margin.

WHAT WAS MEASURED AND WHAT HAPPENED

- Handoff time for the dining room and delivery + percentage of late orders.
- Gross profit by channel, separated.
- After 4-8 weeks: the dining room stopped "dying" at peak. Delivery became controllable and more margin-bearing. Delivery revenue growth became managed, not "accidental."



**It's not the best
who survive. It's
the most
*repeatable.***

Key takeaways

Five claims that hold the whole document.

1. **"Revenue" is no longer proof of life.** Proof of life is gross profit on the actuals, execution discipline, and the absence of a cash gap. The till's full, the cash isn't — this isn't a paradox. It's the standard scenario for a Moldovan restaurant without a system.
2. **Hospitality in 2026–2029 = boundaries + scenarios.** A smile without rules turns into weakness, and weakness gets monetised quickly — by guests, by the team, and by suppliers.
3. **You either build a system or you pay for chaos.** The bill is always the same: discounts, write-offs, turnover, overtime, the owner's nerves, lost reputation. The price of chaos isn't "sometimes" — it's every day.
4. **No "concept" rescues a weak owner.** A weak owner turns any team into a simulation and any system into paper. Restaurant OS only works under discipline, boundaries, and uncomfortable truth from the top.
5. **It's not the "best" who survive. It's the most repeatable.** The 2026–2029 winner isn't talent. It's discipline, rhythm, and a clear contract with the guest.

How to use this document

Not as reading. As a method.

STEP 1. DIAGNOSTIC SCORECARD

Fill out **Appendix A** — 20 questions, 5 minutes, 100 points. Get a numeric picture of your current state across 5 blocks: model, nodes, money, roles, culture. Write down the 3 weakest blocks.

STEP 2. DECISION TREE

Open **Appendix E**. For typical problems ("the till's full, the cash isn't," "quality bounces shift to shift," "everything hangs on one person") — find your case and identify 1–2 levers for the coming week.

STEP 3. RESTAURANT OS LAYERS

Read the chapters as **Restaurant OS layers**, not as continuous text. Each chapter answers the question: symptoms → diagnosis → lever → metric for one layer. Apply by layer; don't try to fix everything at once.

STEP 4. 30-60-90 PLAN

Appendix E has the route: 30 days — money and safety valves, 60 days — node speed and scenarios, 90 days — channel control and resilience. With owners, artefacts, and success metrics at every stage.

Boundary: the order of intervention depends on your diagnosis. If you start "with scenarios" while cash leaks are open, you'll get fine rhetoric and the same minus.

Closing thought

In 2026–2029 the market will punish not the absence of talent, but **the absence of structure**. A restaurant wins not when "everyone tries hard" but when the system delivers a predictable result with whatever team is on shift.

If you recognised your restaurant here — you already have a system. It's just working against you.

Pulling it apart without an outside eye is hard, but possible. This document isn't a consultation and it isn't a sales pitch. It's a map of the terrain you're already living in. Apply it yourself or with the team. It's free, because its value isn't measured in what you paid for it, but in what you do with it next week.

If the document is useful, the best thanks is to share it with a restaurant owner who needs it. The Moldovan HoReCa market needs a common language, and that language is built through the circulation of texts like this, not through closed doors.

— Egor Negruta

02

PART TWO

Appendices

Diagnostic Scorecard, Money Leakage Map, channel mini-P&L, 7 service scenarios, the 30-60-90 plan + Decision Tree + RACI.

Appendix



Diagnostic Scorecard

100 points / 5 blocks / 20 questions / 5 minutes.

Score each item on a 0–5 scale: 0 = none/chaos, 5 = runs stably without your personal involvement.

Fill it out quickly. The first intuitive score is usually more accurate than the "considered" one. If you don't know — put 0. Not knowing = it doesn't exist.

Block A. Model and position (0–20)

#	Question	0–5
A1	We can explain in 2–3 sentences the contract with the guest: who/why/why they come back.	
A2	The team (floor, kitchen) understands the same way what we promise the guest and what we don't promise.	
A3	We have 1–2 positional anchors — specific reasons to choose us.	
A4	We know which guest scenarios aren't ours , and we don't try to "please everyone."	

Block A total: ___ / 20

Block B. Nodes and speed (0–20)

#	Question	0–5
B1	The shift has a specific person who holds the tempo of the nodes (kitchen/floor/bar/delivery).	
B2	Time at the key steps (arrival, seating, first course, check) — is measured.	
B3	The stop-list is managed: causes are logged, decisions are taken the same day/week.	
B4	Quality doesn't "bounce" shift to shift: scenarios exist and execution is controlled.	

Block B total: ___ / 20

Block C. Money and leakage (0–20)

#	Question	0–5
C1	Rules exist for discounts/refunds/comps, and access is locked down.	
C2	Write-offs have causes (not "it just happened") and are visible by category.	
C3	Receiving and specs defend portion and cost.	
C4	At minimum, a basic mini-P&L is visible by channel (floor/delivery/takeaway).	

Block C total: ___ / 20

Block D. Roles and control (0–20)

#	Question	0–5
D1	Critical roles are described: who decides, who is accountable (RACI on 1 page).	
D2	"Everything hangs on one person" — isn't us: knowledge is duplicated (instructions / training / backup).	
D3	A management rhythm exists: day / week / month (meetings, metrics, decisions).	
D4	The manager builds the system rather than just "putting out shift fires."	

