



## Quality Management and Customer Care

### 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 and Customer Care

### Introduction

The secret to any organisation's success, especially in the present age (where the world is moving toward globalisation) is quality control and management. This holds especially true for those who work in the service-oriented industry, where rapid changes and the guarantee of satisfaction, via quality products, is an uphill task. This unit focuses on factors that can help in coming up with, offering and delivery quality service products geared towards tourists. Factors that encourage consumers to repeat their purchases or verbally publicise your brand will be discussed.

### The Concept of Quality Management In Services

During the past two decades, the definitions of quality have evolved and become highly developed. The idea of quality, as superiority, has now been outmoded with definitions placing greater emphasis on quality than issues linked to production or modes of delivery. Furthermore, the new element of quality perception by the consumer has been added to the definition. Some existing definitions demand zero defects to associate quality with the product and manufacturing specifications, while others deal with quality from consumers' points of view and level of satisfaction. In this unit, we are concentrating on the idea of quality management as an essential challenge that the tourism industry has to deal with - to bring together the quality of services actually provided and those demanded by the tourist.

This concept has given rise to a theoretical model created by Nightingale (1985), who singles out two virtues of service offering as intended by the provider and their perception by the consumer. This has effectively been refined by Parashraman et al (1985) into the 'gap model' - highlighting five inconsistencies or 'gaps' that can show up in the service supply process and hinder = the service experiences shown in Table 1.

Table 9.1

| Sr# | Designation    | Location  |
|-----|----------------|---|
| 1.  | Positioning    | Between management perception of customer expectations and the actual expectations themselves.                      |
| 2.  | Specifications | Between management perceptions of customer expectations and actual service specified.                               |
| 3.  | Delivery       | Between the services specified and those 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 shown in a flow chart, as adapted by Brogowicz, et al. (1990) which is known as the 'GAP' Model of Service Delivery (Figure 1). Brown, et al. (1990), has made an effort to study the variations between providers and consumer's assessment of service quality shown in Table 6.2.

