

LOGO

**TOURIST SERVICE QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN THE ECOTOURISM
ACCOMMODATION SECTOR OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

BY

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ABSTRACT

There is extensive focus on the practical performance of ecotourism in respect of environmentally invasive activities and the satisfaction of ecotourists in South Africa. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of quality management practices on service quality in the accommodation sector serving ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal.

The study was conducted at 58 hotels within a 50 kilometre proximity to ecotourism development regions of KwaZulu-Natal province. Two separate self-administered questionnaires were designed for the hotel managers and for their guests. A quantitative approach and a census of 58 managers were conducted and the guest response of 587 was obtained using convenience sampling.

The results revealed that there are mismatches in guests' actual experience on the variables of interest for customer service quality and the importance they attach to each variable. The experience-importance findings show that most guests rated their experiences above the importance they attach to those experiences.

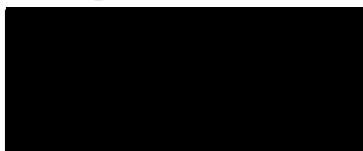
Little attention has been paid to hotel service quality research pertaining specifically to quality-related performance. This study fills this gap by identifying congruent hotel service quality attributes and relating these to management performance by analysing the importance of these attributes for hotel-guests seeking experiences of the natural environment. The results of the study offer measures for ecotourism service quality enhancement for the ecotourists experience at the hotels and a starting point for hotel managers to optimise the service quality growth and development while protecting the resources on which they are based.

Quality function deployment has emerged as a significant tool to guide hotel managers in ecotourism destinations to attain planned levels of guest service quality and formulate a well-informed and systematic framework that will advance strategies for service quality enhancement.

DECLARATION

This work has not been previously accepted in substance for any Doctoral Degree, and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any other Doctoral Degree.

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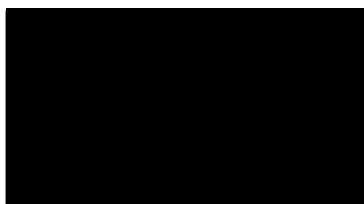


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This submission is the results of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged giving explicit references.

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DEDICATIONS

I would like to thank the following people for the help that they gave me during my study period:

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Declaration of Candidate	ii
Dedications	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	xvii
List of Tables	xix
List of Annexures	xxii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1	Preamble	1
1.2	Background of the study	1
1.3	Contribution of the Study	2
1.4	An overview of salient literature on ecotourism	3
1.5	Conceptual understandings of perceived service quality	6
1.6	Statement of the problem	7
1.7	Aim of the Study	10
1.8	Objectives	11
1.9	Rationale for the Study	11
1.10	Scope	12
1.11	Limiting Factors	13
1.12	Population	14
1.13	Region	14
1.14	Methodology	15
1.15	Conceptual Framework	15
1.16	Organisation of Chapters	16
1.17	Conclusion	17

**CHAPTER 2 BUILDING THE CONCEPT OF SERVICE QUALITY IN
ECOTOURISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MANAGERS OF
ACCOMMODATION**

2.1	Introduction	19
2.2	Overview of external customer service quality	19
2.2.1	The concept of service quality	20
2.2.2	Service quality in the manufacturing sector	22
2.2.3	Service quality in the services' sector	24
2.2.4	Service strategy in the services' sector	25
2.2.5	Service sector management research	26
2.2.6	Service quality in hotels	28
2.2.7	Path to customer delight with hotels' service	30
2.2.8	Service quality in ecotourism	32
2.3	Ecotourists as customers of accommodation	33
2.3.1	Profile of the ecotourism accommodation customer	34
2.3.2	Ecotourist typologies	35
2.3.3	Limitations of typologies	38
2.3.4	Accommodation preferences of ecotourists	39
2.3.5	Ecotourism accommodation structures	40
2.3.6	External Imposition on Accommodation Management Practice	42
	2.3.6.1 At the Destination	43
	2.3.6.2 At the Accommodation Unit	44
2.4	The concept of hotel services	45
2.4.1	The service cycle	45
2.4.2	Improvements in hotel services	46
2.4.3	Attributes of hotel services quality	48
2.4.4	Hospitality	51
2.4.5	Composition of hospitality and tourism consumer experiences	53
2.6	Customer expectation from hotel attributes	56

2.6.1	Expectation and performance only measures of service quality	58
2.6.2	Variations in hotel guest expectations	59
2.7	Manager orientation for hotel service quality	60
2.8	Service failure	62
2.9	Guest perception of ecotourist accommodation service quality	64
2.9.1	Background	64
2.9.2	Gap Studies	65
2.9.3	Attribute expectation	65
2.9.4	Attribute Importance Measurement	69
2.9.5	Discovering hotel environmental expectations among ecotourists	70
2.9.6	Focal interpretations of customer service quality for the study	72
2.10	Influence of ecotourism service design on management of services	73
2.11	Conclusion	74

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN SERVICES

3.1	Introduction	76
3.2	Hotel Design for service quality in ecotourism	76
3.3	Challenges of environmental care to service quality management	78
3.3.1	Guide to environmental practices of managers	79
3.3.2	Environmentally sensitive management of sustainable practices	81
3.3.3	Hotel environmental performance categories and indicators	82
3.3.3.1	Management of Energy efficiency	83
3.3.3.2	Management of Water efficiency	85
3.3.3.3	Communication for environmental awareness	86

	3.3.3.4 Architecture and landscape design	88
	3.3.3.5 Waste Reduction	89
	3.3.3.6 Managerial knowledge on environmental protection	90
	3.3.7 Conclusion	92
3.4	Service quality management practices of managers	93
3.5	Service quality management generic to services	93
3.5.1	Compensation	95
	3.5.1.1 Strength of the compensation in the team- driven service quality	95
	3.5.1.2 Challenges to service quality promotion	96
3.5.2	Process Management	97
	3.5.2.1 Process Management for Service Orientation	97
	3.5.2.2 Need for process management for service quality enhancement	98
	3.5.2.3 Contribution of process management to customer service quality	98
3.5.3	Benchmarking	99
	3.5.3.1 Benchmarking in Tourism	99
	3.5.3.2 Influence of accreditation and standards	99
3.5.4	Training Management	100
	3.5.4.1 Management of Training Delivery	101
	3.5.4.2 Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Training Management	102
3.5.5	Training	103
	3.5.5.1 Disquiet with service quality training in hospitality	104
	3.5.5.2 Education and training for environmental awareness	104
	3.5.5.3 Desired service quality training to improve customer services	106
3.5.6	Empowerment	107
	3.5.6.1 Empowerment Approach	108
	3.5.6.2 Challenges to empowerment intent	108

3.5.7	Technology Management	109
3.5.7.1	Role of technology to hotel customer service quality	109
3.5.7.2	Human-technology balance in hotel customer service	110
3.5.8	Participation	111
3.5.8.1	Challenges to customer service management	111
3.5.8.2	Supplier Participation	112
3.5.9	Teamwork	112
3.5.9.1	Benefits to management of customer service quality	113
3.5.9.2	Challenges to Team Conditions for Service Quality Management	113
3.5.10	Outcome Measurement	113
3.5.11	Assessment	115
3.6	Conclusion	116
3.7	The role of quality function deployment for strategy development	116
3.8	Gaps identified in the literature	119
3.9	Conclusion	120

CHAPTER 4 THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1	Introduction	121
4.2	Research Strategy	121
4.3	Research Design	122
4.3.1	Perspectives of Research Design	122
4.3.2	Purpose of Research	123
4.3.3	Qualitative and quantitative techniques for research	124
4.3.4	Cross-sectional research design	126
4.4	The Theoretical Framework	130
4.5	Data Collection Design	130
4.5.1	Design of Measurement Instruments	131

4.5.2	The Unit of Analysis	133
4.5.3	Operational Measures of the variables	133
4.5.3.1	Variables and indicators	133
4.5.3.2	Data collection procedures	134
4.5.3.3	Data Collection from Managers	136
4.5.3.3.1	Research Assumptions of Population	137
4.5.4	Guest Data Collection	137
4.6	Study Area	138
4.6.1	Region	139
4.6.2	Study Population	139
4.6.3	Sampling	140
4.6.3.1	Sampling Frames	140
4.6.3.2	Sample and Sample Type	141
4.6.3.3	Sample Size	142
4.6.3.4	Guest Sample	143
4.6.3.5	Manager Census	143
4.7	Instrument Development	144
4.8	Development of indicators for concepts	144
4.8.1	Research variable development	146
4.8.2	Variables and indicators of independence and dependence	146
4.9	Questionnaire design	147
4.9.1	Manager Questionnaire	147
4.9.2	Guest Questionnaire	148
4.10	Validity and Reliability Development	149
4.10.1	Manager Questionnaire	150
4.10.2	Guest Questionnaire	151
4.10.3	Pretesting	151
4.10.3.1	Learning from pretest	152
4.10.3.2	Pilot Study	152
4.11	Deduction	153
4.12	Statistical Control	154
4.12.1	Chi square test	154
4.12.2	Factor Analysis	154

	4.12.3 Commuality	155
4.13	Conclusion	156

CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY FINDINGS

5.1	Introduction	158
5.2	Survey response rate	158
5.3	Descriptive Statistics	159
5.3.1	Reason for staying at hotel	159
5.3.2	Respondent characteristics	160
5.4	Reliability	162
5.4.1	Reliability of managers' questionnaire	162
5.4.2	Reliability of guest questionnaire	162
5.5	Analysis contributing to research objectives	162
5.5.1	Results of statistical analysis for objective I	163
5.5.1.1	Influence of biographical data	163
5.5.1.2	Factor Model Formulation	163
5.5.1.2.1	Factor association with guest gender, age and nationality	166
5.5.1.2.2	Reliability of Factors	166
5.5.1.2.3	Communalities of measured variables in guest survey	167
5.5.1.2.3.1	Communalities for Management of Employee Engagement	167
5.5.1.2.3.2	Communalities for Management of Environmental Care	168
5.5.1.2.3.3	Communalities for Guest Communication and Information Management	168
5.5.1.2.3.4	Communalities for Management of Value Proposition	168
5.5.1.2.3.5	Communalities for Value adding structures	168
5.5.1.2.3.6	Communalities for Management of Hotel Operations	168

5.5.1.2.3.7	Communalities for Managing Aesthetic Fit	169
5.5.1.2.3.8	Communalities for overall factor contribution to service quality	169
5.5.1.2.4	Factor Analysis	170
5.5.1.2.4.1	Management of Employee Engagement	170
5.5.1.2.4.2	Management of Environmental Care	170
5.5.1.2.4.3	Guest Communication and Information Management	170
5.5.1.2.4.4	Management of Value Proposition	170
5.5.1.2.4.5	Value adding structures	171
5.5.1.2.4.6	Management of Hotel Operations	171
5.5.1.2.4.7	Management of Hotel Operations: Service quality cues	171
5.5.1.2.4.8	Management of Hotel Operations: Property, fittings and fixtures	171
5.5.1.2.4.9	Managing Aesthetic Fit	172
5.5.1.3	Determination of gaps in service quality delivery to tourists in ecotourism accommodation	172
5.5.1.3.1	Management of Employee Engagement	172
5.5.1.3.2	Management of Environmental Care	174
5.5.1.3.3	Guest Communication and Information Management	175
5.5.1.3.4	Management of Value Proposition	177
5.5.1.3.5	Value adding structures	178
5.5.1.3.6	Management of Hotel Operations	179
5.5.1.3.7	Managing Aesthetic Fit	180
5.5.1.3.8	Gaps in respondent experiences and importance ratings	181
5.5.1.4	Hotel performances of customer service quality	183
5.5.1.5	Meeting customer needs	184
5.5.1.6	Open responses of guests	185
5.5.1.7	Conclusion to objective 1	185
5.5.2	Results of statistical analysis for objective 2	186

5.5.2.1 Respondents to the manager survey	186
5.5.2.2 Hotel grading by Tourism Grading Council	187
5.5.2.3 Association of Hotel Star rating with location and perceived quality of customer service	187
5.5.2.4 Alternate and additional hotel ranking	187
5.5.2.5 Generic service quality management practices	187
5.5.2.5.1 Reliability of instrument for gathering manager service quality management practices	189
5.5.2.5.2 Compensation for quality	189
5.5.2.5.3 Benchmarking	190
5.5.2.5.4 Training Management	191
5.5.2.5.5 Empowerment	192
5.5.2.5.6 Technology Management	193
5.5.2.5.7 Assessment	194
5.5.2.5.8 Process Management	195
5.5.2.5.9 Participation	196
5.5.2.5.10 Teamwork	197
5.5.2.5.11 Training	198
5.5.2.5.12 Outcome Measurement	198
5.5.2.6 Product service quality from environmental management	199
5.5.2.6.1 Reliability	199
5.5.2.6.2 Communalities of measured variables in management survey	200
5.5.2.6.3 General pattern of response	201
5.5.2.6.4 Architecture and Landscape Design	202
5.5.2.6.5 Energy Efficiency	203
5.5.2.6.6 Waste Reduction	203
5.5.2.6.7 Water Efficiency	204
5.5.2.6.8 Education and Training for Environmental Awareness	205
5.5.2.6.9 Communication for Environmental Awareness	206

	5.5.2.6.10 Managerial Knowledge on the Environmental Protection	206
	5.5.2.6.11 Importance ratings	207
	5.5.2.6.12 Conclusion to objective 2	208
5.5.3	Results of statistical analysis for objective three	208
	5.5.3.1 Manager rating of the quality of customer service	208
	5.5.3.2 Manager agreement with generic service quality manager scale	209
	5.5.3.3 Manager environmental practice scale for ecotourist service quality	210
	5.5.3.4 Manager ratings of influence of generic management practices in managing service quality at their hotel.	210
	5.5.3.5 Trend in reasoning for management practice	212
	5.5.3.6 Conclusion to objective 3	213
5.5.4	Results of statistical analysis for objective 4	213
	5.5.4.1 Factor model formulation for environmental management	214
	5.5.4.1.1 Environmental management practice for service quality	216
	5.5.4.1.2 Correlation of manager service practice in the hotel's environment with hotel service quality attributes	218
	5.5.4.1.3 Limitations of factor analysis	218
	5.5.4.2 Relationship between guest experiences and importance rating with generic management practice	219
	5.5.4.2.1 Correlation in guest experience with generic management practices	219

5.5.4.2.2	Factor association of guests' service quality responses and hotel managers' agreement on generic management practices for service quality	223
5.5.5	Correlation of generic management practice with factor derived management practices from guest perceptions of service quality	223
5.5.6	Rankings for service quality management practices	226
5.5.7	Conclusion to objective 4	226
5.6	Key Findings	227
5.7	Conclusion	228

CHAPTER 6 INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

6.1	Introduction	229
6.2	Patronage at hotels serving ecotourism destinations	229
6.3	Managers at hotels serving ecotourism destinations	230
6.4	Objective 1	230
6.5	Objective 2	233
6.6	Objective 3	240
6.7	Objective 4	243
6.8	Conclusion	246

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

7.1	Introduction	247
7.2	Objective One	247
7.2.1	Findings from the literature	248
7.2.2	Findings from empirical study	248
7.2.3	Conclusions in respect of objective one	249
7.2.4	Opportunities for further research arising from objective one	250
7.3	Objective Two	250

7.3.1	Findings from the literature	250
7.3.2	Findings from empirical study	252
7.3.3	Conclusions in respect of objective two	253
7.3.4	Opportunities for further research arising from objective two	254
7.4	Objective Three	255
7.4.1	Findings from the literature	255
7.4.2	Findings from the empirical study	256
7.4.3	Conclusions in respect of objective three	257
7.4.4	Opportunities for further research arising from objective three	258
7.5	Objective Four	258
7.5.1	Findings from the literature	258
7.5.2	Findings from the empirical study	259
7.5.3	Opportunities for further research arising from objective four	261
7.6	Contribution of the study	262
7.7	Study Limitations	265
7.8	Future Research	266
7.9	Conclusion	267
	List of References	268

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Conceptualisation of service quality	7
Figure 1.2	Tourism Sector Potential	14
Figure 1.3	Conceptual Framework	16
Figure 2.1	A model for hotel customer delight	30
Figure 2.2	Continuum of Dominance in Service Provision	37
Figure 2.3	Ecotourism Accommodation Spectrum	42
Figure 2.4	Service Quality Challenges	44
Figure 2.5	Importance-performance analysis	49
Figure 2.6	Hotel service determinants	50
Figure 2.7	Framework for the composition of hospitality and tourism consumer experiences	55
Figure 2.8	Quality Evaluation	57
Figure 2.9	Hotel Inputs and outputs	61
Figure 2.10	Service Quality Expectations of Ecotourists (ECOSERV)	67
Figure 3.1	Environmental strategies of hotels in Macao	81
Figure 3.2	Management Responses to Environmental Sustainability	82
Figure 3.3	The Sustainability Matrix	91
Figure 3.4	Proposed 'house of quality' matrix for strategy development at ecotourist hotels by researcher	118
Figure 4.1	Theoretical Framework for Study	132
Figure 4.2	Relationship between concepts	145
Figure 5.1	Reasons for visiting the area	160
Figure 5.2	Variation in respondent experiences and importance ratings	182
Figure 5.3	Rating of hotel quality of customer service	184
Figure 5.4	Extent to which hotels in ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal fulfil guest needs	184
Figure 5.5	Position held by respondents to manager survey	186
Figure 5.6	Compensation for quality	189
Figure 5.7	Benchmarked accommodation service quality	190
Figure 5.8	Benchmarking Practices	191
Figure 5.9	Training Management	191
Figure 5.10	Manager views on employee empowerment levels	192

Figure 5.11	The contribution of technology management	193
Figure 5.12	Assessment	194
Figure 5.13	Management of service process	195
Figure 5.14	Employee Participation	196
Figure 5.15	Teamwork contribution to customer service quality	197
Figure 5.16	Staff Training	198
Figure 5.17	Outcome Measurement	199
Figure 5.18	Architecture and Landscape Design	202
Figure 5.19	Energy Efficiency	208
Figure 5.20	Waste Reduction	204
Figure 5.21	Water Efficiency	204
Figure 5.22	Education and Training for Environmental Awareness	205
Figure 5.23	Communication for Environmental Awareness	206
Figure 5.24	Managerial Knowledge on the Environmental Protection	206
Figure 5.25	Manager rating of the quality of customer service at their hotel	209
Figure 7.26	Framework for the management of service quality in ecotourism accommodation by researcher	263

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Benefits of Ecotourism	35
Table 2.2	The Ecotourist Spectrum	36
Table 2.3	Ecotourism building typologies	41
Table 2.4	Service elements of five star hotels	47
Table 2.5	Critical Areas in Hospitable Tourism	53
Table 2.6	Comparison of dimensions in service quality expectation of ecotourists by researcher	67
Table 2.7	Guest importance rating for responsible room facilities	72
Table 2.8	Mapping of ECOSERV with Accommodation Satisfaction Items by Researcher	73
Table 3.1	Mapping by researcher from selected studies of outcomes and tasks associated with the management of service quality at hotels	94
Table 4.1	Perspectives of research design	123
Table 4.2	Quantitative and qualitative research approaches	126
Table 4.3	Overview of Study Design	127
Table 4.4	Merits and demerits of cross-sectional data collection methods	135
Table 4.5	TKZN database listings tourist accommodation in study area	139
Table 4.6	TKZN database listings of hotels in study area	140
Table 4.7	Types of Knowledge and Personal Attributes	143
Table 5.1	Descriptive statistics of guests	161
Table 5.2	Communality and Factor Loadings	165
Table 5.3	Management of Employee Engagement	173
Table 5.4	Chi square tests for Management of Employee Engagement	174
Table 5.5	Management of Environmental Care	174
Table 5.6	Chi Square Tests Management of Environmental Care	175
Table 5.7	Guest Communication and Information Management	176
Table 5.8	Chi Square Tests for Guest Communication and Information Management	176
Table 5.9	Management of Value Proposition	177

Table 5.10	Chi Square Tests for the Management of Value Proposition	177
Table 5.11	Value adding structures	178
Table 5.12	Chi Square Tests for Value adding structures	178
Table 5.13	Management of Hotel Operations	179
Table 5.14	Chi Square Tests for Management of Hotel Operations	180
Table 5.15	Managing Aesthetic Fit	180
Table 5.16	Chi Square Tests for Managing Aesthetic Fit	181
Table 5.17	Variation in respondent experiences and importance ratings	181
Table 5.18	Chi Square Tests For Variation in respondent experiences and importance ratings	183
Table 5.19	Importance of generic service quality management practices	198
Table 5.20	Environmental measures for service quality	200
Table 5.21	Respondent "Extremely Important" Rating	201
Table 5.22	Respondent "Unimportant" Rating	202
Table 5.23	Mean ranking of management practices for ecotourist hotels	211
Table 5.24	Communality of natural area accommodation management practice and statements	214
Table 5.25	Rotated Component Matrixa	216
Table 5.26	Guest experience and management practice	220
Table 5.27	Management practice correlation with measures of guest experience	221
Table 5.28	Importance of service quality attributes and management practice	221
Table 5.29	Direction of significant relationships in hotel service attributes and management practices	222
Table 5.30	Generic management practice vs 7 factors	224
Table 5.31	Chi square tests of significance for correlations of guest importance rating with generic management practices	225
Table 5.32	Rankings for service quality management practices using quality function deployment	226

Table 6.1	Management practices within an integrated service strategy	242
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No.	LIST OF ANNEXURES	
1	Quality Management System for Services	305
2	The critical factors of customer-perceived service quality	306
3	Mapping of most highly rated attributes expected by ecotourists at service businesses in ecotourism destination	307
4	Environmental Management Measures by US Hotels	308
5	Researcher illustration of theoretical comparisons with practice of hotel environmental performance categories and indicators.	309
6	Comparative Summary by Researcher of Outcomes and Tasks Associated with the Management of Service Quality	310
7	Component perspective for ecotourist service quality management in accommodation by researcher	312
8	Formulation of a typical house of quality	313
9	Mapping of customer expectation of hotel service quality with management practices by researcher.	314
10	Researcher illustration of theoretical comparisons with practice of hotel environmental performance categories and indicators.	316
11	Hotel Guest Questionnaire	318
12	Hotel Manager Questionnaire	322
13	Profiles of Managers	330
14	Profiles of Hotels	331
15	Influence of biographical data on hotel guest responses.	332
16	Pearson chi-square tests of factor association with guest biographical information descriptors of age, gender and nationality with 7 management factors	334
17	Management of Employee Engagement	335
18	Management of Environmental Care	336
19	Guest Communication and Information Management	337
20	Management of Value Proposition	338
21	Value adding structures	339
22	Management of Hotel Operations	340
23	Managing Aesthetic Fit	341
24	Guest Open Comments	342
25	Hotel ranking by Tourism Grading Council of South Africa	343

26	Spearman's rho correlation of hotel grade, location and perceived quality of customer service	344
27	Alternate and additional hotel ranking	344
28	Manager opinion of conditions for Compensation for Quality	345
29	Manager opinion of how benchmarking may promote customer service quality	346
30	Manager opinion of challenges in training of hotel staff	347
31	Manager opinion of why employee empowerment levels improve customer service quality	348
32	Manager opinion of how to harness technology to promote service quality	349
33	Manager opinion on conditions to reap benefits of assessment practices	350
34	Manager opinion on conditions for effective process management	351
35	Manager opinion on conditions for effective employee participation	352
36	Teamwork contribution to customer service quality	353
37	Manager opinion on the nature of support for staff training	
38	Manager opinion of contribution of outcome measurement to service quality	355
39	Manager agreement with generic service quality manager scale	356
40	Manager environmental practice for ecotourist service quality	357
41	Manager rationale for adoption of a management practice	358
42	Relationships between guest importance ratings and generic management practices for service quality	359
43	Dynamic Strategy Implementation Model	361
44	Association of the derived management practice from the current study with generic management practice	362
45	Guest ratings of the degree of importance of service quality attributes	363
46	Relationship Matrix between management practices and customer importance of hotel service quality attributes	364
47	Correlation of manager service practice in the hotel's environment with hotel service quality attributes	365
48	Relationship matrix of service quality management practices and attributes of hotel service quality	368

49	Alignment in derived importance of management practice from current study with generic management practice by researcher in determining the composite technical specification for management practice for service quality at hotels serving ecotourism destinations	369
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

Adopting the popular view that ecotourism has evolved to a state where it is manipulated to favour human interests (Buckley 2009:667), this study will focus on hotels as a major support service in tourism and equally a central contributor to visitor satisfaction at host regions (Singh 2006:162).

1.2 Background of the study

The management of service is preceded by definition of service on offer. Atul (2008: 276) draws attention to the inclusion of the customer, the environment, enterprise competencies and skills, and available resources. The literature accounts for four important elements that are integral to management of hotels for ecotourism. Firstly, it is the stimuli in ecotourism service environment that frame customer expectation (Joseph-Mathews and Bonn 2009:188). Secondly, Nicolau and Sellers (2010:834) advocate that hotel service quality needs to be considered subjectively as client perception of quality is dependent on personal expectations and needs. Thirdly, ecotourists' expectations are known to be justifiably higher (Fennel 2002:184) because ecotourists spend comparatively greater amounts of time and money for their experiences. Fourthly, hotel-guests are increasingly recognizing the level of environmental practices as a measure of hotel quality and, therefore, their level of satisfaction with hotel services (Robinot and Giannelloni 2010:158).

According to Motwani, Kumar and Youssef (1996:13), there is no forthcoming standardisation of performance in hospitality organisations. The authors further lament the lack of congruence in practice arising from lack of standardisation in quality in hospitality organisations. The shortcoming is yet to be addressed. More recently, Wilkins, Merrilees and Herington (2007:842) account for the shortcoming in quality in hospitality organisations. The authors contend that service quality models do not

transfer successfully. Reasons may lie in the range and uniqueness of services in different contexts (Grönroos 2007:86).

This study attempts to link service quality with management practice in hotels serving the ecotourist, and to do so by developing a framework for this concept. The research will pay particular attention to established service quality management theory in the services' sector and the unique factors that affect hotels in general and those serving environmentally-sensitive regions. It is anticipated that the focus on existing conditions will foster a better understanding of managing the commercial hotel enterprise in ecotourism from both the academic and managerial points of view. Importantly, the study will acknowledge that assessment of quality is mediated by perceptions of the ecotourist.

1.3 Contribution of the Study

A variety of knowledge gaps around the quality of ecotourism has been raised internationally by a range of stakeholders in, for example, consumer protection, the image of ecotourism enterprises, destination management and tourism policy (United Nations World Tourism Organisation n.d.; Trauer and Ryan 2005:481; Silva and McDill 2004:291; Wood 2002:25). Hitherto, while much research has been reported which seeks to understand the processes by which general tourist expectations of service quality are formed (Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes and Llorens-Montes 2006; Eraqi 2008) and triggers to hotel service quality (Akhaba 2006; Fernández-Barcala 2009; Yilmaz 2009), relatively little attention has been devoted to an understanding of how tourist service quality for ecotourism accommodation may be managed.

Therefore, this research endeavours to generate a workable framework for management practice in ecotourism accommodation provision. The research will involve a multidisciplinary exploration of ecotourist hosting that deals with the connection of conservation, business management and human behaviour. It is intended that this study will contribute to the existing knowledge by testing the relevance of sustainable items and other dimensions of management using the outcome of prior research in a context not yet investigated.

1.4 An overview of salient literature on ecotourism

In the face of the overwhelming tendency for lucrative market opportunities to set off intensification in regional and global competition for customers, Nicolau and Sellers (2010:835) are of the view that quality of tourism accommodation can shape destination competitiveness. According to Chan and Baum (2007:586), ecotourist-accommodation influences overall perception of the ecotourism experience by ecotourists. A key building block is the management aimed at guest service quality, guest value and guest satisfaction (Knutson, Beck, Kim and Cha 2010:16). This key to the success of ecotourism in KwaZulu-Natal is not addressed in the local ecotourism literature. Benefits that accrue from continued guest relationships, stronger customer confidence, trust in service received, revenue growth, recommendations and referrals, cost savings profitability improvements are likely to be lost (Schneider and White 2004:20). Also, customer credibility, according to Stan, Gabrovecanu, Andrei and Radneantu (2009:1516), is expensive and slow to achieve, but it may be lost very easily.

Ecotourism applies appropriate principles to optimize benefit, minimize and alleviate damage to the environment and lives of local inhabitants (Wood and Hughes 2006:77). But it seems that the scale and escalation of ecotourism reported in Weaver and Lawton (2002:270) had too rapidly loaded challenges for quality interpretation and knowledge of the market to quality definition, promotion and assurance. Thus, conditions for gaps in the management of quality in tourist services are created by underperformance of interpretation of service quality to achieve balance between people, culture and the environment (World Economic Forum 2008:43).

The conditions for gaps may be attributable to the general limitations in knowledge of ecotourism service quality inferred by Khan and Su (2003:123). According to Republic of South Africa (2008), knowledge development seems equally slow in South Africa. As early as 2001, the South African Minister for Environmental Affairs and Tourism asserted the indispensable role of quality assurance, superior service standards and international benchmarking to sustain unprecedented tourism growth in South Africa (Republic of South Africa 2001). However, by 2008, the country service delivery standard has been rated the lowest in the world (Republic of South Africa 2008). Moreover, disturbing levels of customer service-related breaks in ecotourism guest

service in KwaZulu-Natal are reported in Damon (2004:49). The ecotourism sector strives to sell KwaZulu-Natal tourism experiences that originate from the province's core ecotourism products centred around natural beauty, wildlife, culture, heritage, visits to mountains and beaches and adventure wander-lusting (South African Tourism 2007 as cited by Tourism KwaZulu-Natal 2008a:9).

According to Diamantis (2004:59), contemporary ecotourism management approaches lie in four vehicles, each emphasizing supply, demand, resource or impact management techniques. Few efforts have been made to investigate the detail of accommodation provision in the ecotourism context. Among these are fresh issues of concern for hotel managers such as current business pressures on hospitality enterprises (Wadongo, Edwin and Oscar 2010:29), mitigation of physical and social negative impacts to sustain the quality of tourism services (Kasim 2006: 6) and the short cycle time in the complex blending of provision and consumption (Vrtiprah 2001:111). Host-guest relations also emerge as important factors especially in the light of earlier claim by Weaver (2001:525) that "the tone for guest experience" in ecotourism is set by guest accommodation. For example, Ive (2000:235) explains that it is the staff, as hosts, who deliver the personality of the hotel in conveying the hotel service culture, style and philosophy of service. Moreover, how the use of behavioural tools, such as a code of practice, will feed into the ecotourist need to conserve nature (Buckley 2009:656) is not known.

It is also observed that the general force of concern for environment quality has catalysed broad change in business and society. For ecotourism, forces of concern for environmental-care seem to have found expression in accredited or certified ecotourism operators, generation of permit conditions in protected areas and parks and increase in literature on good practice principles of ecotourism. The accommodation sectors that serve natural areas seem to have unique challenges in creating customer service quality.

O'Neill and Alonso (2009:222) call for revisions in traditional dimensions of customer service quality to incorporate new patterns of demand requirements from tourists in, for example, new greener attributes from service providers (Robinot and Giannelloni 2010:158). Sound environmental practice in natural areas is a basic attribute of customer service satisfaction. The authors demonstrate that economic viability of hotels

is dependent on good environmental practices to deliver value to their guests in order that the desirable outcomes from positive guest satisfaction are created.

Therefore, commercial ecotourism accommodation providers must, according to Buckley (2009:655), implement environmental-care measures. On the other hand, Erdogan and Tosun (2009:413) contend that the lack of time and the availability of financing and staffing commonly obstruct good environmental programmes. Moreover, Kanellopoulos and Kotsiantis (2007:1) are of the view that small hospitality businesses are not uniform and are unable to deliver consistently high service quality. A study by Weaver (2002:31) in Australia, deduces that more half the number of ecotourists in the survey usually stay on hotels.

Stan et al (2009:1515) contend that accommodation patronage is adjudged by the quality offered to the customer. Hotels represent a mature sector of the hospitality industry (Lau, Akbar and Fie 2005:46). The authors' summary of prior works on guest expectation of service quality in the hospitality service setting reveal that hotel customers' perceptions were consistently not meeting their expectations in a five-star setting. Many shortcomings are within the control of accommodation managers. By the use of generic standards, leadership in the hospitality sector should be advancing quality performance by a system of customised instruments to advance performance in service quality (Stan et al 2009:1516). Ongoing review of manager interpretations of customer service quality at hotels in ecotourism destinations seems necessary.

In common with international practice, the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa offers some regional assistance by defining the country standards in tourist accommodation (Keyser 2004:186). The process yields internationally recognizable representation in a star symbol (Lau et al 2005:47). However, it seems that this one dimensional steering of accommodation service quality by such external certification requirements neglect needed empirical investigation in management performance that yield quality (Nicolau and Sellers 2010:835).

Kozak and Nield (2004) contend that the quality of tourist services in ecotourism is managed unsatisfactorily by reliance on accreditation schemes only. Also, external accreditation seems only to confirm that compliant internal design and management

exist. Moreover, external assertions of tourist perception of value are likely to be misleading. For example, according to Janér (as cited by Black and Crabtree 2007: 167), tourists place their quality of personal experiences above consideration of the sustainability of the local culture and the environment. This finding suggests a perplexing profile and various meanings to customer service across ecotourism accommodation services.

1.5 Conceptual understandings of perceived service quality

Service quality has received considerable attention from researchers and managers for its compelling influence on customer satisfaction and profitability (Seth, Deshmukh and Vrat 2005:913). Perceptions of service quality may be influenced by market structures, client behaviours or management (Meyer, Chase, Roth, Voss, Sperl, Menor and Blackman 1999:370). There have been five paths in customer service quality research, namely:

- concept and nature;
- measurement;
- how to improve service quality;
- effects on consumer behavior; and
- strategic implications (Pérez, Abad, Carillo and Fernández 2007:137).

Whatever the path, for Jennings and Nickerson (2006:45) the concept is integral to the continued success of a tourist service organisation.

The study of conceptualisation of overall perceived services quality (Brady and Cronin 2001:37) supports Rukuižienė (2008:138) that provision of customer service quality in countryside tourism settings emerges from the history, cultures, traditions and tourism products of the region. This provision finds concord with earlier research by Galley and Clifton (2004:71) who show that, over the last decade, tourists have treated natural areas as an object of appreciation; a change from treating the environment as mere platforms for activities such as hiking. In accordance with the SERVQUAL model that is serving service measurement research in the hospitality (Mey, Akbar and Fie 2006:147), Brady and Cronin (2001:37) capture the levels of hotel quality and the interactions in Figure 1.

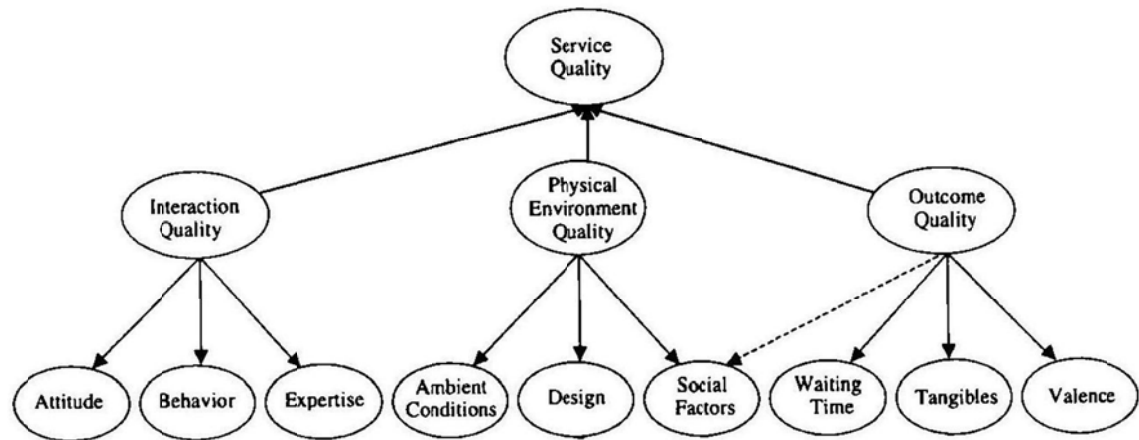


Figure 1 Conceptualisation of service quality (Brady and Cronin 2001:37).

Given the global awareness of environmental-care, the projection of respect and care for the environment is advanced as a necessary aspect of service quality by Khan and Su (2003:122) in their study of travellers to Cheju Island in Korea. Additionally, Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:168) stress the critical role hotel manager performance in environmental-care practices in their study of hotel guest satisfaction in the coastal, remote and mountainous Mediterranean regions. According to the researchers, environmentally-friendly practices are integral to the shape of guest satisfaction with hotel services. Of particular importance is that poor environmental practices erode overall satisfaction while good practice, albeit slight, improves guest satisfaction with hotel services. The researchers note the growth in the selective nature of market to choose accommodation on environmental criteria.

1.6 Statement of the problem

Ecotourism has grown into a vital industry that uses markets to economic advantage (Wood 2002:7) and has become a powerful instrument for regional development, conservation, employment and, the management of cultural and natural heritage (Denman 2005:3-4). It is also an influential tool that initiates and attracts compassion and approval for local causes (Weaver and Lawton 2007:1174). Customer service quality perspectives have not featured to the point of being recognisable in ecotourism studies (Keenan 2004).

In an investigation of ecotourists visiting the Galapagos Islands Rivera and Croes (2010:96) illustrate that greater levels of customer value and satisfaction emerge from their higher levels of perceived quality. Customers have to be imported to the area of production to generate business, namely, the tourist destination. Therefore, issues of quality demand special attention at individual nodes of distribution and supply as well as the holistic experience at the destination. Deficiency in service delivery hinders benefits that surface from tourist experiences of products, choices and needs of the customer.

Managers must be concerned with the service design decisions, approach to delivery style, process implementation, monitoring and review (Walker and Johnson 2009:85). On the other hand, relatively little systematic knowledge exists with respect to quality ecotourism services as a holistic unit of analysis. Even less is known about the linkage between accommodation management performance and contribution to ecotourist expectation of service quality at the destination.

Wight (1997:209) claims that ecotourism is a growing market. Later, Khan and Su (2003:115) note the rapid worldwide expansion of the ecotourism segment of tourism. Perkins and Grace (2009:223) further assert that ecotourism is growing faster than the tourism industry as a whole. Particular spikes in the sector have been reported in Australia (Khan and Su 2003:116) and Malaysia (Chan Baum 2007:574). The rapid growth of the ecotourism sector has necessitated the delivery of high quality destination services that fulfill the need and expectations of ecotourists described by Khan (2003:117). Better management translate to benefits for ecotourism destinations in rural KwaZulu-Natal that characteristically house declining traditional industries, are geographically isolated and are threatened by economic marginalization (Zakwe 2001).

There seems to be a dearth of independent empirical information on practical performance of ecotourism operators in respect of environmentally invasive activities (Buckley 2009:644) and satisfaction of ecotourists (Nepal 2007:256). No datasets exist. Such information may be important for accommodation operators because, according to Sebola (2008:59), South Africa has good potential for successful ecotourism. The degree of success depends on the management of ecotourism opportunities.

Uriely, Reichel and Shani (2007:162) further report that growing numbers of ecotourists have a yearning for the welfare of the physical environment, local communities and social milieu of host destinations. Significantly, there is an existing call for green practices by ecotourists (O' Neill and Alonso 2009:222). Therefore, shortcomings in the integration of good environmental practices by accommodation managers may result in lowered guest satisfaction and undesirable perceptions of service quality.

According to (Grönroos 2007:144), loyal customers have a tendency to be unperturbed by paying premium prices for services they enjoy. Moreover, tourists are willing to pay more for environmentally-friendly accommodation (Masau and Prideaux 2003:201). Ecotourists, in particular, have a more passionate interest for the conservation of the environment. The ecotourist market possesses deeper affinity for nature and desire to learn more from through personal experience (Dolnicar 2006:3).

The contextualization of accommodation by Stan et al (2009:1515) as a vital component in tourist destinations, suggest that the quality of service at accommodation serving ecotourist destinations can either bring incremental gains, sub-optimal performance or failure at the destination. Gains from factors such as credibility, trust of customers, superior levels of competitiveness and continuous improvement are possible. In fact, the resultant rewards of effective ecotourism, especially generation of revenue, environmental education and local involvement, are among the South African government's priorities (Zama 2001:6). Necessary sustainable growth and development derive from better ways to enhance positive customer value and customer satisfaction.

Intended economic and the consequent, social, political, technological, legislative and environmental benefits of tourism will be threatened by the absence of service quality of providers (Albacete-Sáez et al 2006:46). The authors further elucidate the pivotal place of tourist accommodation in the tourist experience. Moreover, Nicolau and Sellers (2010:835) advocate the strategic position of accommodation in shaping destination competitiveness. Various studies have accordingly contended that deficient management of service quality will lead to lost opportunities such as failure to enhance ecosystems and conservation, education, ethics, sustainability, local community empowerment as well as suboptimal allocation, beneficiation and utilisation of resources

(Soltani and Lai 2007:1; Akbar, Som, Wadood and Alzaidiyeen 2010:114; Kasim 2004:65). Also, researchers have demonstrated that the development of positive relationships between the people, resources and tourism is unlikely to occur without implementation of management strategies to initiate, promote and sustain the quality of ecotourism services (Rivera and Croes 2010: 99; Perkins and Grace 2009:236).