Block D total: ___ / 20

Block E. Culture and boundaries (0–20)

#	Question	0–5
E1	The team knows the boundaries: what we always do / never do / do under conditions.	
E2	A guest error is compensated by the rule, not by emotion and fear of conflict.	
E3	Exceptions are logged and don't turn into the norm.	
E4	Inside, you can raise a problem without "seems fine" and without being punished for the truth.	

Block E total: ___ / 20

Result

Total: ___ / 100

Sum of blocks with minimum values:

Block A (model): _ _ _

Block B (nodes): _ _ _

Block C (money): _ _ _

Block D (roles): _ _ _

Block E (culture): _ _ _

Write down the **3 blocks with the lowest values**. These are your priorities for the next 30 days.

Interpretation by band

0-30: CHAOS

The business runs on heroism and luck. Without your daily involvement it loses control in 1-2 weeks. "Everything hangs on one person" — that's about you, and that person is most likely you.

What gets fixed first (the order is strict): 1. **Money:** discount/comp policy, write-off reasons, receiving by spec. Without this, you pay for every other change with leakage. 2. **Stop-list and shift rhythm:** a shift lead appears, a brief appears, cause logging appears. 3. **Describe 3 key roles** on one page each. Not the org chart — the decisive roles.

Don't do now: marketing, rebranding, new interior, menu expansion. All of this multiplies chaos. First the foundation.

Realistic timeframe to reach control: in my experience on projects in this zone — around six months, provided the owner actually holds discipline. Without that — never, no matter how many consultants you hire.

31-60: MANUAL CONTROL

There are elements of control, but no control loop. Decisions get made, but they don't repeat. People look at metrics, but actions aren't tied to thresholds.

What gets fixed first: 1. **Control Loop on 5 key metrics:** gross profit, food cost, payroll, node speed, discount share. Each metric → threshold → action → owner. 2. **7 service scenarios** (Appendix D). Service stops being "the talent of the shift." 3. **Channel mini-P&L** (Appendix C). You stop managing the illusion of total revenue.

Timeframe to reach 61+: 3-4 months.

61-80: SYSTEM IN EMBRYO

You can scale if you close 2-3 nodes. Most processes repeat. The team understands the standard. But there are limiters: either roles aren't separated, or metrics don't reach the owner, or one zone (usually "money" or "culture") is lagging.

What gets fixed: 1. Split the manager and shift lead roles, if not already split. 2. Audit of exceptions: what turned into the norm over the last 6 months? 3. Prep for the next level: product lines, channel ecosystem, readiness for a second location (if in strategy).

Timeframe to reach 81+: 4-8 months.

81-100: MANAGED MACHINE

Repeatability outweighs dependence on people. You can open a second location. You can leave for 2 weeks without operational degradation.

What to do: 1. Lock discipline in with rituals: quarterly system audit. 2. Prepare the "replicator" — the document by which a copy of your restaurant can be opened in 90 days. 3. Layer in strategy: new channels, new products, ecosystem.

The main threat: relaxation. The machine works → attention drifts → 6-9 months later the scorecard is back at 65. Discipline isn't "achieved," it's **maintained**.

What to do if one block is radically lower than the others

Weak block	What it means	Where to go
A (model)	You can't explain to whom and why you matter.	Part I, Part IX. Position first, then everything else.
B (nodes)	Service is a lottery. The guest leaves.	Appendix D, Case B (Repeatability Machine).
C (money)	The till's full, the cash isn't.	Appendix B (Money Leakage Map), Case A.
D (roles)	Everything hangs on 1-2 people. You're hostage to the rota.	Part VII, RACI in Appendix E.
E (culture)	Double standards, exceptions, quiet cynicism.	Part IV, Part VI.

When to refill

No sooner than **60 days** after the first diagnostic. Earlier is self-deception: you'll remember your answers and rate higher to "see progress."

After 60 days — a real second measurement point. After 6 months — the third. The chart shows whether the system is moving, or you're treading water.

Appendix

B

Money Leakage Map

A map of leaks by Restaurant OS layer. **None of these leaks alone kills a restaurant.** Each is 0.3–2% of revenue. But added up, an untouched map means 8–18% of revenue flowing past the account.

These aren't "theoretical risks." This is the typical set I find on first operational audit at a project the owner calls "the till without cash."

Map structure

Each leak is described on four parameters: - **Where** (Restaurant OS layer) - **Leak type** (what's actually happening) - **Indicator** (where it shows up in the data) - **Control point** (what to put in place to stop it)

Layer 1. POSITION — positional leaks

Leak	Indicator	Control point
<i>Attracting "non-target" guests via discounts</i>	High one-off conversion, low return rate	Promotion audit: what % of new guests return within 30 days
<i>Menu "for everyone" instead of positioning</i>	Long menu, blurred sales leader	The top 10 SKUs should give 50–60% of revenue, otherwise position is blurred
<i>Marketing without a funnel</i>	CAC isn't tracked	Introduce acquisition cost per channel at least once a quarter

Layer 2. PRODUCT & MENU — product leaks

Leak	Indicator	Control point
<i>Specs missing or not followed</i>	Drifting portion across shifts	Portion calibration by weight 1× a week on 5 key SKUs
<i>Owner's "favourite dishes" with low margin on the menu</i>	Good sales, low contribution margin	Monthly menu-mix analysis (Stars/Plowhorses/Puzzles/Dogs)
<i>Menu too complex</i>	Long training, many stops, handoff errors	Cut down to 70–80% of revenue on the top 30 SKUs
<i>Overspend on "comps for guests"</i>	Write-offs to "comp" without cause	Limit on "comp from the chef" by shift