Fig. 9.1

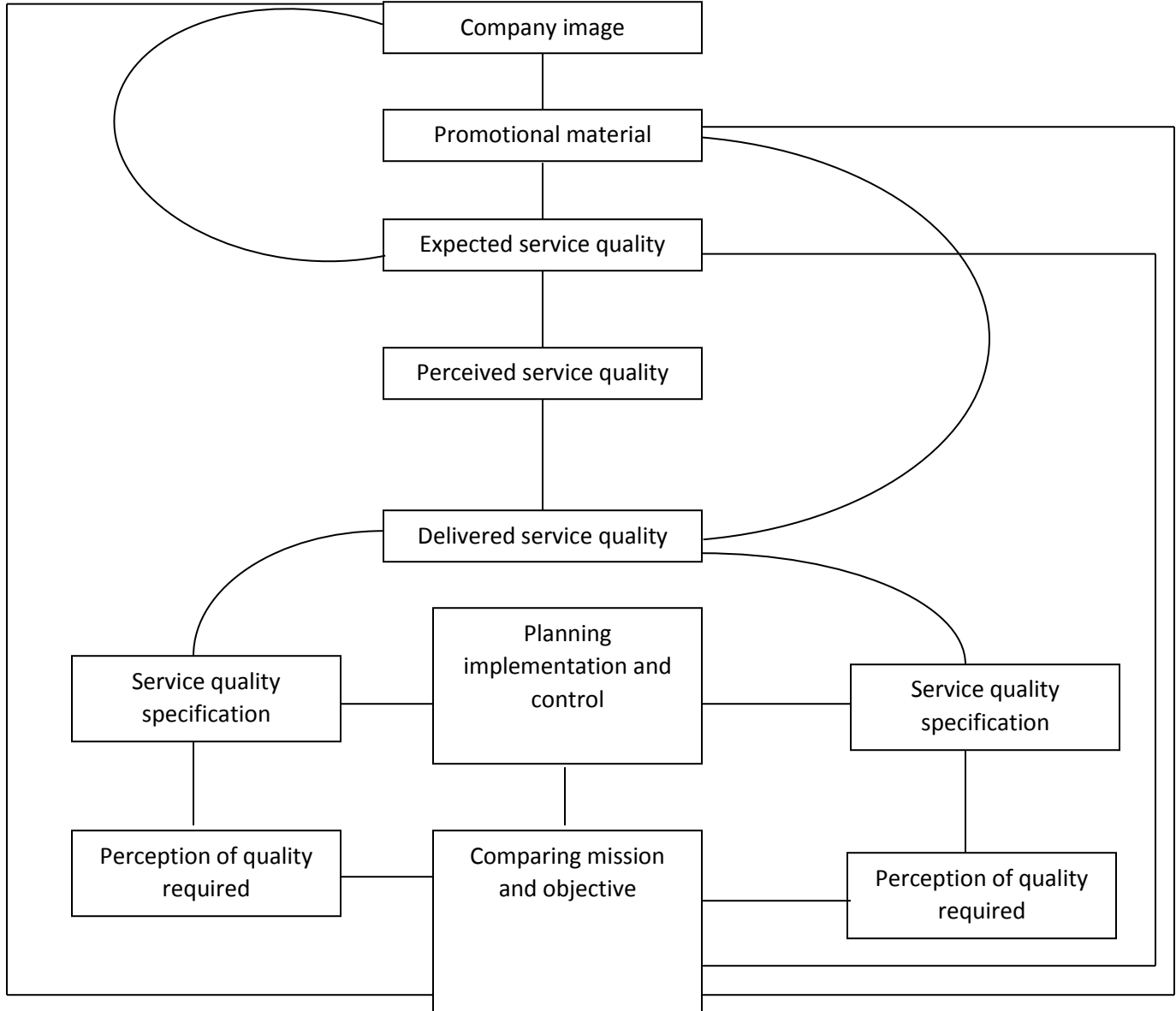


Table 9.2

| 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 expect 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 | Customers 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                                   |

From the many reasons pinpointed for the continuation of the service gap, a few examples worthy of noting include the following:

- a) When the top management does not assign specific employee priorities or when erroneous priorities are assigned;
- b) If the middle management and front line employees are not given the power to make suitable remedial decisions on the spot;
- c) In cases where the environment or set-up of the organisation leaves no room for encouragement, improvement and originality;
- d) When upper management becomes too overconfident/smug;
- e) If higher management loses control of one of the gaps – gap 3 (delivery) or 4 (communication), as indicated in the flow chart (Figure 6.1).

To make certain that quality is delivered in tourism operations, the service provider has to ensure that all gaps are filled.

### Quality Management in Tourism

The concept of quality management became significant in tourism operations as soon a different countries started to understand that not all tourists are the same. They differ in their origin, length of stay, travel purpose and activities etc. For example, German, Japanese and North American tourists are considered to be bigger spenders. Due to this, a large number of countries have crafted their services to fulfil the needs of a segmented tourist market. As a result, a number of countries/destinations made it known that they desired quality tourists. The theory here is that the large spender will also be an

excellent customer in regards to the different sensitivities, but this may not always be the case. A situation can arise where the big spender, due to their elevated purchasing power, may exploit the resources of tourism more. Some countries realized that due to the segmentation of the market, it has to be associated with the resources available and the infrastructure at the destinations. This gave birth to another type of an approach, in which not only the quality of the product and services has to be considered, but the quality of the users also has to be taken into account.

This means that, if a single tourist spends as much as three others, the effect and resource use of the former will be significantly smaller. Therefore, the cost benefit ratio will have a more positive effect. This is why the 1980s saw a great many service providers in North America acting in response to the 'quality' crises, which had been created by products offered by rival providers as a way to retain market share. So, if the 1980s were identified by a business environment with commitment to quality, then the 1990s were characterised by Total Quality Management, which is a more complex way of understanding the consumer needs as an inseparable part of the organisation's aims.

From the viewpoint of the cost-benefit ratio, quality management is dependent upon a number of factors, including expenditure in a time unit (i.e., money spent per day/expenditure per trip), the amount of money spent making it available, the regional and sectorial patterns of expenditure, governmental objectives and aims in this objective.

Before you determine what makes for quality in tourism services, you must first define your own idea of Service Quality (Quality Policy) and your intended market. As stated earlier, some tourism industry sectors associate the boundaries of quality with the power of the tourist to purchase. To a certain extent, this might be in line with the most common objectives of tourism development, like the elevation in foreign exchange earnings, balance of payment improvement and greater earnings through tourism and related industries. However, many economists think that calculating the per-day expenses of tourists may not always be an accurate measure, as high daily expenses go hand in hand shorter durations of stay.

