



Quality Management

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the Concept of Quality Management in Service
- ✓ Identify the need for Quality Management in Tourism

Quality Management

In this age of globalisation quality control and quality management hold the key to success for any organisation. In particular, this is true if you are in service-oriented industry where changes come rapidly and where guaranteeing satisfaction through quality product is a challenging task. In this Unit, therefore, emphasis is laid on aspects which help in producing, presenting and delivering quality/ services products to tourists. This can lure them to repeat their purchases or provide verbal publicity to your brand. The Unit starts with a discussion on the concept of quality management and further links it up with customer care in relation to tourism operations.

Concept of Quality Management in Services

The definitions of quality have become increasingly sophisticated through the past two decades. The concept of quality as excellence has now been largely superseded by definitions emphasising upon quality issues related to production or delivery mechanisms. Also, a new dimension added to this is the perception of the quality by the consumers. Some present definitions confirm requirements for zero defects to relate quality with product and manufacturing specifications whereas others tackle quality from customers' perception and satisfaction level. We are also focusing upon the concept of quality management in this Unit as an important challenge being faced by tourism industry to

reconcile the quality of services actually produced with that perceived by the tourists. This notion has given birth to a theoretical model, designed by Nightingale (1985), who identifies two qualities of the service offering as perceived by provider and that of the service received by the consumer. This has been successfully refined by Parashraman et al (1985) into 'gap model' identifying five discrepancies or 'gaps' which may develop in the service supply process and interface with the service experiences as shown in Table 7.1.

Table 1.1

Sr#	Designation	Location
1.	Positioning	Between management perception of customer expectation and expectation themselves.
2.	Specifications	Between management perceptions of customer expectation and actual service specified.
3.	Delivery	Between the services actually specified and that actually delivered.
4.	Communication	Between the service actually delivered and that externally communicated to customer (e.g., through advertisements).
5.	Perception	Between the service quality perceived and that expected by the customer.

It can also be represented as a flow chart as is adopted by Brogowicz et al. (1990) which is termed as the 'gap' model of service delivery (Figure I). Brown et al. (1990) have also attempted to study the difference between providers and consumers perception of service quality as shown in Table 7.2.