Layer 3. OPERATIONS – operational leaks

Leak	Indicator	Control point
Stop-list as "habit"	Chronic repetition of the same items	Stop-list with causes + decision within the week
Write-offs without causes	Write-off amounts logged, causes aren't	Reason codes (4–6 codes) + daily top-3 review
Receiving is a formality	Invoices signed, but shortweight/poor inputs reach the kitchen	Receiving spec for 5 key SKUs
Kitchen overpays for "urgent"	Frequent emergency buys in retail	Food cost gap between planned vs. emergency purchases
Overtime and double shifts	Payroll growing faster than revenue	Hours per person per week, overtime cap
Irrational rota	Payroll per hour highest at low-traffic hours	Hour-by-hour revenue profile vs. payroll profile

Layer 4. PEOPLE & ROLES — people leaks

Leak	Indicator	Control point
Turnover from weak onboarding	Time-to-standard for a new hire > 30 days	Onboarding programme with 7–14 day checklists
Discounts and comps without rules	Discount share above 5–7% of revenue	Discount policy: who, within what limits, with what reason
"Access to everything" in the POS	Discounts given by anyone, not tied to a person	Role-based POS access, discount tied to pin code
Manager "on the floor" instead of system	Role overlap, no management rhythm	Manager's calendar with 30% of time on the system
Shadow conflicts between shifts	Shift handoffs done on "you know, I'm tired"	Formal shift report logging what's unresolved

Layer 5. CONTROL LOOP — numbers leaks

Leak	Indicator	Control point
Total revenue visible, channels aren't	"Delivery is saving turnover" while margin falls	Channel mini-P&L (Appendix C)
"Average check is rising" while traffic falls	Revenue stable, fewer guests	Checks/day + average check tracked together
Food cost from stock, not from sales actuals	Gap between paper and kitchen food cost	Reconcile theoretical and actual food cost once a week
Metrics without actions	Reports exist, no one acts on them	Each metric: threshold + action + owner
Cash gap not tracked	"The till's full, the cash isn't" treated as a surprise	14-day payment calendar

Layer 6. CASH & RISK – financial leaks

Leak	Indicator	Control point
Rent with unclear indexation	Shock rent rise per quarter	Lease audit once a year
CAPEX as expense	Decor/equipment without business case	CAPEX = only what improves speed/quality/safety/repeatability
Suppliers as a "buffer"	Overdue > 30 days becomes the norm	Payment calendar with priorities
Acquiring and FX risk	FX exposure of food cost isn't tracked	Imported input share in food cost $\leq$ 40% or hedge
Taxes "later"	Financing scheme via deferred state payments	Separate tax account, transfers on calendar

How to use this map

STEP 1. MARKING

Walk through the 6 layers and mark leaks you definitely have. Not "possibly." Only the ones you're sure of. Usually 6–12.

STEP 2. PRIORITISATION

Rank by "ease of closing" $\times$ "effect." Don't dive into the hardest first. Start with the 2–3 easiest — they deliver fast wins and psychological confirmation of the system.

STEP 3. CONTROL POINT

For each leak in the "top-3" — install the control point from the right column. No more than three at a time.

STEP 4. RE-MEASURE AT 30 DAYS

Same sheet, new marks. Which leaks closed, which new ones opened, what's blocking closure.

STEP 5. CYCLE

Repeat monthly. After 4–6 months — the map is almost empty. After 9–12 months — it's no longer a "leak map," it's **the operating mode of your restaurant**.



*Money Leakage Map isn't an audit done once a year by a consultant.
It's the manager's working tool, reviewed every month.*

Appendix

C

Channel mini-P&L

A template that converts "total revenue" into a manageable set of channels. The goal: understand **how much you actually earn in each one**, and which channel is eating the dining room's margin.

In Moldova you have to track at minimum **5 channels separately**: - Dining room - Takeaway - Glovo delivery - Wolt delivery - Bolt Food delivery

If you have banquets/events — they become channel 6. If coffee-to-go — channel 7. The less "basket" accounting, the more visible the real economics.

Channel mini-P&L structure

For each channel, calculate 8 lines per period (usually a month):

Line	What it includes	How it's found
1. Gross channel revenue	All sales through the channel	POS channel report
2. Direct discounts and promos	Discounts within the channel (aggregator promo codes, promotions)	POS + aggregator billing
3. Net channel revenue	(1) – (2)	Calculation
4. Cost of goods (food cost)	Inputs into sold dishes	Per recipe cards or channel-average food cost
5. Direct variable channel costs	Packaging, aggregator commission, acquiring, extra couriers, extra kitchen labour	Per billing
6. Channel gross margin	(3) – (4) – (5)	Calculation
7. Channel margin %	(6) / (3) × 100%	Calculation
8. Bottlenecks and stop factors	Late orders, refunds, assembly errors	Per logs / reviews

Worked example (orders of magnitude)

Assumptions: mid-segment restaurant typical of Chişinău, one-month period. Numbers rounded to the thousand lei and given **only to convey the proportions**. Yours will differ.