They claim that in many cases, the tourists spending the greatest amounts per day are not the ones spending the highest amount per capita or per trip expenditure. So, simply concentrating on per-day expenditure of a tourist might not be in line with the total earnings from tourism. What's more, in such situations tourism does not provide equal benefits to everyone in the host destination. Some types of tourism may be based more on a wider region, though most will likely be focused on the main tourist destinations and international gateways.

The tourist who falls into the category of very low daily expenditure may actually end up being a quality tourist, when the destination's interests are taken into account. They might be more caring towards the local resource/customs and show more respect instead of exploiting them – they may choose to work in harmony with them. So when the sustainability of the destination is considered, they may actually turn out to be quality tourists. So, quality operations in tourism needs to be associated not just with the amount of spending, but with the guiding principles of tourism at the location *and* the contentment of tourists and hosts combined.

The Quality Management of the 1990s is of major concern to tourism operations for practitioners and academicians equally. This is because of the greater interest in and concern for satisfaction and customer care. Hence, it can be thought of as an all-inclusive approach, allowing an organisation to create a more holistic view of the consumer, quality factors and service offerings, as an ongoing process connected with the quality perception of the hosts.

Problems always exist when formulating a universal definition of “quality,” which is applicable to the varying sectors of tourism operations. Townsend and Gebhart (1986) differentiated between the subjective evaluations of quality by the consumer (quality of perception) and offer a more objective evaluation (quality of fact). This is, that the meaning of quality will change in accordance with the context and perceptions of who is establishing it and what is considered to be quality. This concept in tourism necessitates that establishments work at reaching specific targets, built upon an agreed idea of quality.

Corporate devotion is a must, so that Quality Management filters through from every aspect of the business. Quality Management can also provide the opportunity to keep an eye on and put into operation internal procedures to monitor suppliers, using recognised quality standards and practices. One of the major issues for Quality Management in tourism operations is how to determine or decide what clients think of as ‘excellence in service provision’ and go on to design a service delivery system, in order to be able to satisfy each tourist’s demands, needs and expectations. Many tourism industry players are now targeting each customer individually through value added products, by analysing what the individuals think of as quality. Of course, both price and costing go up in these types of cases. Other players have made efforts to offer a budget-friendly category of tourists.

The tourism service providers need to work out a strategy at policy and planning level and agree on how to continuously improve quality when making services available, so that the tourist’s experience is made better. One obstacle, in this effort, will be to eliminate the idea in the tourist’s mind that travel is a mundane and stressful activity. Putting a Quality Management strategy into action is a difficult task at any time for service providers - especially when it involves changing corporate culture. Nonetheless, when management works hard to adapt certain principles, management strategies can become the key to successful functioning of quality management in tour operating business.

If you are a manager looking to carry out Quality Management with success, the following points have to be kept in mind:

- Uphold long-term commitment to ongoing improvement;
- Adapt a culture of “right the first time”;
- Train employees to understand customer-supplier relationships;
- When making purchases, the price should not only be the focus - the total cost and quality need to be considered as well;
- Perfection in delivery should be practiced;
- New training and supervision methods should be implemented;

- Breakdown of inter-departmental barriers is a must to improve communication and encourage teamwork, which in turn will aid in managing the service process;
- Build human resource strategies (motivation, incentives, and on-the-job training), to develop and nurture specialists and experts within your workforce;
- Lastly, establish systematic methods to manage the total implementation of a Quality Management Program in your company.

To recap, we can state that execution of a Quality Management Program can be moulded by the application of the above-mentioned concepts, and their combined result can be felt in the following areas:

- a) Enhanced customer-service provider relations;
- b) Improved management procedures;
- c) Transformation of organisational culture;
- d) Employee commitment

These results are naturally connected with the requirements of a system founded on national or international standards. Additionally, the equipment that is capable of examining and predicting what kinds of remedial steps are required to improve quality and ways to monitor the progression of the remedial action are also needed. A durable Management Information System supported by customer feedback and front-line employees also assist quality management.

### Caring For Customers in Tourism

One of the manager's duties in the tourism business is to provide quality service to customers. This automatically brings in the idea of customer care. When this is ignored, it becomes difficult to attract customers. There is tremendous competition to win and retain clients for inbound as well as outbound travel. Only the establishments providing exceptional customer care can thrive in the tourism sector.