Although Pizam and Shani (2009:141) bestow “relentless enhancement” to the practice of service quality, the authors contend that hospitality is not simplistic and one dimensional. Aggregate interpretations of quality in the hospitality sector will be incomplete and lead to sub-optimal allocation and utilisation of resources. Ecotourism is a subset of nature tourism and hotels are a part of hospitality. This research will address the practices of management that are crucial to the hotel-accommodation sector serving ecotourism. This study potentially contributes to theory development in understanding the relationships between service quality management of accommodation and the service quality expectations of ecotourists.

1.7 Aim of the Study

This study aims to examine the impact of quality management practices on service quality in hotels serving ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.8 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To determine gaps in service quality delivery to tourists in ecotourism accommodation and to identify the management factors that can influence these gaps;
- To evaluate the significance of selected quality management practices in the management of the service quality in ecotourism accommodation;
- To ascertain possible strategies that ecotourism accommodation managers perceive as being critically important in achieving quality-related objectives; and

- To develop methodologies for the formulation of management strategies for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism.

1.9 Rationale for the Study

According to Min and Min (2005:54), gaps in service quality perception of hotel accommodation providers and of their guests results in management failure to facilitate customer service quality. Existing works, such as Khan (2003:117), seem to be one-dimensional and cannot reliably and comprehensively be a representation for management.

It is intended that this study will fill a gap in literature by relating accommodation service quality conditions to management performance requirements. Although contextual prescriptions and guidelines have emerged to promote quality in ecotourism, standardised or widely used methodologies do not emerge. In this situation, the availability and application of a method which defines and evaluates the management of quality of tourist services at ecotourism destinations may assist in understanding the gaps between ideal prescriptions and grand-level failure. The study will accordingly analyse effects of specific management constructs on service performance and tests its applicability to the ecotourism accommodation sector. The study offers focus on the management of the quality of hotel accommodation services in ecotourist destinations in KwaZulu-Natal.

The investigation also intends to ascertain the relevant generic elements of service quality management and determination of the existence of further elements peculiar to ecotourism accommodation. Also related to this intention, the study will seek to trace management trends and manager characteristics in the designated accommodation to reveal issues of service quality management that are in dispute.

It is anticipated that this study will contribute to the development of a systematic framework and associated method for managing ecotourist preferences for customer service quality at hotels. The contribution aims to improve research efforts to understand the quality management of ecotourism accommodation and managers' response to customer service quality in ecotourism. It is expected to provide good

practices for incorporation into a management agenda for managers of hotels and represent options for managers at alternate accommodation to adopt the good practices that emerge. Also, findings will encourage and help facilitate the achievement of more successful ecotourism at an operational and entrepreneurial level.

1.10 Scope

The purpose of the study is to investigate and assess dimensions of service quality management hotels serving ecotourist destinations through the perception of managers and their guests. The study of ecotourist-accommodation service quality will focus on the accommodation provision of the hotel sector in the ecotourism designated regions of KwaZulu-Natal as envisaged in Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (2008b:19).

There are a number of compelling reasons for selecting hotels. The first reason is lodged in a recognition that the market for the soft ecotourist sector prefer greater comfort, more points of service and higher degrees of service assurance (Weaver 2001:571). Hotel accommodation is the preferred option of the soft ecotourists for reason of the service variety, physical comfort and multipurpose of hotel facilities. Secondly, the hotel sector has a potentially larger environmental/ecological imprint. Thirdly, the hotel sector has the broadest range of customer services and wider staffing and customer service resources. The hotel sector, therefore, represents the highest range of service delivery for advanced study from the management of customer service quality perspective and, for that reason, greater value to this study than other accommodation types. Moreover, the KwaZulu-Natal Planning and Development Commission (Damon 2004:36) find that hotel accommodation has high economic viability, high demand and among the three highest environmental impact businesses in the accommodation sector.

The study will not be concerned with the broader tourism industry, or to management changes in the latter brought about by ecotourism growth, legislation, or any aspect of the tourism industry beyond the impact of quality management in accommodation services. The main focus of the study is on management of service quality insofar as

the on-site manager is concerned and will not attempt to include the role of tiers of government, policy or local community.

1.11 Limiting Factors

There are a multitude of ideological and philosophical positions in the study of tourism that influence the management of service (Lee, Hsu, Han and Kim 2010:903; Warnken, Bradley and Guilding 2005:367; La Lopa and Marecki 1999:38). Consistent with Cohen (1984:374), this research will adopt a theoretical approach that is guided by the principle that tourism is commercialised hospitality. This study places great value on host-guest relations and the recognition of the transient role and ranking of hosts and guests in the ecotourism transaction. As such, the management of customer service quality in the context of ecotourist destinations will use existing theory from service quality management and natural area management for visitors. The focus will be on the activities and processes that are within the direct control (zone of influence) of ecotourism accommodation suppliers. The study will apply to ecotourism accommodation in hotels; no attempt will be made to distinguish between specific types of ecotourism.

1.12 Population

Two populations will be investigated. The first population is limited to managers of the hotels serving ecotourist destinations. Destinations have been identified by state targeted ecotourism development areas of the province (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal 2008b:19). Secondly, the target population of the customer survey is overnight guests.

1.13 Region

The study is restricted to hotels with 50 kilometre proximity to ecotourism development regions of KwaZulu-Natal depicted by Figure 2.

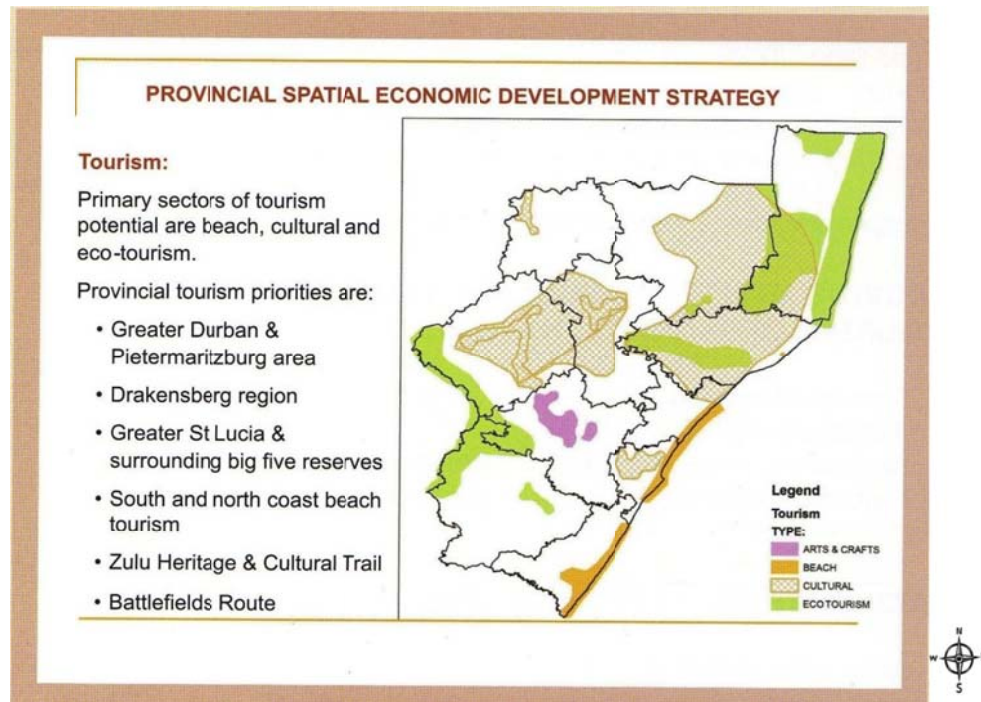


Figure 2 Tourism Sector Potential (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal 2008a:19)

A scan of the marketing material of the research regions indicates strong projections of regional product that is distinctive and differentiated by elements of the ecological and natural area traits at the destinations. While some mass-market segments visit the regions, the regions are better known much more for ecotourism, cultural and heritage tourism (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal 2008a:19).

1.14 Methodology

The study will focus primarily on assessment of dimensions of service quality management at hotels serving ecotourist destinations through the perception of managers and their guests. Most important attributes of customer-driven service requirement and management-driven service practice will be identified from the literature. There will be two units of analysis; the population of accommodation managers at hotels supporting ecotourism destinations of KwaZulu-Natal and paying guests at such hotels.

Self-administered questionnaires will be utilized. The data collected from the responses will be analysed with the PASW Statistics version 18.0. Analysis will necessitate

application of a series of statistical analyses using the survey data. The methods to be adopted include descriptive statistics analysis, reliability/validity analysis, correlation analysis, factor analysis and chi-square test analysis. The results will be presented in the form of graphs, cross tabulations and other figures. The analysis will take what managers do as explanatory variable and the dependent variable will comprise what guests want or regard as being important to their service experience.

1.15 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework proposed in Figure 3 indicates that service quality in ecotourism accommodation arises from managers' practices and attributes of that accommodation. It postulates that management of the quality of service is composed of generic service quality management practices and further service practices necessary peculiar to an ecotourism environment. The ecotourism accommodation attributes comprise those attributes common to the tourism sector and particular attributes of accommodation by the ecotourist market.



Figure 3 Conceptual Framework

1.16 Organisation of Chapters

Chapter one presented an introductory overview of the study.

The next chapter will begin with a review of generic practices to the management of service quality with the aim of establishing the grounds for the justification and development of management constructs for service quality. These constructs underpin the study. The chapter will then consider the broad nature and purpose of service quality in ecotourism and the influence of the ecotourism milieu on service quality

management in the hotel sector. The chapter will then turn to evidence in the literature that ecotourists' higher level of interest in the environment (over more mainstream tourism) is related to explicit preferences for ecotourism type accommodation and also to host behaviour.

Work recently begun will be examined with the aim of exploring and establishing the nature and effect of service quality management in accommodation establishments in the context of ecotourism. Thereafter, market-related perception of tourist accommodation service quality in general will be examined with more explicit examination of the hotel sector. The collective aim of these chapters is to examine elements of performance required by managers. In order to quantify management practice at hotels serving ecotourist destinations, it is necessary to develop a theory for process; the theory may be a complex mechanistic model, or a simple empirical correlation.

Chapters two and three will provide the reader with different constructions of accommodation service quality. They will distinguish the bases for different management practices and trace the outcomes of the application of different management practices.

The third chapter will examine recent methodological approaches with the aim of establishing a methodology for the study. Survey techniques will be applied to accommodation managers and ecotourists. The subject selection, reliability and validity measures, design instrumentation, and procedure and conduct data analysis will be presented. Limitations will also be presented.

Chapter four will comprise of the outcomes of application and administration of the study instruments, resultant data, measures of phenomena and discussion of results of the assimilation of data and measures

Chapter six will examine the study findings and present discussion and recommendations of the research. It will review relevant various elements of the literature against the study findings and highlight the limitations of the study,

Chapter seven will present the conclusions of the empirical study and the original contributions along with the recommendations for additional research.

1.17 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the setting of the study and orientation to determine the management practices for service quality in hotels serving ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal. It provided the general background and statement of the problem within the study setting. The chapter then turned to providing an overview of the study space by a brief evaluation of the challenges and need for relevant management practices for service quality and the justification for these practices. The aims and the objectives of the study were also presented. A brief review of the literature revealed the concept of service quality in ecotourism and the need for its management at accommodation establishments in the sector. Attention was drawn to the limitation of existing theory and the knowledge gap in the ecotourism literature. A brief overview of the research design, methodology and the content of the remaining chapters concluded this introductory chapter.

As indicated earlier, limitations in knowledge of service quality in ecotourism destinations may challenge service quality in hotels. Moreover, there is a need develop a clear understanding and working framework for management practices for service quality in hotels serving ecotourism destinations. This aspect is addressed in chapter two and chapter three of the study.

CHAPTER 2

BUILDING THE CONCEPT OF SERVICE QUALITY IN ECOTOURISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MANAGERS OF ACCOMMODATION

2.1 Introduction

According to Solis, Rao, Raghu-Nathan, Chen and Pan (1998:48), a fundamental requirement for the management of service quality is detailed knowledge of customer needs and expectations and how these are addressed in the organisation's service attributes. In developing a background for the management of service quality this chapter will, therefore, present the factors contributing to service quality interpretation by guests at hotels serving the ecotourism market. Identification of these factors would provide a conceptual basis for the generation of a scale of needs and expectations of ecotourists.

The chapter will begin with a discussion of service quality and the role of service quality in the manufacturing and services' sectors. It will then examine the specific application of service-quality to hotels and the ecotourism sectors. The discussion will then turn to market-driven requirements to define service quality in the ecotourism context before examining the contribution of contemporary accommodation to meet market requirements. The need for management will thereafter be introduced. This chapter will close after building a basis for the central elements of the ecotourism product. It is hoped that this chapter will demonstrate that the need for service quality in hotels serving ecotourist destinations is undeniable and that the ecotourism product can suffer costs brought on by compromises to the natural settings. Accordingly, the influence of service design will be highlighted.

2.2 Overview of external customer service quality

All commercial organisations have internal and external customers (Beaumont, Sohal and Terziovski 1997:830). Consistent with Yang (2006:114), service organisations focus mainly on the external customer. Unlike internal customers, external customers pay for the goods and services sold by the organisation. Various authors contend that service

quality to these external customers is important as it benefits profitability, promotes cost efficiencies, stimulates customer retention, builds customer trust and confidence, improves sales, avoids price competition and encourages positive word-of-mouth (Kotler, Bowen and Makens 2006:427; Schneider and White 2004:20). Additionally, a demanding customer base according to Briggs, Sutherland and Drummond (2007:1008), is among strategic drivers for relentless service quality enhancement.

2.2.1 The concept of service quality

Three perspectives in the definition of service quality are available in the literature. Firstly, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985:44) define service quality in terms of customer satisfaction and interpret the concept in the degree of fit between customers' expectations and perceptions of service. Stated differently, this view focuses on service quality as the difference between the user perceptions of the service experience and what was expected from the provider. Secondly, Edvardsson (1998:144) place greater emphasis on customer orientation in a definition that contends that service quality is the extent to which the organisation meets customer requirements and needs. Thirdly, Knowles (1994:215) advances service quality as being value based and determined by costs and the benefit to the customer. Service quality is the perceived value of the service performance for its conformity with the perceived ideal price for the service.

Consequent hybrid interpretations separate service quality by service providers and customers, respectively. Provider perspectives envisage service quality as the outcome of the organisation's design of services (Kasper, van Helsdingen and Gabbot 2006: 182). Hence, Briggs et al (2007:1017) argue that service quality is producer driven rather than customer driven. Conversely, from the customer perspective, service quality is the impression made on the customer, on the relative strength or failing of the organisation and its services (Green and Boshoff 2002:4). Thus Kasper et al (2006: 175) place customer perception as a key determinant of the level of service quality.

Many researchers derive their conceptualisation of service quality from customer service expectation (Fernández-Barcala et al 2009: 33; Brunner-Sperdin, Peters and Strobl 2012:23). However, Crick and Spencer (2011:467) claim that changing consumer expectations and variations in consumer perceptions ensure that "quality service is not

a fixed goal but rather a moving target". The statement suggests that quality service goes beyond addressing customer expectation as a static goal to a dynamic one that perpetually seek ways to address evolving customer requirements and needs. Hence, Knutson, Singh, Yen and Bryant (2003:100) observe that contemporary, broad studies of customer expectations make it difficult to generalise results of customer expectations across service sectors.

The foregoing discussion identified different perspectives of service quality. It has been shown that the different perspectives have spawned further interpretations that have created a powerful assemblage of research. The theory of service quality is shown to have been derived from specific organisations, situations or application. However, the expanse of service is vast. The theory of service quality remains broad as it cannot account for its application across the considerable number of organisations that provide services. The present study addresses this gap in the literature for ecotourism. Its purpose is to explore some of the pertinent conceptual and empirical issues involved in the management of industry-specific accommodation for service quality.

The literature is also divided on whether expected service quality comes from an attitude or a transaction-specific measure. In response, Sibley (2007:43) posits that interpretations of service quality, as an attitude, accept that the concept derives from customer satisfaction. Conversely, the transaction-specific view contends that existing service quality leads to customer satisfaction.

Service quality improvement is continually sought for business performance (Wilkins et al 2007:840). Earlier, Ghobadian, Speller and Jones (1994:44) contend that service quality is critical for competitiveness. However, current research asserts that that customer service has moved beyond a competitive advantage to being a decisive condition to remain in the service business (Knutson et al 2010:17).

2.2.2 Service quality in the manufacturing sector

According to Dwyer (2008:69), excellence in manufacturing is no longer adequate in the competitive manufacturing sector. Solutions have been sought for transition from an

industrial-production orientation of the manufacturing sector to one that seeks service alignment with complex customer needs. According to Santamaría, Nieto and Miles (2011:1), the distinction between the manufacturing and the service sector is waning, especially in developed economies. There is an erosion of a manufacturing logic in favour of service logic (Kowalkowski 2010:290).

The erstwhile prominence of manufacturing logic is giving way to the centrality of customer service in manufacturing organisations; service is no longer a peripheral product. According to Gao et al (2011:445), there is marked growth in service orientation in manufacturing. The customer is central in to this orientation (Gebauer, Gustafsson and Witell 2011:1270). Among the main agents for the transition, according to Kowalkowski (2010:285), are complex customer demands and a need for product differentiation to defend against competition.

Hence, the role of customers has moved from being targets of sales to collaborators in the production and provision of goods and an integral component in the resources of management (Kowalkowski 2010:285).

This evolution is most evident in the customised product in industrial markets. Customers are often major participants in product design, commissioning and operation. Customers thus add to the resources available to management.

The new role of customers, according to Gebauer et al (2011:1278) enables organisations to better satisfy the often complex customer needs, for example, by more desirable products, better value and better service. Service differentiation is thus created which, in turn, makes for higher business performance and better safeguards' imitation of the organisation's offerings. Products better fit customer needs.

Managers of manufacturing organisations now recognise that the creation of customer value results from customer-producer interaction that is regulated by the customer (Kowalkowski 2010:285). However, the development of effective customer services in the manufacturing-sector, according to Clark (as cited in Dwyer 2008:71), cannot be treated as an auxiliary function outside manufacturing operations or, as a secondary to manufacturing activity, to reap the benefits of a service orientation (Brax 2005:152).

The foregoing examination illustrates the adoption of a service-dominant logic in manufacturing organisations. It surmises the need for engagement with the wider manufacturing-sector debates within the mainstream management literature. Most importantly, manufacturers need greater attention to service quality in manufacturing (Brax 2005:152). The discussion thus demonstrates the importance of service-dominant logic in uncovering the role played by service in customer-product fit in manufacturing organisations. The illustration of the importance of services in a manufacturing context assumes even greater significance for the services' sector.

In an environment of market shifts to customisation, services in manufacturing are critically important to customers (Gao,Yao, Zhu, Sun, and Lin 2011:436). Hence, manager understanding and respect for customer needs and goals, commitment and support for customer co-production of products, customer information management and care in customer communication are demonstrated by Brax (2005:152) as key to manufacturing in the industrial sector. Consequently, Kowalkowski (2010:286) asserts that the introduction of customer services starts with an overhaul of the strategic purpose and repositioning of manufacturing organisations. Stated differently, the cultivation and protection of a new perspective to value creation will call for service infusion. Service infusion may mean review of the organisation's structural design, recasting of employee roles, redesign of product portfolio, repositioning, rebranding and even relocation (Dwyer 2008:70).

In another enquiry, Gao et al (2011:445) contend that products of manufacturing organisations typically integrate tangible goods and intangible services into an outcome purchased by customers. Beaumont et al (1997:825) note that, despite its intangibility, service quality makes a significant contribution to perceptions of tangible manufacturing quality purchased by customers. The role and behaviour of employees assume greater value in services. Hence, the manufacturing literature stresses the significant role of training to meet intangibility challenges and to advance service competencies (Santamaría et al 2011:11; Solis, et al 1998:49). Moreover, Daniel and Prajogo (2005:225) raise the importance of management practices in services beyond training to encompass the spectrum of human resource management.

2.2.3 Service quality in the services' sector

Yang (2006:1130) argues for improved quality management systems in the services' sector as the long established quality-management practices of the manufacturing sector do not easily transfer to the services' sector. Successful transfer is narrowed by characteristics of services not encountered in manufacturing. Various authors state that common service characteristics such as simultaneous service co-production and consumption, intangibility, customer contact and heterogeneity, individually and collectively, account for the failure of quality principles of manufacturing in the services' sector (Foster 2007:233; Ghobadian et al 1994:45). Service characteristics result in unique impediments to management in the services' sector, namely,

- deficiencies in service quality are often imperceptible or not easily perceptible;
- individual accountability for delivery is thwarted by the multi-stage production of services;
- service quality improvements often come from time consuming change in people's outlook, styles, opinions and values; and,
- arising from the unpredictable disposition of people, envisaged level of service delivery cannot be guaranteed (Ghobadian et al 1994:46).

Therefore, the tourism-sector study of Green and Boshoff (2002:13) argue that the function of the service quality construct is vague. The function is elusive mainly because it is indistinguishably woven into many practices.

Nonetheless, leading organisations in the services' sector are strongly customer-centric (Kotler et al 2006:51). Johnston and Kong (2011:6) show the customer view as the common, principal thread in the entire services' sector. Thus Chen, Yang, Lin and Yeh (2007:162) contend that service quality begins with customer orientation. Customer orientation is characterised by service organisations' comprehension of customer requirements. For Edvardsson (1998:144), customer orientations in conceptualisation of the service quality concept is critical to consistently meet customers' expectations and satisfy customer needs, wants and desires. Also, customer orientation is contingent upon the dynamics of the subjective, individual nature of customers' expectations,

needs, wants and desires. Solnet (2011:14) accordingly emphasises that service strategy ought to be formulated around the customer.

2.2.4 Service Strategy in the services' sector

Various studies present alternate approaches for the development of service quality strategy. Two approaches that are appropriate to the services' sector are mentioned here. Cândido and Morris (2001:825) present static, dynamic and mixed models in the formulation of service quality strategy. Static models are snapshot of strategy in a given moment in time. In contrast, they account for changes in the organisation. Mixed models take account of movement in the dimensions of interest in the strategy. Independent of this perspective, Juran and Blanton (2001:25.3) present a four-stage approach to service-quality strategy. It begins with confirmation of the strategic intent. This strategic-service intent is included into the annual business approach by having it ingrained into the organisation's strategy. Attributes of customer service are hypothesised from available management sources and then subjected to verification and iteration by organised procedures. Thereafter, enabling structures, procedures, systems are developed. This is followed by the formulation of a suitable organisation structure. The final stage is the implementation and control of the service strategy.

2.2.5 Services' sector management research

According to Crick and Spencer (2011:463), the management of service quality initiates and underpins guest value, guest satisfaction and the quality promotion efforts of management. Managers, therefore, have a fundamental role in creating firm foundations for enhancing the service climate (Schneider, Young and Macey 2007:29).

Earlier, Gray, Sohal and Sarros (1996:93) acknowledged the pivotal role of management research in service quality. The authors nevertheless note that the development of research streams in management of service quality is slow. While noting the inappropriateness of well-tested practices of manufacturing quality to service quality, a study by Yang (2006:1130) contends that there are no agreed on empirical models for implementation of a service-quality management system. The study

proposes a general implementation model to incorporate significant service-quality practices. However, the model also remains unvalidated (Annexure 1).

Some studies show strong consensus in management practices. Behara and Gundersen (2001: 592-3), Sureshchandar, Rajendran and Anantharaman (2001:352-4), Yang (2006:1135), Brogowicz, Delene and Lyth (1990:41) contribute to the management of links between service-quality management practices and organisation performance.

Studies of Urban (2009:77) and Kaner and Karni (2007:263) demonstrate the effects of variation in services' management practice on general organisation performance. These efforts led to incremental development of management performance theory in the hospitality sector. This direction in the hospitality literature is exemplified in the significance in relationships between individual, service organisation management measures, performance and customer service (Chang and Tarn 2008:306; Onsøyen, Mykletun and Steiro 2009:81; Murphy and Muurman 2010:547; Ping, Muurman and Perdue 2010:36).

Among studies showing hotels steeped in customer service determination and correct delivery are the work of Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:160); Yilmaz (2009:375) and Narangajavana and Hu (2008:47) which illustrate the compelling need for the management of high standards of service provision. A few contributions to research in the management of service quality for the hotel segment focus on a variety of drivers. For example, a wide-spectrum study by Mola and Jusoh (2011:22) that range from upmarket to backpacker type accommodation establishes that knowledge of hotel employees in all aspects of their functions and the convenient availability of hotel services is most highly ranked by guests. Additionally, Walker and Johnson (2009:85) highlight service design, standard of delivery and internal operations and practices as determining elements of standards of service provision. For Kaner and Karni (2007:262), the standard of service provision arises from a hybrid system that uses multiple process and knowledge elements derived from service marketing, operations and management. Collectively, these studies point toward hotel managers being individually concerned with the guest experience, value, guest satisfaction and with customer-service quality (Knutson et al 2010:20).

The foregoing discussion demonstrates the critical needs for service quality in the services' sector. The discussion also highlights topical challenges to service delivery. Help from the literature in the management of service quality has been introduced as a credible way to alleviate the challenges in the development and delivery of service quality.

2.2.6 Service quality in hotels

This section presents an overview of the application of service quality in hotels. It will introduce the importance and complexities of hotel service quality as key factors for management of service quality. Service quality at hotels is important as tourist accommodation is a central contributor to visitor satisfaction at host regions (Singh 2006:162).

According to the European Commission (2003:7), hotels constitute the most significant tourist service affecting the quality of tourism in the destination. Min and Min (2005:53), therefore, regard optimal service satisfaction a hallmark of an effective hotel service delivery system with service satisfaction results reflecting the efficacy of its management. However, Knutson et al (2010:22) contend that provision of hotel service quality, value satisfaction and guest experience are still elusive, blurry and hard to isolate.

Blurry and elusive notions may be attributed to the maturity of the sector within the hospitality industry (Lau, Akbar and Fie 2005:46). Their study claims that a feature of maturity of the hotel sector is dominance of information to guests over erstwhile protection of guests. Furthermore, hotel sector maturity is identifiable in the diversity of establishments, markets segments, service variety as well as the growingly discerning customers (Briggs et al 2007:1015). The literature above indicates that indicators of the mature hotel sector are: better informed market, intense competition for the same guests, weak service differentiation and service quality taken for granted.

Hence, there is a need for revision of the hotel service concept and the product offerings. Kasper et al (2006:38) state that the traditional attributes of service quality

require review. Font, Tapper and Cochrane (2006:52) remark that a hospitality-quality service level that was once tantamount to opulence and personalised service has undergone dramatic shifts. Expectations of extravagance and opulence seem to have given way to new preferences. For example, as stated by Pizam and Shani (2009:141) the effects of technology and the development in ecologically sensitive practices have grown in significance for hospitality. Also, community social responsibility has become an important factor in service perception (Gjerald and Øgaard 2010:485). Approval of society is a significant catalyst for transformation in hotels' practices (Kotler et al 2006:28). This view is congruent with modern-day public concerns over environmental degradation.

The important role of the hospitality workforce for respect for the values and judgements of others is identified in a service innovation study by Hu, Horng and Sun (2009:45). Greater accountability from hotel managers is being sought by guests for hotels' palpable respect for the natural, social and economic environment (Webster 2010: xiii; Knowles 1994:203; Bohdanowicz 2006:662). Also, tour operators are urged by Buckley (2009:652) to meet the challenges of local social issues and economic inequalities in ecotourism destinations

This section has shown that many of the ideas behind the evolution of hotel service quality are in line with contemporary hotel management thought. Despite the mentioned elusive nature of service quality, the domination of customer centric models of hotel management suggests sounder scrutiny of mature market needs. This also includes rethinking to derive new ways to support modern-day customer needs. The next section will explore current literature of what fulfilment of these needs mean to customers.

2.2.7 Path to customer delight with hotels' service

Prior sections have shown that hotel-service quality is mature enough to rise above the theory and ideology of service quality into empirical investigations. Customer satisfaction measures hold a prominent position in the service-quality literature (Brunner-Sperdin et al 2012:23). This section will follow this line of enquiry to reveal the contribution of studies of service quality to customer satisfaction. The importance of this discussion to the current study lies in the significant role of hotel customer satisfaction

to service quality. The section adopts the attitude measure perspective of service quality discussed earlier.

According to Mola and Jusoh (2011:19), customers' satisfaction arises when service meet their expectations. Conceptualisations of customer satisfaction in the tourism and recreation sectors revolve around the evaluation of the result of each individual service transactions over time and appraisal of the overall service (Johnston 1995:3; Lee, Graefe and Burns 2004:75; Robinot and Giannelloni 2010:159). For example, guest summative evaluation of service quality in a hotel restaurant comes from appraisal of each transaction in a bundle of service received from the time a reservation was sought until the farewell greeting from the restaurant host. Better quality of hotel service increases the possibility of more satisfied guests (Mola and Jusoh 2011:19).

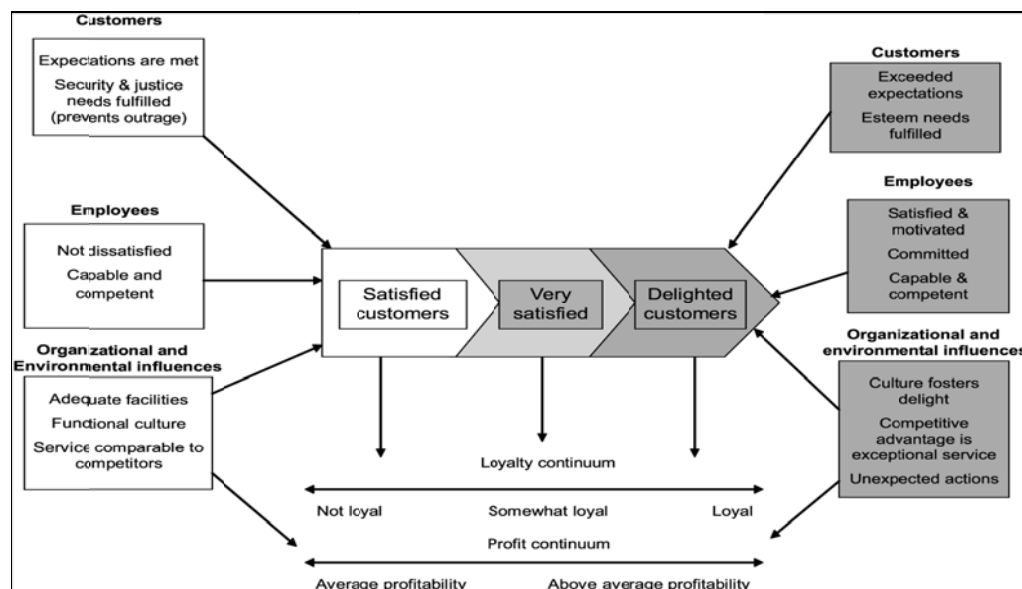


Figure 4 A model for hotel customer delight (Torres and Kline 2006:298).

The literature contends that long-term and, therefore strategic success of an organisation comes from sustained congruence of service delivery with customer satisfaction (Gagnon and Roh 2008:61; Edvardsson1998:144). According to Briggs (2007:1009), any customer-service scale that begins by meeting expectations of customers described as 'adequate' is not enough to retain customers; what is needed are operations to 'delight' customer expectation. For Torres and Kline (2006:298), the

approach to customer satisfaction is based on the behavioural characteristics of employees and the influence of the environment that move satisfied hotel patrons to being delighted customers as illustrated in Figure 4. Delighted customers are at a higher, more pleasant emotional state than satisfied customers (Solnet 2011:18)

While there is consensus in the literature in aligning service delivery to delight hotel-guests, Grönroos (2007:113) draws caution to customer-spiraling service expectations. According to the author, delighted customers expect to receive even better service at the next encounter.

This section has shown that when hotels are engaged in customer satisfaction they can perform well in roles that are important to the customer and deliver high-service quality for targeted services encounters. In doing so, the section provides the rationale for the importance of customer satisfaction to service quality in hotels. The next section begins with an introduction of service quality in the context of ecotourism to frame hotel-service quality in ecotourist destinations. The discussion will then turn to the profile of the ecotourist market before examining the accommodation typologies available to ecotourists.

2.2.8 Service quality in ecotourism

The International Ecotourism Society (2006) states that ecotourism is: "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." Increased conservation awareness over three decades has stimulated all forms of nature-based tourism, a part of which developed as ecotourism (Strasdas 2004:3). Ecotourism distinguishes itself from other forms of tourism in its reliance on indigenous ways of life and customs, personal growth, cooperative assistance, wilderness, natural area adventures, and human appreciation of sustainable approaches to living on earth (Keyser 2004:401). Article 26 of the Québec Declaration on Ecotourism requires that the supply chain and the final product of ecotourism are sustainable in all respects (World Economic Summit 2002:70).

Hence, the focus of ecotourism is on developing and nurturing close association between sustainable human consumption, resource and natural area conservation and host communities. More importantly for this study are submissions in the literature regarding the environmentally-friendly disposition of ecotourists and their high participation in nature-based activities of ecotourists (Nowaczek and Smale 2010:45; Dolnicar Crouch and Long 2008:200; Keyser 2004:26). The apparent natural area connection finds ecotourists seeking out those destinations whose managers demonstrate attitudes that are environmentally friendly (Khan and Su 2003:115; Krider, Arguello, Campbell and Mora (2010:783). According to Chan (2010:80), traditional service-quality dimensions fail to take into account key experiences of ecotourist accommodation. According to the authors, opinion-forming experiences that contribute to customer satisfaction lie in key areas associated with ecological sensitivity, conservation and guest participation.

As they are paying customers, ecotourists will have service-quality expectations (Khan and Su 2003:116). Meeting customer expectations is fundamental to service satisfaction. Therefore, Rahman, Yusof, Daud and Osman (2010:51) state that good customer service quality yields higher levels of ecotourist satisfaction. Service satisfaction is central to the ecotourism experience (Rivera and Croes 2010:89). According to Weaver (2001: 568), positive perceptions of services translate to wider and grander purchase of ecotourism experiences. Fennel (2002:183) alludes to a customer-centred manager approach that has long been favoured in the ecotourism literature. Additionally, this approach is based on enhanced acquaintances and bonds with the customer (International Sports Adventure Institute n.d.). The relationships are characterised by social and knowledge bonds that go beyond simple needs satisfaction to long-term relationships where customers are close to understanding the business and role in it.

Evaluative judgments of internal service design and operations that account for core, peripheral and external attributes of ecotourism will constitute overall customer satisfaction (Anderson, Pearo and Widener 2008:376). Kasper et al (2006:182) contends that the environment's contribution to service quality in ecotourism operations may be considered as service factors outside of the organisation's design. In contrast,

in an empirical study of ecolodge experience management, Chan (2010:86) contends that the environment is the main attraction in customer experiences in ecolodges.

Nonetheless, there remain significant concerns around permissible degrees of consumptive use of the natural environment for ecotourism activity (Meletis and Campbell 2007:855). Ecotourist consumption is likely to impact on perceptions of service quality. Hence, Uriely et al (2007:165) contend that pristine environments and flourishing tourism is a paradox. The more environmentally attractive destinations are, the more likely are they to be impacted on negatively by tourist traffic. However, Gunn (1993:83) cautions that tourism must not be blamed for poor manager decisions. Contributing to the discourse, Faulk (2000:7) finds value in the management of site-carrying capacity, limits-of-acceptable-change to the site and environmental impact among the techniques available to managers of ecotourism organisations.

2.3 Ecotourists as customers of accommodation

As indicated earlier, service-based performances vary on a number of scales. Among them is the market being serviced. Ecotourists are a distinct segment of the general tourist market. The remainder of this section will examine the ecotourist market with a view to establishing the approach to the management of service quality for this specialised sector.

There are strong associations between tourist service satisfaction, their expectation and their motivation to travel (Nepal 2007:259). This section, therefore, commences with an examination of ecotourists' motivation that lead to particular expectation. The discussion will show how comprehension of ecotourist motivation assists ecotourism accommodation managers to better meet ecotourist expectations.

2.3.1 Profile of the ecotourism accommodation customer

Nowaczek and Smale (2010:47) suggest that the definitions of ecotourism surmise characteristics of the market, inclinations of ecotourists, choice of ecotourist destination and preferences for services. According to Dolnicar et al (2008:200), ecotourists are a category of environmentally-friendly tourists who venerate nature. Ecotourism research

has demonstrated the common desire from ecotourists for environmentally sustainable experiences than the consumptive disposition of mainstream tourists (Perkins and Grace 2009:234). It is, therefore, necessary for managers to know the market in order to align common environmental friendly aspirations (Dolnicar 2010:718), select ecotourist choice of activities (Nowaczek and Smale 2010:56) and plan structural designs that meet ecotourist levels of service and standards (Weeks 2009:37).

On the other hand, McCleary, Weaver, and Hsu 2006:127) caution that generalizations across tourists and service types are not realistic. According to Joseph-Mathews and Bonn (2009:188), service interactions within same classifications individually vary on their emotional significance to consumers. Hence, the authors claim that interpretations of customer reality are personal, individualised and, therefore, subjective. As such, interpretation of the service will differ within the ecotourist market (Bennet and George 2004:91). Thus George (2007:267) emphasises the need for managers to be conversant with tourist-purchasing decisions and their specific motivations. Generalisations have limited value to practicing managers. Therefore, the next section will review sector variations that are, amongst others, defined by differences in destinations and traveller characteristics (Krider et al 2010:786).

2.3.2 Ecotourist typologies

According to Nowaczek and Smale (2010:46), the literature lacks theoretical foundation for the identification ecotourists. Instead, the literature seems dominated by ideologies of ecotourists. According to Krider et al (2010:787), it is the themes in the definition that identify the particular interest of the market in their ecotourism experiences. The different ways in which studies have identified ecotourists are beyond the scope of the current research.

Table 1 Benefits of Ecotourism (Fennel 2002:23)

PSYCHOLOGICAL	SOCIOLOGICAL	EDUCATIONAL	ECOLOGICAL
Self-Concept	Compassion	Outdoor education	Enjoy nature
Fitness	Shared similar values	Nature awareness	Life support
Skills	Respect for others	Environmental education	Aesthetic
Self-discovery	Problem solving	Value clarification	Scientific
Actualisation	Behavior feedback	Ethics	Historical
Well-being	Friendship	Scientific	Ecosystem
Personal testing			Religious/ Philosophical

However, the motivational profile for engagement in ecotourism is of relevance to the current study for its potential to address the management of ecotourist service quality. The literature advances two motivational profiles. Firstly, Perkins and Grace (2009:226) advocate a robust pro-environmental psychological orientation. Ecotourists possess a deep-seated interest in nature and its ecological sustainability. On the other hand, Nowaczek and Smale (2010:46) advance the psycho-social characteristics. In addition to the natural environment, the authors locate culture, education, ethics, contribution and specialisation as common themes that drive ecotourism. The social aspects were also found by the authors to constitute the foundational dimensions of ecotourism. The obvious common motive in conceptualisations of this nature-oriented market is observed by Dolnicar (2010:731) to be ecotourist enjoyment of nature and care for the natural environment.

In another enquiry of ecotourist behavioural profile, Kerstetter, Hou and Lin (2004:491) deduce that it is the ecotourism benefits that define and motivate the market. Table 1 shows that possible demand for ecotourism arises from various permutations of perceived or real benefits for ecotourists.

Table 2 The Ecotourist Spectrum (Weaver and Lawton 2002:272).

<div> <div> HARD (active, deep) </div> <div> the ecotourism spectrum </div> <div> SOFT (passive, shallow) </div> </div>	
Strong Environmental Commitment.....	Moderate or Superficial Environmental Commitment
Enhance Sustainability	Steady State Sustainability
Specialized Trips	Multi-purpose Trips
Long Trips	Short Trips
Small Groups	Larger Groups
Physically Active	Physically Passive
Physical Challenge	Physical Comfort
No services expected	Services expected
Deep interaction with nature	Shallow interaction with nature
Emphasis on personal experience	Emphasis on mediation
Make own travel arrangements	Rely on travel agents and tour operators

In another typology, Weaver and Lawton (2002:272) assist ecotourism managers in ordering ecotourists in a profile from hard to soft-labelled ecotourists (Table 2).The

categorisation informs ecotourism accommodation managers that the hard cohort of ecotourists comprises resilient natural area visitors with inflexible environmental commitment seeking ecologically intact and remote destinations with rudimentary amenities (Krider et al 2010:781). Higher degree of immersion and motivation for independent, personal interaction with elements of the natural environment setting is sought by the hard cohort of ecotourists. In contrast, Black and Crabtree (2007:6-7) distinguish at the soft end of the continuum of ecotourists that service-quality experiences are supplied by a greater number of service intermediaries. Soft ecotourists have a shallow inspiration to engage on a deep level with the natural environment setting. This means that sophisticated guest services are more distinctive in soft ecotourism (Weaver and Lawton 2007:1170).

In another line of enquiry, Swan, Bowers and Grover (2002:90) propose that ecotourism-customer expectations are dependent on where the customer is placed on a continuum of dominance. Provider dominated experience in Figure 5 is accompanied by limited opportunity for flexibility and choice from the customer with the opposite being the case in user-dominated circumstances. Research ecotourists, characterised by Galley and Clifton (2004:80) as wanting to contribute to environmental protection and conservation, appear to have expectations that straddle the joint and user-dominated slot in the continuum.