CHANNEL "DINING ROOM"

Line	Lei
1. Gross revenue	700,000
2. Discounts/ comps	-35,000 (5%)
3. Net revenue	665,000
4. Food cost (32%)	-213,000
5. Acquiring 1.5% + consumables	-12,000
6. Channel gross margin	440,000
7. Channel margin %	66%
8. Bottlenecks	Speed at peak; a few tables/shift with delay > 25 min

CHANNEL "GLOVO DELIVERY"

Line	Lei
1. Gross revenue	100,000
2. Aggregator promos/ discounts	-12,000 (12%)
3. Net revenue	88,000
4. Food cost (35%, higher packaging and assembly loss)	-31,000
5. Aggregator commission (~28%) + packaging (~4%) + acquiring	-33,000
6. Channel gross margin	24,000
7. Channel margin %	27%
8. Bottlenecks	Late orders at peak; 2-3% refunds; heavy kitchen load during dining-room hours

CHANNEL "WOLT DELIVERY"

Line	Lei
1. Gross revenue	70,000
2. Promos	-5,000 (7%)
3. Net revenue	65,000
4. Food cost (33%)	-21,500
5. Commission (~22%) + packaging + acquiring	-18,000
6. Channel gross margin	25,500
7. Channel margin %	39%
8. Bottlenecks	Fewer late orders, but more demanding guests on packaging quality

CHANNEL "TAKEAWAY"

Line	Lei
1. Gross revenue	50,000
2. Discounts	-2,000
3. Net revenue	48,000
4. Food cost (30%)	-14,400
5. Packaging (~6%) + acquiring	-3,500
6. Channel gross margin	30,100
7. Channel margin %	63%
8. Bottlenecks	Queue at peak interferes with the dining room

Channel summary table

Channel	Net revenue	Gross margin	Margin %	Share of revenue	Share of margin
Dining room	665,000	440,000	66%	71%	81%
Glovo	88,000	24,000	27%	9%	4%
Wolt	65,000	25,500	39%	7%	5%
Takeaway	48,000	30,100	63%	5%	6%
TOTAL	866,000	519,600	60%	100%	100%

What this table shows (and why it changes management)

FINDING #1: "DELIVERY BRINGS TURNOVER, NOT MARGIN"

Glovo brings 9% of revenue and only 4% of margin. That is: for every lei of dining-room margin, you get 0.4 lei of Glovo margin. Translation: while the dining room is under-loaded, delivery makes sense. The moment the dining room starts suffering from delivery – Glovo has to be capped.

FINDING #2: "WOLT AND GLOVO ARE DIFFERENT BUSINESSES"

Wolt's margin is 1.4× Glovo's margin. If you treated "delivery" as one channel, you'd lose this. **Decision:** keep Wolt always on, turn Glovo off during peak hours.

FINDING #3: "TAKEAWAY IS UNDERVALUED"

Takeaway is 5% of revenue, but a 63% margin channel with no aggregator dependence. Translation: if you can build "takeaway" as a product (the morning coffee ritual, lunch box) – it's the cleanest economics after the dining room.

FINDING #4: "REAL MARGIN IS LOWER THAN IT LOOKS"

If you counted "total food cost at 32%" – you'd see 68% margin. In fact, with channels factored in, it's 60%. The 8 pp gap is exactly the amount that "went somewhere" over the month.

How to fill this for your restaurant

STEP 1. PULL CHANNEL DATA

POS usually has a breakdown. If it doesn't — configure tags/categories so it does.

STEP 2. ALLOCATE FOOD COST

If the dishes are the same across channels — food cost allocates by revenue share. If the delivery menu differs — recalculate per recipe cards.

STEP 3. ALLOCATE LABOUR

The hardest part. Simple approach: kitchen payroll splits by order-count share; floor payroll stays with the floor; courier costs go to delivery.

STEP 4. RUN IT EVERY MONTH

Not "on request." Every month, in one table, in one file. After 3 months you have trends, after 6 — conclusions, after 12 — management.

STEP 5. MAKE DECISIONS

None of these decisions are possible without mini-P&L:

- Which aggregator to switch off during peak hours.
- Whether to shrink the delivery menu.
- Whether to raise delivery prices (most Moldovan restaurants should).
- Whether to invest in takeaway as a channel.
- When to close the restaurant during off-hours.

The main rule

Each channel has its own economics, and until you see it separately — you're managing not a restaurant, but an illusion of a restaurant.

This is the most underused tool in Moldovan HoReCa. Most owners in Chişinău **have no channel mini-P&L** in any form. Roll it out and update it monthly — and you're in the top 10% of operationally mature projects on the market. Not from genius — from the fact that the rest don't count.

Appendix

D

7 service scenarios

This is a **working document for the team**, not theory. Its job is to remove the question "how do we do this?" in repeating situations. Your staff shouldn't improvise in the moments that repeat 50 times a day.

Each scenario is a sequence of steps with trigger, action, and line. Lines are given in two languages, because a Moldovan restaurant speaks two languages at once.

Principle: *the lines are a recommendation, not dogma. The team has to sound natural. But **the sequence of steps is not negotiable.** Step not done — standard broken.*

Scenario 1. Arrival

TRIGGER

The guest crosses the threshold.

GOAL

In the first 60 seconds, the guest gets recognition, orientation, and a sense of the next step.

STEPS

Step 1.1. Eye contact ≤ 5 seconds. Any floor staff who sees the guest must make visual contact and nod/smile, **even when busy**. Silent ignoring is the main killer of the first impression.

Step 1.2. Greeting ≤ 60 seconds.