Keep in mind that this field is composed of specialised services and your customers hold high hopes for the services you promise/deliver. Your company delivering on those anticipations or otherwise is going to be determined by how good you are as a manager. Your actions can make the tourist's dreams come true, or turn them into a nightmare. It is up to you to ensure that you not only meet the expectations of the client, but go beyond what's expected. Otherwise, your actions could make them very unhappy. Keep in mind that a number of your clients might be experienced travelers. In which case, they will make comparisons between your product/services with those of previous travel businesses.

Customer contentment is gained through not just providing value for money, but gaining their repeat business and good verbal publicity. The best way to make certain that your clients get the high quality service they deserve - and know they are cared for - is to establish a system of checks and tests before delivering the product, to make sure you are ready. To be able to deliver quality service to each customer means maintaining high standards and delivering them consistently. It also means to implement new schemes and make them work, so that the organisation's quality and client's

contentment goals are reached. You have to keep in mind that each client wants to feel like they are special - ensuring that a single client is treated different from all of others is a difficult task. A start can be made by using the communication skills of your front-line staff effectively.

The staff should be trained to:

- Remember to acknowledge the customer every time;
- Smile genuinely;
- Address the customers politely;
- Not forget to look them in the eye while conversing with them;
- If the customer's name is known, use it

When considering customer care, going the extra mile beyond what the customer expects should come to mind naturally. For example:

#### **Situation 1**

When selling your standard services to a corporate client like traveller cheques, insurance, foreign currency, collection and application of visa and hotel vouchers, make the additional effort of supplying them with a taxi/chauffeur car to get them to and from the airport. This gives them the feeling that you understand their situation and are in a position to offer them what others cannot.

#### **Situation 2**

A passenger in an aeroplane gets an additional smile from the airhostess and an enquiry like the following: "Sir, can I get you something?" This makes the customer feel that they are looked after. In each of these situations, it should be noted that what gives the client a special feeling is that they are looked after. Another key factor of these examples is the compassionate method of delivering your service that contributes to the success of your organisation. It also demonstrates that the client's interests should be placed first. There are situations in a job where the focus may shift from doing the job to pleasing your seniors and top-level management. In reality, the job is to make sure the client always is given top priority.

As the manager, you need to understand and train your employees to realize that the most vital part of your job is to provide the optimal standard of service and care to the customer - this differentiates your duty from others. Alternatively, giving the extra push shows you are thinking of your customer's response to your work and are making every effort to ensure their comfort and fulfilment. With time, you will understand that the secret to providing extra care is foreseeing the request before it is made - being ready to provide it and maybe even offering it before it is requested. Another vital area that is crucial and the manager must be able to deal with is complaints. It is understood that when things go wrong, customers will complain. Their grievances will need to be handled tactfully and appropriately by you.

While such complaints are considered from the individual tourist transport operation's point of view, predominantly to improve the quality of services provided in accordance with the clients' expectations, the circumstances remain almost the same in all tourism businesses. Thus, the essence of complaints and the proper handling of the complaints stay the same. Particularly, when it comes to dealings with difficult/intense emotions and feelings, in addition to dealing with the problems themselves. Even if you feel that the complaint is overstated or irrational, you must always take it seriously.

This shows the client that you are willing to listen to them and help. In such a situation, keep calm and maintain a professional tone using conversational language. Ask the client questions to be able to ascertain full details.

Interject with comments, such as, "I see," "I understand," or "do go on," while listening to their story. Such comments show that you are paying attention, but do not make comments that indicate that you agree with them. If you indicate agreement in any way regarding the problem or fault, that means you are accepting responsibility. When this happens, the customer then expects some kind of compensation - maybe even through legal channels.

All this illustrates how while caring for customers, their complaints need to be dealt with tactfully.

As a tour operation manager or a travel agency business, if you are able to provide customer care as expected by clients, you can build and nurture excellent professional relationships. Once this stage is reached, your clients may even begin to ignore small mistakes made by your staff or you, which otherwise may have ended up taking a great deal of your time to solve. More importantly, the satisfied client becomes a source of reference, i.e., they recommend your name as a dependable and thoughtful service provider in their business and social circles. In this way, customer care and quality management become the main principles of becoming successful in service sectors, such as tourism operations.

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Robert Ford, Michael Sturman, Cherrill Heaton, (2012), Managing Quality Service In Hospitality*
- ✓ *Bradley Gale, Robert Chapman Wood, (1994), Managing Customer Value: Creating Quality and Service That Customers Can See*
- ✓ *John A. GOODMAN, (2009), Strategic Customer Service*
- ✓ *William B. Martin, (1989), Managing Quality Customer Service*