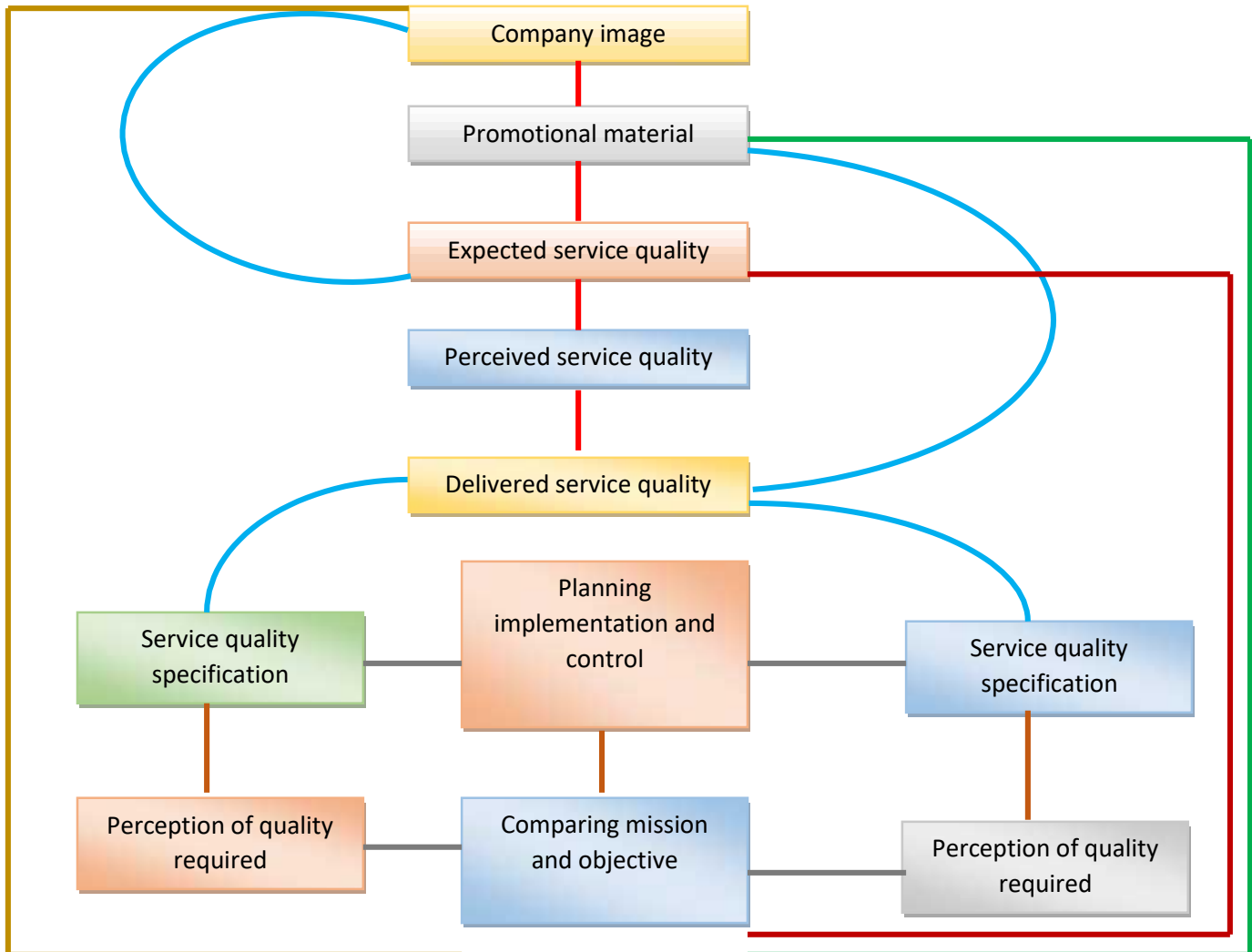


Fig: 1.1

Table 1.2

Sr#	Designation	Location
1.	Professionalism and Skills	Customers see the service providers as knowledgeable and able to solve their problems in a professional way
2.	Attitudes and Behaviours	Customers perceive a genuine, friendly concern for them and their problems.
3.	Access and Flexibility	Customers feel that they have easy, timely access and that the service provider is prepared to adjust to their needs.
4.	Reliability and Trustworthiness	Customer can trust the service provider to keep promises and act in their best interests.
5.	Recovery	Customers know that immediate corrective action will be taken if anything goes wrong
6.	Reputation and Credibility	Customers believe that brand image stands for good performance and accepted values

Among the numerous reasons identified for the existence of service gap a few notable ones are:

- a) When top management does not give employees any priority or when they have wrong priorities;
- b) When middle managers and front line employees are not empowered to make appropriate corrective decision on the spot;
- c) When the environment or structure of the organisation does not encourage innovation and creativity;
- d) When top management is complacent; and
- e) When top management has lost control of one of the gaps – either gap 3 (delivery) or gap 4 (communication) as is shown in the flow chart (Figure 6.1).

In order to ensure quality in tourism operations the service provider has to fill in all the gaps.

Quality Management in Tourism



Fig: 1.2

The application of the Concept of Quality Management in tourism operations emerged when many countries realised that all tourists are not the same. They are dissimilar on the basis of their origin, travel purpose, length of stay, activities, etc. For instance Japanese, Germans and other North American tourists are often thought to be particularly great spenders. As a consequence to this many countries have developed their services to meet the needs of such a kind of segmented tourist market. Because of this many countries/destinations started announcing that they want quality tourists. However, the assumption here that a high spender will also be a quality consumer in relation to various sensitivities still remains a question mark. There can be a situation where a high spender

because of his/her high purchasing power may become more exploitative of tourism resources. Some countries have discovered that the market (being highly segmented) is to be linked to the available resources and infrastructure at the destinations. This led to another kind of approach wherein it was not just the quality of products and services was to be taken into account but the quality of users of such products or services was also to be ensured. In other words, if one tourist spends as much as three others combined, the absolute impact and resource use of former is likely to be smaller and, therefore, cost benefit ratio would be more favourable. It is, therefore, widely acknowledged that 1980s saw many service providers in North America responding to a perceived 'quality' crisis posed by products offered by rivals as a method of retaining the market share. Hence, if late 1980s was characterised by a business environment committed to quality early 1990s was dominated by the Total Quality Management, a more sophisticated form of recognising customer's needs as an integral part of an organisation's goals.