EN: "Good afternoon! Please, come in." / "Hello! One person or are you waiting for someone?" **RO:** «Bună ziua! Vă rog, intrați.» / «Bună ziua! O persoană sau așteptați pe cineva?»

Step 1.3. Reservation and preference check.

EN: "Do you have a reservation? / Where would you be more comfortable: by the window, closer to the bar, or in a quieter area?"
RO: «Aveți rezervare? / Unde v-ați simți mai bine: la fereastră, mai aproape de bar, sau într-o zonă mai liniștită?»

Step 1.4. Walking the guest to the table. Walk ahead of the guest, at the guest's pace. Not "over there." Take them all the way, pull out the chair (for solo guests and couples), gesture.

Step 1.5. Handing over the menu and promising the next step.

EN: "Here's the menu. I'll be back in 2–3 minutes to take your drinks order." **RO:** «Acesta este meniul. Mă voi întoarce peste 2–3 minute pentru a vă lua comanda de băuturi.»

WHAT WE DON'T DO

- Don't ask "is everything okay?" a minute after seating. The guest hasn't decided yet whether it's okay.
- Don't leave the guest without a promise of the next step.
- Don't hand the menu "in the air" — set it on the table.

METRIC

Time from entry to first contact ≤ 60 sec. Sampled once a week.

Scenario 2. Waiting

TRIGGER

The guest is seated, studying the menu.

GOAL

The guest shouldn't have to look for you.

STEPS

Step 2.1. Check-in after 2–3 minutes.

Approach, ask:

EN: "Ready to order drinks, or would you like another minute?" **RO:** «Sunteți gata să comandați băuturile, sau aveți nevoie de încă un minut?»

Step 2.2. If the guest isn't ready — name the second contact.

EN: "Okay, I'll be back in a minute." **RO:** «Bine, revin într-un minut.»

And actually come back. Don't "forget."

Step 2.3. Take the drinks order separately from the food order.

This is a baseline technique. Drinks are out in 5 minutes, food takes longer. Don't queue everything together.

Step 2.4. Recommend without pressure. If the guest asks for a recommendation, give **2–3 options**, not one and not five. With reasoning:

EN: "If you want something typical for us — go with X. If you want something lighter — Y." **RO:** «Dacă vreți ceva caracteristic pentru noi — luați X. Dacă vreți ceva mai ușor — Y.»

WHAT WE DON'T DO

- Don't leave without naming the next contact.
- Don't comment on the guest's choice ("oh, great choice!" — sounds fake on the 50th repetition).
- Don't "sell" expensive items if the guest is clearly aiming for an average check.

METRIC

Time from seating to drinks $\leq$ 5 minutes.

Scenario 3. Seating and baseline table service

TRIGGER

The guest has placed the order.

GOAL

The table runs in a calm rhythm until farewell.

STEPS

Step 3.1. Promise the time on the main course.

EN: "The main course will be ready in about 15–20 minutes. I'll keep you posted if anything is delayed." **RO:** «Felul principal va fi gata în aproximativ 15–20 de minute. Vă voi anunța dacă va dura mai mult.»

Step 3.2. Check-in 2–3 minutes after first plate.

EN: "Everything alright? Do you have enough [water/drinks]?" **RO:** «Totul e bine? Aveți suficient [apă/băutură]?»

Step 3.3. Holding the table. - Empty plates are cleared within 2 minutes. - Water/bread refills — without being asked. - If the guest is done but doesn't call you — approach after 5 minutes with a dessert/coffee offer.

WHAT WE DON'T DO

- Don't "hover" over the table.
- Don't clear plates while someone else is still eating (a baseline mistake at many places in Chişinău).
- Don't ask questions every 5 minutes.

METRIC

Clean table $\leq$ 2 minutes after the last bite.

Scenario 4. First course

TRIGGER

The kitchen signals the dish is ready.

GOAL

The dish reaches the guest hot, intact, with the right information.

STEPS

Step 4.1. Check at the pass. Before picking up the plate: right dish? right table? full set? clean plate?

Step 4.2. Serve with naming.

EN: "Your [dish name]. Enjoy." **RO:** «[Numele felului de mâncare].
Poftă bună.»

Step 4.3. If the table has multiple courses — name each. Not "here's yours." Each dish gets named separately. If someone ordered X with a modifier — mention the modifier.

Step 4.4. Check-in after 2 minutes.

EN: "Everything to your liking?" **RO:** «Totul e după gustul
dumneavoastră?»

This check-in is critical. It's the window where an error is still cheap to fix. After that window, the error is 5× more expensive.

WHAT WE DON'T DO

- Don't bring the dish cold ("I thought you'd finish the salad first").
- Don't leave the table without check-in for 5+ minutes after the first plate.

METRIC

Time from dish ready to plated ≤ 90 seconds.

Scenario 5. Error and recovery**TRIGGER**

Guest is unhappy. Dish disliked / delay / wrong order / anything else.

GOAL

The guest leaves with the impression that **you solved the problem**, not that you "compensated."

STEPS

Step 5.1. Acknowledge without excuses.

EN: "I'm sorry. This is our mistake. I'll take care of it right now." **RO:**
«Vă cer scuze. Este greșeala noastră. Mă ocup imediat.»

Not "we're having a tough day." Not "usually we're not like this." Not "let me check with the chef."

Step 5.2. Decide, don't negotiate.