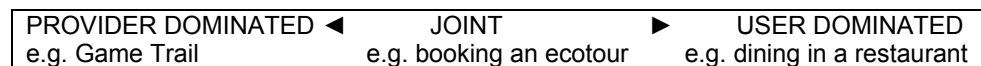


Figure 5 Continuum of Dominance in Service Provision (Swan et al 2002: 90)

It can be concluded from Table 2 and Figure 5 that the task of managing causal elements that affect guest perceptions of accommodation service quality will differ. According to de Mooij (as cited by Faulk 2000:3), successful services must complement customer values. Hence, services in tourism pastimes and the interests the ecotourist wishes to engage must not be at variance with the features of the accommodation where the ecotourist stays. This may even amount to negligible management of accommodation (Wood and Hughes 2006:86).

Variations in the foregoing market characteristics have accounted for much of the robust history of tourist accommodation (Brotherton and Wood 2008:104). Significant portions of the robust development are accounted for by ecotourist demand to play their part in environmental responsibilities. For example, according to Diamantis (2004:215), educated ecotourists better enjoy outdoor accommodation. Contemporary accommodation provision and facilities in ecotourism studies are fortified by ecological limitations to encroachment on the environment and returns to the local community (Keyser 2004:336). However, the quality of experiences is interpreted differently within existing typologies. The uncertainty of the relationship between typologies and the quality of ecotourist services is discussed in the next section.

2.3.3 Limitations of typologies

The research of the contribution of ecotourist typologies to management of ecotourism organisations seems incomplete. Bennet and George (2004:91) contend that inside the ecotourist market there are inconsistent levels of ecotourism engagement, varying degrees of ecotourist empowerment and erratic willingness to engage with services on offer. Liu and Yen (2010: 1531) find that each cohort is likely to demonstrate different service expectations. While providing a basis for distinction, the behaviour of cohorts is not constant.

It can be, therefore, be deduced that the quality of experiences is interpreted differently by each ecotourist. In a general observation, Walter, Edvardsson, and Öström (2010:239) corroborate that the perceived quality of service experiences is generally dynamic and relative because they are impacted upon by comparative personal and situational conditions. In this regard, Dagger and Sweeney (2007:23) caution that studies of “experience” tend to examine the service experience as a static condition. Instead, the way people experience stimuli changes with the expiration of novelty over several incidents of participation. Parallel shifts in customer expectations, perceptions and satisfaction will result in changing interpretations of service quality.

Therefore, Kerstette et al (2004:492) contend that little is known about the behavioural profile of ecotourists. For example, Weaver and Lawton (2002:273) find anomaly in the hard-soft classification in respect of a portion of the market that places priority on whose

comfort (soft) but pursue dedicated, hard ecotourist-type experiences. Similarly, soft ecotourist types may occasionally seek the adventure in hard-path rudimentary accommodation but may place great reliance on intermediaries for their experiences.

Further to blurred hard and soft activities, the importance placed by ecotourists on hard and soft services are disparate. For example, Khan (2003:117) presents the extraordinary importance of the environmentalism dimension of ecotourist service quality to the American ecotourist. Conversely, Khan and Su (2003:122) reveal that the inclination for environmentalism is rated a lowly fifth by ecotourists to the Korean Islands.

Moreover, while ecotourism, according to Meletis and Campbell (2007:854), conjures images of pristine environments and rugged living conditions to travellers, Weaver (2001:528) submits that ecotourists, especially from western countries, seek the ease of technology and the comforts of advanced economies at ecotourist hotels.

The literature does not present progressive ecotourist surveys that provide reliable data for taxonomy of ecotourists to contribute to standardisation of their service quality expectations. Existing surveys are once off, narrow and have a limited scope. Biederman et al (2007:418) observe that tourism studies are hampered by definitions and research methodologies. These anomalies impact negatively on knowledge of ecotourist behaviour and no satisfactory alignment of accommodation preference to ecotourists exists. Ecotourist service quality attributes of ecotourist hotels and consequent perceptions of service quality envisaged in this study may assist in filling this gap.

This next section will focus on the nature of ecotourist-accommodation and draw attention to elements of services provision that impact on service quality. For the purpose of this study, ecotourist-accommodation is a broad referral to overnight board and lodge to a specialist natural area tourist market. It is relatively unique in its attempt to bridge two areas – the visitor need for a natural area experience and the economic need for commercial profit.

2.3.4 Accommodation preferences of ecotourists

Presbury, Fitzgerald and Chapman (2005:357) argue that accommodation more than any other component of the tourist experience, impacts on the course and outcome of the development of a tourist destination. Customer satisfaction with ecotourist-accommodation is, therefore, crucial. Moreover, accommodation is central to guest ecotourism experience (Weaver 2001:525) and, in the context of its hospitality, rightly finds itself in “relentless enhancement” (Pizam and Shani 2009:141).

Typologies of ecotourists are an indicator of congruent accommodation expectation of ecotourists. For example, Lu and Stepchenkova (2011:11) find that ecotourists need ecolodge type accommodation to extend the depth of their nature experience. Hence, the choice of ecotourist accommodation, according to Wight (1996b:12), is predicated by the nature of the sought ecotourism experience. Accommodation also affects visitor preferences for ecotourism activities (Kelly, Haider, Williams and Englund 2007:380).

2.3.5 Ecotourism accommodation structures

According to Wight (1997:216), the planning and control parameters for ecotourism accommodation ensures guardianship of the environment and green practices. The author holds the view that sought accommodation blends ecotourist experience with surroundings and ecotourist need for spiritual links with nature. In addition, ideal ecotourist-accommodation meets guest expectation of empathy, education, appreciation, style, and on-site nature-based experiences.

Hence, Weaver (2001:525) contends that accommodation is at the fore of the ecotourism experience. However, developers’ and managers’ general quest for luxury in the ecotourist sector have come under criticism. In this regard, Grossman and Koch (1995:66) criticise the focus on luxury because of the short stay of ecotourists. On the other hand, accommodation services and comforts are not consistently included as a significant aspect of the demand for ecotourist experiences. For instance, some authors recognise accommodation as incidental to the greater desire of ecotourists for environmentally sustainable participation and experiences (Fennel 2007:175; Perkins

and Grace 2009:234). Therefore, the scope and levels of service vary with the ecotourist need for rudimentary facilities (Chan and Baum 2007:582) to modest accommodation (Wight 1996b:12) to superior hospitality services and high quality accommodation (Font and Clark 2007:309).

In another enquiry, Jackson (2010:214) asserts that contemporary accommodation practices favour sustainable development. Consequently, managers of tourist accommodation seek to improve relationships with consumer groups and satisfy customer demand for practices that are environmentally friendly.

Specific ecotourism pursuits must be supported by the appropriate accommodation type (Kelly et al 2007:380). In this regard, Weaver (2007:167) recounts four ecotourism building typologies in Table 3 that respond to a range of market needs to support their different ecotourism pursuits.

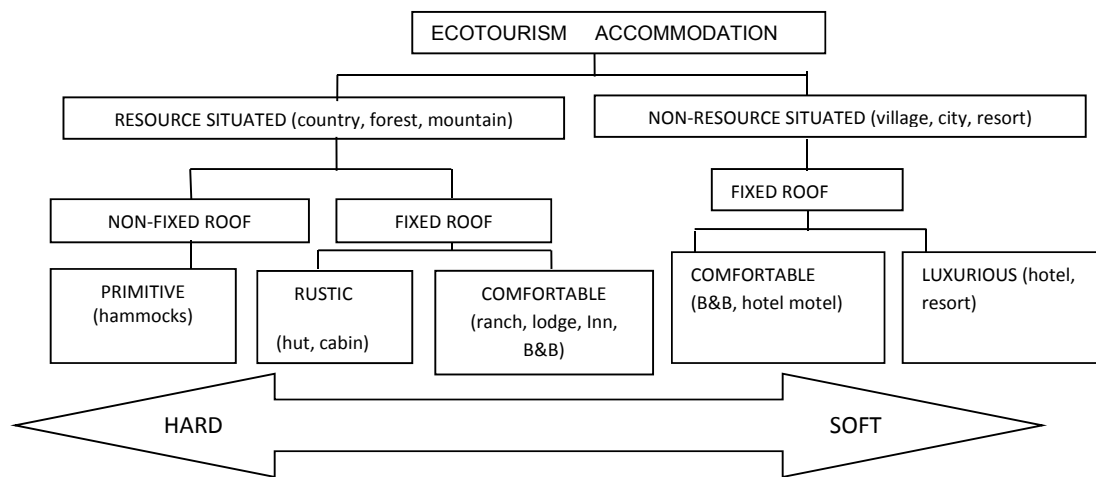
Table 3 Ecotourism building typologies (Weaver 2001:526)

	CLASS	STRUCTURE	TYPE
1.	Vernacular building types	Indigenous Structures	Grass huts, mud structures, caves, elevated halls, house boats, reed platforms and buildings, yurts (i.e. Mongolian circular tents), tree platforms, ice houses, tepees, cliff dwellings, stick houses.
2.	Historical building types	Developed vernacular	Colonial architecture, residentially derived styles, commercial developed styles, military architecture, ecclesiastical architecture, monuments, industrial building, palaces and great homes.
3.	Contemporary structures	Prefabricated structures	Masonry, glass fiber, reinforced concrete, rigid tents, inflatable structures.
		Traditional tourism	Cottage colonies, inns, guesthouses, homes.
4.	Portable and low impact structures		Rigid tents, collapsible tents, elevated huts, inflatable structures, vehicles, jungle hammocks.

Hotel structure and building type are significant determinants of the standard and variety of guests' services (Dagger and Sweeney 2007:22). Hence, Brotherton and Wood (2008:384) argue that guest services are frequently blamed for unfavourable guest experiences that arise from incongruent hotel design and construction.

Thus Pollack (2008:537) emphasises the significant influence that firstly, the physical environment and secondly, accompanying service outcomes have on design. For Phillips (2005), buildings for ecotourist-accommodation must blend into and add value

to the natural landscape; use natural lighting, ventilation, materials, textures and colours; replicate cultural values on the local area and use every opportunity to encourage nature features of the local area nature into building. Hence, building construction inevitably impacts on the services within (Wight 1997:218). Importantly, Managers need to design services around environmental-care (van Haastert and de Grosbois 2010:180).



2.3.6 External Imposition on Accommodation Management Practice

(2003:200) caution that gaps in service quality will arise when accommodation providers focus on their provision while ignoring the broader tourism industry and the activities in which tourists wish to engage. Essentially, all stimuli, in the service environment frame customers' expectations (Joseph-Mathews and Bonn 2009:188). This section will surmise the role of external factors in the destination ecotourism system that affect planning and delivery of ecotourist service quality.

The literature identifies two components of service quality that lie outside direct functions of managers. According to Walls, Okumus, Wang and Kwun (2010:12), there are situational factors and individual ecotourist characteristics that lie beyond the direct control of managers. The significance of these aspects cannot be underestimated. According to Brady and Cronin (2001:40), such unmanageable stimuli termed 'valence' influence customer perception service quality. The discussion will now turn to situational factors that shape service quality.

2.3.6.1 At the Destination

Hotel experiences are influenced by destination quality. For instance, studies show that ecotourist perceptions of accommodation service quality is influenced by particular destination attributes such as destination cleanliness, local food, scenery, welcoming communities and integrity of the natural environment (Nepal 2007:256; Keyser 2004:400). According to Walls et al (2010:12) situational factors present critical stimuli that can lead to satisfaction with service experience. Key situational factors for ecotourism providers are eco-friendly quality systems that typically feature unspoiled natural areas, prolific wildlife habitats and scenic quality of natural attractions and resources (Kelly et al 2007:379).

However, these factors constitute parallel external factors outside of an accommodation organisation's services design but influence the quality of customer service (Kasper et al 2006:182). Further extraneous aspects commonly cited in the ecotourism literature take the form of road signage, public facilities, access to general information, climate, location, accessibility of natural resource attractions, site of scenic beauty and historical sites of interest (Black and Crabtree 2007:87; Claver-Cortés, Pereira-Moliner, Tarí and Molina-Azorín 2008:240; Silva and McDill 2004:291). Ecotourists may have a positive

perception of any or all of the service-quality dimensions, but the negative ‘valence’ of the outcome can lead to poor service experience (Brady and Cronin 2001:40). For example, managed vehicle use can enhance the experience of tourists by decreasing noise and pollution (Kelly et al 2007:378).

2.3.6.2 At the Accommodation Unit

The management of guest experiences, according to Biederman et al (2007:428), must be fortified by requisite degree of property appeal, knowledgeable personnel and systems while fulfilling sustainability requirements in tandem with the local ambiance. However, Presbury et al (2005:365) argue that management of these areas present impediments to service quality that are not within the competency of hotel managers. Their study of the Australian hotel sector aptly sums up four major restrictions hampering managers from meeting customer expectations in the luxury hotel sector in Australia (Figure 7).

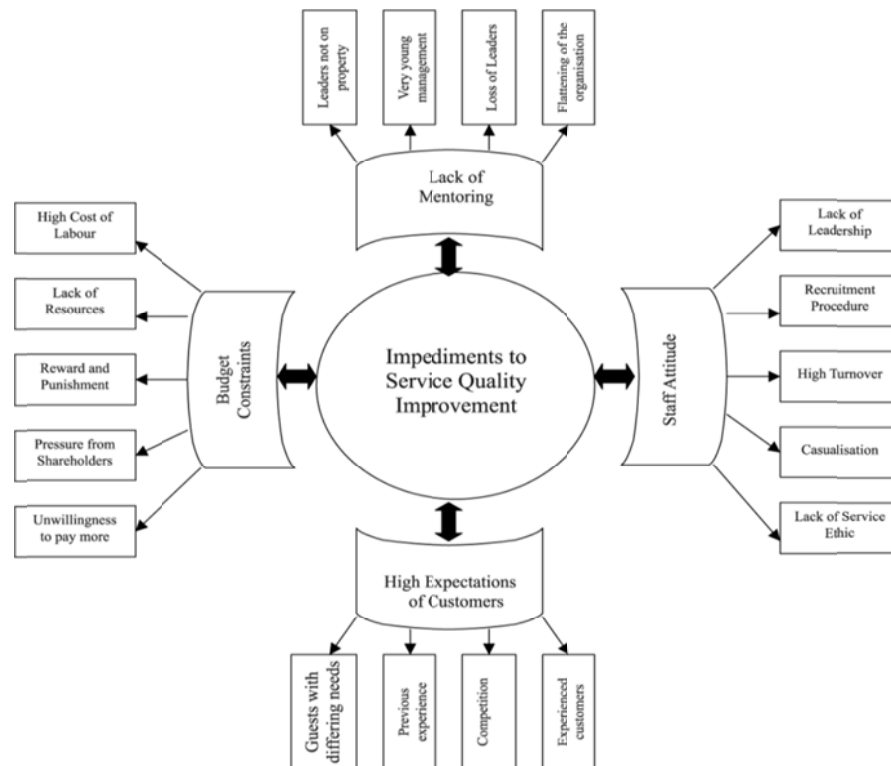


Figure 7 Service Quality Challenges (Presbury et al 2005:365)

The preceding discussion contends that specific destination and organisational factors, which often lie in the periphery of manager focal areas, influence service quality. It seems that informed manager interventions are likely to emerge by a comprehension of the variables that restrict the role of hotel managers.

However, the literature is not forthcoming in options for interventions available to managers. The management of service quality is dominated by inward-looking approaches that tend to ignore elements of the external environment or the restraints on managers. For example, conceptual models of service quality seem to only support management in anticipating internal shortcomings in service quality (Ghobadian et al 1994:56). Additionally, Mey et al (2006:154) call hotel operators to focus their attention and efforts to managing what it is they offer to their guests. Holistic options to remedy external service quality problems by carefully planned, deliberate and systematic interventions seem not to have received the attention of the literature.

This section has illustrated that management of accommodation at ecotourism destinations functions mostly within a predetermined context. It has highlighted areas of literature showing the need for hotel managers' vigilance of valences, tracking and formulation of strategies that ameliorate its impact on the quality of customer service.

2.4 The concept of hotel services

An understanding of the perspective of hotel service used in this study will provide an improved understanding of what is offered to hotel-guests. This section will commence with a broad background before reviewing the development provided in empirical studies of hotel attributes that address customer expectation and satisfaction.

2.4.1 The service cycle

A four stage generic service cycle is presented by O'Shannessy, Haby and Richmond (2001:15) as a common feature of hotels. The cycle ordinarily comprises pre-arrival, arrival, occupancy and departure. In an account of hotel service design and delivery, Saxena (2008:76) further proposes that hotel service is defined by the degree of congruence in facility, resources, nature of the operating environment, staff

competencies and hotel-guests' needs. Service outcomes may be manifest in guest use of rooms, restaurant, bars, nightclubs and healthclubs (Kandampully and Suhartanto 2000:346). According to Edvardsson (1998:143), the structures and processes for customer opportunities to participate in hotel services are formulated on the discretion of the service organisation. Since quality-driven service is, according to Barrows and Powers (2009:297), fundamental to accommodation, continual improvement at each stage is necessary.

2.4.2 Improvements in hotel services

Service improvements may call for revision in underpinning hotel structures and processes. In their longitudinal study of hotels, Min and Min (2005:72) argue that no hotel can sustain high service quality without continual improvements in service. Jeong and Ho (1998:376) consequently recognise the need for continual redesign and innovation of hotel product and services to meet hotel service performance goals. It is, therefore, expected by the researcher that on-going change and innovation in hotels' structures and processes are constant. However, empirical studies in this area are weak. Wilkins et al (2007:842) observe that performance of structures and processes for service quality at hotels is not a favoured area of research.

In another enquiry, Kasper et al (2006:175) affirm that customers must be satisfied with service quality. The authors draw attention to two perspectives of quality that are relevant to this study, namely, attribute-based quality and user-based quality. Improvements in the features of hotel services constitute an attribute-based approach to service quality management. For example, cleanliness of guest rooms and courtesy of employees, are the most highly-rated service attributes in hotel service quality in a study of luxury hotels in Korea by Min and Min (2005:73). On the other hand, the user-based approach to quality emphasises quality as being determined by the hotel-guest. All customers do not experience service in the same way (Peters 1999:6). Later Akbaba (2006:71) contends that this approach is common in the literature because it defines service quality by the perspective of each customer.

In this regard, empirical methodology by Paryani, Masoudi and Cudney (2010:13) uses a case-study of the quality function deployment technique to recommend action plans to

satisfy hotel-guests' needs from provision of service attributes that align to customer requirements of five star hotels.

Table 4 Service elements of five star hotels (Paryani, Masoudi and Cudney 2010:13)

The organisational	The personnel	The process
Equipment, furniture, soft furnishings, and fittings	Attire and appearance	Expert judgement
Cleanliness	Responsiveness to guest needs	Cross functional teams
Guest facilities	Capacity and skill	Target setting
In room Entertainment systems , broadband, radio, phone, facsimile and television	Manners	staff motivation
Atmosphere and Mood	Knowledgeable	Staff teamwork
Attentiveness to guest needs	Staff are polite and courteous	Staff training and education
Functionality	Willingness to assist	Sensitive performance tracking system
Safety and security	On site staff availability	On time problem resolution
Pricing		Mail and message handling
Deliver to promise		

It is observable in Table 4 that the hotel service is a carefully balanced combination of tangible and intangible attributes. The organisation is dominated by tangible provision while the provision of the intangible product, according to literature, is commonly addressed in the hotel atmosphere and character, aesthetic design, staff empathy and impressions and mood created (Sherman 2007:49; Manaktola and Jauhari 2007:367; Kasavana and Brooks 2001:18). Intangibility is in latent elements of service and personal experiences that emerge from guest feel, experience and touch of hotel attributes.

For Chang (2008:83), special importance is placed on tangible attributes in gaining positive perceptions of guest service quality from those guests who have limited experience of hotel service. Tangibility seems to be evident from the physical appearance and attributes of the hotel, its rooms, public areas, food and beverage. There are service aspects of hotels that guests value.

It is along the lines of tangibility and intangibility that the next section will examine further literature in attributes that contribute to service quality.

2.4.3 Attributes of hotel services quality

This section examines a body of literature that views hotel attributes and guest importance-experience ratings of these attributes as powerful guidance to managers. The literature states that as hotel attributes are at the heart of guest expected benefits of service quality they set out the level of hotel service quality (Min and Min 1997: 585; Chang 2008:74). In order to maintain customer service quality, Ghobadian and Terry (1995:27) stress the significance of identifiable and measurable attributes desired by customers. Consequently, Andronikidis, Georgiou, Gotzamani and Kamvysi (2009:320) assert that the identification of such attributes locates the voice of the customer as an essential component of quality function deployment leading to superior service quality to be discussed later in the study. Therefore, managers and attitudes and approach on service quality are closely linked to customer experience (Soltani and Lai 2007:5).

The significance of customer experience to service quality is aptly emphasised by an extraordinary call for customer experience management in tourism (Morgan 2009:107). This position arises from a conceptualisation of customer service quality as a multistage collective of customer perceptions of the service experience. Therefore, this section will examine the guest service experience as a cue to establish desirable attributes of hotels.

As customer experience is unique, much of the literature favours importance-experience assessments of customer service quality. For example, a ratings model by Ladhari (2008:75) assists managers in identifying gaps from analysis of strengths and weaknesses across quality attributes. The author explicitly contends that ratings according to importance-experience by the allocation of weightings enable managers to improve weaknesses, promote strengths and come closer to maintain delighted customers. Moreover, they help managers to prioritise improvements more decisively (Ghobadian and Terry 1995:27).

Matzler, Bailom, Hinterhuber, Renzland Pichler (2004:272) raise the significance of performance ratings for their critical role in the management of service attributes. In Figure 8, Quadrant 1 should be closely guarded, quadrant II requires improvements, quadrant III is not a priority and quadrant IV must be reviewed for validity.

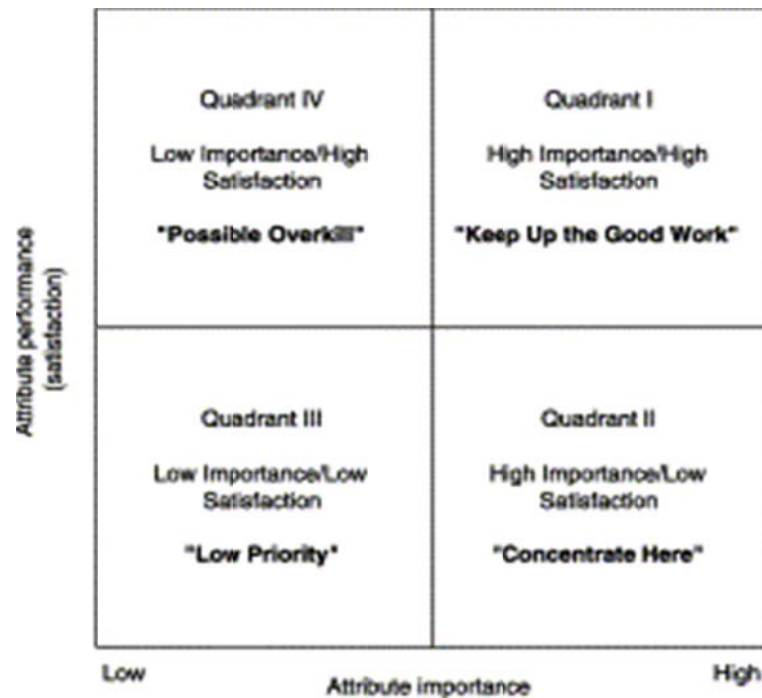


Figure 8 Importance-performance analysis (Matzler et al 2004:272).

However, the literature indicates gaps in attribute identification in hotels. Walker and Johnson (2009:87) claim that there are attributes affecting service quality that are not visible or appreciated by the customer. According to the author, these may be located in design, processes and core systems. Consequent experience ratings will not tell the full story. Also, there is a lack of attributes for better hotel environmental performance. While the literature has a wide spread of attributes desired by hotel-guests, there are minimal environmental and biophysical performance attributes in the tourist accommodation literature (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:414).

The empirical interest in hotel service attributes has received attention for its primary relevance to superior service (Min, Min and Chung 2002:303). Determinants of hotel service attributes are important because they represent the way in which the desires of the market and the implicit performance standards that hotel-guests use will be addressed.

Therefore, Dagger and Sweeney (2007:22) contend that it is the attributes of service in hotels, as determined by the hotel and service design, guest facility layout and style of service, that influence the outcome of service. In another enquiry, a longitudinal study of Min and Min (2005:58) of the discrepancy between hotel managers and their customers locate basic service determinants in hotel personnel, systems, property appeal and ambiance.

According to Min and Min (2005:58), accurate data and manager proficiency in the service elements of Figure 9 are critical to customer service quality and continuous service improvements. However, Akhaba (2006:185) claims that studies that rate important attributes of hotel service quality differ in substantive areas. Differences may be accounted for study settings in different service offerings, different hotels serving different market segments.

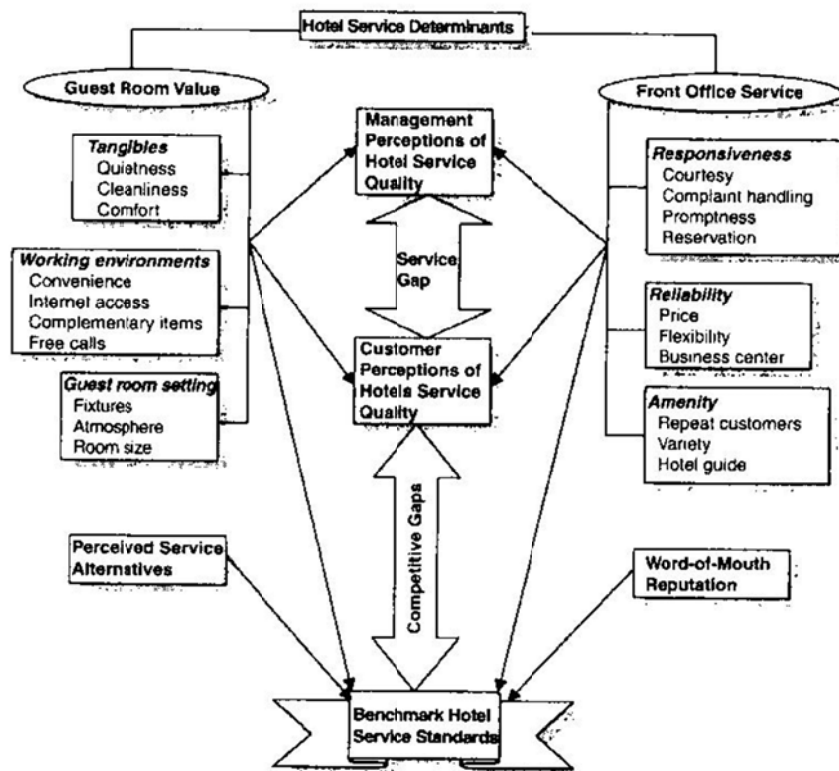


Figure 9 Hotel service determinants (Min and Min 2005:58).

For Min and Min (1997:589), it is the rooms and front-offices' service performances in Korean luxury hotels, that are important to guest satisfaction with service quality. On the

other hand, a study of chain hotels in New Zealand by Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000:350) establish that reception, housekeeping, food and beverages and price are important to customer satisfaction. In an investigation of first class and luxury hotels in Queensland, Australia, Wilkins et al (2007:850) claim that hotel service quality is determined by the physical product, service experience and quality of food and beverage. On the contrary, price is demonstrated by Shahin and Dabestani (2010:43) to be the most important determinant of guest service quality in 4-star hotels in Iraq. Furthermore, a segmented approach of corporate guests in business hotels by Akhaba (2006:185) found that hotel ease of access, employee friendliness and prompt service were the most significant indicators of hotel service quality. Notwithstanding the unique variation in the foregoing hotel attributes, the delivery of desired attributes is considered to be essential for the success and survival of hotels.

The foregoing general framework of hotel services and hotel service attributes function within a broader hotel hospitality. Hospitality is, therefore, common to the otherwise different observations in the foregoing studies. Therefore, this section will now turn to the concept of hospitality in hotels.

2.4.4 Hospitality

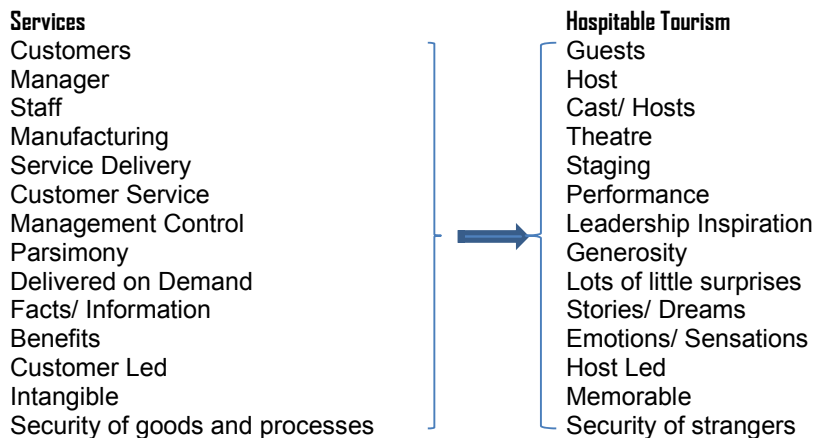
The complexity and challenge of the tourism sector in creating enjoyable experiences from genuine kind-heartedness, engaging people to ensure that they have a good time and guiding them to eliminate the insecurity of a new environment is recounted by Gunn (1993:57-77) as a recurring theme in the tourism literature. This theme accords with the purpose of hospitality to ensure that guests are consistently treated to the best behaviour and welcoming disposition of an enthusiastic host (Crick and Spencer 2011:464). According to Pizam and Shani (2009:136), hospitality may be regarded as an approach and attitude that is integral to the service concept. Hospitality is of particular importance in the hotel sector service quality for its focus on guest experiences (Schendler 2003:128).

Pizam and Shani (2009:136) assert that social and cultural meanings of hospitality contribute significantly to hospitable behaviour as a virtue in the hospitality sector.

These meanings are associated with the traditional warmth and cordiality unique to hotel services (George 2007:115). According to the author, major influences on warmth and geniality arise from hotel employee competence, cordiality from guest recognition, pleasantness, politeness, proficiency and support. For that reason, there is consensus in the literature that capable employees are at the centre of manager resources to advance effective hospitality (Teng and Barrows 2009:1413; Knowles 1994:219).

These studies demonstrate that hospitality, as a service attribute, is dominated by host-guest transactions and selfless commitment to hosting performances by the organisation (Onsøyen et al 2009:82). Thus hospitality is closely associated with behavioural elements of hotel service quality. The quality of service is a component of the hospitality that guests are offered (Knutson et al 2010:15). Hemmington (2007:10) draws attention to critical areas of hospitality that impact on the quality of customer service in tourist accommodation by providing an extension of standard services to higher guests' experience of hospitality.(Table 5).

Table 5 Critical Areas in Hospitable Tourism (Hemmington 2007:10)



It can be inferred from the preceding discussion that the development of hospitable tourism seems to favour a process view of service. The process view broadens the often restricted emphasis of service quality to the hotel receptionists as the first person that guests encounters or to the housekeeping department. According to Soltani and Lai (2007:5) the process approach account for all hotel departments' visible and non-visible engagement in customer service quality. Therefore, hospitable tourism appears to

present better value to tourist service quality mechanisms in the tourist accommodation sector. The process view also favours ecotourism's service provision for its multistage character that needs to deliver seamless tour experience from beginning to end.

It is apparent that hospitable tourism requires initiative from management as mediators of hotel service delivery. Capable employees are a vital manager resource to advance effective hospitality (Teng and Barrows 2009:1413; Knowles 1994:219).

Three main responsibilities are advanced in the literature. Firstly, managers must understand with a fair degree of assurance what is it that guests seek from their services (Crick and Spencer 2011:466). Secondly, the customer-activity profile, according to Witt and Muhlemann (1994:422-423), must be clearly communicated and understood so that hotel systems, structure and personnel are appropriately geared to integrate with service strategy. Thirdly, reliable screening, recruitment, selection and continual mentoring and coaching of hospitality staff is advanced by Teng and Barrows (2009:1413).

2.4.5 Composition of hospitality and tourism consumer experiences

Experience in a human context spans a range of discipline and approaches that are beyond the scope of this study. This section will examine the influence of tourism experiences on the provision of service quality.

It has been shown earlier that the attainment of targeted guest experiences is central to the measures of success of service quality. Green and Boshoff (2002:8) contend that the quality of service is a multi-stage experience. Additionally, Dagger and Sweeney (2007:22) claim that judgements of service quality come from a sequence of numerous service experiences over time. Analysis of guest experience is especially useful for the window it provides to improve site specific service quality.

Methodical observations of consumer experience reveal areas where individual managers can develop and improve performance to promote customer satisfaction (Christopher and Andre 2007:116). Therefore Walls et al (2010:12) study offers a tourism-biased conceptual framework that assists managers to comprehend the tourist experience. Managers must be aware of these elements and the changes taking place in it (Figure 10). Analysis of individual elements makes it possible to examine customer

expectation, customer perceptions, services' satisfaction levels at each stage and overall service quality assessment.

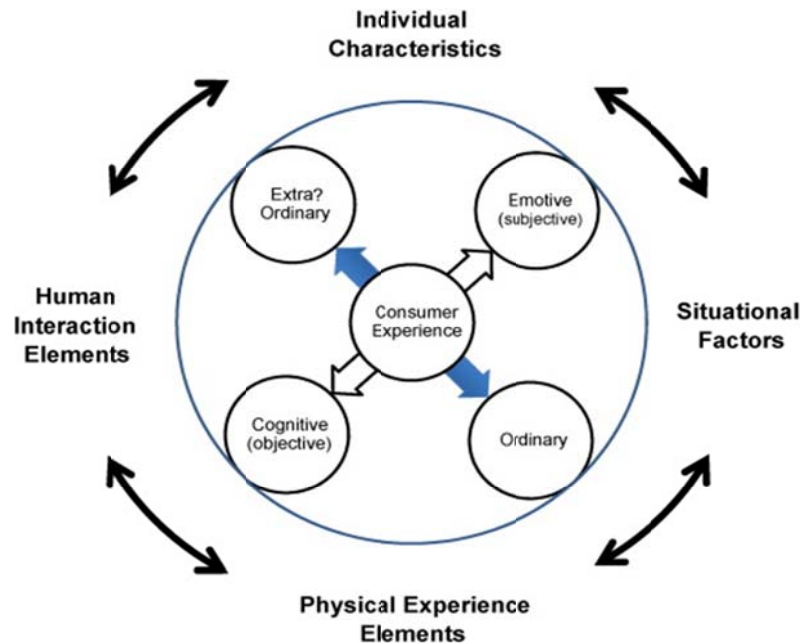


Figure 10 Framework for the composition of hospitality and tourism consumer experiences (Walls et al 2010:8).

Figure 10 views the tourist experience as being composed of a number of influences that mould and sway experiences.

- Firstly, the researchers distinguish regular everyday tourist experiences considered ordinary from those that tourists may consider extraordinary. Serving up a complementary bottle of chilled wine on a guest birthday may be considered extraordinary from the previous evening's stay.
- Secondly, managers must be aware that experiences are evaluated and experienced differently by hotel-guests. According to Knutson et al (2010:22), the hospitality experience, satisfaction and value levels are individual and subject to guests' unique attitude, background, values and beliefs. The free bottle of wine may not appeal as much to a teetotaler as it would to one who is not. Receiving the bottle (objective) may have varying emotive/subjective experiences. Also, a guest may experience the same service differently in another setting.

- Thirdly, hotel managers may manipulate physical and human interaction elements. The physical environment may be staged to appeal to the five senses of the consumer. For example, smell, warmth, colour and layout can work toward a physically appropriate environment. Joseph-Mathews and Bonn (2009:188) demonstrate that physical components of the environment in which the service is being consumed dominate customer overall impression and resultant meanings of that environment. Human interaction experience elements are influenced by employees and other guests.
- Fourthly, experiences arising from situational factors and individual characteristics are beyond the direct control of managers. Poor guest experiences en route to tourist accommodation constitute a situational factor that negatively influences satisfaction with a tour and thus influences perception of tour accommodation. Individual guests' personality is also shown to affect guest experiences. Dreyer (1995), cited in Trauer (2006:185), point to individual emotions, needs, motives and attitudes of tourists that characterise their demand. These are modified by tourists' cognitive perceptions, awareness and learning and also their willingness for involvement, perceived risk and personal values.

Thus, Walls et al (2010:12) support the view that hotel patrons may not be viewed as passive buyers; perception of service quality from consumption of the hotel product and service is based on cognitive and emotive aspects of hotel-guests. A user-based approach that does not compare quality to prescribed standards seems appropriate.

Consequently, it seems important that ecotourism accommodation managers understand the relationship between preconceptions, experiences, emotions, absorption, cognition, and multi-sensory elements amongst guests. Such multi-dimensionality of the derived ecotourism experience demands that managers develop relevant knowledge and adequate comprehension in order to be able to enhance the quality services and the satisfaction of guests (Chan and Baum 2007:588).

This section has examined the provision of hotel services and revealed the dynamics of arriving at a standard level. In doing so, the core attributes of hotel services and the need to incorporate these attributes into component parts of the guest experience has been presented. Hotel attributes are a key variable in the current study. The next section, therefore, continues in this theme to examine guest expectations of hotel attributes.

2.6 Customer expectation from hotel attributes

According to Wilkins et al (2007:851), managers need to comprehend all component parts of service quality in order to be able to manipulate these to deliver total service quality in specialist accommodation. However, hotel service quality remains buoyant as long as assurance of predetermined quality of service level continues to be hazy (Crick and Spencer 2011:466).

Reasons for variation in customer expectations are provided by the literature. According to Walter et al (2010:251), pre-knowledge and pre-experience of individual guests' influences expectations. Additionally, customer expectation of service is shown by Fernández-Barcala et al (2009:2733), Grönroos (2007:87) and Ghobadian et al (1994:49) to be based on individual emotions, needs, motives and attitudes. Each of these, according to Dreyer (1995), as cited in Trauer (2006:185), is modified by customer cognitive perceptions, awareness and learning and also their willingness for involvement, perceived risk and personal values. Meeting the bundle of needs of the innumerable permutations of expectations seems to favour the earlier discussed user-based approach to service quality that does not compare quality to prescribed standards (Schneider and White 2004:10).

Thus, the popular causal model of Fernández-Barcala et al (2009:28) state that predetermined quality of service level is congruent to guest expectations, as defined by the hotel attributes by way of price, graded standard, range of service offerings and its locations. The authors advance a causal model that shows that service quality in hotels requires managers to formulate precise objectives, recognise relevant concerns, conceive and shape alternatives, design activities, and allocate limited resources to assure correct service provision to address guest expectations. Notwithstanding,

managers remain duty bound to balance what is offered by hotel infrastructure and resource availability with meeting guest expectations and promoting positive guest perceptions in Figure 11. Failure will amount to guest dissatisfaction with service quality.

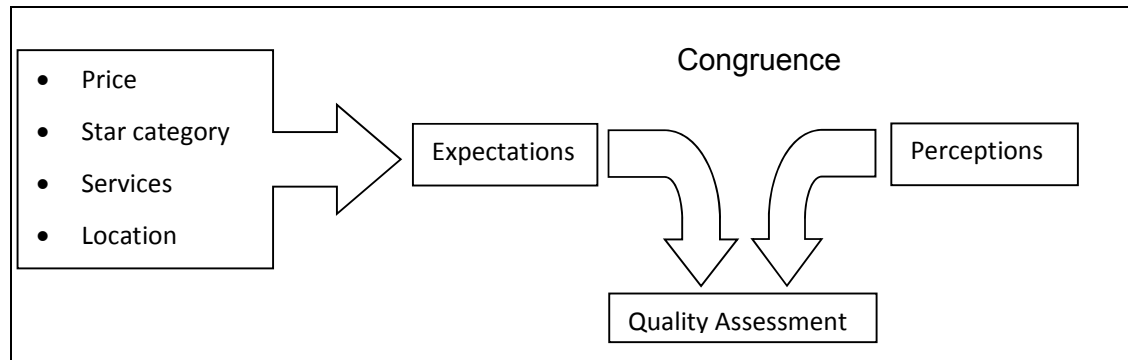


Figure 11 Quality Evaluation (Fernández-Barcala et al 2009:28).

Every hotel-guest has expectations of hotel service attributes (Knowles 1994:124). According to Walter, Edvardsson, and Öström (2010:237), expectations of service are the reference point for the evaluation customer perceptions of service experiences. Quality is entrenched in customer expectations and needs (Fache' 2000:357). According to Mola and Jusoh (2011:23), as a self-reinforcing activity, it is incumbent on hotel managers to fully comprehend guest expectation, factors leading to guest perception and their satisfaction with the quality of hotel services.

The important role of guest expectation in addressing guest service quality has resulted in widespread use of expectation and performance measures. The discussion in the sections that follow, therefore, examine these measures before a discussion of the role of hotel-guest expectations.

2.6.1 Expectation and performance only measures of service quality

Customer expectation research has grown to be the focal area in hotel service quality research (Wilkins et al 2007:842). Researchers have adopted a range of perspectives in contemplating measures of service quality. Of these two, expectation measures and performance measures will be examined for their relevance to the current study.

To begin with, the literature establishes that customer expectation is closely related to the perceptions of service quality (Mola and Jusoh 2011:20). Therefore, Knowles (1994:215) contends that perceptions of service quality emerge from the customer perceived differences between actual performances with their expectation.