Quality management, from the perspective of making cost-benefit ratio depends upon several factors, such as, the time reference unit of expenditure, i.e., expenditure per day/expenditure per trip, how much money is spent on providing it as well as leakages involved in it, the sectoral and regional patterns of expenditure, and government's objectives and goals in this direction. However, before you decide upon what constitutes quality in tourism services, you should clearly define your own objectives of service quality (Quality Policy) and your target market. In the absence of such a framework quantity in tourism may not be the quality in tourism. Certain tourism industry sectors as stated earlier, link the parameters of quality with the purchasing power of the tourists. To some extent this may be in line with most often mentioned objectives of tourism development, like, increase in foreign exchange earnings, improving the balance of payments, and increased income earned through tourism and allied industries. But economists believe that taking in account the per day expenditure of tourists may always not be a correct measure as these high daily expenditures go hand in hand with short length of stay. In many cases they argue that tourists with the highest per day expenditure are not those with highest per capita or per trip expenditure. Hence, merely focussing upon per day expenditure of tourist may not be in line with the overall earnings from tourism. Moreover, in such cases tourism does not benefit everybody in the host community equally and some form of tourism may be more regionally or sectorally based than others since expenditures by tourists with a short length of stay are more likely to be concentrated in the primary tourist destinations and international gateways.

Those tourists who turn out to be visitors with very low daily expenditure may in fact turn out to be quality tourists as far as the destination's concerns are to be accounted for. They may care for local resources, respect, local customs instead of exploiting them, and may live with them in harmony. Thus, they may turn out to be quality tourists from the point of view of the sustainability of the destination. Therefore, quality operations in tourism have to be linked not just with high spending but also to the guiding principles of tourism in that area and the satisfaction of both tourists as well as hosts. The 1990's Quality Management is of great concern to tourism operations for both academicians and practitioners. This is largely due to increasing interest and concern for customer care and satisfaction. Therefore, it can be seen as one all-embracing approach enabling an organisation to develop a more holistic view of customers, quality issues and service provisions as an ongoing process linked with the quality perception of the hosts. There is always a problem of establishing a universal definition of "quality" which could be applied to different sectors of tourism operations. Townsend and Gebhart (1986) distinguished between the subjective evaluation of quality by the customer (quality of perception) and providers more objective assessment (quality of fact). Clearly the meaning of quality will vary according to the context and perceptions of who is establishing what and what can be deemed as quality. But this concept in tourism operations requires organisations to work towards specific goals focussed on an agreed concept of quality.

Corporate commitment is required so that Quality Management permeates from all areas of company business. Quality management will also provide you with an opportunity to monitor and implement internal procedures and to control suppliers using established quality standards and procedures. One of the real challenges for Quality Management in tourism operations is to establish or determine what customers consider as excellence in service provision and design of service delivery system so as to deal with individual tourist's requests, requirements and needs. Many players in the tourism industry have started targeting the individual customers by adding value to their products through an analysis of what the individual perceived as quality. Naturally, the costing and pricing both go up in such cases. Others in this sector have attempted to provide budget category of tourists. It is at the strategic policy and planning level that the tourism service provider may need to agree on how to improve continuously on the quality front in providing the services so that the tourists experience is enhanced. One challenge in this endeavour will be to ensure that the process of travel is not perceived as a mundane and stressful experience by tourists. Whatever be the stage, implementing a Quality Management strategy is not an easy task for service providers where it may involve a change in corporate culture. Nevertheless, if management is willing seriously to embrace certain principles, then the management strategies will prove to be the key to successful implementation of Quality Management in tourism operations. As a manager if you wish to implement successfully Quality management strategies you are advised to consider following points:

- You should have long term commitment to constant improvement,
- You should have a culture of "right first time",

- Your employees need to be trained to understand customer-supplier relationships,
- While purchasing you should not just focus upon price but take in to account the total cost and quality,
- You should manage improvements in delivery system,
- You should introduce new methods of supervision and training,
- In order to improve communication and build teamwork you should breakdown inter-departmental barriers. This will also help you in managing the service process well,
- You should develop Human Resource Strategies (on the job training, incentives and motivation) so as to develop experts and specialists in your work force, and
- Last not the least you must develop systematic approach to manage the overall implementation of Quality Management programme in your organisation.

In nutshell we can say that the implementation of Quality Management Programme can be shaped by applying the above stated principles and their outcome can be experienced in following areas:

- a) improved Customer-service provider-relationships,
- b) better managing processes,
- c) change in organisational culture, and
- d) commitment of employees.

These outcomes, of course, are accompanied by necessities of a system based on national or international standards as well as tools to analyse and predict what type of corrective action is needed to improve quality or how to monitor progress of such corrective actions. A strong Management Information System backed by feedback from customers as well as front-line employees will also help you in quality management.

Caring For Customers in Tourism

The managers' task in tourism business includes providing quality service to the tourists. This naturally includes the concept of customer care. If you ignore this you will find it difficult to attract customers. Both in the field of inbound and outbound tour operations there is a fierce competition to win and retain clients. Only those who really provide good customer care have a hope and scope for surviving in the business of tourism.