Decision scenarios (held by the shift lead):

Error type	Resolution
Dish disliked for objective reason (overcooked, undersalted, wrong item)	Replace + offer an aperitif on the house
Delay > 10 minutes past the promised time	Inform in advance, offer a comp (dessert/coffee/drink)
Order error (brought the wrong item)	Replace urgently + remove the error from the check
Guest uncomfortable (neighbouring table, noise, temperature)	Reseat if possible; if not — comp
Guest unhappy, reason subjective	Apologise, offer an alternative; comp at shift lead's discretion

Step 5.3. Don't comp spontaneously. Every comp is logged in the system with a reason. Without logging — it's a cash leak and a discipline loss.

Step 5.4. Close the contact.

EN: "Apologies again. If you need anything — I'm here." **RO:** «Încă o dată ne cerem scuze. Dacă mai aveți nevoie de ceva — sunt aici.»

Step 5.5. After shift — debrief. Every error with a comp is discussed at the end of the shift (3 minutes). What happened, can it be prevented.

WHAT WE DON'T DO

- Don't argue with the guest.

- Don't explain "how it works in our kitchen."
- Don't push compensation out of pity — comp by rule, not by emotion.
- Don't do "compliments from the chef" on every second error. That turns compensation into a business model.

METRIC

- **Comp share $\leq$ 1.5–2.5% of revenue.** Higher than that — it's a symptom, not the norm.
- **Comp share by cause** has to be visible in breakdown: speed / quality / handoff error / other.

Scenario 6. Check and payment

TRIGGER

Guest asks for the check. Or: shift lead notices the guest has finished and is waiting.

GOAL

The check closes without waiting, without awkwardness, without errors.

STEPS

Step 6.1. Check within 90 seconds of request.

This is the baseline standard. Longer than that — the guest loses the last minutes of impression.

Step 6.2. Presenting the check.

Check goes in a dedicated folder. Not "tossed on the table." Not "into the hands."

EN: "Here's your check. Whenever you're ready, I'll come back." **RO:**
«Iată nota dumneavoastră. Când sunteți gata, mă întorc.»

Step 6.3. Wait, don't hover. Don't "hover" over the guest while they count money/check the bill.

Step 6.4. Accept payment. - Terminal works, not "let me get the cable." - Card/cash — no verbal questions about tipping. If there's a POS prompt for a tip — it's automatic, not spoken. - Change — exact, no "I don't have 20 lei."

Step 6.5. Receipt to the guest. Fiscal receipt — mandatory. Silently, in the folder.

WHAT WE DON'T DO

- Don't "count the check for 5 minutes."

- Don't "forget the terminal."
- Don't mention tipping verbally.

METRIC

Time from check request to delivery ≤ 90 seconds.

Scenario 7. Farewell

TRIGGER

Guest stands up, heading for the door.

GOAL

The guest leaves with **the sense of being remembered**.

STEPS

Step 7.1. Eye contact + words.

Any staff member who sees a guest leaving says:

EN: "Thank you! Come back to us." **RO:** «Vă mulțumim! Vă așteptăm cu drag.»

Not "come again." Not "all the best" (that's a bank line). This is the last word the guest hears in your restaurant.

Step 7.2. If there was direct contact with the server — a short feedback line.

EN: "Was everything good? If we can improve anything — I'd be glad to hear it." **RO:** «A fost totul bine? Dacă putem îmbunătăți ceva — m-aș bucura să aflu.»

Not every table. Only those with longer contact. Otherwise it turns into a formality.

Step 7.3. The door.

In a small restaurant — hold the door for the guest leaving. In a mid-size one — a nod with the eyes.

WHAT WE DON'T DO

- Don't ignore guests leaving, especially when the room isn't empty.
- Don't hold them up with two minutes of verbal questions if they're clearly in a hurry.

METRIC

- Not quantitative. Monitored via mystery shopper and review feedback.

How to roll out the 7 scenarios on shift

STEP 1. ONE SCENARIO A WEEK

Don't roll out all 7 at once. That's overload. One scenario a week, rehearsed at the 7-minute pre-shift brief. After 7 weeks — all 7 scenarios are live.

STEP 2. EACH SCENARIO FITS ON ONE PAGE

One scenario = one page. Posted in the back-of-house area. The team sees it; they don't memorise.

STEP 3. SHIFT LEAD ENFORCES EXECUTION

Not "hopes they follow it." Specifically logs on shift: which scenario is the day's focus, who did what, what we work on tomorrow.

STEP 4. ONCE A MONTH — MYSTERY SHOPPER

One outside person walks the scenarios and rates them. 30 minutes of debrief afterwards.

The main principle

*A scenario isn't about the team saying the same words. A scenario is about **the guest getting the same level of attention regardless of which shift is on today.***

The guest shouldn't be able to tell whether there's a "star" on the floor tonight. With 7 scenarios live — they won't.

Appendix

E

30-60-90 plan + Decision Tree + RACI

Three working tools in one appendix: a 90-day route, a decision tree for typical problems, a minimal map of roles.

E.1. 30-60-90 plan: Route to the Repeatability Machine

Goal: *in 90 days, assemble a system that delivers a predictable result with any shift composition.*

Boundary: *the order of steps depends on your diagnosis. If your money leaks aren't closed, starting with scenarios gets you pretty rituals and the same minus. **Money and safety valves first.***

DAYS 1-30: MONEY AND SAFETY VALVES

Goal: stop the leaks. Make the invisible visible.