Guest expectation and perception of service received become the focal points of the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm lodged in the popular SERVQUAL approach of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985:47). The literature shows that, although SERVQUAL has assisted in sector benchmarking and cross-sectional studies, there have been criticisms (Wilkins et al 2007:842). Use of SERVQUAL in accommodation studies had been previously supported only after inclusion of eight new items that specifically pertain to the hospitality industry, subsequently referred to as HOLSERV (Mei, Dean and White 1999:136). Bowen (1997:337) acknowledges two further hospitality sector revisions to SERVQUAL; firstly, adaptation of SERVQUAL by Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert, Patton, and Yokoyama (1991) into a specific, reliable instrument for hotels named LODGSERV and; secondly, the DINESERV (Stevens, Knutson, and Patton 1995) instrument developed for measuring service quality in restaurants. Furthermore, Getty and Getty (2003:97) developed the lodging quality index (LQi) to reflect the distinctiveness of the lodging industry in an instrument. All of these were based in associations with hotel services by the use of altered versions of the SERVQUAL scale. While the researchers have presented their justifications for adjustments and additions to scales, these revisions frustrate comparisons. An attempt to streamline diverse prototypes is made by Sureshchandar et al (2002:379) identification of common critical service elements in Annexure 2. The identified elements closely align and support the service quality expectation scale that will be introduced later in this chapter.

The literature indicates that the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm is currently the dominant theory underpinning conceptualisations of specifications to meet customer service quality and satisfaction (Said, Jaddil and Ayob 2009:77; Mey et al 2006:145). According to Gopalan and Narayan (2010:101), customer assessments are performance-based. When expectations exceed perceived performance outcomes, the disconfirmation is negative (positive service quality perception); when expectations

equal realized outcomes, the disconfirmation is neutral and when expectations were lower than experience of outcomes, the disconfirmation is negative resulting in perceptions of inferior service quality (York University n.d.). Customer satisfaction is thus low when experience of quality falls below customers' expectations (Grönroos 2007:11). Nepal (2007:257) corroborates the suitability of expectation disconfirmation theory in ecotourist accommodation.

On the other hand, the performance-only work of Wilkins et al (2007:842) is of particular interest to the current study for its relevance to accommodation service quality. The study is firstly accommodation biased, and places service quality as a higher order construct derived from bundles of service attributes. Secondly, antecedents, as performance drivers of service quality, are examined. Third, the study views service quality in its entirety as a structural element of hotels. Fourthly, the literature establishes that items in customer expectation measurement are closely associated with service quality (Mola and Jusoh 2011:19).

Finally, because guest expectations are dynamic, they do not seem to constitute reliable indicators of desirable service attributes. Performance-only measures convey the actual areas of gratification located by the guest.

2.6.2 Variations in hotel-guest expectations

Chang and Tarn (2008:319) observe that hotels wait on an uneven range of variations in guest purchase intentions, needs and personal patterns. Various attributes are indicated in different studies of hotel-guest expectation.

Highly-rated hotel-guest expectation span the range from employee knowledge, courtesy and ability to convey trust (Mey et al 2006:154) and speedy service (Wilkins et al 2007:847) to cleanliness of guest rooms (Min and Min 2005:73), the hotel green image (Lee, Hsu, Han and Kim 2010:911-914), physical facilities and equipment (Akbaba 2006:182) and price (Fernández-Barcala et al 2009:33). Akhaba (2006:185) observes that only a few studies have a segmented approach. Hence, Crick and Spencer (2011:466) call for better analysis of hotel patron satisfaction in both their

cognitive and affective domains of their service encounters as tools to formulate the approach to the delivery of service quality

As earlier indicated, for measurement purposes, many studies prefer a performance-only approach to service quality. These studies of hotel service disregard hotel-guest expectation. For instance, the SERPERF model of Cronin and Taylor (1992) adopts a performance-only paradigm. Also, Yilmaz (2009:382) derives wanting hotel quality improvement interventions in need of introduction and development. The paradigm excludes expectations as well as importance weightings. Researchers consider that these omissions produce a superior method as it is less time consuming, meet manager information for service quality improvement and, the administration is easier than the more popular expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Wilkins et al 2007:843; Yilmaz 2009:383).

2.7 Manager orientation for hotel service quality

Solnet (2011:14) is critical of manager performance in tourism service delivery because managers' decisions are informed solely on cost efficiencies and convenience. Decisions on tourism service management lack recognition of the customer. Hence, Walker and Johnson (2009:85) assert that managers must be concerned with the service design decisions, approach to delivery style, process implementation, monitoring and review. Given equal prices, hospitality customers will, according to Stan et al (2009:1515), select that organisation with better service as greater satisfaction is more likely.

According to Singh (2006:203), the sustained delivery of quality customer service is imperative to the success of hospitality. Kotler et al (2006:5) underline leading service sector organisations that characteristically make management decisions based on the customer and are obsessed by their service performances.

The literature contends that a range of factors account for poor perceptions of hotel service quality. There are specific factors within these areas that require careful management. More notable, for the current study are the variation in customer individual zones of tolerance (Pollack 2008:540), weak manager understanding, dissimilar expectations between hotel and guests, communication barriers, variation in

motivation factors guests, host and guests' cultural values, variations in personality, perceptions of safety and security, hotel organisational structure and management of change (O'Shanessy et al 2001:373).

Crick and Spencer (2011:473), therefore, call managers to reach or meet guest expectation by seeking congruence in manager-led alignment in inputs, outputs and service processes. Significantly, the veracity of input arises from appropriate manager orientation and, according to Johnston and Kong (2011:11), shared understanding and vision of what is meant by service quality in hotels. Poor quality of input reduces the likelihood of attaining high level of outputs and meeting customer expectations (Figure 12).

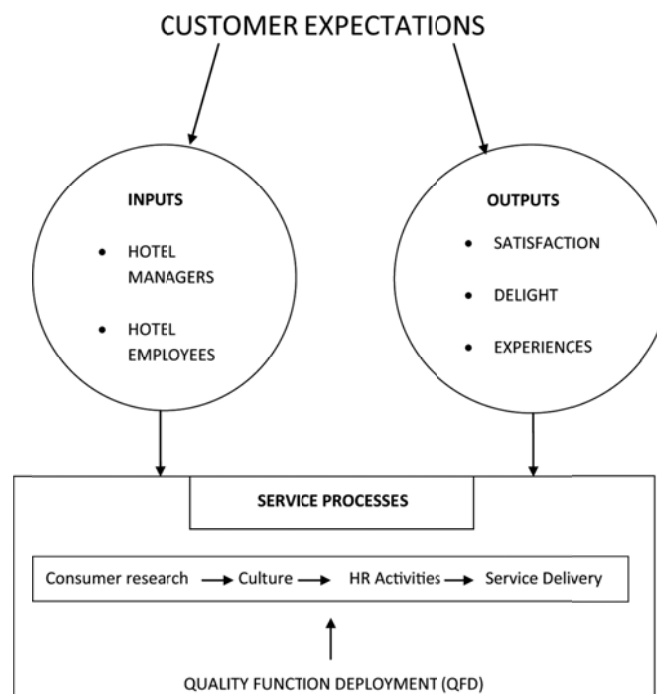


Figure 12 Hotel Inputs and outputs (Crick and Spencer 2011:473).

Hence, a corresponding manager perspective of hotel service quality is critical to effective development of the framework for service quality and for manager measures to sustain the framework. A common organisation-wide and clear understanding of the orientation of managers will support their role in organisations (Crick and Spencer 2011:470).

Therefore, Ghobadian et al (1994:48) earlier suggest that hotel service quality is both customer and process led. Service design and delivery in hotels focus on conforming to customer needs and expectation. This view is supported by the contention that hotel resources and capabilities are tailored to customer expectations (Orfila-Sintes and Mattsson 2009:384).

According to Teng and Barrows (2009:1427), hospitality-sector service orientation is better addressed by requiring manager commitment, a trusting and supportive work environment, co-employee support and the stable role model of the manager. Khan and Su (2003:114) add that managers must recognize that service processes become unpredictable as guests are co-creators of their own service experiences often in the company of other guests. Moreover, the characteristic inseparability of service production and consumption introduce slips in service in immediate view of the guest (Lau et al 2005:48).

2.8 Service failure

Service failures culminate in customer dissatisfaction, diminished levels of customer confidence, harmful word-of-mouth and a decline in customer base (Dale et al 2007:249-250). Moreover, Kadampully (2007:265-267) argues that it is more expensive to recruit a customer than it is to retain loyal customers. It is imperative that customers are returned to satisfaction state after a service failure. Manager quest for service quality aptly lies in the impetus it holds for growth and consolidation of customer loyalty (Grönroos 2007:144).

According to Akbar (2010:114), hotel managers need a 'service failure solution' as service failures are inevitable. Based on the tourism sector work of the authors, it is apparent that processes need to be in place to reverse unpleasant guest experiences. Most service failures, according to the authors, can be traced to unfulfilled customer expectations.

It is along these lines that Petzer and Steyn (2006:162) recognise the importance of the hotels' service failure management and service recovery. Knowles (1994:216) advises managers to install a formal service recovery programme to defend hotel service quality

aspirations. In order to better manage service failures, Dale et al (2007:252) submit that managers should:

- sustain active hunts for potential breaks in customer service, especially those that are anchored in critical service encounters;
- create and implement easy and non-threatening methods for customers to complain;
- offer service guarantees;
- conduct customer research into the service delivery process and outcomes of service design; and
- make visible to employees the commitment of management to customer service satisfaction.

According to Chang (2008:83), service quality must be embedded into service recovery designs and, informed service recovery decisions are to be based on understanding of customer-perceived value. Grönroos (2007:127) adds that managers' problem resolution and service recovery must be sensitive, courteous and respectful, taken seriously and acted on with urgency and followed up. It can constitute opportunities for customer loyalty.

The next section will examine the contention of Dolnicar et al (2008:200) that the hallmark trait of ecotourists is their interest for nature and nature-based activities. The section will accordingly also examine the delivery by hotels in this regard.

2.9 Guest perception of ecotourist-accommodation service quality

It has been established that the attributes of hotels predicate the level of customer satisfaction. Earlier examination of customer service satisfaction emphasises that it is an integral element that leads customer perceptions of the quality of service. A generic hotel perspective dominated these reviews of the literature. This section turns to the peculiarities of the ecotourist perspective on service quality in ecotourist accommodation. The examination on this theme aims to elucidate the unique expectation of this subgroup.

2.9.1 Background

Despite contention by Rivera and Croes (2010:89) that service satisfaction is central to the ecotourism experience, Nepal (2007:259) establishes that there is no recognisable pool of research in satisfaction in the sector that focuses on ecotourism experiences. According to the author, it is, therefore, broad tourism research that guides the appraisal and management of tourist satisfaction in key customer interfaces. Additional contributions come from the development and general interest in the services' sector where information is elicited from service quality measurement models. These are picked at to be of value to studies of ecotourist expectations of service quality.

Also, the impact research into the role of ecotourists interfaces with the social and physical environment in co-creating customer meaning to service is thin (Walter et al 2010:241). Practitioner assessments of ecotourism quality is, therefore, likely to be founded on intrinsic planning elements such as costs and benefits, technical, functional or interpersonal terms. Therefore, much of this section draws on literature from the broader services' sector and from the general fields of tourism to inform a direction for ecotourism accommodation managers.

2.9.2 Gap Studies

According to Peters (1999:7) service quality specification is necessary to measure and manage deviations in service. Grönroos (2007:118) contends that the gap analysis model offers managers cues of where their efforts are most needed for customer service quality. Gaps present themselves at both service expectation and service delivery. Any combination of five mismatches may, according to Parasuraman et al (1985:44), present between:

- i. customer expectations and management's perceptions of those expectations;
- ii. management's perception of what the customer wants and specifications of service quality;
- iii. service quality specifications and delivery of the service;
- iv. service delivery and what the organisation promises to the customer through external communication; and

- v. customers' service expectations and their perceptions of service performance.

These mismatches provide a basis for assessment and consequent gap-closing effort by managers.

However, development of theory in customer research across different tourism sectors has not been uniform. Study of the ecotourist expectations and perceptions of delivery is slow. According to Rivera and Croes (2010:86), understanding of customer needs will result in better ecotourist service experiences. This section adopts a consumer behaviour approach to examine the gap in ecotourism customer service theory.

2.9.3 Attribute expectation

This section examines the need for awareness by the management of hotel of those attributes that impact on perceptions of hotel service quality at ecotourism destinations. Earlier discussions demonstrate that the quality function cannot be linear as perceived service quality will not increase at the same rate as hotel service quality. Moreover, the presence of specific attributes may greatly improve perceptions of service quality in some customers and remain unchanged in others. It is therefore important to be reminded that, in addition to the theory of user based perception of service quality discussed earlier, attributes of nature-based service attributes are not equally important to all hotel-guests (Mehmetoglu 2007:659).

Like other sector studies, Nepal (2007:257) contends that ecotourist service satisfaction emerges from prior expectation. According to Briggs (2007:1009), any customer-service scale that begins by meeting expectations of customers described as 'adequate' is not enough to retain customers; what is needed are operations to 'delight' customer expectation. Such a state does not automatically translate to opulent services and facilities with carbon imprints; instead, a balance between type of ecotourist experience, desired luxury and environmentally sustainable hospitality practice must be reached (Weaver 2001:528).

A direction for engagement is presented in empirical investigation by Khan (2003:117) of ecotourist expectations, service dimensions and levels of service quality. This study

stands out in ecotourism for specifying 19 of the original SERVQUAL service dimensions to facilitate measurement of ecotourist service quality expectations to a new instrument named ECOSERV. The study sought to first identify the specific characteristics of ecotourism to find its unique dimensions that add to the common features it has with SERVQUAL. In order to accentuate crucial ecotourism expectations, the study enhanced SERVQUAL by formulating 8 new items and revising 3 original items into the final grouping of 30 ecotourism service quality attribute expectations into six dimensions in Figure 13.

American ecotourists travelling to the destinations in America, Asia and Africa are shown by Khan (2003:121) to desire services that are underpinned by awareness and respect for the natural environment. All items from the ecotangibles' dimension of ECOSERV dominate service expectation while the service expectations from tangibles are the lowest rated. The finding appears obvious as, according to (Nepal 2007:256), ecotourists have a grander expectation of environmental consciousness.

Ecotangibles - physical facilities and equipment appropriate to the environment	Responsiveness - willingness to be of assistance, promptness and readiness to help.
Facilities appropriate to the environment	Employees always be willing to help
Equipment that minimizes degradation	Employees give prompt service to customers
Facilities environmentally safe	Employees never too busy to help
Assurance - employee ability to convey a sense of safety and confidence in guest transactions, knowledgeable in response to customer and courtesy.	Employees tell exactly when service will be
Feel safe in their transaction	Empathy - considerate, individual care afforded to customers.
Provide the necessary information	Personal attention
Have knowledge to answer questions	Individual attention
Instill confidence in customers	Operating hours convenient
Consistently courteous with the customers	Understand specific needs
Reliability - dependability, accurateness and sincerity in service provision.	Tangibles - local influence material, their condition and appearance and, employee attire encountered by visitors.
Provide services at promised time	Materials reflect local influence
Promise to do service by certain time	Provide local entertainment
Perform the service right the first time	Materials visually appealing
Insist error-free service	Facilities visually appealing
Show sincere interest in solving a problem	Employees in local attire
	Facilities reflect local influence
	Employees in comfortable attire

Figure 13 Service Quality Expectations of Ecotourists (ECOSERV) (Khan 2003:117).

However, the preceding results reported in Khan (2003:117) contrast with a similar study by Khan and Su (2003:119) conducted among Korean ecotourists in the island province of Chenju, Korea (Table 6). Using the ECOSERV model the latter study found that service expectation from ecotangibles is lower than the study mean and ratings in Khan (2003:117). Assurance is substantially higher than ratings in Khan (2003:117).

Table 6 Comparison of dimensions in service quality expectation of ecotourists by researcher

Rating	Khan (2003: 117)	Khan and Su (2003: 119)
1.	Ecotangibles	Assurance
2.	Assurance	Tangibles
3.	Reliability	Reliability
4.	Responsiveness	Responsiveness
5.	Empathy	Ecotangibles
6.	Tangibles	Empathy

The researcher observes that service quality studies are dominated by comparative assessments of customer expectations, provider performance and customer perceptions of service without adequate reflection on the complexity of the processes in service quality development and the effectiveness of its implementation. O'Neill and Palmer (2001:182) locate that timing of surveys is an important factor in assuring accurate recollection of customers of their expectations and their experience. In accounting for this threat to reliability, research by Rahman et al (2010:49) on the alignment between resort service quality and ecotourist satisfaction collected ecotourist expectations and perceptions data at the same time. The study claims a loftier attribute expectation from the ecotourist for physical facilities and equipment that are visually aligned and in good condition, improved access to facilities and equipment and change to existing landform and vegetation. The finding in this study strongly concur with ecotangibles cited in Khan (2003:117).

In another ECOSERV study where expectations and perceptions were collected at the same time, investigation in Gunung Gading National Park, Sarawak by Said, Jaddil and Ayob (2009:83) corroborates (Khan 2003:117) high importance attributable to ecotangibles. The provision of services that are in tandem with the environment is also a highly- rated service.

Conversely, Rukuižienė (2008:139) established different results from a service quality study in the allied rural tourism sector. The study argues that service attributes that are tangible (references, infrastructure, amount of services, service differentiation according to price and content and applied technologies) and intangible (security, convenience, ambience, respect, friendliness and competence) are the basis for customer-service quality evaluations. It is further argued that intangible attributes make up a greater part of rural tourism experiences. As a result, assurance of service quality can be more difficult because the absence of quality in intangible service performances cannot be returned if the customer is dissatisfied.

Discrepancy in the scientific work on service quality models is not new. According to Rukuižienė (2008:139), imprecision of the parameters for service quality has long persisted as a challenge for scholars. This observation suggests that attribute expectations may better be understood by arranging them along a continuum. This will empower managers to be in tune with the market mainly because ecotourists have been shown not to be a homogeneous group. Also, knowing how the prediction of preferences from ecotourists are moderated by individual traits, and the degree of heterogeneity of traits, will, at the very least fine tune management practice, and may very well culminate in a framework for sector service quality management.

The foregoing discussion indicates that ecotourist's expectation gravitate towards ecotangibles and assurance dimensions (Figure 13). Ecotourism service providers that better deliver on user expectations will enjoy the benefits of good customer service.

2.9.4 Attribute Importance Measurement

The previous section established that a key to attaining quality in customer service is an understanding that service specifications are determined by the customer expectations

in their involvement. However, discussion has found that the available studies show no uniformity in the ecotourist expectation. This section examines that importance given to hotel attributes by ecotourists. Understanding of the importance of these attributes will provide managers with helpful data to guide their actions and prioritise performance improvements more decisively.

Wilkins et al (2007:842) contend that performance-only measures of service quality are a better method of measuring service quality. Measures of performance provide effective management information because the elements of service quality management concur with measured results of service quality (Rukuižienė 2008:141).

Among the few studies of ecotourism accommodation Nepal (2007:273) use an importance-satisfaction paradigm in the evaluation of accommodation experiences of ecotourists in a study of international guests, who stayed at accommodation in Annapurna, natural area region of Nepal. The study reveals that recommendations from fellow ecotourists', mountain views, peaceful atmosphere, host friendliness and overall good quality of the environment are considered important. Satisfaction with these attributes is very high. The findings accord with studies examined in the previous section in the tangible and intangible dimensions. However, the involvement of fellow ecotourists has not reported previously. In common with prior ecotourist studies little importance was assigned to hygiene and sanitation. The empirical results of Nepal (2007:273) accord with Weaver and Lawton (2007:1172) view that visitors to higher-order protected areas are more environmentally aware and, according to Mehmetoglu (2007:652), more environmentally responsible.

Dolnicar (2006:3) aptly summarises the world views and values of ecotourists. According to the author, the market is fascinated by nature; they have endless interests in discovering new information about natural surroundings, desire personal interaction and involvement with it and safeguard its existence.

The preceding sections examined available literature in respect of ecotourist service expectation and then attributed importance as bases for managing perceptions of service quality. Despite the a lack of clear definition of service quality for ecotourism, it seems that hotel managers will need to respond appropriately to the significant

importance attributed by ecotourists to provision of services that show respect for and delivered in tandem with the natural ecology of the region. The next section will, therefore, turn to the role of this element in ecotourist-accommodation service quality.

2.9.5 Discovering hotel environmental expectations among ecotourists

As a special interest category of tourists, all nature-based tourists share the need for deep experiences to include the often invisible attributes in the atmosphere, personal, intense engagement and experiences of all intricacies that come from physical closeness to their interest area (Trauer 2006:183). According to [Valentine \(1992\)](#), cited in Mehmetoglu (2007:651), nature-based tourists are defined by their affinity for experiences that are dependent on or, enhanced by or, incidental to settings in the natural environment. Ecotourists as part of the nature-based tourists, seek experiences from unspoiled natural environments (Khan and Su 2003:116). Consequently, the environmentally- friendly disposition of all ecotourists is a common theme in ecotourism literature. The presence of appropriate attributes greatly improves perceptions of service quality in some customers and remains unchanged in others. Managers are custodians of the environment (Lee et al 2010:902). Consequently, Kelly et al (2007:379) contend that custody of the natural ecology is assisted by the pre-emptive approach of management to biodiversity retention and environmental aesthetics. This section will accordingly review hotel ability to sustain these themes in meeting customer expectation for environmental attributes.

To begin with, Erdogan and Baris (2007:605) contend that studies in general environmental protection practices of hotels focus mostly on large hotels that cater to the demands of mass tourism on seashores and in popular resort areas. Other researchers lament the minimal number of studies that examine guest improvement programmes from responsible tourism practices (Kirk 1998:33; Chan and Wong 2006:482). In addition, knowledge in ecotourism accommodation is challenged by thin empirical literature on management of ecotourist experiences (Weaver and Lawton 2007:1173). According to Chan and Baum (2007:575), this lack of empirical work on the perceptions of ecotourist experiences hampers proactive management. Nonetheless, amongst the scant empirical work in ecotourist accommodation, some broad sector findings are available.

Firstly, Wight (1997:209), asserts that ecotourists seek out environmentally-sensitive lodging. Secondly, investigation by Nepal (2007:266) of ecotourists trekking through Annapurna conclude that the quality of the natural environment, view of its landscapes, conformance with local architecture and host friendliness are highly-rated requirements of ecotourist-accommodation providers. From a hosting perspective, Meletis and Campbell (2007:863) consider this attribute in ecotourism to go beyond a service commodity into being a negotiated relationship modified by different cultures, worldviews, and value systems between host and guests.

Han, Hsu and Sheu (2009:325) lament the lag in empirical understanding of customer preference for hotels with environmentally-friendly practices. Among the few studies on this theme, Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:163) establish that environmentally-friendly hotel attributes are basic to guest service satisfaction. Study of hotels in an established tourism destination, Pulau Pinang, in Malaysia, by Kasim (2004:77) shows that tourists' propensity for specific environmental practices are highly-rated contributors in determining the hotel selection decision of patrons.

Table 7 Guest importance rating for responsible room facilities (Kasim 2004:77)

Room has energy saving features	80.4 %
Room has water-saving features	73.5 %
Room provides information on local eco-tourism offerings	69.8 %
Room has recycling bins	57.3 %

Table 7 offers the association between hotel provision and service quality by-alignment of attributes contributing to guest satisfaction at hotels in environmentally-sensitive Mediterranean regions with the earlier tangible and intangible attributes of ECOSERV (Khan 2003:117) reviewed earlier. Additionally, Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:163) discover that the use of solar, wind and other forms of clean and renewable energies is a powerful contributor to guest satisfaction.

2.9.6 Focal interpretations of customer service quality for the study

The preceding sections demonstrate that that improvements and respect for the natural environment yield better perception of service quality. These findings suggest that clarification of the attributes of service that are ecotourist specific will assist in determining the management practices necessary to introduce and maintain these in the hotel a serving ecotourism destination. Table 8 maps attributes of accommodation that lead to guest satisfaction.

Therefore, Erdogan and Tosun (2009:407) insist that well-informed managers with empathy for the environment are essential at accommodations in natural areas. It is also clear that systematic management of the impact on the natural environment is an indispensable structural element for service quality in ecotourist-accommodation provision. The revenue generating framework must accordingly sustain congruence with respect to the natural landscape and resources (Weaver 2001:115).

Table 8 Mapping of ECOSERV with Accommodation Satisfaction Items by Researcher

	Ecotangibles		Empathy
X	You find the surroundings beautiful.	X	The bathroom is clean.
#	You appreciate the fact that hotel uses clean or renewal energies (solar, wind, power, etc.).	0	You appreciated the presence of a car park
X	The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant.	X	The bedding is comfortable.
X	The room is pleasant.	X	You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels
X	The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work.	X	You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel (ISO, Quality Charter, etc.)
X	The available leisure facilities are pleasant (swimming pool, sauna, etc.).		
	Assurance		Tangibles
X	The staff are competent.	X	The hotel is appropriately decorated
#	The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate.	X	You find the hotel charming.
X	You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff.	X	The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere.
#	You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail.	X	You like the authentic character of the hotel
0	The price is fair compared with the service provided	X	You like the way the room is decorated.
	Responsiveness		Reliability
X	The reception staff were attentive.	X	You did not have to wait to make your booking.
X	The staff told you about things to do in the area.	X	The telephone contact during the booking was efficient
0	You do not have to wait to get your keys.	X	Your room is quiet.
#	The hotel was well signposted.	0	The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars

Key: # Absence of attribute reduces guest overall satisfaction. Presence of attribute does not increase guest overall satisfaction.
0 Absence of attribute does not impact heavily on guest overall satisfaction. Presence of attribute increases guest overall satisfaction.
X Absence of attribute heavily decreases guest overall satisfaction. Presence of attribute greatly increases guest overall satisfaction.

2.10 Influence of ecotourism service design on management of services

Service design impacts on satisfaction of customer service expectations (Andronikidis et al 2009:321). Therefore, the integration of ecotourists' performance expectations into

service design are a primary activity in service design (Whiley and Knight 2004:65). Various studies establish that good service design, layout and customization produce good hotel service quality (Yang 2006:1150; Dagger and Sweeney 2007:22). Thus, competitive service designs in tourist accommodation according to Presbury et al (2005:357), boast its facilities, image, and quality of service simultaneously. However, hospitality services including accommodation receive censure for its potential to inflict the severest negative environmental impact of the sector (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:407). Consequently, Silva and McDill (2004:294) insist that the quality of service responses, such as fine dining and luxurious accommodation, must lie inside boundaries of market forces, regulations, sustainability standards and minimal ecological footmarks. For Buckley (2003:14), design must advance health consciousness and traditional hunting type, environmentally-appealing lodge designs. Service design is shaped by the market perceptions of environmental-care, responsible practice and visibility of service providers green initiatives. A parallel physical-environment design to incorporate conditions to favour social elements, ambience to favour the five senses, appropriate space and functionality and tangible positive signals to influence the customer are important factors in service experiences (Walter et al 2010:240).

2.11 Conclusion

The focus of service quality research has been on customer perception of dimensions and attributes of service and the measure of congruence of these dimensions and attributes with customer expectations in different contexts. There is paucity in studies of management practice in meeting service quality aspirations of customers. This chapter's evaluation of perceptions of service quality from a customer point of view informs managers' performance to make up part of the conceptual background for this study.

The chapter commenced with the backdrop to customer-service quality. It then moved the discussion through various stages to examine customer desires to ascertain desired management practice. It has shown the need for management of service quality at hotels serving the ecotourism market. The need has been expressed by the wants of

the ecotourism markets and the options to address the needs. Satisfaction of the market desires has been shown to require management.

With this in mind, the few ecotourist-accommodation studies have been discussed. This has been seen as being importantly led by the user-based approach to service quality. The illustration of service sector management research shows that service quality is on a path to customer delight with hotels, service. The chapter concluded with discovering attribute expectation and importance to ecotourists. It has shown that the precision of service design in meeting attribute expectation and importance is a vital factor in meting out positive perceptions of service quality in ecotourist hotels.

The next chapter turns to studies of management practice in meeting service quality aspirations of customers. It will examine the available literature to ascertain the mechanisms and practices by which service quality at ecotourist hotels may be sustained.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN SERVICES

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter established particular attributes, expectations and needs of the ecotourist market. Various studies have shown that the service dimensions sought by ecotourists do not completely align with studies of other sectors. The chapter has also provided the attempts by the sector for alternative accommodation options that align with specific ecotourists' attributes. Hotels structures are shown to be characterised by fixed-roof premises, wider range of assisted guest services and greater comfort that has more appeal to the typology of the soft ecotourist.

This chapter will examine the quality management practices as represented, according to Beaumont et al (1996:817), by techniques, practices, policies and procedures that enhance service quality at hotels serving ecotourist destinations. The section commences with a review of the congruence between the management of hotel design and its operation with the required light impact on the natural environment reported in the previous chapter. The section will first provide literature that will reveal the role and importance of pristine environments for ecotourists. The discussion will then turn to the contribution of sustainability management for the retention of pristine environments. Thereafter, the literature on possible ways to ameliorate the negative results of provision of hotel goods and services are revealed.

3.2 Hotel Design for service quality in ecotourism

Edvardsson (1998:143) contends that organisations do not produce customer services; instead they produce structures and processes for customer opportunities to participate in service. The contention seems to focus attention to the design of service.

Ransley and Ingram (2001:81) consequently highlight the fit of hotel structural design with the desired image sought by the customer to the retention of market appeal. A common expectation demonstrated by Kelly et al (2007:384) is that visitors to ecotourist resorts prefer higher percentages of protected landscape set aside for the natural

ecology. The International Ecotourism Standard accordingly envisage that “A major objective of the accommodation is to encourage visitors to interact with natural areas adjacent to the accommodation” (Crabtree, O’Reilly and Worboys 2002:9).

Hence, hotel-guests’ behaviour and personal value systems place service value on environmentally friendly practices of their hotels (Manaktola and Jauhari 2007:365). Further to the contention of Chan and Ho (2006:303) that customers gravitate to hotels with overt green practice, investigations of Khan (2003:117), Khan and Su (2003:120), Said et al (2009:81), Nepal (2007: 266) and Rahman et al (2010:50) claim that a significant importance is assigned by ecotourists to their expectation of their engagement with staff, the physical environment, the service design and the organisations’ facilities and equipment (Annexure 3). Service design that accords with the voice of the ecotourist is elaborated later by inclusion in quality function deployment.

However, the sudden growth in ecotourism has resulted in unplanned, ad hoc structures (Wood and Hughes 2006:78). Hence, O’Neill and Alonso (2009:222) claim that tourist accommodation development is among culprits in overdevelopment and overuse of natural assets of ecotourism. The authors contend that the activity of the sector is accused of environmental damage in the course of its provision of goods and services, effluent and waste creation and high impact energy and water consumption. A need for planning appears clear from the argument presented by Brotherton and Wood (2008:384) that service weaknesses are incorrectly blamed for inferior guest experiences that instead result from inadequacies in design, construction and conceptualization of accommodation. Correspondingly, Heide, Lærdal and Grønhaug (2007:1315) show that because architecture, style and layout contribute significantly to the hotel ambience it may well be a determining variable for perception of service quality.

According to Stronza and Durham (2008:188), the traditional mass tourist hotels lack specialised ecotourist appeal for their lack of ecologically-friendly operations. Service quality expectations of ecotourists, described in Khan (2003:117), are particularly informative in calling attention of managers to commit to and retain clean environmental performance of hotels. There is a greater desire from ecotourists for environmentally sustainable experiences than mainstream tourists (Perkins and Grace 2009:234). A

common thread running through ecotourism service quality studies demonstrate the need for hotel design to support environmentally-friendly practices. Moreover, a recent study by Lu and Stepchenkova (2011:11) of ecotourists in the United States contend that ecofriendliness underpinned by respect for the natural ecology is a 'satisfier'. The latter constitutes a core performance area that adds to guest satisfaction when delivered at higher than the minimum level of performance. Key areas of ecofriendliness are ecotourist-accommodation conservation practices, peaceful co-existence with nature and retention of undisturbed surroundings.

Stan et al (2009:1516) also point out that the implementation of environmental management system is an integral part of quality management in the general hospitality sector. As such, advanced practices from the use of technology in areas of design, materials, energy, water, sewage and wastewater, security control systems, electronic energy management programmes and recycling are promising environmental initiatives of hotels (Brotherton and Wood 2008:384; Buckley 2009:654). Accordingly, Mensah (2004) traces successful practices in the United States (Annexure 4).

3.3 Challenges of environmental-care to service quality management

New expectations from ecotourists show preference for services of tour operators who engage in green practices (Black and Crabtree 2007:171). According to Bewsher (2005), visitor dissatisfaction with depleted natural resources and diminished biodiversity compromise ecotourist service quality. Conversely, enhanced travel experiences are enjoyed in well-preserved destinations and sites (Chafe 2004:2).

The literature suggests that, left unchecked, tourist accommodation depletes and destroys the tourist product (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:407). Hotel managers, therefore seek to integrate green practices into management of hotel service levels (Manaktola and Jauhari 2007:366). Williams and Todd (1997:78) draw attention to the obligation for continual monitoring of green practices. The authors insist that there can be no point of perfection in environmental performance. Instead, managers are to embark on the continual environmental improvement project with on-going organisational benchmarks and self-reflection. The management of environmental-care is therefore intrinsic to ecotourism service quality (Rahman et al 2010:47).

However, there are distinct customer expectations of sound environmental practices of the service provider at ecotourist venues (Perkins and Grace 2009:236). Managers steer expectation realisation. Hence, Tarí et al (2010:507) underline the need for scrutiny of the associations between hotel environmental management and hotel quality management. Managers need to be competent at environmental-care for the retention of guest satisfaction with hotel services (Robinot and Giannelloni 2010:165). However, managers are challenged according to Chan (2008:193) by the limiting factors at hotels that lie in the areas of (1) lack of knowledge and skills (2) lack of professional advice (3) uncertainty of outcome (4) verification and certification impediments (5) lack of resources and (6) implementation and maintenance costs.

3.3.1 Guide to environmental practices of managers

As primary destination service providers, accommodation services play a lead role in demonstrating stewardship of the natural environment because tourists seek out tourism services that are environmentally vulnerable and ecologically innovative (Black and Crabtree 2007:171). Mensah (2004) accordingly states that the International Hotels' Environment Initiative (IHEI) and Accor disclosed that 90% of hotel-guests showed preference to stay in a hotel that demonstrated respect for the environment by their practice. The eminent need for natural attributes in ecotourist accommodation is underlined in investigations of expectation-satisfaction by Rahman et al (2010:49) and importance-satisfaction by Nepal (2007:255). The attractiveness of light hotel environmental footprint has even led to some ecotourist hotels falsely marketing under the green mantle (Strasdas 2004:5). There are others who exaggerate their environmental practices (Insch 2010:282).

The need for environmental management is made clear in the World Economic Forum (2008:60) consensus of greater destination attractiveness from successful conservation practice. Therefore, Brotherton and Wood (2008:385) contend that managers require new skill sets. Blame for the lack of change in accommodation management practice in hotels is accounted for by the author in the persistence of traditional ideologies of management.

Tapper and Cochrane (2006:52) argue that hospitality quality standards, that were once tantamount to indulgence and opulent, personalised service, have undergone dramatic shifts. Grossman and Koch (1995:66) criticise the dated focus on luxury at accommodation in natural areas. Practices that cost the environment have given way to an environmental-care agenda promoted by awareness, accreditation programmes and government initiatives. Codes of practice, certification and accreditation are among primary tools that guide adoption of management measures (Black and Crabtree 2007:11). For example, the International Organisation for Standardization 14001 standard sets out binding requirements for continuous improvement and compliance with legislative and environmental regulations. Also, the Green Globe 21 Standard recognise performance and practice in ecotourism and in hospitality (Stan et al 2009:1516). A detailed examination of these is beyond the scope of the current study.

The literature suggests hotel manager adoption of environmental-care lie at different points, scales and areas of practice. Present success of Macao hotel managers in Penny (2007:291) show that 56.8% of hotels developed environmental guardianship strategies across different elements of hotel environmental-care in Figure 14.

It seems that sustainable management of sensitive ecosystems by hotel managers lies inside the sphere of ecotourist service quality. Poor practice erodes overall satisfaction. Therefore, substantial reliance bears on leadership of hotels to ensure establishment, implementation and achievement of environmental guardianship objectives.

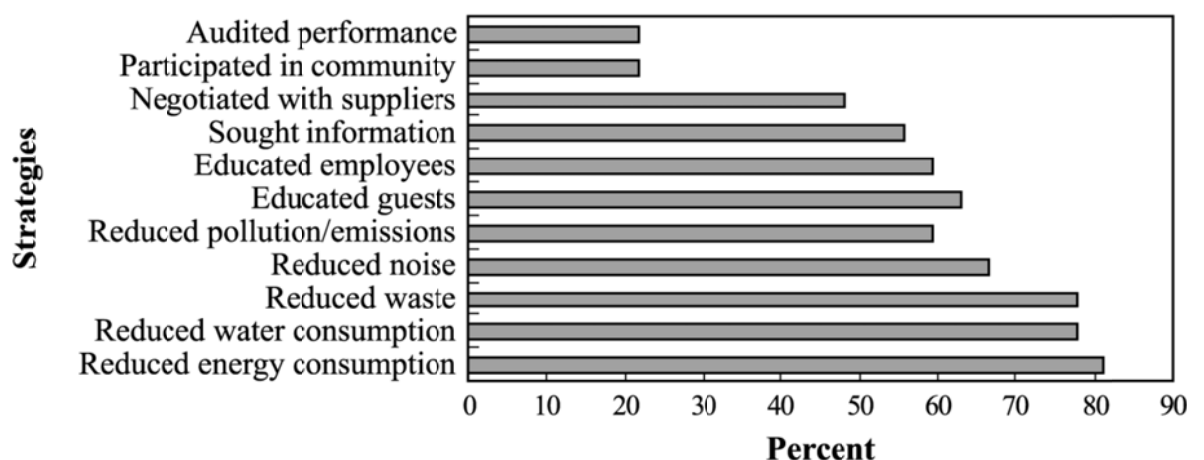


Figure 14 Environmental strategies of hotels in Macao (Penny 2007:91)

This study notes that misalignment of system elements can thwart management endeavours to enhance service perceptions of ecotourists. For example, while ecotourists may be supportive of the environment, not all are prepared to sacrifice hedonistic experiences in favour of the environment.

3.3.2 Environmentally-sensitive management of sustainable practices

The ecotourism sector thrives on the natural environment (Diamantis 2004:305). The author observes that demand for ecotourism increases with increases in the obscurity and fragility of sensitive ecotourism destinations. Greater impacts on the environment from the ecotourism accommodation sector can thus be expected. In contemplating the management of ecotourism, Bewsher (2005) accordingly warns that ecotourists' discontent with expectations of environmental-care is to be avoided. Consequently, McNamara and Gibson (2008:91) report a range of responses by managers to environmental-care at tourist accommodations (Figure 15). Hence, the literature notes that accommodation managers recognise the value of environmental sustainability (Webster 2010:256). On the other hand, Jackson (2010:227) raises the caution of managers who embrace environmental management at their hotels to remain guarded against consequential drop in service quality. Trade-offs that balance the grandeur of human comforts with ecologically sound management is sought, not the forfeiture of either (Dolnicar et al 2008:206).

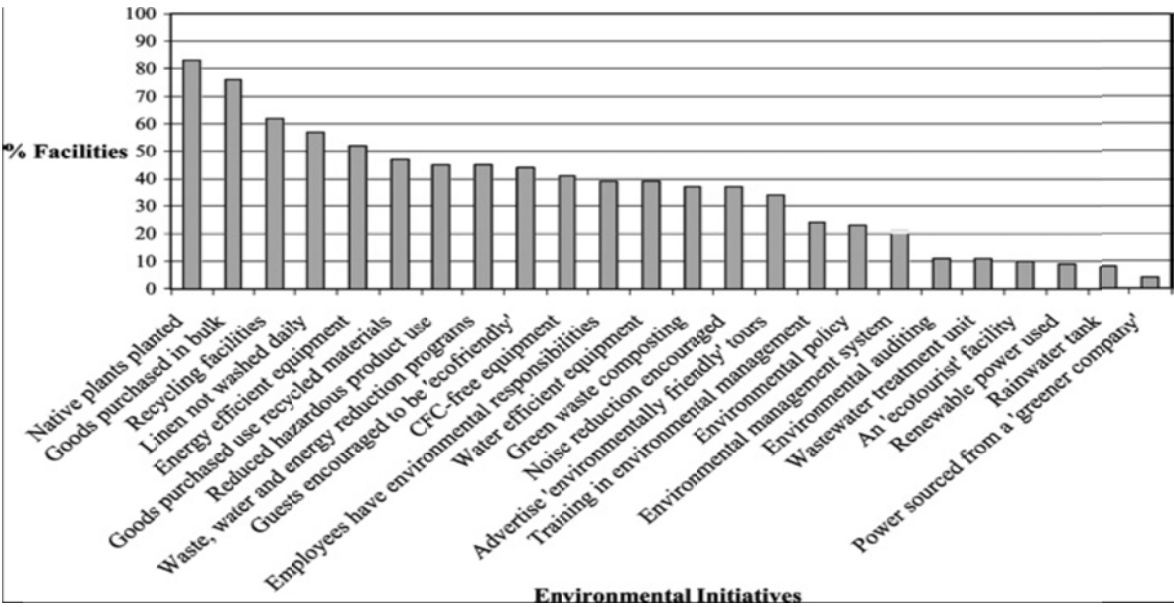


Figure 15 Management Responses to Environmental Sustainability (McNamara and Gibson 2008: 91).