Always remember that you are operating in the field of specialised services wherein your clients have high expectations of the services you provide or you can provide. Meeting these expectations by your company largely depends upon how good you are at your job as a manager. You can either make their dreams come true or turn their dreams in to nightmares. On the one hand you have a situation wherein when these expectations are not met the customers remain unhappy or on the other hand, you deliver your services with the quality beyond their expectations and hopes. Remember, that many of your clients might be experienced ones who would compare your services and product with their previous

experiences. Customer satisfaction is achieved not only by giving them value for money but also by winning them for repeat business and good publicity. Best example of caring for your clients and ensuring that they enjoy a high quality service is that before delivering the service develop certain checks and test that you are ready or not. Besides, to offer a quality service to every client means being able to maintain high standards and to repeat them every time. It also involves developing new systems and making them work to achieve your organisations' quality and customer satisfaction related goals. You must always remember that each of your customer would like to feel special and making each one feel different from thousands of others is not always easy. However, a beginning can be made through effective use of communication skills or your front-line staff should be trained to:

- Always acknowledge the customer,
- Smile and mean it,
- Address people courteously,
- Look them in the eye when while speaking to them, and
- if known, use their name.

When you think of customer care what should come instantly in your mind is idea of little bit extra than what the customer is aspiring for. For example:

Situation 1

When you are selling to a corporate client your services of insurance, traveller cheques, foreign currency, visa application and collection as well as hotel vouchers if you also try to provide him/her with a taxi/chauffeur driven car to get him/her to airport or from airport to hotel, it would make him/her feel that you understand his/her need and you are capable of offering that little bit extra what others cannot.

Situation 2

An airline passenger gets an extra smile from the airhostess and a query – Sir, Can I get you something? This makes the customer have a feeling that he/she has been cared for.

In both these examples if you notice what made a client more relaxed is the feeling that they were being looked after. These examples also highlight the key factors in giving quality service – it is the caring way the service is delivered that brings success to your operations. It also signifies that you should put the client's interest first. At times what happens while doing a number of jobs you start focussing on doing the job to please your seniors and top management and forget that the reason for doing the job is to look after your client.

As a manager you must realise and train others to acknowledge that most important part of your job is to give best possible standard of care and services to your client and this makes your task distinct from others. In other words, giving that little bit extra means thinking of your customers' reactions to your work and trying to look after their comfort and satisfaction. With experience you will also learn that the

secret in giving that little bit extra is anticipating the request before it comes, being prepared to deal with it and even perhaps offering it before it is asked for. Another important area which is believed to be crucial for a manager is to handle complaints. It is for sure that when things don't go right the customer will complain. This gives rise to complaints or grievances which you need to handle effectively and convincingly.

Though these complaints are discussed from the perspective of tourist transport operations, more or less for improving quality of your services in relation to clients' expectations and satisfaction gap the situation remains the same in practically all tourism businesses. Therefore, nature of complaints and complaint handling remain the same, particularly, when it comes to deal with feelings and emotions as well as to deal with the problems.

Hence, do take the complaint seriously, even when you think it is exaggerated or unreasonable. This will let your client know that you are prepared to listen and help. It is advisable for you to stay calm and keep your speech and tone business like. You must ask questions to your client to get full details. While doing so you can use comments like, "I see", "I understand" or "Do go on". These comments only suggest that you are following his/her problem but do not comment anyway that you agree with him/her. If you indicate in any manner your agreement with the customer about the fault in effect you accept the responsibility. Once this happens then client expects compensation even, if possible through legal battle. All this clearly indicates that while caring for customers complaints must be handled tactfully. If you, as a manager of a tour operation or a travel agency business, are able to take customer care the way customer expects, you can establish long lasting personal as well as professional relationship with your customers. After this stage customers even start ignoring small mistakes committed by you or your staff which otherwise may consume your good amount of time in solving these problems. Moreover, these satisfied customers become reference sources, i.e., they start recommending your name as a reliable and caring service provider to friends or in their business circles. Therefore, customer care and Quality Management can be seen as key principles of success in service sectors like tourism operations.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *David Timothy Duval, (2007), Tourism and Transport: Modes, Networks and Flows*
- ✓ *Ratandeep Singh, (2008), Tourism and Transport Management: Practice and Procedures*
- ✓ *Les M. Lumsdon, Stephen J. Page, (2004), Tourism and Transport*