#	Action	Owner	Artefact	Success metric
1	Money Leakage Map: walk through Appendix B, write out the top 10 leaks	Owner + manager	Sheet with 10 leaks + priorities	Sheet signed
2	Discount/refund/comp policy	Owner	1-page document, tied to POS pin codes	Discount share < 5–7% of revenue per week
3	Reason codes for write-offs (4–6 codes)	Manager	List of codes + kitchen and floor training	100% of write-offs with a reason code
4	Specs for the TOP-10 SKUs	Chef + manager	Recipe cards with weight and photo	Calibration 1× a week
5	Stop-list with causes + daily review	Shift lead	Stop-list log	5-minute review every morning
6	Cash gap: 14-day payment calendar	Owner	Excel/Google Sheets table	Forecast updated every Friday
7	Channel mini-P&L — assemble first version	Owner + bookkeeper	Table from Appendix C	Close the month by channel

Anti-marker at end of day 30: "We decided to start with marketing." If at the end of 30 days you launched a promotion instead of rolling out reason codes for write-offs — you've broken the route.

DAYS 31–60: NODE SPEED AND SCENARIOS

Goal: service stops being a lottery. A shift lead appears.

#	Action	Owner	Artefact	Success metric
8	Assign a shift lead for every shift	Manager	Rota with shift lead marked	100% of shifts with a named shift lead
9	Describe the shift lead role on 1 page	Manager	Document + training	Signed by candidates
10	Roll out 7 service scenarios (one a week)	Manager + shift lead	7 pages in the back-of-house area	7-minute pre-shift brief every day
11	Node speed measurement	Shift lead	Measurement log: first contact, drinks, mains	Time to first contact ≤ 60 sec
12	Theoretical vs. actual food cost reconciliation	Bookkeeper + chef	Weekly reconciliation	Gap < 2 pp
13	Audit of exceptions over the last 6 months	Owner	List of "what became the norm by concession"	0 exceptions becoming the norm in the new period

Anti-marker at end of day 60: "The scenarios are posted, but no one looks at them." If the shift lead doesn't reference the scenario before the shift — you've moved documents from text to text. You haven't built a system.

DAYS 61-90: CHANNEL CONTROL AND RESILIENCE

Goal: each channel — a separate mini-business. Metrics function as a loop.

#	Action	Owner	Artefact	Success metric
14	Mini-P&L separately for Glovo / Wolt / Bolt Food	Owner + bookkeeper	Table for months 2 and 3	Contribution margin gap between aggregators is visible
15	Delivery windows and limits at peak	Manager + shift lead	Limit schedule	Dining room stops "dropping" at peak
16	Delivery menu rebuild	Chef + owner	Shortened aggregator menu	Order assembly time for delivery < 12 minutes
17	Control Loop: 5 key metrics with thresholds	Owner	"Metric → threshold → action → owner" document	Every Monday – review of 5 metrics for the week
18	Management rhythm: day / week / month	Owner	Calendar of recurring meetings and reports	All meetings happen for 8 consecutive weeks
19	RACI on 1 page (see E. 3)	Owner + manager	Signed document	Each role knows its block
20	Crisis scenarios (at least 3)	Manager	1-page documents	At least 1 rehearsed

Anti-marker at end of day 90: "We look at the metrics, but don't make decisions." A metric without an action is decoration.

WHAT SHOULD BE VISIBLE BY DAY 90

- Revenue has stabilised or is growing without dependence on "stars."
- Discount and comp share is in a managed band.
- Write-offs fell by more than half on average (from the chaos baseline).
- The dining room doesn't "die" at peak because of delivery.
- The shift lead holds the shift without your daily involvement.
- Cash gap is forecast 14 days ahead.
- Channel mini-P&L is updated every month.

E.2. Decision Tree: "If you have X — do Y"

A decision tree for typical problems. Not "general advice," but the concrete first step.

PROBLEM: "THE TILL'S FULL, THE CASH ISN'T"

Symptoms: turnover stable or growing, but the bank balance isn't increasing. Suppliers paid late. Taxes "later."

First step: **Money Leakage Map** (Appendix B). Especially the "Discounts and comps" block, the "Write-offs" block, the "Receiving" block.

What you close in the first 30 days: 1. Discount/comp policy with limits and reasons. 2. Reason codes for write-offs. 3. Cash gap — 14-day payment calendar.

What you DON'T do: marketing, promotions, rebranding, new menu. This will multiply the problem.

PROBLEM: "QUALITY BOUNCES SHIFT TO SHIFT"

Symptoms: some days everything flies, other days the reviews are bad. "A good shift" depends on who's working.

First step: 7 service scenarios (Appendix D) + shift lead.

What you close in the first 30 days: 1. Assign a shift lead for every shift. 2. Roll out the 7-minute pre-shift brief. 3. Launch the first 3 scenarios: arrival, error, farewell.

What you DON'T do: don't fire "the weak ones." First give them the scenario. Often the problem isn't the people — it's the absence of a standard.

PROBLEM: "CHRONIC STOP-LIST"

Symptoms: the same items get stopped regularly. Guests get annoyed. The team hides the stop-list.

First step: stop-list log with causes + weekly cause review.

What you close in the first 30 days: 1. Every stop — a cause (purchasing / production / supplier / demand). 2. Top-3 causes for the week → decision within the week. 3. Specs on "hot" SKUs + minimum stock thresholds.

What you DON'T do: don't shrink the menu without analysing causes. You could remove a profitable item.

PROBLEM: "MARGIN ON PAPER IS FINE, BUT THERE'S NO CASH"

Symptoms: food cost in the report looks healthy, but the bank account is the problem. Write-offs — by total. Discounts — without reasons.