It is clear that environmental management is fundamental to interventions to improve ecotourist perceptions of accommodation services. Ecotourist perceptions that are congruent with their expectation result in better assessments of customer service quality (Fernández-Barcala et al 2009:28). Therefore, Erdogan and Tosun (2009:406) raise attention to the need for hotel managers' formulation of immediate and long term strategies to sustain the environment and natural ecology. These are reviewed in the next section.

3.3.3 Hotel environmental performance categories and indicators

The management of water, waste and energy are common environmental priorities in the hotel sector (Faulk 2000:16). Erdogan and Tosun (2009:408) contribute a more comprehensive view to the discourse. The researchers contemplate environmental performance indicators and indexes appropriate to tourism accommodation in natural areas. The study contends indicators and indexes are structured by architecture and landscape design, energy efficiency/resource conservation, waste reduction, water efficiency/conservation, education and training for environmental awareness, communication for environmental awareness and managerial knowledge on environmental protection. These collectively constitute the 'litmus' test for ecotourism (Weaver 2001b:98). Based on Annexures 5 and 10, this section will examine the distinct need for integration of the environmental-care function into the management of service quality at hotels serving the ecotourist.

3.3.3.1 Management of Energy efficiency

According to Nelson (2010:347), hotel energy consumption depends on hotel type, services on offer, state of maintenance, hotel occupancy and management practices. Therefore, Meletis and Campbell (2007:855) raise issue over the consumptive orientation in the use of natural resources in ecotourism. It seems that ecotourists benefit from knowing that their stay in a natural area destination is destroying the environment. Better management is likely to enhance ecotourist perceptions. Thus,

congruence of service design with environmental performances is necessary (Chen, Yang, Lin and Yeh 2007:162). Nelson (2010:347) traces four manager strategies for energy management in accommodation, namely:

- Use of alternative energy;
- Use of renewal energy;
- Reduction in consumption; and
- Enhanced energy efficiency.

Wood (2002:30) contends that alternative energy seems to be a popular objective at ecotourism destinations. These energy sources emit less pollution than non-renewable sources such as fossil fuels.

On the other hand, Kelly et al (2007:384) insist that tourists benefit from knowing that a resort uses renewable sources to meet its energy needs. The benefit of knowing that their stay in a natural area destination is not adding to greenhouse gas emissions is likely to enhance ecotourist perception of service quality. This finding is corroborated in a study of Australian hotels by Dalton, Lockington and Baldock (2008:2179) who establish that guests at ecoresort type accommodation show preference for renewable sources compared to those in urban hotels. The researchers also contend that whilst guests are willing to accept any inconvenience arising from renewable energy supply, the measure was not shared by the service providers.

In another line of enquiry, managers at older building structures seem to have greater difficulty with energy efficiency. Hence, Faulk (2000:15) notes that good architectural design promotes minimal energy consumption. Sookram (n.d.), therefore, calls for energy efficiency options that comprise changing to higher efficiency products, enhancing systems to better monitor and manage energy saving, fitting building insulations and the promotion of improved procedures and maintenance.

Ecotourism accommodation in Dominica Island in the Caribbean often suffers greater service quality breaks from outages in traditional electricity supply grids (Nelson 2010:351). It is clear that these breaks are likely to be greatly pronounced in more

obscure hotel locations. The study, moreover, locates significant energy management difficulty from often old building structural design that does not envisage energy efficiency. Hence, energy issues are hotly debated in the general tourism literature. However, the study contends that deliberation has only recently emerged in the accommodation sector of ecotourism. Contrary to other ecotourism studies reviewed earlier, managers at Dominica Island contend that their guests are not as environmentally aware to hold concern for energy production and consumption matters (Nelson 2010:355).

It seems that all ecotourists welcome energy efficiency measures in their accommodation. Uneven perceptions of the efficiency measures have been traced in another natural area study. For example, Kelly et al (2007:384) found that destination energy efficient measures were appreciated more by day visitors to natural environmental destinations than by the overnight sample. The absence of research into ecotourist customer satisfaction with regular and with alternate energy supply makes it impossible to accurately account for service quality perceptions with either source. The researcher observes that building design and the degree of opulence on offer are determining factors in energy management.

3.3.3.2 Management of Water efficiency

Hotel-guests commonly expect water to be available for direct and indirect consumption such as that in bathrooms, kitchen, laundry, swimming pools and general maintenance services (O'Neill and Alonso 2009:223). According to Cole (2011:15) the contentment of tourists and therefore tourism depends in on the quality and adequacy of potable water. Nonetheless, Kwan et al (2008:711-713) posit that alternative, sustainable means of water acquisition and non-intrusive mechanisms to reduce water consumption are decidedly desirable attributes of specialist ecotourist accommodation.

Hence, evaluation of tourist propensity for good environmental practice by Kasim (2004:77) indicates that water conservation is considered an important attribute of tourist room usage. Moreover, the World Economic Forum (2008:5) asserts clean drinking water as fundamental to comfort and health of tourists. The availability of clean water seems to be an elementary tourist feature in a natural area ecosystem. Clean drinking water in the wild and also the welfare of creatures living off clean water is of

great significance to the environmentally aware ecotourists (Tang, Tang and Lo 2005:19). This finding accords with a study by Kerstetter, Hou and Lin (2004:496) that illustrates the critical importance attributed by ecotourists to the advancement of local environmental quality. Consequently, the World Economic Forum (2008:59) urges hotel developers to be sensitive to minimizing impacts on freshwater settings.

It follows from the above discussion that the benefit of knowing that their stay in a natural area destination is not adding to water-borne disease and that water consumption is responsibly managed is likely to enhance ecotourist's perception of service quality. Ecotourists demand is fashioned by guests who prefer an environmentally friendly way of life (Dolnicar 2010:717). The management of water resources is a hotel service attribute that is fundamental to nature tourists (Han et al 2009:325)

The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (2011) has recently acknowledged the need for water efficiency by incorporating hotel grading criteria to curb usage. Current criteria include management initiatives to restrain water usage by curbing erstwhile frequency of towel washing and by installation of independently regulated water flows in baths and showers. In addition, the World Economic Forum (2008:59) claim widespread hotel management practice that support responsible water consumption and water saving methods at hotels. For example, Warnken et al (2005:373) observe growing usage of water efficient technology designs in ecotourist resorts that use dual-flush toilets, low-flow shower heads, low-flow taps, water effluent recycling, low irrigation landscaping and water efficient gardens. Further to water-saving fittings and sensed water-flow mechanisms, Tarí et al (2010:502) contemplates manager initiative such as limiting the full laundry washing cycle, gray water reuse and monitoring for water leaks.

3.3.3.3 Communication for environmental awareness

The significance of this management practice had been demonstrated in a study in Cheju Island, in southwest Korea. Khan and Su (2003:118) identified guest communication materials as significant tangibles of ecotourism service quality. Fennel (2002:23) contends that communication of environmental programmes is of psychological, sociological, educational and ecological benefit to guests. According to

the author, these benefits fashion the demand for ecotourist activity. Proper communications of information on sustainable practices to ecotourists enhance positive perception of visitors' services (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:413). Therefore, Han et al (2009:332) call on marketers to better show the attributes of the hotel "health environment" and eco-friendly practices to better inform buying decisions.

Andronikidis et al (2009:319), moreover, demonstrate that consumers are increasingly more knowledgeable, serious in their needs and switch suppliers easily if their demands are not up to expectation. Satisfaction with accommodation services is diminished by poor perceptions of environmental management (Robinot and Giannelloni 2010:169). Appropriate depth and scale of awareness, therefore, seems significant in shaping perceptions of customer service quality in a natural area.

Hence, awareness fosters specific guest expectations following their deliberate purchase of perceived environmentally sound services (Han et al 2009:332). However, Jackson (2010:213) cautions that deviation erodes service satisfaction. Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:169), therefore, contend that apprehension in assurance of environmental practice will lead to managers refraining from drawing attention to environmental initiatives for fear of opening themselves up to poor guest evaluations.

In another line of enquiry, Bohdanowicz (2006:672) shows that communication on environment practices can draw negative perceptions of service. Guests may believe that the hotel intrudes on the experiences they have paid to enjoy. Signage and leaflets restraining extravagant, environmentally consumptive activities are likely to be offensive to hotel-guests. Hence, managers do not always favour guest mindfulness of environmental management initiatives.

However, opportunities to learn about their locality from their travel experiences are a fundamental attribute of ecotourists (Nowaczek and Smale 2010:51). The literature points to a selection of management approaches to address this service. Nelson (2010:352) emphasises customer-environmental awareness through hotel websites, instructional materials, orientation at check-in or in-room signage helps sensitise guests. More popular approaches lie in training (Chiang and Birtch 2011:8) and empowerment

(Gjerald and Øgaard 2010:484) of hotel employees. In this regard, Erdogan and Baris (2007:608) contend that establishing mindfulness of the environment among staff is the most important first step in improving environmental sensitivity and protection. Chan and Hawkins (2010:645) add that, after effective induction into the environmental agenda, employees must feel that their serious commitment to the environment is shared by their employers. According to Jackson (2010:213), eco-label accreditation schemes assist awareness creation especially when supported by education and training. Erdogan and Baris (2007:608) propose a written environmental policy, a written environmental programme and the inclusion of environmental statements in work definition and proactive staff participation in environmental meetings.

3.3.3.4 Architecture and landscape design

Ordinarily, human intrusions on natural-area landscapes seem to debase some or other natural area element, especially in the delivery and consumption of tourist pleasures. Nowaczek and Smale (2010:51) establish that the ecotourist market seeks attributes that demonstrate respect for the integrity of the environment, minimal environmental modifications, responsible consumption and light ecological impact. It becomes necessary for biodiversity, environmental quality and aesthetics to be mediated by management initiatives (Kelly et al 2007:379). It consequently seems that total quality of ecotourism accommodation is dependent on how it treats the environment. Simply locating buildings in pristine environments but ignoring ecologically friendly design that is crucial to ecotourism must be avoided (Black and Crabtree 2007:415).

The design of ecotourism business activity must accordingly defend the natural landscapes and simultaneously offer desired experiences to visitors (Bewsher 2005). According to Dolnicar et al (2008:206), destination trade-offs that balance the grandeur of human comforts with ecologically sound management is sought, not the forfeiture of either. It is prudent for ecotourism operators, according to Fennel (2002:106), to demonstrate affinity for open-air activity, want to contribute to care of the natural environment and learn from their love of these desires.

In another line of enquiry, Heide, Lærdal and Grønhaug (2007:1315) show that because architecture, style and layout contribute significantly to the hotel ambience it may well

be a determining variable for perception of service quality. The environmental ambience at the hotel form a major part of the product package sold to customers (Penny 2007:287).

The vital role of design in the physical environment and the appropriateness of materials, equipment and facilities is established by the literature on ecotourist expectations (Nepal 2007:266; Khan 2003:117; Khan and Su 2003:120, Said et al 2009:81; Rahman et al 2010:50). These studies contend that architecture and landscape design is to be congruent with the environment and reveal the local influence. Respect for the integrity of existing land form and a good view of the natural landscape are highly-rated expectations of ecotourists. It is apparent that the ecotourist market places significant value in visiting places where the integrity of natural heritage has been maintained or restored (Biederman et al 2007:113). Human intrusion is to be minimised in the design by environmentally-friendly equipment and facilities, waste-management and recycling, and deliberate efforts for the retention of the visually appealing environment. The sought balance in the accommodation structure, according to Phillips (2005), must blend into and add value to the natural landscape; use natural light, ventilation, materials, textures and colours; replicate cultural values on the local area and; use every opportunity to encourage nature features of the local area nature into the building design. The report further draws attention to retaining an aesthetic visual appearance, seeking ways for minimal effect on biodiversity, ease of access and communication.

3.3.3.5 Waste Reduction

The tourism sector places exceptional reliance on the natural environment (Uriely et al 2007:164). Tourism will not occur in environments that are filthy, contaminated and unattractive (Kasim 2009:721). Therefore, Berchicci and Bodewes (2005:281) admonish manager attitude that escalate waste-management performance thresholds to maintain the poor status quo. Kitazawa and Sarkis (2000:225) locate managers who perceive environmental interventions as alien or simply an 'end of the pipe' problem. The authors propose compilation of a simple process flow diagram to identify waste streams as a good starting point for managers.

According to Erdogan and Baris (2007:612) hotels' generation of waste is the sector's most notable bearing on the environment. Studies show that hotels need spotless surroundings in their servicescape to enhance perceptions of hotel quality of service (Erdogan and Baris 2007: 604; Chang 2008:74). Hence, Tarí et al (2010:502) contend that a drop in pollution level is likely to increase patronage from environmentally-sensitive tourists. Greener credentials are derived by hotels with better waste practices (Robinot and Giannelloni 2010:168). Good practice uses waste as a resource. For example, investigation of tourists to natural area mountain resorts in British Columbia by Kelly et al (2007:384) found that recycling and composting featured highly in tourist resort preference. The study elicited waste intervention specific to natural area hotel management in the areas of waste exchanges and reuse centres; collection systems and drop-off facilities for recyclable materials; centralised regional composting facilities; commercial and public composting programmes; waste collection and tipping fee programmes at landfills; and increasing waste reduction promotional campaigns for residents, visitors and businesses.

Consequently, Webster (2010:171) predicts a trend that prioritises waste reduction, waste reuse, waste recycling and waste recovery. These trends will advance ecotourists' expectations that the management of waste assures the safety of biodiversity in the local environment (Said et al 2009:81) and that the hotel engage in recycling and reuse (Rahman et al 2010:50).

3.3.3.6 Managerial knowledge on environmental protection

The preceding sections reviewed environmental practices of managers that improve quality of service to hotel-guests from the ecotourist sector. Managers at ecotourist hotels are charged with initiating, facilitating and monitoring environmental practices and to assure its acceptance and advocacy at all operational levels of the hotel (Jackson 2010:218). Bewsher (2005) observes that managers of ecotourism organisations operate within a framework fashioned from the integration of a conservation, resource management, regional biodiversity, heritage, guest management and benefit-flow management within an integrated development plan. It appears that knowledgeable managers are managing existing ecotourism accommodation. However, Erdogan and Tosun (2009:413), disagree. Their study contends that only a small minority of tourist

accommodation providers are competent to engage in sustainable environmental performance. Moreover, manager knowledge of environmental issues is particularly weak at small and medium hotels (Kasim 2009:721).

Chan (2008:193) attributes the unpreparedness of hotel managers for custodianship of the environment to the sudden change to traditional priorities of hotel managers. There is now the need to track, evaluate, interrogate and implement improvement options to better overall environmental performance to meet ecotourists' expectation. Moreo, DeMicco and Xiong (2009:55) depict the new role of hotel managers in a scorecard that suggests that they strive for and remain in the sustainable quadrant in Figure 16.

Various studies have identified two groupings among a range of manager limitations in ecotourism. The first group is a manager's lack of basic environmental knowledge (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:413). Weaver (2001:566) reports that the lack of primary skills and capacity in ecotourism management practice amongst ecotourism operators are the main reasons for poor conduct of business in the sector. Improved manager orientation, education and continual training seem necessary. Knowledgeable managers turn destinations to be desirable (Kelly et al 2007:378). The authors draw attention to recently initiated reduction in intensity of resource consumption, rise in efficiency standards and the establishment and redirection of guest pursuits to lesser resource consumptive pastimes.

- Return on Investment +	Environmentally Unfriendly	Sustainable
	Unsustainable	Unprofitable
	- Inverse Environmental Impact	+

Figure 16 The Sustainability Matrix (Moreo et al 2009:55).

Further to attesting to the lack of necessary environmental knowledge, Erdogan and Baris (2007:607) empirically draw attention to the second limitation. Their study shows that managers also lack interest in the natural environment. Managers seem to perceive their customer-quality expectations inaccurately. Therefore, Soltani et al (2008:1400) argue that quality management problems emerge from the characteristics of the managers and not on the quality management system. This gap in meeting guest expectation arises from:

- Poor communication within the organisation;
- Poor communication with guests;
- Imprecise interpretation of guest expectations; and
- Absence of appropriate demand analysis (Grönroos 2007:115).

Chan and Li (2001:589) contend that awards and standards increase manager awareness, stimulates constructive engagement amongst management and meet the approval of growing ranks concerned with the environment. For example, Erdogan and Baris (2007:611) note ecotourism managers' interest in the International Organisation for Standardisation 14000 series. Stan et al (2009:1516) highlight the merit of this reference standard for its credibility. Awareness brought on by credible labels and accreditation seems to have also assisted managers. Such awards help hotel managers to better integrate environmental guardianship objectives into their service quality measures. More recently, South African managers are guided by the performance based responsible tourism accolade (Imvelo Awards for Responsible Tourism n.d.), criteria for heritage certification (Heritage: The Environmental Management Company n.d.) and the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (The Star Guide n.d). Hotel ratings and grading kindle attentiveness to service quality improvements by offering managers to learn what customers expect (Walker and Johnson 2009:101).

3.4 Conclusion

This section has placed focus on the need for environmental management in service quality of hotels in environmentally-sensitive destinations. The literature posits

challenges and the guardianship measures available to managers of hotels to increase the quality of the hotel services for ecotourists from improvements the environmental practices. The information examined in this section will be used to recommend methodologies and practices by which hotel managers of hotels serving ecotourism destinations may enhance hotel ratings of service quality.

The next section will elaborate on further management practices and will provide a detailed account of the contribution of the practices on the management of service quality in hotels. The section will commence with an outline of generic service quality management practices and confirm the veracity of the practices from the available literature. Thereafter, the section will proceed to review the literature on eleven management practices and examine the alignment of these practices to the management of service in hotels.

3.5 Service quality management generic to services

The management of service in the hotel sector is as fundamental as good service is at a hotel. Good management leads to customer service quality and the benefits that derive from it (Edvardsson 1998:143). This purpose of section is to review generic practices of service management for its relevance to the study.

As there is no prior study on the theme of managing service quality at hotels serving ecotourism destinations, this section will adopt a generic collection of practices derived by Behara and Gundersen (2001:592). The practices emerged from respondents in the services' sector with a marginal contribution of 5.3% of respondents from manufacturing services. Use of the collection is considered appropriate as it is an empirical study of services managers and executives. The 5.3 % is accounted for in hotel manufacturing activity in the preparation and consumption of meals and beverages in hotels. According to Yang (2006:1132), these collections of practices are significant for quality in services. The practices will be evaluated for their relationship with service quality at hotels.

Representative contributions that validate the practices identified by Behara and Gundersen (2001:592-3) as annotated in Annexure 6, are supported by similar subsequent empirical studies. Significant validations are in service sector dimensions

and attributes of organisational service orientation by Urban (2009:77), service system elements by Kaner and Karni (2007:263); quality practices by Yang (2006:1135); critical dimensions of total quality service by Sureshchander, Rajendran and Anantharam (2001:352-4); and managerial tasks by Brogowicz et al (1990:41). The cross-section of service sectors studied offers a basis to support ordering them into clusters of generic practices.

From a hotel-perspective, congruence with the generic practices, identified by Behara and Gundersen (2001:592-3) is similarly supported. For example, in the Torres and Kline (2006:298) model founded on the behavioural characteristics of employees and influences of the environment and organisation wherein guests may be moved from base-level service satisfaction to being delighted; Pizam and Shani (2009:147) work on hotel managers' perspectives on their job functions and; Vrtiprah (2001:111-126) case information of how management of quality is performed a hotel. The alignment of these lodging sector studies with quality management theory is illustrated in Table 9 as causal clusters associated with hotels' management of customer service.

Table 9 Mapping by researcher from selected studies of outcomes and tasks associated with the management of service quality at hotels

Quality Management Practices in Services (Behara and Gundersen 2001: 592-3)	Managing Quality in Hotel Excelsior (Vrtiprah 2001: 111 -126)	People and Quality: Delta Hotels Pallet, Taylor and Jayawardena (2003: 350)	A model for hotel customer delight Torres and Kline (2006:298)	The nature of the hospitality industry: present and future manager's perspectives Pizam and Shani (2009: 141-147)
Compensation (practices for non-management, middle, senior and teams)	Quality and performance incentives; Rewarded at rate of business and completed work	Compensation reports Satisfied and motivated employees	Satisfied and motivated employees	Forms of compensation
Benchmarking (best in class competitor source of new ideas, service design, customer contact systems and delivery and distribution)	Benchmarking exercise in 5-star hotels	ISO 9002 ISO 14000 Minimum standard checklist	Employee loyalty Exceed guest expectations	Customer sophistication Industry progress
Training Management (alignment, inclusivity, skills, delivery, extent of investment)	Training for qualification attainment; training and seminar analysis continual; investment perspective on training.	People Development Continuous Improvement	Capable and competent employees	Employee education
Empowerment (of self-managed work teams, customer contact teams and autonomous teams, independence, decision-making)	Train; internal marketing; personnel assignment; marketing research.	Empowerment	Culture that fosters delighted guests	Employees as 'problem fixers' who anticipate and cater for guests from own imagination and creativity
Technology Management (innovation, cost reduction and technology procurement for service quality enhancement)	Information system design; production and supply resource; facility layout; system capacity; system upgrade; maintenance; resource allocation; build;	–	–	Technology development

Assessment (team emphasis, using quality criterion, application to middle and senior management)	manufacture. Competence, responsibility and task awareness. Directed at realization of policies and set objectives, and on the corrective measures through critical incident reporting and employee evaluation. Skills development and improvement	People Development Continuous Improvement Prevention based strategy Measurement and review	Capable and competent employees	Assessment based balancing and manoeuvrings
Process Management (evaluating cost of quality, cycle time and customer complaints)	Responsibility is with kitchen, maintenance, household and guest services	Process orientation	Exceptional service procedures	Stability in ordinary to provision and administration of extraordinary guest experiences
Teamwork (cross functional, inclusivity, methods)	Employees are clear of how their jobs affect the rest of the team; promoting cooperation and discipline	Teamwork	Motivated teams Strong loyalty	Teamwork and solidarity
Training (of non-management, middle and senior management, inclusivity)	Skills development and improvement; computer proficiency; internal audit; foreign language; exchange programs; industry innovations	Training	Capable and competent employees Exceed customer expectations	Employee training
Participation (of non-management, middle and senior management, general and problem specific contribution)	Responsibility and task awareness.	Co-operation	Motivated employees	Employees as 'problem fixers' Employees as 'problem fixers'
Outcome Measurement (measurement and improvement from labour productivity, process variation, customer feedback and resource usage)	ISO; Facility evaluation; customer satisfaction research; system failure analysis; 'blueprinting'; guest satisfaction surveys, complaint analysis;	Measurement and review Guest satisfaction measurement systems	Exceptional service procedures	Hospitality and profitability Results based manoeuvring

3.5.1 Compensation

In a service-quality context, compensation systems exist to support encouragement from management and job satisfaction (Grönroos 2007:398). According to Kasper et al (2006:379), compensation induces the will for repeat quality-enhancing behaviour, encourages such behaviour in peers and consolidates recipient loyalty.

3.5.1.1 Strength of the compensation in the team-driven service quality

Compensation is a powerful management tool for team performance (Hu et al 2009:49). According to Foster (2007:110), compensation enhances service-value congruence amongst individuals and teams and thus desirable employee behaviour. Among the few works on performance and pay outcomes in the tourism and hotel sector, Chiang and Birtch (2010:632) call attention to the power of compensation as a catalyst for service quality. The catalyst lies in the ability of compensation to promote positive predictable

employee behaviours, retain effective employees and, induce goal congruence with organisational objectives and values. New skills' acquisition and knowledge sharing stated by Spraragen (2008), are among team activities that advance the hotel service-blueprint. Rewards may be share of cost-savings, improved output or increased revenue.

3.5.1.2 Challenges to service quality promotion

The literature establishes two conditions for the success of compensation in raising service quality. Firstly, employees must internalise the notion that service preface financial incentives (Pizam and Shani 2009:142). Good service is the basis for reward.

Secondly, the complexities in the quantification of latent service quality performance require improved attention. For example, Söderlund and Rosengren (2010:161) draw attention to assessment of the degree of emotional labour injected into customer service quality. Such labour may constitute personalised service, anticipating customer desire, meeting intangible customer service needs and reverence (Sherman 2007:49). Brotherton and Wood (2008:264) state that performance of such labour find expression in being nice, smiling and polite in the face of offensive or inappropriate customer behaviour. Caution is accordingly drawn by the study to the prior installation of appropriate systems to offer objective measures of employee service quality output. Therefore, Nicolau and Sellers (2010:837) emphasise that instruments and tools of management to map operating processes associated with quality must be coordinated and controlled.

Compensation systems are among the chief building blocks to a culture of quality (Metters, King-Metters, Pullman and Walton 2006:198). Hence, Brogowicz et al (1990:41) contend that management plans must integrate compensation for service quality into system design to yield optimal performance among individuals and teams. It seems that poor customer service quality may arise from the failure of compensation practices to reflect quality objectives individually stated by management. Improper configuration will fail to advance quality enhancement blueprints (Yang 2006:1140). It is very likely for blueprint failure to ripple through all manager practices indicated in Annexure 7.

3.5.2 Process Management

According to Bouncken, Pick and Hipp (2006:32), the process of service production cannot be isolated from the service outcome. Measures purported in Vrtiprah (2001:118), such as quality regulation, procedures and work instructions, are indicative of the instruments envisaged in this section to manage hotel documents and data.

3.5.2.1 Process Management for Service Orientation

Metters et al (2006:128) establish that it is not uncommon that service organisations are propelled by incongruent points of view, often haloed by the implication of the organisation strategy on individual functions. In contrast, Khoshafian (2006:32) proposes three focal divisions in process management of service-oriented organisations:

- Overarching organisation processes and policies providing guidance through derivative policies and procedures;
- A framework of more concrete procedures and processes to adopt in internal operations;and
- Business process management systems.

Grönroos (2007:32) accordingly justifies a process management approach to services in favour of a functional management approach. Process management is informed by a total value to client approach, epitomised by predictable service processes, control, compliance with standard and continual improvement is envisaged.

3.5.2.2 Need for process management for service quality enhancement

According to Brown (2006:254), process management in service has always sought to ensure processes are in place to document, control, ensure compliance and engage continuous improvement. Routines, structures, resources and expertise are so arranged to produce seamless service (Sureshchander et al 2001:352). Therefore, hotel

managers set controlled processes in place (Vrtiprah 2001:118). In doing so, Camion (1996:194) underlines the need for managers to locate critical processes therein that threatens or leads to superior service quality as targets for improvement and innovation. Hence, according to Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2006:134), the most coordinated and proficient sequence of activities in a system that maintains the efficient utilization of organisations resources to produce customer service quality is sought. It seems that the risk of poor perceptions of guest service quality is reduced and that desirable management practices in Annexure 7 are advanced in hotel departments and functional areas.

3.5.2.3 Contribution of process management to customer service quality

Jones (as cited by Brotherton and Wood 2008:196) traces three key trends that presents opportunities for service quality enhancements in process design of hospitality, namely, production lining, decoupling and customer participation. Production lining analyses activities integral to the performance outcomes indicated in Annexure 6. The activities are then de-assembled into simpler pieces of work. On the other hand, decoupling comprises separation of back of house work from those considered front of house by place and time. Customer participation focuses on self-service practice and possibilities. Production lining has the advantage of superior process management results in hotels. There is better ability to prioritise group level review, better defined measures of quality to the client and wider view of improvement opportunities in “system-wide” factors (Kenett, Waldman and Graves 1994:270).

However, it is the fixing of individual hotel internal standards that according to Williams and Buswell (cited by Eraqi 2008:342), sets the bar for process control and improvement. Standard fixing raises manager capability to provide a predictable level of service. Standards and predictability are often the focus of management benchmarking exercises.

3.5.3 Benchmarking

Early studies of Yasin and Zimmerer (1995:27) show benchmarking as a platform to innovate and learn. User benchmarking studies are on-going as results are not static

and are valid for a short period of time (Faché 2000:361). Moreover, benchmarking is well disposed to promote or innovate the design of service delivery (Faché 2000:364-5) and to tease out those consumer requirements that turn organisations to be competitive (Oakland 1993:180). Potential benefits will emerge from managers' space and power to improve.

3.5.3.1 Benchmarking in Tourism

Benchmarking in the tourism sector for systematic competitor analysis, self-reflection, cost control and quality is well described in the literature (Oakland 1993:180; Yasin and Zimmerer 1995:28; Eraqi 2008:339; Butcher, Sparks and McColl-Kennedy 2009:392). However, Kozak and Nield (2004:139) contend that benchmarking practices by managers in the tourism sector is limited. Carno, Drummond, Muller and Barclay (2001:974) attribute the limitation to the large corpus of small organisations in the tourism sector for whom application may be too time-consuming or too expensive.

3.5.3.2 Influence of accreditation and standards

Walker and Johnson (2009:99) hold the view that accreditation standards are an expression of best practice benchmarks. It seems that labelling, accreditation and grading offer benchmarked source of new ideas, service design, customer contact systems, delivery and distribution toward attributes that contribute to guest satisfaction with hotel services. For example, the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa awards star grades following hotel compliance with a battery of criteria (KPMG Services (Proprietary) Limited 2008:8). Accommodation grading system classification, according to Walker and Johnson (2009:90), presents criteria to guide accommodation managers to define and establish their own measures to attain sustained compliance. The ensuing internal systems, processes and controls are of significant value. Thorough fulfilment of assessment criteria was found by the researchers to enhance management control, critical engagement with internal policies and procedures, emphasises changing customer expectations, fosters consistency in quality, promotes attention to detail, offers benchmarks and points of reflection and, encourages professionalism.

Therefore, Weaver (2001:619) claims that external standards are management tools that are integral to establishing and continually enhancing the quality. Its use for hotel managers lies in the range of service quality performance indicators against what the best organisations in the sector are achieving to deliver a significant number of performance outcomes in this study (Annexure 7). On the other hand, Ellis and Haven (2005:7) caution that managers need to also focus on employees rather than on physical inspection to ensure that their product meets and exceeds customer expectations.

3.5.4 Training management

Timothy and Teye (2009:30) assert the dominance of service workers in the tourist accommodation sector. The management and delivery of activities in hotels can be very multifaceted and entail different competencies and wisdom (Crick 2007:9). Training for guest care and for environmental-care is of particular importance to this study.

The scope and drive by management for customer service training in the sector, according to Butcher et al (2009:390), is influenced by managers' attitude, business orientation and by organisational factors. While training benefits, according to Loan-Clarke, Boocock, Smith and Whittaker (1999:299), accrue to employers in the long-term, Timothy and Teye (2009:34) argue that training can have immediate value for tourist accommodation service quality (Annexure 7). This study recognises two significant positions in this regard. Firstly, the employer has a greater investment incentive in training than his/her employees (Oosterbeek, Sloof and Sonnemans 2007:329). Secondly, employees must be enabled to deliver on service promises by management support, knowledge support and technical support (Grönroos 2007:402-403).

Environmentally-sensitive areas call for managers to capacitate staff to sustain the natural environment protection agenda and endeavour (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:413). In fact, Tarí, Claver-Cortés, Periera-Moliner and Molina-Azorín (2010:505) found these practices to be active among managers of selected hotels in Spain.

It follows that well-formulated employee management systems, according to Frei (2008:75) assure that all service employees are capacitated to, at least, be reasonably able to offer excellence within the parameters of their jobs. Conversely, training, not applied, translates to wasted resources and training resources and time are scarce (Uden-Holman, Walkner, Huse, Greene, Gentsch and Atchison 2005:108). Stagnant, self-preserving operations then occur (Onsøyen et al 2009:99).

3.5.4.1 Management of Training Delivery

Chiang and Birtch (2011:3) reveal that the viewpoints of employees and the organisation differ on what behaviours constitute hotel service excellence. A study of room attendants by Onsøyen et al (2009:81) claims that hotel managers lack listening skills and fail at employee empowerment. These positions weaken training needs identification and assessment. According to Uden-Holman et al (2005:S110), knowledge development around training needs identification and assessment is vital as it is the base from which all training activity ensues. The elimination of counterproductive notions that often arise from lack of information will foster congruence in the views of employees and the organisations. Hence, Butcher et al (2009:390) underline the need for managers to retain and promote a positive disposition toward training. The researchers call on management to eliminate causes of disinterest arising from perceptions of irrelevance, poor facilitation, distasteful training environment, time constraints, inflexibility, losses in production output and false promise of training. Moreover, the researchers remind services' managers that they are uniquely positioned to better ensure more integration of service quality benefits into the organisation's training management system.

Cairncross, Wilde and Hutchinson (2008:149-50) claim that training design in the hospitality sector must seek to attain professionalism, set performance standards, promote consistency, and collectively enhance quality in accommodation management. Also, the characteristic formal and informal training procedures within hospitality organisations are vital elements in the reach for sustainable service quality (Timothy and Teye 2009:34). Formal module sequencing, development and evaluation of training seem to be key management activities that add value to the workforce. Service levels, according to Oakland (1993:386-390), are shown to advance when training and its

periodic review for effectiveness is embedded in the organisation's quality policy. Accountability is enhanced by supervisor training to conduct appraisals that produce useful employee feedback that reduces training-error rate (Carraher, Franklin, Parnell and Sullivan 2006:113).

3.5.4.2 Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Training Management

Managers are well advised by Kasper et al (2006:377) that inadequate training turns employees into liabilities. Conversely, proper training can align service with the service vision of the organisation to assist in proactive spotting of service quality breaks, their correction and effective service recovery (Grönroos 2007:130) and internal marketing (Grönroos 2007:425).

Assessment of training effectiveness, according to Oakland (1993:178-180), is threatened by defective design, poor user orientation and deficiencies in implementation. For Phillips and Stone (2002:2), training effectiveness is based on the conversion of qualitative priorities into quantitative measures. Typically, a return on investment method will be used. More immediate measures typically centre on the number of failings in service delivery of trained personnel. According to Cairncross et al (2008:158) employee self-assessment raises positive commitment. The employee is consequently more likely to better attain the performances in Annexure 7 for, according to the authors, self-assessment fosters adaption to resultant change, demonstration of stronger commitment to accountability and heightened commitment to the level of customer satisfaction.

3.5.5 Training

Chiang and Birtch (2010:638) assert the importance of employee service quality orientation of the hotel sector being attendant at training initiation and subsequent nurturing. Service quality orientation seeks to instil employee enthusiasm and favourable attitude toward organisational practices, policies and procedures to the extent that these are internalised by employees. According to the authors, healthy service quality orientation motivates employees to excel in service; it, therefore,

indirectly elevates the opportunities for service quality attainment from training and managers' responsibility for training.

Kadampully (2007:25) claims that the management of intangible elements of customer perceptions of service quality and the importance of separating and understanding the components of customer service encounters is imperative. Accordingly, the South African Tourism and Sport Skills Audit (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism n.d.:86 - 96) shows that serious limitations in employees' grasp of the tourism context, basic communication, tourism knowledge and life skills coupled with indiscipline and poor problem solving have composed poor service quality on offer. Findings seem to concur with later studies in New Zealand of the training needs of the specialist ecotourism sector among tourism operators (Rhodda 2009:23-32). The investigation found that, in the context of soft skills, operators rated their need for training in customer service skills first. Highly-rated skills outside of customer interaction were team work, personal appearance, problem solving, multi-tasking, planning and organizing, and writing and literacy skills. The researcher observes that as a collective these knowledge and skills areas are essential practices in the delivery of customer service and, their relevance grows when aligned with teamwork and empowerment of this study.

3.5.5.1 Disquiet with service quality training in hospitality

According to Butcher et al (2009:391), frontline employees are noteworthy brokers in the delivery of guest service quality. However, there has been growing awareness that this employee group seem to be "least trained, least compensated and least committed staff members" (Crotts, Ford, Heung, and Ngai 2007:4).

In another line of enquiry, Butcher et al (2009:389) show that managers of small hospitality organisations appear reluctant to engage in customer service training. Training in large organisations has also not performed well. For example, the South African Service Quality Initiative (n.d.) finds generally distressing capability in maintaining 'soft skills such as business etiquette, customer care, and service attitude' in tourism. The severity of the shortcomings saw implementation of a national service excellence strategic framework (Republic of South Africa: 2008). However, alignment of documented training needs to practical capacity to conduct successful training appear

perplexing in the ecotourism sector amongst its predominantly small to medium ecotourism accommodation providers.

Customer service related breaks in ecotourism guest service in KwaZulu-Natal appear to be first reported by consultant Tourism Synergy in the KwaZulu-Natal Planning and Development Commission (2004b:49). Moreover, manager limitations led to unreliability of services, sub-optimal quality of services and customer dissatisfaction. Also, Getty and Getty (2003:94) found that views of personnel (including managers) on quality, in the same organisation but performing in other functional departments tend to differ. Additionally, Nasution and Mavondo (2008:206) found managers have different interpretations of their service quality plans from those of employees who interact with hotel customers.

3.5.5.2 Education and training for environmental awareness

According to Fennel (2002:23), the demand for ecotourism can be is strongly linked to outdoor education and environmental education. The impact of environmental education seems to influence both the customers and accommodation personnel. While education of guests permit enhanced experiences of the hotel services, environmentally-sensitive areas also call managers to capacitate staff to sustain the natural environment care-agenda (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:413).

It was reported earlier that training in environmental awareness is a fundamental need in the ecotourism sector. Environmental knowledge of staff is part of the product offering. A recent tourism study by Solnet (2011:15) accordingly stresses the importance of recognising that service personnel are the keys to customer service quality and, are often perceived as part of the tourism product. Moreover, Presbury et al (2005:364) submit that opinions, values, beliefs, and behaviour of hotel staff have potential to impede the quality service. Management of hotel service personnel to promote environmentally friendly care is thus advocated as an active endeavour by Tari et al (2010:505). According to Fennel (2003:127), a cornerstone of service quality is the provision of education and interpretation of the natural environment and the capacity of personnel to do so. Therefore, Pallet et al (2003: 350) affirm that employee

encouragement and support that favours training, participation and empowerment are essential hotel management activities. Moreover, Erdogan and Baris (2007:607) call for the formulation of education and training environmental management courses and support for participation of personnel. Environmental performance training must focus on policies and practices for best ecological care systems and enhanced sensitivity of the environment (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:413).

In another line of enquiry, Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:157) confirm the growing power of environmental protection as a determinant of hotel selection. Therefore, the enlightenment of guests reinforces both the appreciation and the satisfaction with services that promote the sought ecotourist spectrum of responsible experiences demonstrated by Weaver and Lawton (2002:272). Guest education may encompass service quality-enhancing ecotourist experiences such as rationale for the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices, promotion of respect to the surroundings, participation in environmentally acceptable recreational activities and protocol visitor protection (Damon 2004:6). Understanding among ecotourists are the foundation not only for support for the particular protected area visited but also for more informed green-consumer decisions (Biederman et al 2007:424). As such, a nature interpretation centre and conservation education programmes for guests also, therefore, feature highly among attributes of ecotourist-accommodation (Kwan, Eagles, and Gebhardt, 2008:711-713).

3.5.5.3 Desired service quality training to improve in customer services

It is generally well accepted that jobs in the service sector involve social relationships and the enlisting and connecting of human capacities (Normann 2002:51). These occur, for example, in engendering employee confidence among those effecting customer needs (Tremayne 2009:11) and personal interactions that require expertise and problem solving (Caro and Garcia 2008:717).

Hotel employees constitute a significant information dissemination group. Therefore, in their study of hotels in Ankara, Erdogan and Baris (2007:607) find that activities to enhance knowledge and guardianship of environment must embrace environmental training of staff, inclusion of environmental statements in work definition and proactive

staff participation in environmental meetings. Moreover, Khan and Su (2003:123) allude to the necessity of ecotourism managers to cross-train personnel. Hygiene, cleanliness and comfort are important criteria for ecotourist product quality (Weaver 2001:213).

The vital role of staff and their training for ecotourism are alluded to in studies of ecotourist expectations by Khan (2003:117), Khan and Su (2003:120), Said et al (2009:81) and Rahman et al (2010:50). Knowledgeable contact personnel, who are willing to assist and demonstrate a sense of urgency, are necessary. Moreover, their ability to provide the correct service the first time round with courtesy and genuine interest to solve guest problems is a significant expectation. Notably, the study by Rahman et al (2010:50) which contends that guests expect personal attention and precise explanation of services on offer is at an ecotourism resort.

In another line of enquiry, Timothy and Teye (2009:35) claim that growth in globalised markets sets the agenda for greater service skills among accommodation employees, particularly in the international tourist market to include different international market expectations, language skills, cultural differences and sensitivities. Moreover, Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2006:204) point out the insidious nature of communication and interpersonal skills that can potentially lead any adverse circumstances to grow shoddier.

According to Dale, van der Wiele and van Iwaarden (2007:101), the introduction and acceptance of the requisite service culture to engender a positive view of interpersonal behaviour among individuals, groups and the organisation is a necessary step in facilitating improvements in service quality. In fact, Stutts and Wortman (2006:229) isolate communication and performance culture of accommodation organisations as key service quality drivers. Strong service cultures engender a degree of guest satisfaction that forms a powerful defence of market share and customer base (Knutson et al 2003:99). Guest benefits are undermined by misperceptions of any employee of what they see in climates, infrastructure and cultures in the organisation (Bouncken et al 2006:42.)