First step: the gap between **theoretical and actual food cost** + causes of write-offs.

What you close in the first 30 days: 1. Reconcile theoretical and actual food cost once a week. 2. Reason codes for write-offs. 3. Specs + portion calibration.

PROBLEM: "EVERYTHING HANGS ON ONE PERSON"

Symptoms: one admin / chef / bar manager "carries everything." If they go on vacation — disaster.

First step: RACI on 1 page (see E.3) + knowledge duplication.

What you close in the first 30 days: 1. Describe the key person's role on 1 page (responsibilities and decisions). 2. Duplicate the knowledge: one document with instructions for a replacement. 3. Control points for the role — what should happen regularly.

What you DON'T do: don't "protect" this person, don't "talk them into staying." If they leave — the system has to hold. If it doesn't — that's your problem, not theirs.

PROBLEM: "DELIVERY IS GROWING, BUT THE DINING ROOM IS SUFFERING"

Symptoms: delivery revenue is growing, the dining room has delays. The kitchen complains. Guests in the room wait.

First step: mini-P&L per aggregator (Appendix C) + peak-hour limits.

What you close in the first 30 days: 1. Mini-P&L separately for Glovo / Wolt / Bolt Food. 2. Shortened delivery menu. 3. Limits on order count during peak hours.

PROBLEM: "TEAM IN FEAR OR CYNICISM"

Symptoms: people don't raise problems. "Seems fine." Or: quiet cynicism ("nothing will change anyway").

First step: internal culture audit via 1-on-1s with key staff.

What you close in the first 30 days: 1. One conversation with each key person: what's not working in the system (not "complaints" — defects). 2. One public corrective step — something you did based on those conversations. Without that, the conversations are manipulation. 3. A clear boundary: what we consider the norm of communication, what we don't.

What you DON'T do: don't play "team spirit" with pizza. It's degrading.

E.3. RACI on one page

A minimal role map. Not the org chart. A map **of decisions and accountability**.

Notation: **R** — Responsible (executes). **A** — Accountable (owns the result, makes the decision). **C** — Consulted. **I** — Informed.

Zone / Decision	Owner	Manager	Shift lead	Chef	Bartender/Bar manager
Strategy and position	A	C	I	C	I
Menu and specs	A	C	I	R	C
Pricing	A	C	I	C	C
Marketing and promos	A	R	I	I	I
Hiring / firing key staff	A	R	I	C	C
Hiring line staff (floor, bar, kitchen)	I	A	C	R (kitchen)	R (bar)
Shift discipline	I	A	R	C	C
Stop-list	I	A	R	R	C
Discounts/comps within limit	I	A	R	I	I
Discounts/comps above limit	A	R	C	I	I
Purchasing and suppliers	A	R	I	C	C
Financial control / reporting	A	R	I	I	I
Cash gap / payment calendar	A	R	I	I	I
Lease / contractual relations	A	C	I	I	I
Guest conflict (standard)	I	I	A	C	C
Guest conflict (serious)	I	A	C	C	C

Zone / Decision	Owner	Manager	Shift lead	Chef	Bartender/Bar manager
<i>Crisis scenarios</i>	A	R	C	C	C

THE MAIN RULE

In every row, **only one A**. If a zone has no A — it will fall through. If two A's — they'll toss responsibility between them.

If your map ends up with "two A's" in a row — it's a signal the roles aren't split, and you need to decide **specifically** who makes the decision.

Conclusion to Appendix E

These three tools are the operating pack that turns Restaurant OS from a methodology into **the working mode of your restaurant**.

- 30-60-90 is the **route**.
- Decision Tree is the **first aid**.
- RACI is the **map of accountability**.

Use all three. Each one alone gives an effect. All together — they give a system.

Closing thought

This document is assembled from roughly 20,000 hours of industry work. From four bar projects and a dozen restaurant ones, from openings and from closings, from shifts that ran against me and from those that finally ran the way they should. From mistakes I paid for with my own time, and from decisions I only reached when no alternative was left.

In 2026–2029 the market will punish not the absence of talent, but **the absence of structure**. A restaurant wins not when "everyone tries hard" but when the system delivers a predictable result with whatever team is on shift. This isn't a polished line. It's an engineering observation, repeated across enough projects that I've stopped doubting it.

If you recognised your restaurant here — you already have a system. It's just working against you. Good news: if it can be assembled against you, it can be assembled for you. Bad news: it doesn't get done over a weekend. Six months of discipline — not "inspiration."

This document isn't a consultation and it isn't a sales pitch. It's a map of the terrain you're already living in. Apply it yourself or with the team. I'm giving it away for a simple reason: **the Moldovan HoReCa market needs a common language, and that language won't be built by consulting at a thousand euros per project**. It'll be built through the circulation of texts like this and through dozens of owners who open a PDF and close at least one zero on their P&L. I'd rather it happens at twenty restaurants at once than at three in sequence.

If this document changed even one decision for you — it paid back all 20,000 hours. If nothing — that's bad for you, not for the document.

The best thanks isn't following me on Instagram or sending a thank-you DM. The best thanks is taking the Diagnostic Scorecard (Appendix A) this week, and forwarding this PDF to a restaurant owner who still doesn't believe their problems have a name, a method, and a timeframe.

— Egor Negruta, Chişinău, May 2026



FIN · EVENING IN THE DINING ROOM