3.5.6 Empowerment

Stutts and Wortman (2006:39) claim that the traditional centralised-management approach to tourist accommodation has shifted to employee empowerment and broadened decentralisation to accomplish “task certainty”. Three reasons from a customer service perspective are evident. Firstly, the reduced number of middle managers in the hospitality industry place increased reliance on employees (Barrows and Powers 2009:27). The second reason can be concluded from the empirical results by Khan and Su (2003:114) that despite technological advances in tourism and hospitality service, organisations are largely labour intensive. Thirdly, Stutts and Wortman (2006:39) insist that empowered hospitality employees put in discretionary effort that contributes to a positive employee performance culture.

Thus, the compelling role of empowerment to support the quality process (Scarnati and Scarnati 2002:110) and guest satisfaction (Murphy 2008:287), such as those in Annexure 7, cannot be disputed. Employee empowerment has been known to traverse beyond the granting of decision-making authority to take care of customers as customer service goes beyond the physical process; also, the mind-set and conduct motivated by the will to perform exemplary work need to be integrated into the outcome of empowerment initiatives (Tschohl 1998:421-22). Murphy (2008:285) nevertheless cautions that the effectiveness of empowerment in management practice is conditional on a conducive internal work environment.

3.5.6.1 Empowerment Approach

Early work by Tschohl (1998:422) shows that despite empowered employees improving revenue inflows, productivity and quality and, decreasing errors and employee turnover, few employers comprehend the magnitude of the influence that empowerment has on customer service. Therefore, Huq (2005:467) states that employee empowerment is ineffective unless continuous, adequate training is administered. Indeed, according to Sosteric (as cited by Brotherton and Wood 2008:265), capacitating hospitality employees to use opportunities to bring their own characteristics and approach in customer interfaces advances improved attitudes, service commitment and behaviour from employees.

Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2006:201) observe that an inverted 'T' empowerment model in service organisations is now emerging. Such a model elevates individual contribution and commitment on the vertical axis to levels that yield appropriate and reasonable actions that result in improvement (Scarnati and Scarnati 2002:115). It is observable that the model gives employees power to take initiative to ensure that customer service is led by satisfaction of the customer and not to the satisfaction of the organisation (Kotler et al 2006:51). Employee empowerment is thus driven by the direct connection between employee participation and employee decision-making (Eraqi 2008:344). The resulting improvements in staff self-esteem and efficacy further catalyse good customer service (Murphy 2008:285)

3.5.6.2 Challenges to empowerment intent

Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2006:202) remind that the selection of employee empowerment approach must operate with a management control system that is informed by clear objectives. The selected approach seeks to empower the employee to perform within a boundary of activities, achieve desired goals, contribute to advantages and benefits or create new advantages and benefits. The chosen objective informs whether empowerment is best achieved by participation, involvement, commitment or structural delaying approaches (Lashley 1999:177). Nonetheless, Murphy (2008:286) cautions that resort employees must want and be able to handle the responsibility and be up to the challenge expected from empowered employees.

Two possible reasons are advanced in the literature for limiting reliance on employees. Firstly, employee transiency may dominate; hence, Brotherton and Wood (2008:267) question the need to empower the large number of accommodation staff who are transient workers. Secondly, Murphy (2008:286) observes that not all hospitality employees are keen or have the ability to handle responsibility that comes with empowerment. However, for Crick and Spencer (2011:472), hotel employee knowledge, incentives, communication and trust are critical to empowerment enablers.

3.5.7 Technology Management

According to the European Commission (2003:29), dominant uses of information technology at hotels are in internal operating systems, revenue management, customer communications, reservations' technology and telecommunications. Accordingly, Republic of South Africa (n.d. 32) recognises that advances in technology has changed the way tourism conduct business. It seems that tourism organisations' technological assets are embedded in infrastructure, processes and resources and, according to Ive (2000:133), service staff capability on these areas.

3.5.7.1 Role of technology to hotel customer service quality

Pizam and Shani (2009:141) argue that the hotel sector does not need to be as technologically adept as other industries. It seems that, while there may be service, process, market and resource-input innovation, the relative technology advancements among accommodation suppliers appear not to present new knowledge that breaks from existing practices; only incremental changes resulting from technology borrowed from other sectors prevail.

3.5.7.2 Human-technology balance in hotel customer service

Hotel technology application incorporates macro-level technology that range from building structures to micro-levels analogous to hotel room cleaning technology (Brotherton and Wood 2008:385). Other forms such as information technology traverse across these levels in vital areas such as hotel accommodation performance, as found in booking systems, market tracking systems, yield management information systems, guest loyalty systems and internet marketing (Timothy and Teye 2009:39). Other classes of hotel technology, according to Martinez-Ros and Orfila-Sintes (2009:634), are in areas of quality control, environmental management, computer equipment, information and telecommunication technologies, kitchens, food and beverage service, rooms, and maintenance and savings in utilities, security and cleaning and laundry service.

According to Buckley (2009:655), low-impact technology is sought in ecotourism. A significant segment of such technology must hold potential to remodel, innovate and expand or to impose limits (Normann 2002:136-139). There has been little research in

understanding the implication of each of these technologies for customer service orientation (Carraher et al 2006:109).

Nonetheless, Kasper et al (2006:121-22) observe that the human-technology mixes in service organisations often favour either human or technology. Given the human interface in hotel services, Sureschandar et al (2002:79) find it important that total quality service favours 'high touch' quality management in place of a 'high tech' quality management. The final mix claimed by the Kasper et al (2006:121-22) must be based on the value placed by customers on the service dimensions served and the appropriateness on the emphasis or mix in that dimension. Equally, technology challenges hotel managers to cater for structure and flexibility - a balance between decisions on technology and the transient shifts needed by changes in technology must be reached (Carraher et al 2006:108).

3.5.8 Participation

According to Nasution and Mavondo (2008:206), the processes in delivering customer value in a hotel involves customers, managers and employees. The power of employee participation as a management tool in the service environment lies in the inherent advantage, according to Grönroos (2007:401) of internal customer information gathering and generation. Conversely, service quality improvements are lost by impaired participation (Onsøyen et al 2009:95). Hotel employees, who see their work as cheap and menial, are prone to poor service and lowered employee performance (Gjerald and Øgaard 2010:476). Also, fear as a management tool is counterproductive (Scarnati and Scarnati 2002:113).

Lashley (1999:177) claims that autonomous work groups, flexible training, clear job enrichment programmes, work councils and employee directors are typical to an empowered work environment. These are among employee improvement efforts that are directly proportional to employee perception of their meaningful involvement in organisational decisions (Kitapçı and Sezen 2007:3). Quality, productivity and creativity of employee output remains significantly related to participation of employees. Hu et al (2009:47) show that gains to customer service quality arise from enhanced hospitality team culture and cohesiveness.

3.5.8.1 Challenges to customer service management

Managers are confronted with the creation and sustaining of will amongst staff for frank debate that promotes organisational learning (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons 2006:202). The challenge to managers, according to Brotherton and Wood (2008:267), come from the complex behaviour and mind-set of customer service staff. Employee participation does not materialise in an environment of fear and anxiety (Scarnati and Scarnati 2002:113).

Every internal service personnel as supplier should take responsibility for the task completion and control to meet specifications (Dale et al 2007:43). Eraqi (2008:343) is among the first to raise the significant role of internal marketing in tourism that reinforces employee participation in quality enhancement. Visible displays of helpfulness, promptness, communication, tangibility, professionalism, reliability, confidentiality, flexibility, preparedness, and consideration by Reynoso and Moores (as cited by Schneider and White 2003:122) are among the indicators of success in internal marketing.

3.5.8.2 Supplier Participation

According to Pallet et al (2003:350) external cooperation, teamwork and partnering are among the lead factors for quality improvement at hotels. Therefore, suppliers as co-providers of service quality have found increasing support in empirical literature (Fantazy, Kumar and Kumar 2010:685). The authors maintain that the adversarial view of hospitality managers has moved to the mediating role that suppliers play in the delivery of accommodation service quality. Accommodation managers are advised to take responsibility for their induction, skills provision and on-going training (Frey and George 2010:627) and in overall supplier development and management (Eraqi 2008:341).

3.5.9 Teamwork

Urban (2009:76) criticises managers for not taking teamwork as an element for quality management and attributing management success to “a single person achievement”. Teamwork is backed by extensive theoretical and empirical literature confirming its positive impact from group behaviours (Dayan and Benedetto 2009:135).

Service personnel seem to be mediators of customer experiences in service delivery. There is evidence that the quality of outputs in hospitality depend on quality teamwork rather than just individuals giving off their best (Hu et al 2009:49). Pizam and Shani (2009:145) accordingly conclude that employee teamwork at hotels is a strong customer service lever that must be correctly supported and nurtured by accommodation managers. Not surprisingly, Goyal and Akhilesh (2007:207) benchmark teamwork as an indicator of a successful organisation.

3.5.9.1 Benefits to management of customer service quality

The effectiveness of teamwork as a management tool is especially evident in handling complex tasks, for instance, those with high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty (Dayan and Benedetto 2009:135). Moreover, Hu et al (2009:42) stress the positive service innovation to hospitality available from knowledge management and knowledge sharing in teams. Team members' possession of required skills and knowledge to perform the service reflect the competence of a service provider, creates avenues for improvement and fosters opportunities for innovation from the process of continual improvement (Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin and Day 2006:121). Hu et al (2009:47) state that teamwork fosters completion of tasks beyond the capability of one individual, provides superior problem resolutions and promotes shared ownership. Positive team culture assists in alleviating poor perceptions of the essential contribution of the many lower-ranked employees who, according to Gjerald and Øgaard (2010:476) are often treated as expendable and inferior

3.5.9.2 Challenges to Team Conditions for Service Quality Management

Teamwork uses the perceptions of employees to tie them together in a common faction of meaning beyond superficial performance. Therefore, as an instrument of management, teamwork is dependent on alignment in personal and team priorities, task

clarification and elimination of team tensions (Mastenbroek 1991:205). Not all employees automatically perform within teams (Useem 2006:40). Harrison and Enz (2005:290) assist by stating that poor team conditions require managers to nurture a work environment that is sustained by an organisational culture that values individual's ideas and exercises effective employee reward systems.

3.5.10 Outcome Measurement

According to Johnston and Kong (2011:6), organisations input resources and customer participation into design and delivery of customer experiences. Measurement and assessment practice need to, therefore, evaluate both the operational (per organisational specifications, procedure and operational and strategic objectives) and the customer experience of service. The usefulness of practice is dependent on the ability to correct reported deviations (Robson 2004:511). According to Eraqi (2008:342), comparative studies against key indicators drawn from internal and external sources provide a basis for analysis and feedback to managers.

A basic quality management principle is that quality can be improved only after it is measured (Caro and Garcia 2008:714). Luk and Layton (2004:259) claim that accurate measurement determines the effectiveness of quality management. The value of measurement lies in providing specific knowledge of areas needing improvements, monitoring and change. However, questions, peculiar to the service organisation in respect of what to measure, how to measure and why measurement is necessary, are key to the effectiveness of the instrument (Robson 2004:510).

Luk and Layton (2004:259) emphasise both outcome and process elements of service as determinants of the effectiveness of quality management in hotels. Outcome measures, according to Jusoh and Parnell (2008:5), include measures of service quality, return on quality, and investment impact. Measures of service quality seek identification of the customer expectation, major service dimensions and their sub-factors, the relative importance of the latter to plan, develop and improve customer service quality in hotels (Akbaba 2006:186). Return on quality measures, according to

Metters et al (2006:179), suggests outcomes that isolate those quality enhancements that optimise profitability on investment. Performance outcome must not, however, be determined by emphasis on financial measures.

According to Jusoh and Parnell (2008:5), performance outcomes must combine multiple measures that encompass both financial and non-financial measures. Thus in study of hotels Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:159) suggest outcome measures to protect the environment. Also, broad outcomes linked to organisational and customer issues in the form of labour productivity, process variation, customer feedback and resource utilization are proposed by Behara and Gunderson (2001:593).

Pyo (2005:2) states that managers must avoid restricting their selection to preferred instruments that have little bearing on the unit of interest. Instead, combinations of tools and instruments used match quality improvement questions. However, knowledge of both the purpose of the tools and instruments and their effective use is prerequisite to its use in decision making.

Robson (2004:517) accordingly demonstrates that measurement alone does not add to quality. Existing measurement instruments must lie inside a control system that assures effective and timeous remediation of deviation.

3.5.11 Assessment

Employee performance must align with organisation's policies, procedures and values. However, a peculiar challenge in the hospitality sector is the mobilisation of staff with low dedication and distant affinity to deliver consistent customer service quality (Crotts et al 2007:3). Hotel managers seem to pay scant regard to the value of assessment. According to Scarnati and Scarnati (2002:114) the value of assessment as a measure of effectiveness of quality improvements (and not 'chastisement') lie in culmination of self-assessment of the individual, group and team progress in continuous quality improvement. The need for on-going appraisal of alignment with organisation goals is raised. It seems that sound assessment design needs to address all critical areas of customer expectations, the assessment system and its instruments.

However, according to Kenett et al (1994:267), employee performance appraisals have not worked as was traditionally anticipated. The study attributes the constraints to the focus on individual performance that has been limited by variables in organisations and the lack of opportunity for employees to perform. Kasper et al (2006:378), moreover, observe that a lack of employee performance criteria in service organisations hinders work of supervisory service personnel and lowers employee productivity. Conversely, unambiguous criteria and assessment methodology make a major contribution to customer service quality. Assessment of alignment is available in degree of employee commitment, satisfaction, turnover rates and management support on guests' assessment of quality (Crotts et al 2007:10).

3.6 Conclusion

The focus of this section was to locate the practices other than those for environmental-care that lead to definition of management of service quality in hotels. The literature indicates that the implementation of service quality management practices in the hotel sectors is uneven. While partly due to manager attitude, manager perception and availability of time and resources, there is evidence of lack of manager awareness and training, especially at smaller hotels. Lapses in effective practice occur in the areas of compensation, training, technology, output measurement, assessment and empowerment.

3.7 The role of quality function deployment for strategy development

According to Tarí et al (2010:508) quality management promotes improved customer information, better quality assessment systems and improved employee development. Hence, the previous sections examined ecotourist and hotel-guest expectation and perception of service. Gap analysis is shown to help recognise the shortfall in service quality. The inclusion of management practices in Annexures 6 and 10 bring the hotel closer to meeting or exceeding expectation have been reviewed earlier. In doing so, sources of breaks in service quality and how service quality may be improved were explored.

However, 'intra-organisational' service development that brings market demands, management decision-making, organisational processes and hotel functional units are necessary to assure the high quality of service. This section will examine methodology for the design of services to bring quality standards expected by customers within reach of hotels service ecotourism destinations. Hotel manager performance is improved by the emphasis on the quality function deployment (QFD) on multi-departmental service outputs and congruence in the service delivery process in meeting services valued by guests (Jeong and Oh 1998:385).

Accordingly, Andronikidis et al (2009:320) draw attention to quality function deployment (QFD) to plan, develop and support services. Whilst QFD has its origin in manufacturing, Ghobadian and Terry (1995:30) recognise its value to the services' sector. However, the authors establish that better formulation and implementation will arise from service organisations that:

- Are market drive and customer oriented;
- Rely on teamwork and multidisciplinary team approach;
- Create an environment which regards everyone downstream as a customer;
- Attempt to eliminate bureaucracy;
- Develop a culture that aims at delighting the customer; and
- Internalise the QFD technique and use it as a matter of course.

The relevance of this technique to the current study is established by Jeong and Oh (1998:386) focus on the value of the application of QFD to the enhancement of quality lodging in the hospitality sector. More recently, Crick and Spencer (2011:473) allude to quality function deployment to lower the number of service failures and establish, expand and preserve ideal hotel-guest service. It is clear that the technique has potential to help hotel managers plan, improve and maintain service quality.

It was also reported earlier that there is no unique prescription to assure that quality of service exists. Knutson et al (2003:100) observe that contemporary, broad studies of customer expectations make it difficult to generalise results of customer expectations across service sectors. On the other hand, the literature recognises that QFD benefits service quality management from gaining a deeper understanding of customers'

requirements. Perspectives on the benefits of QFD for the management of the quality of customer services have accordingly been affirmed to be:

- improved service designs that meet or exceed customers' expectations;
- improved service quality by prioritizing customer requirements in order of importance from the customer viewpoint;
- increased customer satisfaction due to the fact that QFD helps understanding the actual customer requirement; and
- more stable planning of quality assurance (Ghobadian and Terry 1995:26, Deros, Rahman, Rahman, Ismail, and Said 2009:405, Andronikidis, Georgiou, Gotzamani and Kamvysi 2009:321; Jeong and Oh 1998:386).

In addition, Deros et al (2009: 398) successfully extends the QFD methodology to locate missing service features blocking higher levels of customer satisfaction. By matching customer requirements to service design and processes in Figure 17, QFD formulates a sequential set of quality illustrations individually referred to as 'house of quality' (Bicheno 1994:63). In addition, Jeong and Oh (1998:385) contend that hotel manager performance is improved by the emphasis on the quality function deployment (QFD) on multi-departmental service outputs and congruence in the service-delivery process in meeting services valued by guests. Crick and Spencer (2011:473) allude to the power of QFD to lower the number of service failures and establish, expand and preserve ideal hotel-guest service. Consequently, a generic 'house of quality' matrix, illustrated in Figure 17, is considered to be the primary planning tool of QFD.



Figure 17 Proposed 'house of quality' matrix for strategy development at ecotourist hotels by researcher.

The sequential application (Annexure 8) assist managers in raising guest satisfaction by a process of ongoing engagement of managers and their personnel to retain the guest views (Crick and Spencer 2011:473). Charts of matching solutions in a central (Part C) and roof matrices (Part B) of Figure 18 bring together ratings of customer-satisfaction requirements, management practices for service quality. These are depicted in a relationship matrix between the organisation's services and customer requirements and in a roof matrix of perceptions of customers of the organisation's services among its competitors and relative importance rating of service characteristics. The outcome of the technique deploys customer requirements to stages of its delivery (Shin, Kim and Chandra 2002:473).

However, Jeong and Oh (2007:385) raise the significance of reliability and validity of QFD. The literature accordingly contends that successful implementation of the QFD technique is impeded by the lack of precision in translating customer meanings in the construction of the voice of the customer. Jeong and Oh (1998:387) observe the likelihood of inaccurate data inputs that compromise reliability. Andronikidis et al (2009:322) further elucidate that in addition to missing the intensity of a feature, there may also be subtle, but important features that are lost in the communication.

3.8 Gaps identified in the literature

The foregoing literature review demonstrates that the concept of customer service quality and its measurement has been extensively and globally researched. However, empirical works on the management of customer service quality is not extensive. Less so are studies in the management of guest service quality in natural areas. It is, therefore, important to note the following gaps in the literature:

- i. An assessment of the normative standing and importance of guest service quality at hotels serving ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal has to the researchers knowledge, not ever been established. This is the aim of this study.
- ii. The details of the management of guest service quality at accommodation in ecotourism areas have not been strategically assessed. This is the fundamental focus of objectives 1 and 3 of this study.

- iii. The feasibility, application and effectiveness of generic management practices for the management of the service quality to commercial accommodation in ecotourism areas has not been addressed. This is the fundamental focus of objective 2 of this study.
- iv. Survey investigation of the extent to which management can sustain guest service quality at hotels serving ecotourists and meet best practice in hotel environmental management in ecotourism literature is not available. Although this is not a substantive part of this study, specific findings of the influence of environmental- management practices may be made.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the tasks and outcomes of management for superior service at hotels. These have been shown to resonate strongly with generic practices in the services sector. The chapter has furthermore, drawn attention to the sparse literature on the management of service quality in accommodation serving ecotourist destinations. It is clear that management of service quality in the ecotourism sector is at a formative stage and warrants further study. Nonetheless, some shared views of peculiar hotel management practices to meet the service quality requirements of the environmentally-sensitive hotel guests have been examined. Consistent with Sekaran (2003:67) the chapter documented the conceptual foundation of the research by detecting and highlighting critical variables and findings from current knowledge. Eleven generic and seven sector specific manager practices for ecotourist service quality in the theoretical framework have been confirmed. The next chapter will operationalise methodology of the principle study using these manager practices.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The previous chapters set out a review of hotel service quality management at an ecotourism destination. The examination was within its political, socio-cultural, economic and environmental-philosophical context. This review was rooted in a discussion of hotel service quality and its reliance on sustainable management. Therefore, detailed concepts intimately related to customer service quality management were examined. These chapters examined the literature that has provided a foundation to inform the primary research methodology that will be described here.

4.1 Introduction

This study aimed to examine the impact of quality management practices on service quality in hotels serving ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal. The study methodology and design segmented the research stages in the sequence (1) integrative literature review, (2) survey of hotel managers of their practice, (3) survey of hotel-guests' perceptions of preferred and actual service delivery, (4) comparison of stage 2 and stage 3 results, and (5) integration of stage 1 and stage 4 results. This chapter encompasses the preliminary stages of preparing for stages 2 and 3 of the study.

4.2 Research Strategy

According to Page and Meyer (2005:19), a selected research strategy delineates its research type and its reason. The authors locate pure research and applied research as the two types of research that predict each of their outcomes. Pure research seeks to understand practices, phenomenon and their theoretical development (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2007:592). Applied research, according to Schindler and Cooper (2003:12), emphasises immediacy with a direct, practical problem-solving focus. The current study constitutes applied research for its systematic enquiry of service quality management to resolve an existing management problem.

After justification of the research design, this chapter will provide an insight to the approach to the design of data collection. Thereafter, the chapter will turn to the study

area before presenting an account of instrument development and its validity and reliability. This will be followed by the method of data analysis before the conclusion of the chapter.

4.3 Research Design

Page and Meyer (2005:84) contend that research design follows the articulation of the research idea and the conceptual structure of the research as contained in chapters two and three. These chapters provided the necessary literature review to build the theoretical framework and research design. This section will examine relevant research designs of theorists and their applications.

4.3.1 Perspectives of Research Design

Research design is fundamental to the purpose of the research (Sachdeva 2009:15). According to Haynes (2009:169), research design serves to develop justification for a study. Moreover, it assists in representing the objectivity and structural logic of the study. Schindler and Cooper (2003:146) argue that the intention of research design is to construct a framework for the unhindered, smooth execution through each stage of obtaining answers to the research question.

Table 10 Perspectives of research design (Emory and Cooper 1991:139)

	Perspective	Design Option
1.	Extent to which research problem is well-defined	Exploratory or Formal
2.	Data gathering method	Observation or survey
3.	Independence of researcher	Experimental and ex post facto
4.	Purpose of study	Descriptive or causal
5.	Time	Cross-sectional or longitudinal
6.	Topical scope	Case or statistical
7.	Research environment	Field setting, laboratory or simulation
8.	Respondent objectivity	Respondent perceptions and deviation from standard routines

Page and Meyer (2005:84) state that research design is usually initiated by transforming questions posed in the study into research variables. Next, the data collection design that features the unit of analysis and sampling is formulated. This is followed by the derivation of the method of analysis. Estimated time horizons and expenditure are then forecasted. These activities culminate in a formal research proposal. However, Table 10 indicates that research design is impacted on by diversity in purposes that, in turn, influence the design of data collection and analysis.

4.3.2 Purpose of Research

The distinction in four established purposes of an empirical study by Sekeran (2003:119) raises a key concern for research design. The author states that the purpose of a study may be exploratory, descriptive, intended to test a hypothesis or to conduct a case-study examination. These purposes will be briefly outlined.

The design of exploratory studies, according to Emory and Cooper (1991:139), rely on literature searches, experience surveys and focus group interactions. An exploratory study centres on gaining new ideas and deeper insights to phenomena from broad and vague statements of the phenomena (Saunders et al 2007:133).

In contrast, descriptive research, according to Saunders et al (2007:134), may be conducted to profile and describe the variables of interest sometimes before or after an exploratory study. Therefore, descriptive research is considered by Emory and Cooper (1991:13) as a means of drawing inferences from frequencies but cannot respond to reasons for associations between variables. The culmination of successful descriptive research lies in the extent of credibility and authority by which the ideas and insights are found (Emory and Cooper 1991:148).

Hypothesis testing engages in explanations of relationships, differences and interdependence between them (Saunders et al 2007:482). The outcome of case-study examination is a complete contextual representation of a limited number of concerns and situations, their associations and relationship.

However, Page and Meyer (2005:22) argue that case-study research can be located in exploratory studies. The authors further distinguish comparative study as another separate purpose of research. This type of research compares groups, processes or outcomes.

The exploratory study research design described by Page and Meyer (2005:22) aligns with the current study. Exploratory design promotes deeper understanding in a research area where there is sparse knowledge is appropriate for this type of design (Sekaran 2003:121). Schindler and Cooper (2003:151) affirm that both qualitative and quantitative techniques are applicable to this type of research design.

4.3.3 Qualitative and quantitative techniques for research

According to Vila, Rovira, Costa and Santoma (2011), each of the methodologies respond to different research paradigms. Quantitative techniques resonate with positivism as opposed to qualitative that responds to constructivism. Saunders et al (2007:606) contend that positivism is embedded in social reality with rigorous methodology to raise well-defended generalisations. Constructivist theory commences with acceptance that a study becomes meaningful by the variables of interest acceptance of interpretation and associations external to the focal discourses of the study (Scollon 2003:75).

Vila et al (2011) criticise combined approaches because the objectives of the selected paradigms are not congruent with combined approach. Quantitative and qualitative research methods are distinctly different as they have different ontological and epistemological assumptions indicated in Table 11.

Nonetheless, Watkins (2006:37) contends that qualitative and quantitative paradigms share common research approaches such case-study research, field experiments, focus groups, futures research, mixed methods and in-depth surveys. In addition, quantitative paradigms envisage further approaches such as forecasting, large-scale surveys, laboratory experiments, stochastic modeling, experimental designs, longitudinal studies and cross-sectional studies. On the other hand and unique to qualitative paradigms are role playing, participant-observer approaches, scenario

research, feminist perspective, grounded theory, hermeneutics and participative enquiry.

Table 11 Quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Castellan 2010:7; Lee 1992:88-94)

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Ontology	Objective	Subjective
Epistemology	Positivist approach	Phenomenologist approach
Philosophical assumptions	Social distance to prevent tainting of objectivity	Social interaction, understanding and empathy
	Independence and detachment of researcher	Involvement and interaction by researcher
Methodological procedure and logic	Outsider approach to methodological procedure and logic	Insider approach to understand respondent frame of reference
	Scientific, precise, systematic and theoretically based methods and techniques	Methods and techniques shaped by researcher's values, assumptions, interests, and purposes shape
Type of research	Experimental, quasi-experimental, single subject and descriptive, comparative, correlational, ex post facto	Phenomenology, case-study, ethnography, grounded theory, cultural studies
Goal of research	To show relationships between variables, statistical description, establishing facts, validation, prediction and control and testing hypotheses	To develop understanding, describe multiple realities, develop grounded theory, description, contextualisation, generation of insight, and giving voice and empowerment to the marginalised in society
Sampling	Randomly selected sample, proportionally representative of population	Usually a small number of non-representative cases
Data collection technique	Includes questionnaires, surveys and tests in the form of numbers and statistics	Includes written documents from field work, interviews, pictures, observations and objects
Data analysis	Statistical analysis, deductive processes	Doing description, inductive processes
	Emphasis on neutralising the role of human effect	Emphasise phenomena in the social world

The diverse research paradigms are manifested in distinct data collection techniques and procedures for data analysis (Saunders et al 2007:145). According to Watkins (2006:50) both quantitative and qualitative collection techniques utilise diaries, interviews, observation and questionnaires. However, focus groups, protocol analysis and critical incidence techniques are unique to qualitative collection techniques. Vila et al (2011) argue that qualitative techniques are suitable for the exploration of yet to be defined research ideas, theories or constructs. In contrast, quantitative techniques count the extent to which these ideas, theories or constructs are relevant.

Vila et al (2011) contend that qualitative techniques have been criticised for its subjectivity, the lack of depth in results and limited generalizability. This is despite the capacity of qualitative methodologies to quantify or statistically process results.

Vila et al (2011) contend that quantitative methodologies generalise and universally apply the results obtained. In contrast, Pizam and Shani (2009:137) argue that the narrow approach of quantitative methods limits study robustness in obtaining a range of results and its richness of information.

In contrast, other authors contend that a mix qualitative and quantitative approaches is relevant to good research (Watkins 2006:74; Saunders et al 2007:145).

In light of the exploratory nature of the study and of the lack of empirical research on the topic, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was chosen to operationalise the current study. Consistent with the definition by Saunders et al (2007:145) of mixed method research, this study will be dominated by quantitative methods, techniques and procedures. Qualitative data will be analysed qualitatively. The preference for quantitative dominance was also led by statements on tourist experience research by Jackson et al (2009:108) that argue that measurement of tourist emotions be done promptly after the consumption of a service, rather than recalled later through interviews.

4.3.4 Cross-sectional research design

This section will portray the process by which constructs of hotel service quality management at ecotourism destinations through the perception of hotel-guests and managers is to be investigated. The specific purpose of the section is to show the methodology to be exercised to gather input on customer service quality and its management.

The methodology will access real world data lodged in practical business experience and hotel-guest experience. A positivistic paradigm using a cross-sectional approach, depicted in Table 12 will be demonstrated. The approach was considered suitable as the characteristics of the variables remain constant over the short survey period (Wadongo et al 2010:17). The study also intends to focus on sense experience and positive verification from results of the different samples (Scollon 2003:77). The intended positivist epistemology is founded on this perspective. Walls et al (2010:20)

currently argue for the use of a positivist approach to guest experience research. However, Haynes (2009:171) cautions that a positivist approach needs rigour and intense focus on detail in the study design and application of research techniques.

Table 12 Overview of Study Design adapted from Cooper and Schindler (2003:147)

Research Strategy	Applied
Arrangement for design	Design Elements
The degree to which the research question has been crystallised	Formal Study – precise procedures and data source investigation
The method of data collection	Interrogation/communication – subjects questioned for their response
The power of the researcher to produce effects in the variables under study	Ex post-facto design – researcher has no control of the variables
The purpose of the study	Exploratory study – to explain patterns and themes among the variables influencing managerial behaviour
The time dimension	Cross-sectional – a snapshot at a point in time
The topical scope-breadth and scope- of the study	Statistical study – inferences are to be made from sample
The research environment	Field setting – actual environment and conditions
The participants perception of the research study	Participants perceive no modification or deviation from normal or daily routine

According to Table 12 this study will employ a formal, cross-sectional research design recommended in a study by Wadongo et al (2010:17) to identify hotel manager roles and performance. The methodology engaged relevant, successful empirical practices of parts of similar studies. The quantitative methods in the investigation resonate with a comparable New Zealand study profiling tourists to ecotourism organisations (Higham and Carr 2002:1169) and performance of hotel managers by Wadongo et al (2010:22). The design intends to logically order data to move from the construction of explanations that contribute to theory in the previous chapters to testing observation of the real world. A positivist, deductive approach has been applied to ascertain the association between what managers do and the service quality desired by hotel-guests.

Consistent with Sachdeva (2009:11), this cross-sectional study will collect data only once over a short time period. The approach augurs well with recommended conditions for a cross-sectional research design where the features of the key variables are

definite and autonomous, respondent predisposition for prejudice is negligible, the time of instrument administration are not known, conceptual underpinning has been well established, interceding incidents will intrude on impartiality, different options for explanations of phenomena are unlikely and, the unit of analysis is the different practices between persons, not differences among individuals (Rindfleish, Malter, Ganesan and Moorman 2008:274).

It is intended that the cross-sectional survey will elicit relationships between variables and project descriptive estimation of manager practice. According to Sheskin (2004:66) the method is noteworthy for its combination of relevance and precision and is consequently better at predicting a score on one variable from applying another variable. Moreover, the study of Wadongo et al (2010:22) on hotel management performance justifies its use of cross-sectional research design method for its ability to show causal relationships between the independent and dependent variables as well its economic use of time and money. However, this methodology does not account for changes in behaviour and responsiveness to other change (Baker 2001:394).

Consistent with the hotel service quality delivery study of Briggs et al (2007:1010), the current study enlisted the responses of both hotel managers and their guests. Also, a field-based setting of customer experience of service quality applied in Johnston and Kong (2011:4) was adopted. In keeping with the suggestion by Erdogan and Tosun (2009:408), that a census be adopted for the small size of the research population in hotels, all hotels in ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal were surveyed in this study. The survey engaged drop-off and collect method recommended by Dief and Font (2010:161). Haynes (2009:173) affirms the appropriateness of the survey method for the current type of study. The selection of a survey data collection method was influenced by sample controllability, accessibility to respondents, availability of respondent knowledge on subjects of interest and respondent English literacy.

This study is directed towards reaching a systematic framework and associated method for managing ecotourist preferences for customer service quality at hotels. The study intended to achieve four objectives. Realization of objectives engaged design and methodological practices of prior empirical studies.

- The first objective was to determine gaps in service quality delivery to tourists in ecotourism accommodation and to identify the management factors that can influence these gaps. Firstly, consistent with similar study objectives of Albacete-Sáez et al (2006:54) samples were drawn from the population of guests with the results subjected to exploratory factor analysis to purify the measures of service quality. Secondly, guest attitude and behaviour toward environmental-care in tourist accommodation used a structured questionnaire survey akin to a parallel study by Manaktola and Jauhari (2007:369). Validated questionnaire items were extracted from the instrument adopted in a study of tourist accommodation in environmentally protected areas by Erdogan and Tosun (2009:410). Ratings of both importance and satisfaction with ecotourist-accommodation were used to evaluate guest service quality perceptions (Nepal 2007:255).
- The second objective was to evaluate the significance of selected quality management practices in the management of the service quality in ecotourism accommodation. Validated themes for the questionnaire were extracted from the instrument adopted in a study of constructs for quality management in services by Behara and Gundersen (2001:590). The derivation of management focal areas was taken from a study of tourist accommodation by Erdogan and Tosun (2009:410).
- The third objective was to ascertain possible strategies that ecotourism accommodation managers perceive as being critically important in achieving quality related objectives. The derivation of strategies used a combination of Likert scales to operationalise the variables and open-ended questions in keeping with a similar study of Kasim (2009:712) to ascertain hotel manager attitude and management behaviour in hotels.
- The fourth objective was to develop methodologies for the formulation of management strategies for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism.

In accordance with a similar study by Wadongo et al (2010:17) the population of destination hotel managers was deemed competent respondents to identify hotel manager roles and performance. Factor analysis practice from a prior study by Behara and Gundersen (2001:590) of constructs for quality management in services

was engaged for its stated usefulness in formulating methodologies for service quality management strategies.

4.4 The Theoretical Framework

Sekaran (2003:86) contends that researchers are able to construct a theoretical framework only after the problem definition and literature review. Accordingly, Figure 18 integrates prior works to show the network with the units of analysis and variables of interest and illustrate the framework for the current study. A graphical representation of the theoretical framework assists in understanding the theory and its connectedness with the study area (Haynes 2009:170). Figure 18 aims to indicate that management of customer service quality at hotels serving ecotourist destinations in KwaZulu-Natal is dependent on generic and sector specific management practices that are aligned to guest's interpretation of service quality.

4.5 Data Collection Design

Haynes (2009:172) suggests that a positivistic methodology using survey research methods is appropriate formative workplace research. This method was considered appropriate as this study is at the foundational stages of natural area accommodation management research and intends to make inferences about the population.

4.5.1 Design of Measurement Instruments

The selected survey instrument was a self-administered questionnaire. The instrument comprised of descriptive and analytical questions. Descriptive questions observed views of guests and hotel managers while the analytical questions surveyed the relationship between guest experiences and the importance they attach to it.

This study applied descriptive surveys to gather the opinion of managers (Annexure 13) and service experience of guests. This technique was selected for two reasons. Firstly, according to

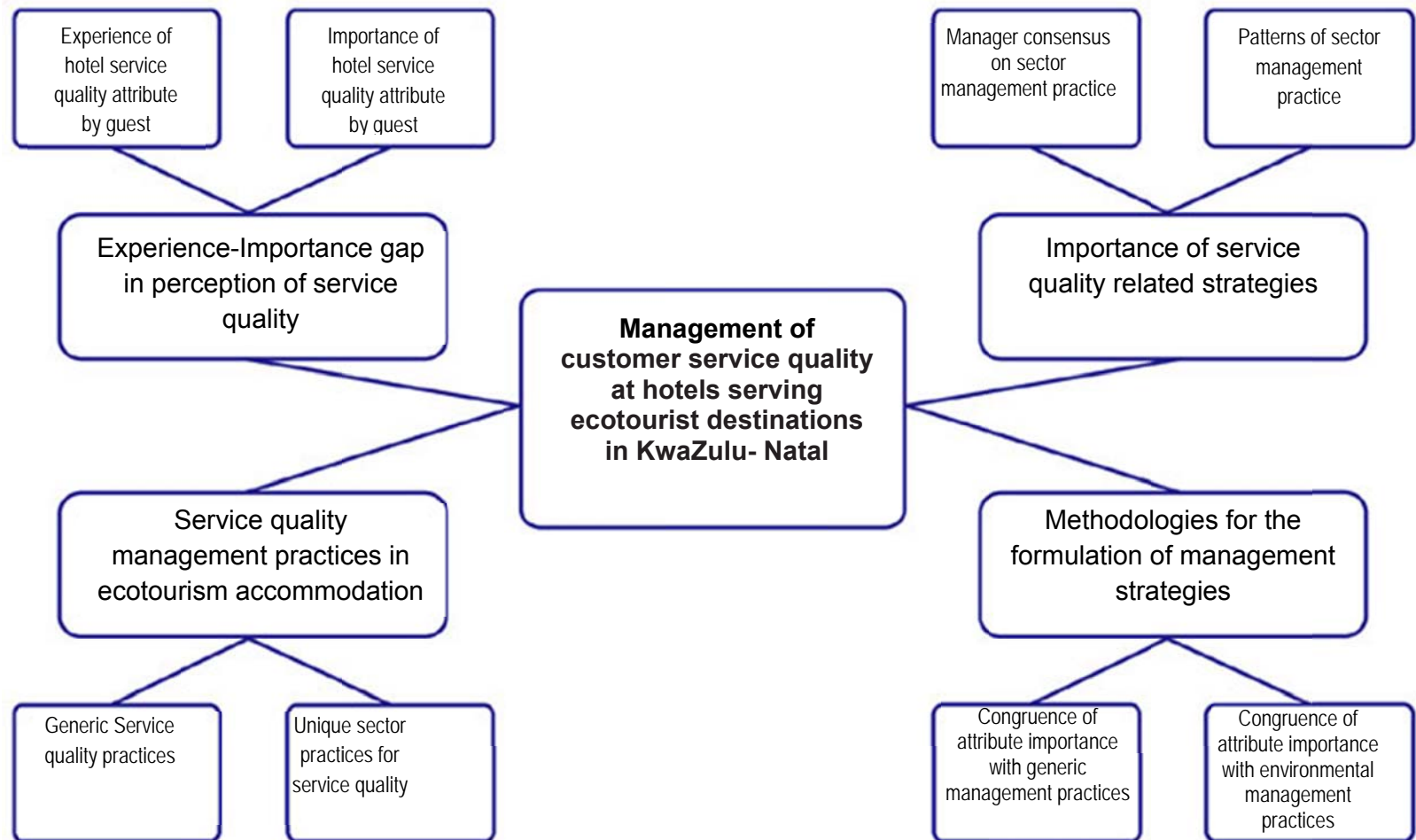


Figure 18 Theoretical Framework for Study (adapted from Rahman et al (2010:49), Nepal (2007:255), Erdogan and Tosun (2010) and Behara and Gundersen (2001)).

Schindler and Cooper (2003:55), the technique is appropriate for its strength in describing elements of behaviour where theory is limited. Secondly, the authors confirm that descriptive surveys has inherent capability to comprehensive describe numerous phenomena along with proportions of the population with shared or different traits and relationships among study variables (Schindler and Cooper 2003:161).

4.5.2 The Unit of Analysis

Sekaran (2003:132) suggests that a unit of analysis is a selection of the level of aggregation of collected data. Hotel managers and guests are the respondents for this study. This group constitutes the most knowledgeable unit in the constructs of interest (Malhotra and Groër 1998:411).

Low-level units of analysis permit progressively higher levels of aggregation, thus creating different units of analysis. In this research data, is collected at an individual level from hotel-guests and from hotel managers. Aggregating this data permits creation of different units of analysis.

4.5.3 Operational Measures of the variables

The logic of the enquiry in this study is embedded in a correlation research strategy. Variables are used to predict systematic relationships between them (Gravetter and Wallnau 2007:524). The manager set of respondents evaluated predictors of management of service quality (independent variable) and the ecotourist set of respondents assessed the outcomes of that management (dependent variable).

4.5.3.1 Variables and indicators

Twenty nine service quality independent variables were identified with the aim of assessing the service quality at hotels. They were selected from the indicators derived following extensive literature review of validated items by Robinot and Giannelloni (2008:161). Consistent with Chiang and Birtch (2010:635), questionnaire items were relevant to the general 'service setting' (ecotourism) and to the hotel sector in particular.

Eighteen constructs were identified from the studies by Erdogan and Tosun (2010:412) and Behara and Gundersen (2001:592-3). These 18 constructs were adopted as dependent variables that are positively related to factors of ecotourist service quality. The theoretical framework for this study (Annexure 9) coincides with the recommendation of Sekaran (2003:98) for essential features for such a framework and also augurs well with the cross-sectional design of the research. The current study extended the research methodology and the dependent variables of the foregoing studies to reveal a comprehensive approach for the development of the management construct in ecotourist hotels.

4.5.3.2 Data collection procedures

Haynes (2009:173) favours two methods of data collection for cross-sectional research. These are questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires may be delivered and collected, mailed or electronically administered (Saunders et al 2007:357). Sekaran (2003:132) states that interviews may be face-to-face or by telephone. Each presents advantages and disadvantages summarized in Table 13.

The data-collection instrument was a self-administered questionnaire (Annexures 11 and 12) for both sets of subjects. As the questionnaires were administered at the hotel property (Annexure 14), the responses were not dependent on memory recall in term of types of experience of the respondents, and this, in turn, enhances the internal validity of the findings.

The self-administration, deliver and collect method was deemed most suitable for terms of usage purported by Saunders et al (2007:359). Sabbatical leave afforded the researcher an appropriate timeline for data collection and research funding was made available for collection and capture. The questionnaires were distributed from 18 April until 15 July 2011 to subjects through co-operation of the management team at hotels.

In order to conduct the survey, the researcher called in personally following scheduled appointments made by telephone with a senior manager of the hotel. During meetings, the researcher contextualised the study and sought to place the managers at ease with the need to have their guests complete the survey. Thereafter, the management

constructs to be evaluated were explained. All queries and concerns were responded to and both sets of surveys were left with the manager or a designated representative. Managers were advised that they were at liberty to return the completed manager questionnaire by e-mail or wait until the collection of the guest surveys.

The delivery and collection method was considered appropriate by Saunders et al (2007: 358) as the method receives a moderately high response rate and is feasible for the sample size in this study. Additionally, the 7-page length of the questionnaire, simple sequencing and the domination of non-complex closed questions of interest to managers is considered appropriate by the authors for the delivery and collection method of administration. Moreover, university research support for travel expense is available and the method offers the researcher the opportunity for enhanced respondent participation by personal visits.

Table 13 Merits and demerits of cross-sectional data collection methods (Sekaran 2003:132)

	Mode of data collection	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Personal or face-to-face interviews	Can establish rapport and motivate respondents Can clarify the questions, clear doubts and add need questions. Can read nonverbal cues Can use visual aids to clarify points Rich data can be obtained Computer assisted personal interviewing may be used Responses may be captured on a portable computer	Takes personal time Costs more when a wide geographical area region is covered Respondents may be concerned about confidentiality of information given Interviewers need to be trained Can introduce interviewer bias
2	Telephone interviews	Less costly and speedier than personal interviews Can reach a wide geographical area Greater anonymity than personal interviews Computer assisted telephone interviewing may be used	Non-verbal cues cannot be read Interviews will have to be kept short Obsolete telephone numbers Respondents having unlisted telephone numbers cannot be reached Respondents may terminate the interview at any time
3	Personally administered questionnaires	Can establish rapport and motivate respondents Can clarify the questions and clear doubts Less expensive when administered to groups of respondents Almost 100% response rate	Organisations are reluctant to give up company time for survey with groups of employees assembled for that purpose
4	Mail questionnaires	Anonymity of respondents high Anonymity is high Wide geographical area can be reached Token gifts can be enclosed to seek compliance Respondents can take more time to respond at convenience Can be administered electronically if desired	Response rate is almost low. A 30% rate is quite acceptable Cannot clarify questions Follow-up procedures for nonresponse are necessary
5	Electronic questionnaires	Easy to administer Can reach globally Very inexpensive Fast delivery Respondents can take more time to respond at convenience	Computer literacy is necessary Respondents must have access to the facility Respondents must be willing to complete the survey

Two waves of visits were conducted in this way. In the first wave, approximately 40% of the appointments were not honoured by the managers or their representatives. A further

5% was not honoured by the researcher owing to poor travelling conditions. The second wave saw 60% of the outstanding meetings being honoured. Unannounced visits were made by the researcher to the remaining 20 %. Of these, meetings were held with a further 5% of managers.

Consistent with hotel sector studies in Malaysia by Mey et al (2006: 149) among the reasons advanced by 15% of managers for their reluctance to support this research were that it conflicted with organisation policy, proprietors that did not allow studies on them by external parties, discomfort to guests, too much of a bother and an invasion of guests' privacy.

4.5.3.3 Data Collection from Managers

Following manager orientation of the study, hard copies of managers' questionnaires (Annexure 12) were left with managers with intimation that they would be collected in three weeks. During this period, 8% of completed manager surveys were returned electronically and 15% were collected. A reminder request was e-mailed together with a fresh questionnaire attached to managers pointing out the importance of their participation and the minimal effort required for completion. This resulted in a further 30% being collected three weeks later and 5% was returned electronically. Three weeks after a further reminder another 30% was collected.

4.5.3.3.1 Research Assumptions of Population

The methodological assumptions of the population of hotel managers and guests were that they competent to respond accurately to questions in the English language. It was also understood that managers have mastered the necessary hotel management practices and competent to convey their management practice in a natural area milieu. It was assumed that there are no gaps around precision in calibrating the distance between what is construed as good service delivery by self-reporting of managers. It was also implicit that if hotel managers or designates were not available to complete the questionnaire, they would allocate the completion to another competent individual that would fairly represent the management practice and disposition of the hotel management.

4.5.4 Guest Data Collection

A quantitative survey was considered most suitable in understanding perceptions of guest service quality in the natural area hotel context. The questionnaires included a cover letter on the first page, which advised the importance of this study, support of management team of the hotel, and the participant anonymity of responses. Consistent with Brunner-Sperdin et al (2012:27), recommendation for survey research, a five-point rating scale with a neutral option was adopted (Annexure 11). The authors claim better reproducibility results.

A quantitative survey is appropriate where the sample population is high and there is a reasonable commonality in the underlying subject matter (Sharpe and Basford 2002). It, moreover, economises research time and allows understanding of the intended population on the ground of only a limited sample of that population with considerable precision. Because of the intangible and tangible attributes of hotel services, the performance variables measured in the surveys contain objective and perceptual items.

Survey data from guests were collected using an en-route methodology that has the advantage of reducing response error, mainly because the response is sought right after or during an experience (Rivera and Croes 2010:99). There were no brochures or any other kind of lead information on service quality given to respondents. This decision was made to reduce the likelihood that particular service or other detailed service quality information might unduly influence respondents' stated preferences. Surveys of overnight hotel-guests were distributed in the following ways:

- with the assistance of the housekeeping department to occupied rooms with each adult receiving a copy; or
- with the assistance of the reception department that had randomly selected guest complete the survey on check-out; or
- by field workers assigned to strategically sited viewing spots, retail areas and campsites serving hotels on the census. Proportionally, more visitors were intercepted on Saturday and Sunday than on other days, which replicated the actual visitation patterns to hotels.

The criticism of post-experience singular administration from Ladhari (2008:81) in favour of dual administration with one being prior to and the other after the service experience to incorporate expectations has been ameliorated by an experience/ importance field in the guest questionnaire.

Since there was low return rate of the questionnaires, mid-way through the collection period the questionnaires were distributed to guests one day before they would check out. Of the 900 surveys distributed, ten weeks later, 494 of the useful questionnaires were collected. Together with 21 unusable questionnaires, 57.2% guest questionnaires were returned.

4.6 Study Area

This study is located in South Africa. In accordance with the objectives of the study, primary investigation is specifically located in designated ecotourism destinations in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

4.6.1 Region

The study is restricted to hotels with 50 kilometre proximity to ecotourism development regions of KwaZulu-Natal depicted in Chapter 1. A scan of Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (2008a:19) marketing material of the research regions indicates strong projections of regional product that is distinctive and differentiated by elements of the ecological and natural area traits at the destinations. While some mass-market segments visit the regions, the regions are better known much more for ecotourism, cultural and heritage tourism.

4.6.2 Study Population

According to Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (TKZN) database, there are 88 hotels and motels in the regional districts (Tiffin 2010). Hotels registered with TKZN were selected because they are most likely to be committed to quality management and, therefore, have better access to resources to support a natural area hotel management system. There was no attempt to distinguish the attributes of the hotels on any criteria other than

their location. Hence, primary markets, existence of formal quality system and grading status were not taken into account. This was done because of the variation in hotel preferences of ecotourist (Han et al 2009:325). The TKZN database contains 30 entries in the category of interest that are located out of the designated region of the districts or outside the unit of analysis for this study. As indicated in Table 14, these were excluded from the study.

Table 14 TKZN database listings tourist accommodation in study area (Tifflin 2010).

Listing of hotels, motel and in target districts	Total	Broking Agency	Lodge	Inn	Game Ranch	Guest House	House Boat	Hotels outside 50km	Hotels
	100	6	17	4	1	1	1	12	58

The remaining 58 hotels in the sample were confirmed from listings in the database of hotels from the targeted regional council's publicity information. A final cohort of 58 hotels in each district in Table 15 was thus derived for the census.

Table 15 TKZN database listings of hotels in study area (Tifflin 2010).

Regional District	No. of database listings of hotels, motels and inns	Distribution of Census/Hotelsafter exclusions	*Available bednights
Sisonke	11	4	490
Umgungundlovu	28	14	621
Umkhanyakude	14	6	386
Uthukela	19	17	1326
Uthungulu	13	11	1513
Zululand	15	6	422
TOTAL	100	58	4750

4.6.3 Sampling

The researcher is aware that empirical research almost always depends upon samples which accurately represent a population. Therefore, the techniques by which the sample was chosen are vital to a discussion of the validity of the research findings.

4.6.3.1 Sampling Frames

Following earlier indication, samples were obtained from hotels serving designated ecotourism regions of KwaZulu-Natal and registered on the database of the provincial tourism authority. Accordingly, the final list of hotels is situated in Sisonke, Umgungundlovu, Umkhanyakude, Uthukela, Uthungulu and Zululand. The regions established the basis of population selection.

Two populations were used to attain the objectives of this study, namely, accommodation managers at hotels supporting ecotourism destinations of KwaZulu-Natal and the paying, overnight guests of such hotels. The adopted multi-respondent approach improves casual inference and reduces systematic method error (Rindfleisch et al 2008: 273). Hotel managers and their guests are two opinion leaders that could truly represent management of service quality and the perception of customer service quality that can be attributed to management.

Hotels are selected because they offer a wider range of facilities and guest services. The population of managers at these hotels constituted the key informants for the abundance of information they possess. The investigation sought their awareness of, and level of participation in the ecotourist service quality delivery programme as described by their superiors or organisation policy. Hotel-guests were expected to indicate their desire and experience of service elements.

4.6.3.2 Sample and Sample Type

The dynamics of the natural area hotel sector, quality practices and aspirations need to be understood. The specific sampling frame for this study comprised the hotel general managers and overnight guests from hotels serving ecotourist destinations of KwaZulu-Natal. Hotels in and within 50 km of designated ecotourism areas in the provincial spatial development strategy lie in the sample frame for study. They were extracted from the database held by Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (TKZN) as at 23 June 2010.

Hotel managers are particularly appropriate for this study for three reasons. They represent a range of supervisory staff responsible for tourist service quality and are the

most likely individuals to have original information regarding its implementation. Being primarily small to medium businesses, managers have often themselves registered their businesses with TKZN and are, therefore, generally well informed on tourist quality matters. Thirdly, they are within a group who are dedicated to the promotion of the province and their regions as ecotourism destinations and are, therefore, very likely to participate effectively in this study.

The second sample frame is guests to natural areas at the core of the tourism phenomena. An accurate evaluation of quality can be elicited from this grouping that visit and stay over at an accommodation establishment (Clerides 2004:23). A significant proportion of this frame is international and well travelled (KwaZulu-Natal 2008:12) and, therefore, more likely to provide comparative detail, informed observations and unbiased opinion.

4.6.3.3 Sample Size

Due to the limited population of hotels in and within 50km of designated ecotourist destinations, a census was the preferred option to obtain information on management practices. It must be noted that the diversity of hotel services make it difficult to sample this population. The census approach is suitable for a small population and differences in the elements within the small population (Cooper and Schindler 2003:181). Hence, the manager survey was applied to managers at all 58 hotels rather than drawing a sample of the hotels.

Target Population	Sample Frame	Size
Hotel-guests	>1000	400
Hotel Managers	58	58

There is no clear data available in respect of the precise population of natural area visitors to designated ecotourist districts in KwaZulu-Natal. Consequently, the occupancy over the survey period could also not be established with accuracy. This data was not available at all hotels. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007:443) contend that a larger sample size is required where anticipated differences are small and vice versa.

Sample size of the hotel-guest group was, therefore, guided by sample size determination for business research of Watson (2006:49). Beyond $n = 1000$, a sample size of 400, is according to the author, considered representative.

4.6.3.4 Guest Sample

Hotel-guests receive the product of hotel management practice and, therefore, constitute a significant response grouping particularly for their valuable feedback. Sampling of guests was led by convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling based on the lists of guests' arrival and departure dates obtained from the managers of hotels over the survey period.

This sampling practice is typical to natural area accommodation given limitations to suitable statistical evidence of tourists' arrivals to ecotourism regions (Chan and Baum 2007:579). Moreover, according to Emory and Cooper (1991:274) convenience sampling has the benefit in exploratory research to yield overwhelming ideas of the subject of investigation that make sophisticated sampling techniques purposeless. The sample size was guided by the rule of thumb proposed by Sekaran (2003:295) for sample size, namely: that the size should preferably be 10 times or more of the number of variables in the study and that it should not exceed 500.

4.6.3.5 Manager Census

The whole population of hotel managers was used. Hotel managers constitute a key sample in this study because managers' responses are influenced by their own knowledge and personal attributes. The influences of these elements in the context of managers' responses on constructs of service quality are indicated by Table 16.

In parallel with a similar study by Tarí et al (2010:503), only one management respondent per hotel was invited to participate as most hotels constitute small establishments. They are chosen from the senior ranks in their capacity of executive directors, general managers, assistant general managers, front office managers and operations managers. The job profile in each of these positions indicates equivalent influence on the management of ecotourism accommodation service quality.

Participation of an incumbent at the hotel holding one of these positions was designated as that hotel management respondent.

Table 16 Types of Knowledge and Personal Attributes (Gummerson 2000:73)

TYPE	CONTENT
General Knowledge	1. Theories, knowledge, concepts
	2. Techniques, methods, tools
Specific Knowledge	3. Institutional conditions
	4. Social Patterns
Personal attributes	5. Intuition, creativity, vitality, social ability

4.7 Instrument Development

The purpose of the study was to investigate and assess dimensions of service quality management hotels serving designated ecotourism destinations through the perception of managers and their guests. Most important attributes of customer-driven service requirement and management-driven service practice was identified from the literature.

The determinants are a mix of individual lagging and leading management indicators of natural area hotel customer service quality necessary to deliver service quality at a hotel serving an ecotourist destination. Excluded from the consideration are attributes related to community development initiatives as there was no evidence that this contributed to customer service quality at hotels. This is also justified from recent studies by Liu and Yen (2010:1544) who found that these exclusions are among results of manager quality initiatives and not the other way around.

4.8 Development of indicators for concepts

According to Haynes (2009:174), the pattern of research design that cascades from a macro level to a micro level contribute to indicator formulation. Concept development cascades from a macro level to a micro level. The macro-level theoretical framework is deconstructed to measurable study indicators.

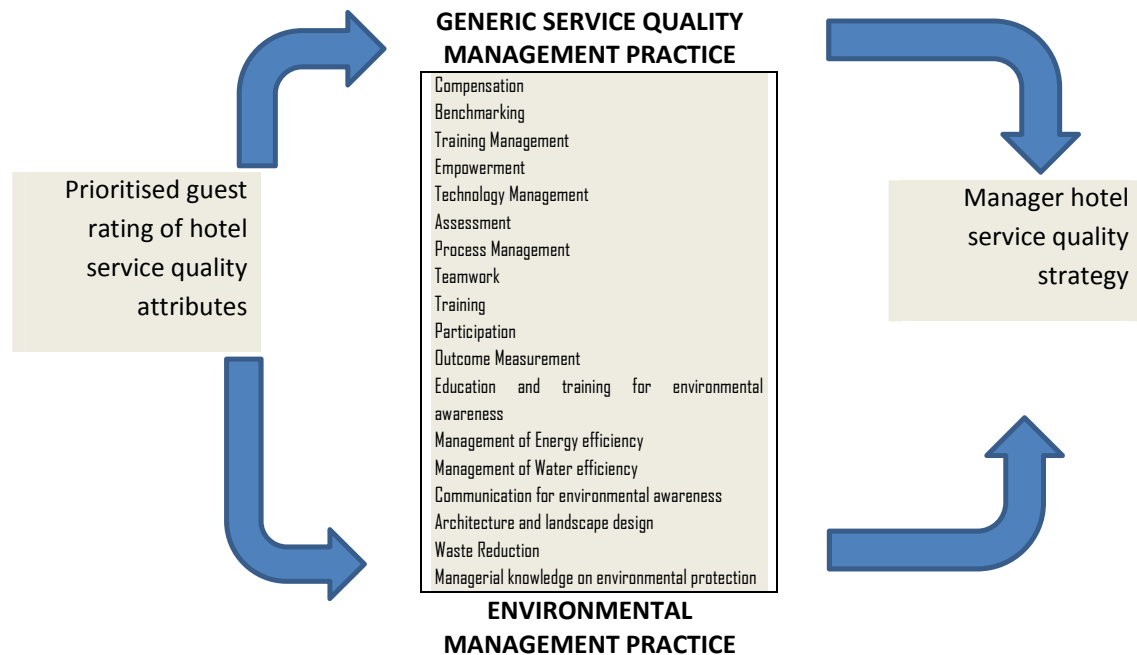


Figure 19 Relationship between concepts (adapted from Erdogan and Tosun (2010) and Behara and Gundersen (2001)).

The theoretical framework defines the following concepts:

- i. Experience-Importance gap in perception of service quality - this concept relates to the issue of how guests perceive the attributes of hotels as contributors to their service quality needs;
- ii. Service quality management practices in ecotourism accommodation – this concept relates to generic service quality management practices and those that are particular to the sector;
- iii. Importance of service quality related strategies – Manager views on contemporary contemporary trends and the extent of consensus of these in the ecotourism sector; and
- iv. Methodologies for the formulation of management strategies – this concept establishes understanding of the alignment of the importance of hotel attributes to guests with manager practice.

Figure 19 accordingly illustrates that the management strategy for hotel service quality emerges from dimensions of guest importance ratings and management dimensions. Having established the study concepts, the study turned to the deconstructed variables of interest.

4.8.1 Research variable development

According to Sekaran (2003:87), variables and their interrelationships are integral parts of a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework validates the conceptual foundation of a study. Saunders et al (2007:361) affirm that variables comprise discrete elements or features that are the basis for research data. The authors contend that the data required is at the core of research design. Variables, therefore, constitute the empirical symbols to advance the theoretical framework (Page and Meyer 2005:89).

4.8.2 Variables and indicators of independence and dependence

Watkins (2006:37) contends that positivistic research requires articulation of the independent and the dependent variables. Independent variables influence and predict the dependent variable (Sekaran 2003:145).

Twenty nine service quality dependent variables were identified with the aim of assessing the service quality at hotels. They were selected from the indicators derived, following extensive literature review of validated items by Robinot and Giannelloni (2008:161).

Equally, 18 constructs were identified from the studies by Erdogan and Tosun (2009:412) and Behara and Gundersen (2001:592-3). These 18 constructs were adopted as independent variables that were positively related to factors of ecotourist service quality. The theoretical framework for this study (Annexure 9) coincides with the recommendation of Sekaran (2003:98) for essential features for such a framework and also augurs well with the cross-sectional design of the research.

4.9 Questionnaire design

A review of the prescriptive, conceptual, practitioner and empirical literature on the management of services, especially focusing on environmental service requirements of natural area tourist destinations, was conducted. The review provided direction and options for the development of appropriate instruments for customer-driven service requirement and management-driven service practice.

Customer-driven service requirement and management-driven service practice were developed and compared. The process first analysed managers' perceptions of factors that contribute to the effective management of accommodation services. Secondly, guest perceptions of service quality received were evaluated. The first section was divided into 11 parts while the second section was divided into 7 parts according to the factors they represent.

4.9.1 Manager Questionnaire

The manager questionnaire assessed their practice to improve guest service quality. The instrument commences with demographic data in the manager survey to reveal the occupational position, hotel regional district location and hotel rating while guest surveys requested age, nationality and gender.

In the first section of the management questionnaire, the researcher asked managers' ratings on elements of management that foster positive perceptions of service delivery. In the second section, subjects were asked to rate the importance of environmental statements to the level of their guests' overall satisfaction. The researcher initially used a scale of 1 to 8 of the level of agreement. In the third section, they were asked hotel service level star-rating, location and philosophical driver of customer service quality.

There is currently no satisfactory scale in use that measures manager practice at hotels serving ecotourist destinations. A large pool of potential items was first generated using literature and expert sources before the researcher found that these supported for constructs of service quality management practices in Behara and Gundersen (2001:589) and benchmarked environmental indicators from the study by Erdogan and Tosun (2009:412). For the purpose of this study, a new scale was therefore developed from a combination of these frameworks. Overall, the questionnaire was divided into two

main sections: organisational practice and environmental performance. The instrument design was informed by the modalities by which managers deliver quality as aligned by the attributes that contribute to guest satisfaction with hotel services.

4.9.2 Guest Questionnaire

Using a similar approach, the instrument to evaluate guests' preferences and experience of service quality of the hotel was formulated. In an investigation of guest satisfaction in environmentally-friendly hotels, Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:161) develop a hotel-guest questionnaire to evaluate service attributes. The 29 items fashioned in this way were adopted in the current study. Explicit service quality related attributes of hotels in natural areas were included.

The instrument for the study was divided into three key data collection themes. In the first theme of the guest questionnaire, the researcher asked for guests' ratings on performance outcomes of management at their units throughout their own experiences of hotel services. In the second theme, subjects were asked to rate the importance of environmental statements to the level of their overall satisfaction. To determine levels of satisfaction, the researcher initially used a scale of 1 to 8 of the level of agreement. For the third theme, they were asked demographic information including gender, age, occupation, income, how long they have stayed in particular hotel and the purpose of their stay and the reason to choose the hotel. One screening question was asked to identify if guests are in residence for experiences of the natural environment. This information will be invaluable for the selection of valid responses for the interpretation and analysis of guests to hotels at ecotourism destinations.

The primary reason for the adoption of questionnaires is to obtain a general idea of tourist perception of service quality in ecotourism accommodation. The research focus is on those tourists who demonstrate pro-environmental reasons for visitation. Hence, the criterion to determine whether a guest falls in this cohort is the 'reason for stay' screening in first section of the guest questionnaire. The instrument also applied an 'importance-performance' construct. Additionally, guests were asked for an electronic contact where they could be contacted to complete any missing information after their visit was finished.

A large number of respondents were required across the geographical spread of ecotourist destinations across KwaZulu-Natal. Moreover, the wide scope of information sought coupled with the need for simple coding made the questionnaire method the most appropriate (Sekaran 2003:249).

4.10 Validity and Reliability Development

Haynes (2009:177) asserts that research reliability may be considered to be the extent to which the study is replicable resulting in the same results as the initial research. The author argues for three conditions for research reliability, namely: stability, internal reliability and inter-observer consistency. Sekaran (2003:204) suggests test-retest reliability and parallel-form reliability to confirm stability of measures. Test-retest reliability is eliminated from the current study because the cross-sectional research design prevented revisits to the original sample. As the research does not involve multiple observers, inter-observer consistency is assured. The researcher will undertake most administration, analysis and interpretation of the research. Statistical tests were used to ensure internal reliability.

The researcher compiled a battery of 35 questions that evaluated management practices for service quality in ecotourism accommodation and 29 questions that examined perceptions of the accommodation service quality enjoyed by ecotourists. The questions are intended to discriminate or determine an attribute in the subject of interest. Consistent with Malhotra and Groër (1998:423), content validity was assessed through extensive review of the literature and the opinion of two hotel management experts who are familiar with the given construct. A positive assessment of construct validity was obtained from exploratory factor analysis and item-construct correlation.

Moreover, the instrumentation employed for this research was modeled from the studies of Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:160), Erdogan and Tosun (2009:410) and Behara and Gunderson (2001:589). Each of these studies is supported by sufficient empirical development and validation. Additionally, a specialist statistician confirmed the test for face validity before administration. The items in both instruments present credible

practicality, are inexpensive to use and provides valuable information on themes in the organisation's service quality that are congruent with this study.

Large sample sizes enhance total reliability of the study. There is greater likelihood of identical measures in repeat exercises on the variables of interest (Page and Meyer 2005:84). In this study sample sizes are increased to the extent of a census of hotel managers at hotels in the study area and at least 400 overnight guests are aimed to constitute the second sample. The use of a validated measures and constructs positively contribute to reliability of the measurement questions in the instruments. As the instruments will use multi-item scales at interval levels of measurement, internal consistency will be confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha values (Schindler and Cooper 2003:239). High Cronbach's Alpha values indicate a degree of consistent scoring for the various aspects of the questionnaire.

4.10.1 Manager Questionnaire

In order to design the questionnaire, the literature on management of service quality and environmental performance indicators was used and several unstructured interviews were carried out with two topic-related academics, three managers and two owners of hotels in the designated area. A draft questionnaire was developed and applied to another set of 3 managers in a pilot field study. Based on the findings of the study, the final questionnaire was shaped. Thus, content and construct validity of the survey questionnaire were established with the resultant instrument resembling the service quality management practices of Behara and Gundersen (2001:589) and the structure for environmental performance of tourist accommodation in protected area by Erdogan and Tosun (2009:410). The final instruments comprised quality attributes and value attributes.

4.10.2 Guest Questionnaire

In order to design the questionnaire, the literature on service quality in ecotourism and service quality at hotels was used and several unstructured interviews were carried out with two topic-related academics and four persons who stayed overnight at three hotels in the designated locations. A draft questionnaire was developed. Based on the findings

of the pilot study, the final questionnaire was shaped. Thus, content and construct validity of the survey questionnaire were established with the resultant instrument resembling that of Robinot and Giannelloni (2010:160).

4.10.3 Pretesting

As in any major project, a pilot study was conducted to ascertain whether the selected procedures and instruments required refinement (Emory and Cooper 1991:118-119). Consistent with Schindler and Cooper (2003:86), there was adequate time available for pretesting. Hence a pilot test of both instruments was conducted.

The initial manager survey was subjected to a focus group of five, comprising two academics and three accommodation managers and two hotel owners to confirm the pilot instrument. The initial guest survey was subjected to a focus group of two topic-related academics and four past hotel guests.

The group was first addressed on the reasons for gathering data and the cognitive questionnaire development method to be followed. Then immediately after each respondent in the group had answered a question, respondents were probed on how they interpreted the elements and concepts in the question. A high degree of misinterpretation of the original survey questions was found. These seemed to arise mainly from initial leading and loading bias. Respondents were invited to suggest other items that should be added.

4.10.3.1 Learning from pretest

The question sequence was in need of rearrangement as sensitive questions were introduced too abruptly. It needed to be more gradual. Question also needed to be re-ordered for continuity and flow. It was recommended that a flyer be slow-mailed to respondents. The flyer was to be designed to be eye catching, give managers' basic information and to foster their interest to respond. A five-point Likert scale was decidedly most appropriate.

Thereafter, three senior academics reviewed and evaluated the two revised instruments. Minor grammatical revisions, to avoid confusion, were made following the revision. In order to raise awareness, improve response and encourage participation, the original letter was reworded to make it less imposing and friendlier. The area around the academic reasons for the study was downplayed; emphasis was given to potential assistance to managers, improved destination image and better service personnel. The complete questionnaires were tested using the instruments and administrative procedures used in the study.

4.10.3.2 Pilot Study

A pilot test was undertaken on each questionnaire to assess the reliability of the attributes and to ensure that the wording of the questionnaires was clear. Respondents were made up of two hotel managers and twenty five hotel-guests.

The 35-scale items of the management questionnaire was tested for construct, criterion-related and content validity by pilot-testing the questionnaire with experienced professionals and academics from the fields of marketing, quality management and hospitality management. The questionnaire was also sent to two hotel managers to compare and validate the standard of the questionnaire with those used in the industry.

In further improvements to the questionnaire, a schema based on a combination of 5-point Likert-type scale questions was first used for testing a preliminary version of the questionnaire. A final version was then designed based on the feedback received from a selected number of the sample test group. Several scale items were edited, eliminated and new ones were added. In particular, the negatively-worded questions were changed to positive wording, as respondents found negatively phrased questions difficult to answer. The final instrument for managers practice retained thirty five scale items and was tested once more with academics and marketing professionals. The only major change was in reducing the Likert scale to 5 options.

Reliability analysis was applied to test the internal consistency of each of the attributes. In order to test the relationship between the managers' perceptions of factors that contribute to the effective management of accommodation services, the 35 factors were

treated as the independent variables and the 29 factors of service quality as the dependent variables. Pilot tests refine the questionnaire and assess the face validity and likely reliability (Saunders et al 2007: 386). The relationship was investigated by using multiple regression analysis. Each of the 29 factors of service quality was regressed on the 35 factors of management. A positive relationship was assumed between the factors of management and the factors of service quality. The results showed that the Cronbach α coefficients for all the attributes ranging from 0.9150 to 0.9866 for the management factors and 0.9671 and 0.09898 were high and acceptable for internal consistency and reliability.

4.11 Deduction

As was indicated earlier in Table 11, a deductive approach will be used. Emory and Cooper (1991:42) contend that deductive study techniques produce valid conclusion when the assumptions are accurate and the form of the argument is valid. According to Haynes (2009:170), deductive approaches place a lesser reliance on theories and hypotheses and emphasise the rigour and rationale in the unique factors of the principal study. The instrument development and its statistical analysis intend to provide evidence that can lead to a valid conclusion.

4.12 Statistical Control

The data collected from the responses were analysed with the PASW Statistics version 18.0. Analysis necessitated application of a series of statistical analyses using the survey data. The methods adopted included descriptive statistics analysis, reliability/validity analysis, correlation analysis, factor analysis and chi-square test analysis. The results were presented in the form of graphs, cross tabulations and other figures. Significant statistical techniques applicable to this study will now be reviewed.

4.12.1 Chi square test

Saunders et al (2009:592) state that the chi square test evaluates the probability of relationship between two categorical data variables. It provides an indicator whether the association is likely to be representative of the association in the population. The test

was extensively used in this study in correlation statistics. The greater the value of chi square, the greater the dispersion of the expected frequencies. By examining the value of the test result, a researcher can ascertain whether the variables are dependent on the population.

4.12.2 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis will be used to derive elements of management that affect respondent perception of service from their experiences. Factor analysis correlates a number of variables to reveal high inter-correlations and, thus, new, common underlying variables, factors or constructs (Schindler and Cooper 2003:635). According to Emory and Cooper 1991:630), the technique seeks out patterns that extract principal combinations in the original variables. The techniques thus promise a systematic basis for inference and analysis of management practices.

The advantage of factor analysis, as a statistical technique, is its proficient data reduction capability (Page and Meyer 2005:198). A typical use of factor analysis is in survey research such as the current study, where a researcher wishes to represent a number of questions with a small number of hypothetical factors. For example, as part of a national survey on political opinions, participants may answer three separate questions regarding environmental policy, reflecting issues at the local, state and national levels. Each question, by itself, would be an inadequate measure of attitude towards environmental policy, but together they may provide a better measure of the attitude. Factor analysis can be used to establish whether the three measures do, in fact, measure the same thing. If so, they can then be combined to create a new variable, a factor score variable that contains a score for each respondent on the factor. Factor techniques are applicable to a variety of situations. A researcher may want to know if the skills required to be a decathlete are as varied as the ten events, or if a small number of core skills are needed to be successful in a decathlon. One need not believe that factors actually exist in order to perform a factor analysis, but in practice, the factors are usually interpreted, given names, and spoken of as real things (Sekaran 2003:651).

Factor analysis was also considered suitable for guest ratings of the services they experienced at the hotel. A factor analysis study of Costelo and Osborne (2005:7) found

that the accuracy of factor analysis grows with increased respondent to item ratios. The authors found that only 10% of the items produced in a 2:1 respondent to item ratio contains accurate factor structures. It is anticipated that the respondent to item ratio of the current study will be higher, hence, contributing to a stronger factor structure.

4.12.3 Communalities

Ford, MacCallum and Tait (1986:308) contend that as studies do not declare communalities, it becomes difficult to ascertain the suitability of factor analysis and the degree of common variance attributable to a variable. Norris and Lecavalier (2010:10) elevate the concern to requiring the generation of communalities estimates before extracting factors. The communalities estimates for this study are, therefore, presented in the next chapter.

According to Pearson (2008:2), factor theory maintains that observed values are affected by multiple factors. Communalities is a reference to a statistical technique aimed at accounting for a part observed variance in a variable. The remaining parts may be explained by variable's variance such as its uniqueness, and the joint influence of a specific factor and measurement error. However, Costello and Osborne (2005:4) acknowledge that it is unusual for studies to demonstrate theoretical hallmarks of effective factor analysis as characterised by uniformly high communalities without cross loadings and with most variables loading strongly on each factor.

Nonetheless, communalities provide an estimate of the variance in each variable that is explained by the factor. For example, a communality of 68.6 indicates that 31.4% of the variance cannot be accounted for on this factor (Schindler and Cooper 2003:636). Costello and Osborne (2005:4) contend that variables with communalities less than 0.40 are best left off the factor as it does not correlate with the remaining variables in that factor. The authors contend that communalities generally range from low (0.40) to moderate (0.70).

4.13 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research design and methodology to affirm the congruence of the scheme with the study objectives and the methods by which principal data is to be gathered and analysed. The chapter commenced by locating the study and the study area for the data search. The discussion then turned to the need for two samples of respondents and the method by which they will be derived. Thereafter, selection and development of the response instruments for respondents from each of these samples was justified. The chapter closed by providing an indication of the technique that will be adopted to analyse the collected data.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY FINDINGS

This chapter reports the outcomes of the field study conducted along the framework detailed in the previous chapter. The reported statistics are based on sample responses and presents the results and findings obtained for the questionnaires in this study. This chapter begins by providing the survey response rate of two groups of participants in the study. Thereafter, the descriptive statistics of the study are described. This is followed by a discussion of the reliability of the two instruments used in the study. The chapter will then state the results of statistical analysis for each of the four objectives. In order to better understand the reported results of the study, an objective-led perspective for the presentation of field study outcomes was preferred.

5.1 Introduction

A series of statistical analyses was conducted using the survey data. The methods include descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and factor analysis. The data collected from the responses was analysed with the Predictive Analytic Software (PASW STATISTICS) version 18.0. The methods adopted included descriptive statistics analysis, reliability/validity analysis, correlation analysis, factor analysis and chi-square test analysis. The results will be presented in the form of graphs, cross-tabulation tables and figures.

5.2 Survey response rate

The study was planned to obtain separate surveys of senior managers and of guests at selected hotels serving ecotourism destination in KwaZulu-Natal. There were forty six usable manager questionnaires derived from the fifty eight hotel managers included the census (79.3%).

Managers were also allocated guest questionnaires with appropriate orientation and instruction for the completion by guests on a personal visit by the researcher. The allocation was calculated on 15% of hotel beds available for sale. Four hundred

questionnaires were distributed in this manner.

On later monitoring by the researcher, it was found that many managers lost track of the guest questionnaires and requested further questionnaires. Some managers reported that guests had taken them away on departure. In order to compensate for the 'lost' questionnaires, it was necessary to redistribute a further two hundred and sixty questionnaires to managers. Other managers returned completed surveys as previously arranged.

It later turned out that some of the 'lost' questionnaires were completed and available for collection. These were further to the additional questionnaires that were circulated later. Nineteen questionnaires were received by the researcher from hotel-guests via the mailing address of the Durban University of Technology.

In this way, a total of 587 completed overnight guests questionnaires were collected by the researcher. Of this cohort, there were 366 questionnaires found useable as they were returned from guests who indicated that their primary reason for staying at the hotel was to experience the natural environment. This represented 91.5% of the targeted sample of four hundred from this category of guests.

5.3 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis is intended to provide an overview of the attributes and their distribution among the respondents. The analysis of guests and managers are reported in this section.

5.3.1 Reason for staying at hotel

Hotel-guests were asked the reason for their stay as it was important to identify the nature of the guest patronage to hotels and those guests who could be called ecotourists.

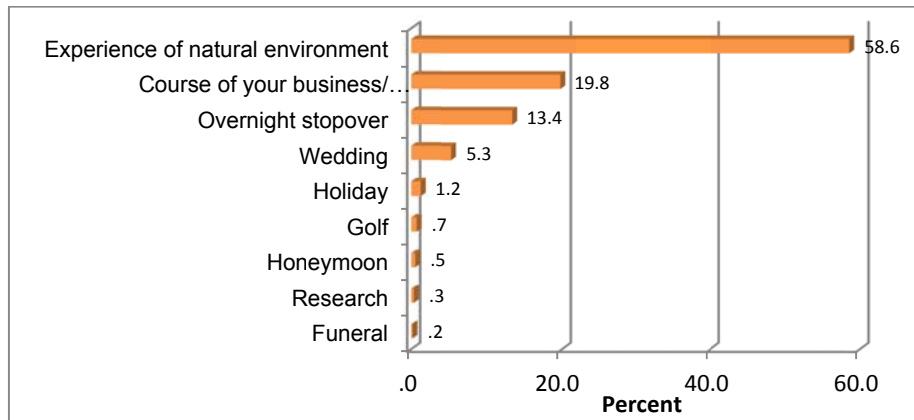


Figure 20 Reasons for visiting the area

The hotel-guests who stayed at the hotel arrived at the destination for various reasons. However, the most number of guests over the survey period were at the destination to experience the natural environment. Figure 20 explains that the majority of hotel-guests stayed at the targeted hotels to experience the natural environment. 0.3% represented research ecotourists. Other reasons for staying mainly include business or employment reasons (19.8%), overnight stop-over (13.4%) and attending a wedding (5.3%).

5.3.2 Respondent characteristics

Basic demographic and biographical information was asked to ascertain variation in these attributes with relationship with the hotel service quality attributes. Table 17 presents the descriptive statistics based on basic demographic and biographical information of 366 hotel-guests seeking experiences of the natural environment.

Table 17 Descriptive statistics of guests

Gender		Frequency	Percentage
	Male	192	52.5
	Female	174	47.5
	Total	366	
Nationality			
	South African	294	80.33
	Non-South African	54	14.67
	Unspecified	18	5
Age			
	Under 20	30	8.2
	20-30	57	15.6
	31-40	87	23.8
	41-50	86	23.5
	51-60	68	18.6
	>60	19	5.2
	unstated	19	5.2

Of the 366 guests indicated in Table 17, 52.4% were male and 47.6% were female. The majority of respondents were males in the group 41-50 (16.4%) followed by females in the group 31-40 (16.1%). The overwhelming majority of respondents were from South Africa (84.5%), with the United States of America and the European Union countries mainly contributing to the rest. A little less than 1% of the respondents were from Asia.

A separate set of descriptive data was needed from managers to ascertain whether the designation of managers qualified them to respond to current practice and thinking of customer service quality. Another data set was required to ascertain the impact of the hotel location on perceptions of service quality and variation in manager practice between locations. The reflection on the hotel service was required to ascertain manager perception of service quality performance against guest perception of service quality experiences.

Most of the 46 managers in Annexure 13 managed hotels in Uthekela (37%) and Umgungundlovu (17.4%). The majority of respondents were general managers (50%) followed by front-office managers (13%) and hotel-operations managers (13%).

The star grading status of the hotel service was required to ascertain congruence in star-rating with manager perception of service quality performance and guest perception of service quality experiences. Of the hotels in Annexure 14, most were rated 3 or 4 star by the Tourism Grading Council. 28.2% of the hotels have not been graded by the Tourism Grading Council. 2 hotels had no form of external quality assurance.

5.4 Reliability

Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. The reliability test of surveys of both the manager and guest questionnaires was conducted.

5.4.1 Reliability of managers' questionnaire

Ordinal scale data in the manager survey comprised management practices for service quality that assessed environmental management practices for ecotourist service quality and generic management practices for service quality. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistic of 0,841 across all 38 ordinal scale items was derived. This statistic was

considered acceptable as it lies well above the minimum reliability coefficient of 0.70 for this type of study (Page and Meyer 2005:198).

5.4.2 Reliability of guest questionnaire

Two Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients were derived. The first with 587 responses advanced a value of 0.939 for the guest questionnaire. The second conducted on the 366 guests whose main reason for staying at the hotel was an experience of the natural environment that was considered acceptable for this study revealed a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0,939. The overall scoring pattern indicates that the Alpha value is greater than the recommended value adopted earlier in 4.10.3.2. The high Cronbach's Alpha values indicate a degree of consistent scoring for the various aspects of the questionnaire.

5.5 Analysis contributing to research objectives

This section will attempt to simplify understanding of the aim of the research by conducting analysis of the results on the basis of the four objectives of the research. The combination of methods to attain the objectives comprised univariate analyses such as frequencies and chi square tests at a 0,05 level of significance, bivariate analysis such as correlation analysis and multivariate analysis such as factor analysis. Some variables in the questionnaire provided data for more than one objective and are repeatedly reported from the perspective of the relevant objective. However, the graphs, cross tabulations and tables of these objectives are not repeated. Instead, after initial presentation, they are later referred to when discussed in the context on the relevant objective.

5.5.1 Results of statistical analysis for objective I

The reporting of data analysis for the first study objective is in two parts. The first part will report on the management factors that influence delivery of service quality. The second part will report on gaps in service quality delivery to tourists in ecotourist hotels. Both parts will be evaluated by way of a factor analysis model.

5.5.1.1 Influence of biographical data

Annexure 15 containing Pearson chi-square tests demonstrates that age and gender played a significant role in terms of how respondents answered 44 of 58 items on the questionnaire. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 on items omitted in Annexure 15, it implies that age and gender did play a role in terms of how respondents answered this question. A p-value is generated from a test statistic. A significant result is indicated with " $p < 0.05$ ". The null hypothesis states that there is no association between the two. The alternate hypothesis indicates that there is an association. The indicated p-values exclude those greater than 0.05 as they indicate that there is no significant relationship between the row (rating of guest experience and attribute importance) and column (attributes of hotel service quality). Annexure 16 illustrates Pearson chi-square tests of factor association with guest biographical information descriptors of age, gender and nationality with seven management factors

5.5.1.2. Factor Model Formulation

The focal area of the first objective is to identify management factors influencing the service that guest receive. Hence, this section will examine the attributes of service experienced by respondents and the importance they attribute to the experience. It will draw on factor analysis to derive elements of management that affect respondent perception of service from their experiences.

Factor analysis correlates a number of variables to reveal high inter-correlations and thus new, common underlying variables, factors or constructs (Schindler and Cooper 2003:635). According to Emory and Cooper (1991:630), the technique seeks out patterns that extract principal combinations in the original variables. The technique thus promises a systematic basis for inference and analysis of management practices.

Hence, factor analysis was considered suitable for guest ratings of the services they experienced at the hotel. According to Costelo and Osborne (2005:7) factor analysis the accuracy of factor analysis grows with increased respondent to item ratios. The authors found that only 10% of the items produced in a 2:1 respondent to item ratio contains accurate factor structures. The current study presents a response of 13:1.

Factor analysis of the data employed the following procedures:

- First, the principle component analysis was used as the extraction method. In order to identify the naturally occurring dimensions of management all 30 items were placed into an exploratory principal components analysis. The principal component analysis identified seven components with Eigen values greater than one. Limiting analysis to seven components was considered adequate as the number of items, according to Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum and Strahan (1999:273), should be at least 3 times the number of factors envisaged;
- Secondly, Varimax with Kaiser Normalization was engaged as the rotation method. This is an orthogonal rotation method that minimizes the number of variables that have high loadings (correlation coefficients) on each factor. It simplifies the interpretation of the factors; and
- Thirdly, the software produces factors with loadings. Factor analysis/loading show inter-correlations between variables (Emory and Cooper 1991:651).

Table 18 Communalities and Factor Loadings

Management factors and hotel-guest statements on natural area hotel service quality	Factor Loadings	Communality	Cronbach Alpha
Management of Employee Engagement		56.9	0.835
The reception staff were attentive	.828	68.6	
The staff told you about things to do in the area	.720	51.9	
You did not have to wait for check-in	.764	58.4	
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient	.737	54.3	
You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff	.816	66.6	
The staff are competent	.644	41.5	
Management of Environmental-care		73.0	0.759
You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels	.898	80.7	
You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures	.774	70.8	
You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency	.916	84.3	
You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal	.817	71.0	
The hotels communication for environmental awareness is of value to me	.735	58.3	
Guest Communication and Information Management		67.2	0.755
You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail	.736	54.2	
The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate	.861	74.1	
The hotel was well signposted	.856	73.4	
Management of Value Proposition		72.6	0.622
The price is fair compared with the service provided	.852	72.6	
The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars	.852	72.6	
Value-adding structures		68.5	0.534
You appreciated the presence of a car park	.828	68.5	
You like the authentic character of the hotel	.828	68.5	
Management of Hotel Operations		56.5	0.768
You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel (ISO, Quality Charter etc.)	.628	40.5	
The bathroom is clean	.581	40.4	
The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work	.844	71.2	

You do not have to wait to get your keys	.543	43.3	
The bedding is comfortable	.620	49.0	
The hotel is appropriately decorated	.885	78.7	
You like the way the room is decorated	.912	83.3	
You find the surroundings beautiful	.609	45.5	
Managing Aesthetic Fit		61.0	0.769
You find the hotel charming	.633	40.1	
The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere	.855	73.2	
The room is pleasant	.851	72.4	
The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant	.764	58.4	
Overall		62.9	.922

In order to identify the naturally occurring management factors of hotel service quality all 29 service quality attributes were placed into an exploratory principal components analysis. Attributes that loaded similarly imply measurement along a similar factor. An examination of the content of items loading at or above 0.5 effectively measured along seven components. The higher or highest loading were used in instances where items cross-loaded at values greater than 0.5.

Respondents accordingly identified seven broad management practices in Table 18 that determine service quality at ecotourist hotels. On the basis of the literature and conceptual understanding of the management of service quality at hotels each composite was formed from items comprising like themes. No items loaded highly on more than one factor. Factors were allocated the labels 'management of employee engagement', 'management of environmental-care', 'guest communication and information management', 'management of value proposition', 'Value-adding structures', 'management of hotel operations' and 'managing aesthetic fit'.

5.5.1.2.1 Factor association guest gender, age and nationality

As in the earlier explanation of significance values, all p-values in Annexure XVI are less than 0.05. Therefore, all values indicate that the 7 factors are significantly related to age, gender and nationality.

5.5.1.2.2 Reliability of Factors

Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. A Cronbach Alpha tests the internal consistency of the items in relation to a single trait

within the instrument. The overall scoring pattern indicates that the Alpha value is greater than the recommended value. All values lie above the minimum value of 0.50 that had been considered acceptable as a measure of reliability for basic research (Nunnally 1975:10). However, Page and Meyer (2005:198) contend that a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is to be considered as “acceptable”.

Hence, the high Cronbach’s Alpha values above 0.70 indicate a degree of consistent scoring for the various aspects of the questionnaire and, therefore that factor analysis can be performed on the data (Page and Meyer 2005:198). It is noted that all the variables that constituted the components loaded perfectly along one factor. This means that the questions (variables) that constituted these components perfectly aligned with the component. Stated differently, the component is congruent to what it was that was meant to be aligned to.

5.5.1.2.3 Communalities of measured variables in guest survey

As indicated in the previous chapter, Costello and Osborne (2005:4) assert that acceptable communalities generally range from low (0.40) to moderate (0.70).

These values are demonstrated in the current study where 12 of 84 variables show low communalities below 0.50. On the other hand, Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), cited in Costello and Osborne (2005:4), regard the lower communality of 0.32 as a good rule of thumb for exclusion. However, Nowaczek and Smale (2010:52) contend that variables with lower values are to be included if they demonstrate conceptual fit. Variation in these observations seems to be accounted for by a study of exploratory factor analysis by Pearson (2008:7). The study criticises the earlier mentioned rule of thumb. Instead it claims that when values for communalities are high, the size of the sample has an insignificant effect on the precision of estimated sample loadings; conversely, when communality values are low, the size of the sample becomes influential. The study regards samples below 100 as small. As this study has a large sample of 400, two items with a score of 0.298 and 0.264 were again evaluated for conceptual fit and retained in the allocated factors.

5.5.1.2.3.1 Communalities for Management of Employee Engagement

As explained earlier, the communality for a given variable can be interpreted as the amount of variation in that variable explained by the factors that constitute the variable. In this instance for Management of Employee Engagement, there are six variables that make up the component as indicated in the component matrix Table 18. This reasoning can then be extended to the rest of the model as the communality values are within acceptable norms, and, therefore suitable for factor analysis. However, there are variables that have low scores (less than 0.50) indicating that there was greater unexplained variability in terms of the responses.

The results indicate that about 41.5% of the variation in terms of “The staff are competent” were explained by the factor model. This argument can then be extended to the rest of the model as the communality values are within acceptable norms. However, low scores indicate that there was greater unexplained variability in terms of the responses.

5.5.1.2.3.2 Communalities for Management of Environmental-care

The communality for this factor in component matrix Table 18 lie well within the recommended range of acceptability of most studies (Nowaczek and Smale 2010: 52; Fabrigar et al 1999: 283). Items “You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency” and “You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels” contribute significantly to the factor model.

5.5.1.2.3.3 Communalities for Guest Communication and Information Management

The communality of variables for this factor in component matrix Table 18 lies well within the recommended range of acceptability of most studies (Nowaczek and Smale 2010: 52; Costello and Osborne 2005: 4; Fabrigar et al 1999: 283).

5.5.1.2.3.4 Communalities for Management of Value Proposition

The communality for this factor in component matrix Table 18 lies well within the recommended range of acceptability of most studies (Nowaczek and Smale 2010:52; Costello and Osborne 2005:4; Fabrigar et al 1999:283). Both items of this factor contributed substantially to explanation of management of value proposition.

5.5.1.2.3.5 Communalities for Value-adding structures

Both items in this factor were considerably explained by the factor model. The communality for this factor in component matrix Table 18 is inside the recommended range of acceptability of most studies (Nowaczek and Smale 2010:52; Costello and Osborne 2005:4; Fabrigar et al 1999:283).

5.5.1.2.3.6 Communalities for Management of Hotel Operations

The communality of variables for this factor in component matrix Table 18 lies well within the recommended range of acceptability of most studies (Nowaczek and Smale 2010:52; Costello and Osborne 2005:4; Fabrigar et al 1999:283). Survey items “You like the way the room is decorated,” “The hotel is appropriately decorated” and “The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work” were significantly explained by the factor model.

5.5.1.2.3.7 Communalities for Managing Aesthetic Fit

In this instance of Managing Aesthetic Fit, there are 5 variables that make up the component as indicated in component matrix Table 18. The results are analysed similar to that for multiple regression: signage against the two common factors yields an $R^2 = 73.2$ (for the variable on “The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere”) (expressed as a percentage), indicating that about 73% of the variation in terms of “The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere” were explained by the factor model.

The communality of variables for this factor lie well within the recommended range of acceptability of most studies (Nowaczek and Smale 2010:52; Costello and Osborne 2005:4; Fabrigar et al 1999:283).

5.5.1.2.3.8 Communalities for overall factor contribution to service quality

As explained earlier, assessment of the how well this factor model is doing can be obtained from the communalities. This gives the percentage of variation explained in the model. Hence, communality may be viewed as an overall assessment of the performance of the model. The individual communalities tell how well the model is working for the individual variables, and the total communality produces an overall assessment of performance.

The ideal is to obtain values that are close to one. This would indicate that the model explains most of the variation for those variables. In this case, the model is acceptable as it explains approximately 63% of the variation for variables that constituted the study. The communality of variables collectively and independently for each factor are well within the recommended range of acceptability of most studies (Nowaczek and Smale 2010:52; Costello and Osborne 2005:4; Fabrigar et al 1999:283).

5.5.1.2.4 Factor Analysis

The general loading pattern for the various components was excellent, except for one which split into two finer components. The results for each component (category) are shown in Table 18.

5.5.1.2.4.1 Management of Employee Engagement

Twenty percent of statements in the instrument accounted for the management of employee engagement. Loadings in this factor lean toward the attentiveness of reception staff. This seems obvious as hotel frontline staff function at a common nexus in the significant number of the hotels' services.

5.5.1.2.4.2 Management of Environmental-care

Approximately 17% of statements in the instrument accounted for the management of environmental-care. Loadings in this factor lean toward energy, water and waste reduction from promoting reusing bed linen and towels. However, when the factors were rotated, split loadings within the factor were revealed.

5.5.1.2.4.3 Guest Communication and Information Management

Approximately 10% of statements in the instrument accounted for guest communication and information management. Loadings in this factor lean toward hotel access.

5.5.1.2.4.4 Management of Value Proposition

Two statements in the instrument accounted for management of value proposition. According to the literature, this factor should not be carried through as a management practice from this study for two reasons. Firstly, the Alpha coefficient 0.622 for the management of value proposition lies below 0.70 and is, therefore, considered inadequate for group data purposes by Page and Meyer (2005:198). Secondly, Fabrigar et al (1999:273) recommend that a factor is to receive consideration for study when it is in excess of two items.

5.5.1.2.4.5 Value-adding structures

Two statements in the instrument accounted for management value-adding structures. However, the Alpha coefficient 0.534 for value-adding structures lies below 0.70 and is considered inadequate for group data purposes by Page and Meyer (2005:198). Moreover, Fabrigar et al (1999:273) recommend that a factor is to receive consideration for study when it is in excess of two items. For these reasons, this factor will not be carried through as management practice in this study.

5.5.1.2.4.6 Management of Hotel Operations

The component measuring Management of Hotel Operations split into two, indicating a mixing of the factors. It is possible that the questions in the overlapping components did not specifically measure what it set out to measure or that the component split along themes. This may be attributable to respondents not clearly distinguishing between the questions constituting the components, subjective interpretation or inability to distinguish what the questions were measuring. However, when the factors were rotated, split loadings within the factor were revealed.

5.5.1.2.4.7 Management of Hotel Operations: Service quality cues

Service quality cues assist guests in developing positive perceptions of hotel quality. Critical cues include external recognition as indicated by independent certification from International Organisation for Standardisation, hygienic area for personal care and consistent, correct operation of guest facilities.

5.5.1.2.4.8 Management of Hotel Operations: Property fittings and fixtures

Loadings in this factor lean toward the agreeable nature of the room décor followed by hotel décor.

5.5.1.2.4.9 Managing Aesthetic Fit

Approximately 13% of statements in the instrument accounted for managing the hotels' aesthetic fit. Loadings in this factor lean toward a desirable pleasantness in the settings and 'serviscape' of the hotel.

This section has reported on the the management factors that influence delivery of service quality. The next section will report on gaps in service quality delivery to tourists in ecotourist hotels.

5.5.1.3 Determination of gaps in service quality delivery to tourists in ecotourism accommodation

The search for gaps in service quality delivery to tourists in ecotourism accommodation is incorporated in the first objective of this study. Difference in measures of importance and experience of tourists will be used in this section to identify gaps in attributes of service quality. Significantly, Chu (2002:285) contends that guest importance ratings with service are closely associated with guest satisfaction. Better delivery to high ratings improves satisfaction. Guest satisfaction has been shown in previous chapters to closely correspond with service quality.

The figures and tables below rate the experience and importance of the statements within categories. The average scoring patterns per category are summarised at the end of this section.

5.5.1.3.1 Management of Employee Engagement

Table 19 indicates that approximately 17.3% of the respondents indicated that the staff

did not inform them of things to do in the area,. A further 13.1% rated no delays in their experience at check-in above the importance they attach to this service attribute.

Table 19 Management of Employee Engagement

	Experience		Importance		
	Yes	No	Very Important	Unsure	Not Important
The reception staff were attentive	95.4	4.6	83.8	14.0	2.3
The staff told you about things to do in the area	69.1	30.9	82.7	6.3	11.1
You did not have to wait for check-in	81.0	19.0	86.9	10.5	2.6
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient	96.9	3.1	92.7	4.3	3.0
You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff	97.4	2.6	94.0	5.4	0.6
The staff are competent	95.9	4.1	94.4	3.8	1.8

Annexure XVII points towards an exceptionally high level of importance for all of the statements. A significant aspect of the factor is the apparent lack of information, volunteered or otherwise from staff about things to do in the area experienced by 30.9% of respondents. 19 % of the respondents were not checked in promptly on arrival at the hotel.

The traditional approach in respect of significance is to provide a statement of statistical significance. To determine whether there were any significant differences between expectations and importance, the chi-square tests were performed in this section. According to Page and Meyer (2005: 323), a P-value is generated from a test statistic. A significant result is indicated with $P\text{-value} < 0.05$. The null hypothesis states that there is no association between the two. The alternate hypothesis indicates that there is an association. The results of these tests are stated in all remaining significant tests of differences between expectations and importance. Chi square tests were performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between experience and importance. Table 22 summarises the results of the chi square tests.

Table 20 Chi square tests for Management of Employee Engagement

	Significance
The reception staff were attentive	.028
The staff told you about things to do in the area	.000
You did not have to wait for check-in	.000
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient	.000

You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff	0.111
The staff are competent	0.742

It is noted that there is a statistically significant difference between experience and importance for the first 4 statements. That means, while respondents rate the service statements as important, that they did not experience service at a level congruent with importance rating.

The last two statements indicate that there was no significant difference between experience and importance values. This finding infers that not only do respondents rate the service statements as important, but that they experienced them it as well.

5.5.1.3.2 Management of Environmental-care

It is noted from Table 21 that there is a general pattern of experience being higher than importance. All attributes of environmental-care are highly-rated with a mean importance of 78.42%.

Table 21 Management of Environmental-care

	Experience		Importance		
	Yes	No	Very Important	Unsure	Not Important
You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels	82.2	17.8	85.3	10.6	4.1
You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures	85.9	14.1	81.1	15.7	3.3
You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency	69.8	30.2	76.9	16.4	6.7
You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal	68.6	31.4	70.1	23.5	6.4
The hotels communication for environmental awareness is of value to me	75.8	24.2	78.7	15.1	6.3

Most guests in Annexure XVIII have had positive experiences of the environmental-care at hotels. This observation may be attributable to the nature orientation of respondents.

It can be deduced from Table 21 that the 'not important' low average score of 5.36% infer considerable concern of most other respondents for the comfort of knowing that that their stay is not damaging the environment. However, approximately 30% of the respondents do not attach worth to measures for waste disposal at the hotels. Also, hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal was not seen by 31.4% of

respondents. Respondent opinion may be attributable to them not being aware of the hotels' practice for waste disposal as indicated by the almost 24% of guests who expressed uncertainty. Equally, 30.2% of respondents do not appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency.

The Chi square tests reflected P-values < 0.05. Table 22 summarises the results of the chi square tests for this category. All of the statements show significant relationships between what is important and what is expected. The assertion that guest comfort of knowing that their stay is not damaging the environment can be made with greater confidence, as suggested by the high significance values.

Table 22 Chi Square Tests for Management of Environmental-care

	Significance
You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels	.000
You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures	.000
You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency	.000
You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal	.000
The hotels communication for environmental awareness is of value to me	.000

5.5.1.3.3 Guest Communication and Information Management

According to Table 23, most respondents enjoyed positive exchanges with the hotels. However, the accuracy information about how to get the hotel when booking was regarded as not being important by 12% of the respondents. This may be accounted for by existing patterns where nature tourists travel in a group, guest familiarity with the locality or the availability of geographical positioning systems. Notwithstanding, the service was received by a majority of respondents.

Table 23 Guest Communication and Information Management

	Experience		Importance		
	Yes	No	Very Important	Unsure	Not Important
You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail	94.2	5.8	92.3	4.6	3.1
The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate	94.2	5.8	88.1	9.1	2.7
The hotel was well signposted	92.4	7.6	89.6	4.1	6.4

Annexure XVIX illustrates that the inputs from communication and information opinions of guests in respect booking status, hotel location and access show a mean of 90%. This factor is, therefore, very important to the management of guest satisfaction.

Table 24 summarises the results of the chi square tests for this category to establish significance of relationships.

Table 24 Chi Square Tests for Guest Communication and Information Management

	Significance
You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail	.000
The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate	.000
The hotel was well signposted	.07

The first two statements show a significant relationship whilst the third does not. The low significance, as mentioned earlier, may be accounted for by response from those who are travelling on a group tour or those familiar with the locality or the use of geographical positioning systems.

5.5.1.3.4 Management of Value Proposition

Table 25 illustrates that respondents mostly enjoy good experiences that are worthy of their needs, intentions and the price they pay. However, almost 16 % of the respondents do not place importance on the correspondence between the quality on offer at the hotel with its star-rating. This could be attributable to respondents from 17.4 % of the hotels that are ungraded. Notwithstanding, the service was received by a majority of respondents. However, 11.8% of respondents did not associate the price they pay for hotel accommodation with the service provided. Responses may have come from research ecotourists or 'hard' ecotourists whose primary reasons for hotel stay are independent of price or service quality.

Table 25 Management of Value Proposition

Experience	Importance
------------	------------

	Yes	No	Very Important	Unsure	Not Important
The price is fair compared with the service provided	86.4	13.6	88.2	9.5	2.3
The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars	87.4	12.6	84.1	13.0	2.9

Annexure XX affirms that the perceived value offer by hotels is significant. A mean of 86.15% indicates respondents' desire for positive value-proposition from hotels. Management of value proposition is, therefore, very important to the management of guest satisfaction.

The chi square test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between experience and importance. Table 26 summarises the results of the chi square tests for this category.

Table 26 Chi Square Tests for the Management of Value Proposition

	Sig.
The price is fair compared with the service provided	.000
The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars	.000

The assertion that practice and star-rating are related to the management of valued proposition can be made with a greater degree of confidence.

5.5.1.3.5 Value-adding structures

According to Annexure XXI most hotels provide a car park and is highly desirable by most hotel-guests. Hotels had also communicated their authenticity well and the attribute was well appreciated by most respondents.

Table 27 indicates that the existence of a car park is found to be unimportant to only 19.2% of respondents. This may be attributable to ecotourist being bussed in by coach tours or responses from respondents other than the 'soft' ecotourists.

Table 27 Value-adding structures

	Experience		Importance		
	Yes	No	Very Important	Unsure	Not Important
You appreciated the presence of a car park	94.1	5.9	80.8	12.9	6.3
You like the authentic character of the hotel	91.5	8.5	88.7	9.3	2.0

The authenticity of elements in the service, appearance and configuration of the appeal of the hotel is not regarded as important by 11.3% of respondents. This discrepancy may be accounted for by respondents who are research ecotourists or 'hard' ecotourists.

The chi square test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between experience and importance. Table 28 summarises the results of the chi square tests for this category.

Table 28 Chi Square Tests for Value-adding structures

	Sig.
You appreciated the presence of a car park	.000
You like the authentic character of the hotel	.000

Both P-values < 0.05 are indicative of a significant relationship between experience of the convenience of a car park and hotel authenticity with the importance attached by guests to these attributes.

5.5.1.3.6 Management of Hotel Operations

Table 29 illustrates that some of the findings are congruent with the market descriptors of ecotourists. For example, 22% of respondents found malfunctioning in all guest hotel facilities. Approximately 12.5% seem to not find this objectionable. 16.1% of respondents had to wait for their keys. 14.4% of did not find this objectionable. Also, the décor in the hotel public areas (21.6%) and in the rooms (24.2%) is not important to respondents.

Table 29 Management of Hotel Operations

	Experience		Importance		
	Yes	No	Very Important	Unsure	Not Important
You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the	88.1	11.9	86.0	12.0	1.9

hotel (ISO, Quality Charter, etc.)					
The bathroom is clean	95.6	4.4	94.8	2.9	2.3
The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work	78.0	22.0	87.5	9.6	2.9
You do not have to wait to get your keys	83.9	16.1	85.6	13.8	0.6
The bedding is comfortable	90.6	9.4	96.9	2.0	1.1
The hotel is appropriately decorated	93.5	6.5	78.4	15.6	6.0
You like the way the room is decorated	90.6	9.4	75.9	21.9	2.3
You find the surroundings beautiful	98.2	1.8	95.8	2.5	1.7

It is indicated in Annexure XXII that importance ratings for prompt room key handover and comfortable bedding and the functionality of guest facilities were over that of the ability of hotels to provide this service to respondents who rated these 'very important'. Other attributes in this factor were well delivered in excess of importance ratings at hotels.

The chi square test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between experience and importance. Table 30 summarises the results of the chi square tests to show significant relationship for this category.

Table 30 Chi Square Tests for Management of Hotel Operations

	Asymp. Sig.
You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel (ISO, Quality Charter, etc.)	.000
The bathroom is clean	.000
The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work	.000
You do not have to wait to get your keys	.000
The bedding is comfortable	.000
The hotel is appropriately decorated	.000
You like the way the room is decorated	.000
You find the surroundings beautiful	.000

Table 30 depicts every P-value < 0.05 indicative of a significant relationship between experience of guests and importance of these hotels' attributes to them.

5.5.1.3.7 Managing Aesthetic Fit

Table 31 illustrates the need for aesthetic appeal is very important by 94.85% of all respondents. A small proportion (5.6%) found no appeal in the charm of the hotel. In addition, 8.2% of respondents do not place importance in the charm of the hotel. 6.9% of respondents do not place importance in pleasantness of the hotel surroundings.

Table 31 Managing Aesthetic Fit

	Experience		Importance		
	Yes	No	Very Important	Unsure	Not Important
You find the hotel charming	94.4	5.6	91.8	7.3	0.9
The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere	97.6	2.4	97.4	2.0	0.6
The room is pleasant	97.3	2.7	96.9	2.8	0.3
The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant	98.2	1.8	93.2	6.3	0.6

Annexure XXIII emphasises the minimal gap in importance ratings by respondent of hotel aesthetic appeal and their experience of it. Stated differently, the quality of aesthetic appeal managers are delivering coincide with the importance attributed to this element of service quality.

Table 32 summarises the results of the chi square tests for this category.

Table 32 Chi Square Tests for Managing Aesthetic Fit

	Asymp. Sig.
You find the hotel charming	.000
The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere	.000
The room is pleasant	.000
The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant	.000

The chi square appraisal in Table 32 shows that the results of the chi square tests present significant relationship for this category of aesthetic atmosphere and ambiance experienced by guests and its importance to them.

5.5.1.3.8 Gaps in respondent experiences and importance ratings

The overall scoring pattern for the categories is shown below.

Table 33 Variation in respondent experiences and importance ratings

	Experience	Importance
Management of Employee Engagement	89.3	89.1
Management of Environmental-care	76.5	78.4
Guest Communication and Information Management	93.6	90.0
Management of Value Proposition	86.9	86.1
Value-adding structures	92.8	84.8
Management of Hotel Operations	89.8	87.6

Managing Aesthetic Fit	96.9	94.8
Overall	89.4	87.3

In summary, collective experience across all factors (89.4%) rate above the importance attributed to the factor (87.3). In particular, positive experiences of hotel value-adding structures were enjoyed by 92.8% of respondents. On the other hand, this factor is not high in respondent importance ratings. Of all factors, the importance ratings for items in the management of environmental-care are the lowest.

According to figure 21, a significant number of respondents rated items on the management of employee engagement highly (89.1%). However, 39 respondents (10.7%) did not experience all items in this factor.

In the items related to the management of environmental-care, 78.4% of respondents found these items to be important. On the other hand, 86 respondents (23.5%) reported not having experienced all this items in this factor.

Twenty three respondents (6.4%) did not experience all the items related to the guest communication and information management. However, 90% of respondents regard this attribute as being important.

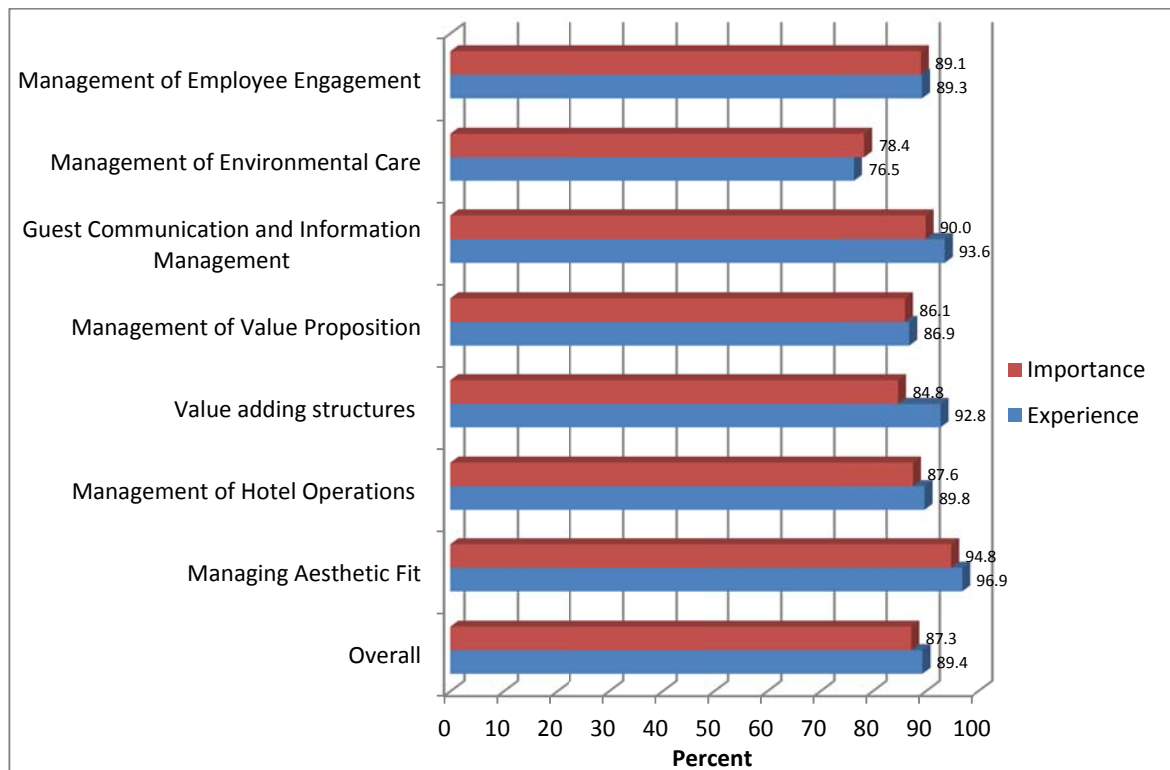


Figure 21 Variation in respondent experiences and importance ratings

A significant number of respondents in figure 21 rated items on the management of value proposition highly (89.1%). However, 48 respondents (13.1%) did not experience all items in this factor.

In the items related to the management value-adding structures, 84.8% of respondents found these items to be important. On the other hand, 26 respondents (7.2%) reported not having experienced all these items in this factor.

Items related in the management of hotel operations were regarded as important by 87.6% of respondents. Conversely, 37 respondents (10.2%) reported not having experienced all items in the factor. A significant number of respondents rated items on managing aesthetic fit highly (87.3%). However, 39 respondents (10.6%) did not experience all items in this factor.

The chi square test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between experience and importance. P-values < 0.05 are

indicative of a significant relationship. Table 34 summarises the results of the chi square tests for this category.

Table 34 Chi Square Tests Variation in respondent experiences and importance ratings

	Asymp. Sig.
Management of Employee Engagement	.000
Management of Environmental-care	.000
Guest Communication and Information Management	.000
Management of Value Proposition	.000
Value-adding structures	.000
Management of Hotel Operations	.000
Managing Aesthetic Fit	.000

Table 34 shows a significant relationship for the composite scale of experiences of the outcome of management of hotel attributes with the importance attached to them by guests.

5.5.1.4 Hotel performances of customer service quality

This item sought to establish hotel-guest perception of service quality across hotels in all ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal. The majority of guests had enjoyed good service quality.

Nearly 80% of the respondents in figure 22 were happy with the quality of customer service received at the hotel. Of the 63 respondents (17.2%) who reported below good customer service quality, 61 respondents found service quality to be of an acceptable standard.

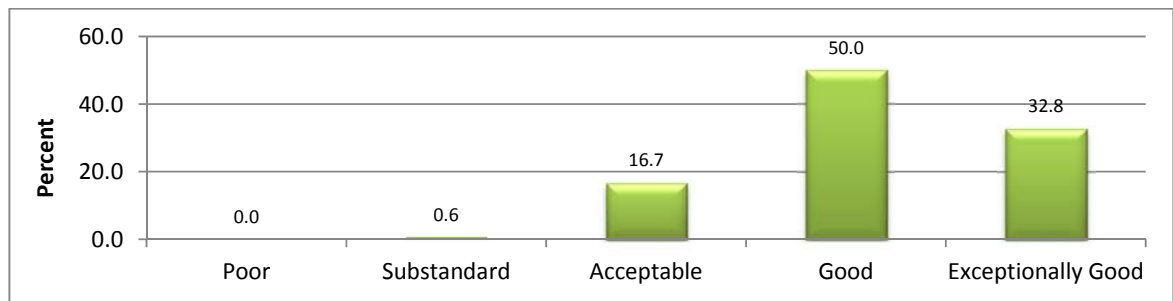


Figure 22 Rating of hotel quality of customer service

5.5.1.5 Meeting customer needs

Most respondents were happy the manner in which hotels in natural areas of KwaZulu-Natal generally meet their requirements.

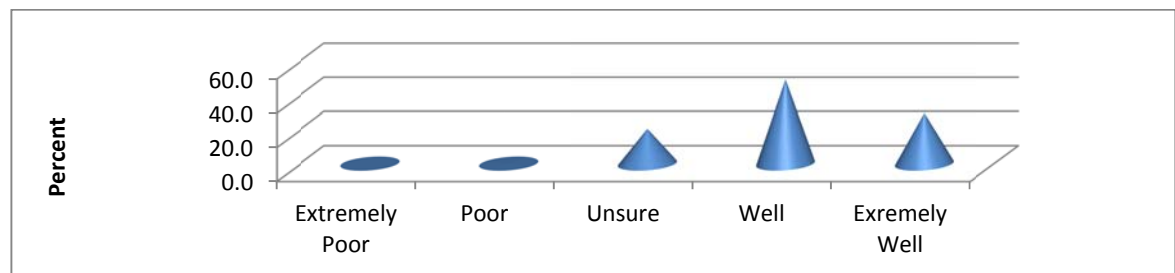


Figure 23 Extent to which hotels in ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal fulfil guest needs

Figure 23 illustrates that over 30% found exceptionally high congruence with their needs. The numbers of unfulfilled guests are negligible.

5.5.1.6 Open responses of guests

Annexure XXIII illustrates that a majority of guests were pleased with the quality of service at the hotels. Notably, almost 65% of respondents indicated their content with accommodation, standard and level of service and helpfulness of staff. The summary comments indicate that guests were positive in respect of the degree to which their service quality needs were fulfilled by ecotourist hotels.

However, these were not without unevenness. Some respondents perceived gaps in service quality such as inferior facilities and services, lack of local area knowledge and enthusiasm among staff, unacceptable standards in servicing of rooms, the poor congruence of hotel design with the ecology of the natural environment, unsatisfactory lighting, insufficient towels, inferior bedding, poor kitchen equipment and poor food.

5.5.1.7 Conclusion to objective 1

This objective established that there are mismatches in guest actual experience of the variables of interest for customer service quality and the importance they attach to that variable. Most guests rated their experiences above the importance they attach to those experiences. However, the variables related to guests' experience of the management of environmental-care were generally rated lower than its importance to them.

Five management factors emerged to manage guest experiences of service quality, namely: management of employee engagement, management of environmental-care, guest communication and information management, management of hotel operations and managing aesthetic fit.

5.5.2 Results of statistical analysis for objective 2

The second objective of this study sought to evaluate the significance of selected quality management practices in the management of the service quality in ecotourism accommodation. A hotel manager or their senior nominee completed the manager survey. The survey aimed to establish the extent of managers' practices for service quality in ecotourism that were derived from literature.

5.5.2.1 Respondents to the manager survey

The literature indicates that senior staff at hotels displayed superior knowledge of the quality of customer service at hotels. All respondents are senior staff at hotels. According to Figure 24, the majority of respondents to the manager survey came from the ranks of general managers.

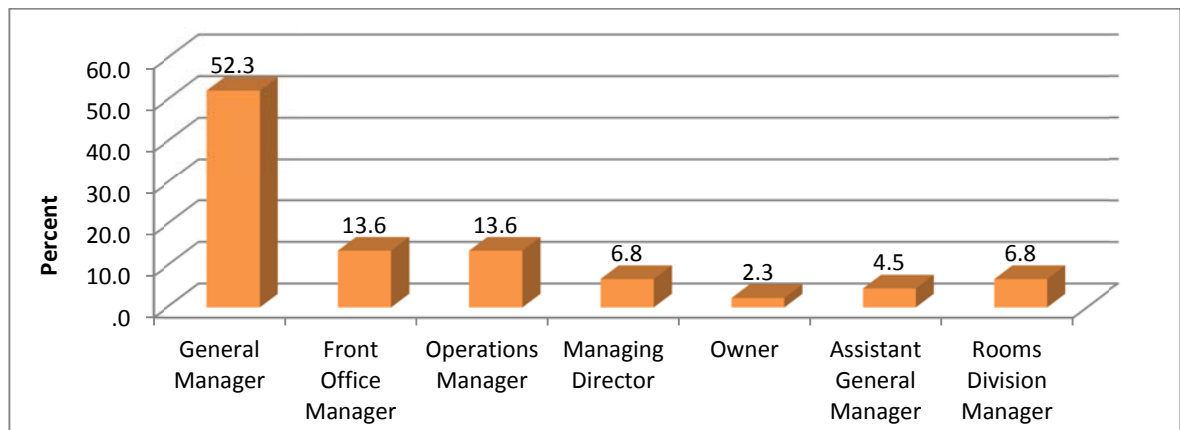


Figure 24 Position held by respondents to manager survey

5.5.2.2 Hotel grading by Tourism Grading Council

Most hotels in the study area had been allocated a star-rating by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa. It is noteworthy that there were no one-star properties and over 30% of the hotels in Annexure XXV were four-star properties. Over 40% of respondent hotels are ungraded or did not subscribe to the Tourism Grading Council system of grading. The number of properties that were 5-star was negligible.

5.5.2.3 Association of Hotel Star-rating with location and perceived quality of customer service

Annexure XXVI illustrates the consequence of relationship between hotel star-rating, location and perceived quality of customer service. Consistent with Brady and Cronin (2001:40), this study intended that the relationship will be useful to interpretation of the importance and experience of service quality by guests, especially in the context of unmanageable location based stimuli. However, even though there were two strong inverse relationships (-0.949 and -0.740), the p-values indicated that relationships among these variables are not significant. Stated differently, hotel grade and the location had little association with the perceived quality of customer service.

5.5.2.4 Alternate and additional hotel ranking

Eight respondents indicated that their hotel has an alternate grading system. Of these, 4 respondents provided the allocated grade and alternate grading system in Annexure XXVI.

5.5.2.5 Generic service quality management practices

Manager's ratings, depicted in Table 35, reveal that the importance of the generic service quality management practices is unevenly rated.

Table 35 Importance of generic service quality management practices

Service Quality Management Practice	Frequency of Importance ratings (%)	Community %	Cronbach's Alpha
COMPENSATION FOR QUALITY		81.7	.879
There are one or more significant and visible employee compensation practices that can be traced to delivery of service quality.	39.2	82.7	
Customer service quality is a compensation criterion for management personnel.	39.2	71.2	
Customer service quality is a compensation criterion for non-management personnel.	37.0	91.3	
BENCHMARKING		63.9	.675
Sales Distribution systems	45.7	52.8	
Customer contact systems	56.5	52.3	
Service characteristics	58.7	59.9	
As a source of new ideas	56.5	61.8	
Against best practices	60.9	76.2	
Competitor analysis	58.7	80.2	
TRAINING MANAGEMENT		65.3	.708
The skills and competencies that yield service quality are known by staff.	67.4	63.9	
Employees are involved in the selection of training and skills development needs.	67.4	54.8	
Employees are adequately trained for the tasks they perform.	71.7	77.0	
EMPOWERMENT		59.5	.654
Staff tasks are compatible with policies and guidelines.	84.7	53.0	
The standard of our customer service is clearly communicated to both customer and staff.	84.8	57.2	
Our customer contact staff are sufficiently independent to make decisions to respond to requests to customize the service and handle local difficulties.	91.3	68.5	
TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT		63.6	.713
Technology and support systems do support and facilitate quality service.	58.7	51.3	
We find innovative uses for technology to support customer service quality.	43.5	65.5	
Our use of technology delivers service quality more than it reduces operating costs.	45.9	74.2	
ASSESSMENT		62.1	.685
Non-management staff is appraised on service quality performance.	67.4	76.7	
Measures of customer feedback display the result of the team effort.	73.9	79.7	
All corrective action to customer service is based on management analysis.	78.2	29.8	
PROCESS MANAGEMENT		60.1	.726
The organisations expectations in respect of service quality is clearly communicated to staff.	87.0	77.9	
Our suppliers heed our service quality targets	76.1	77.9	
Documentation Processing and Invoicing.	80.4	52.5	
Complaints Handling.	93.5	78.0	
Customer Training.	67.4	49.7	
PARTICIPATION		52.5	.541
Service delivery personnel are valued in the organisation.	91.3	33.9	
Our staff are enthusiastic about this business and the local area.	76.1	69.6	
Customer contact staff attend service quality specific meetings.	82.6	54.0	
TEAMWORK		57.9	.635
I receive tasks that are supported by other departments of sections who work to our common purpose.	82.6	65.3	
We have a service-oriented organisation structure.	91.3	38.9	
I work with multiple people groupings whose customer services perspective are similar.	84.7	69.4	
TRAINING		51.7	.509
People and customer management feature strongly in staff training.	82.6	76.0	
Employees are multi-skilled to support guest service quality.	73.9	52.6	
Employees appreciate our service level specification and therefore adequately fulfilling them.	76.1	26.4	
OUTCOME MEASUREMENT		81.9	.886
There are employee productivity measures that can be traced to employee delivery of service quality.	56.6	71.4	
Systems are in place to consistently monitor customer expectations	72.8	86.9	

Our process improvement interventions are informed by regular measurement of our delivery of service quality.	76.1	87.4	
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5.5.2.5.1 Reliability of instrument for gathering manager service quality management practices

All Cronbach Alpha values were above the minimum value of 0.50 that had been considered acceptable as a measure of reliability for basic research (Nunnally 1975:10). Conversely, Page and Meyer (2005:198) contend that a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is to be considered as “acceptable”. Hence, the values in Table 36 were considered acceptable.

5.5.2.5.2 Compensation for quality

According to Figure 25, managers generally reported that a service quality context existing compensation systems did not support encouragement from management and the will among employees for repeat quality-enhancing behaviour.

A majority of managers did not receive further compensation for maintaining superior customer service quality. 60% of managers’ report that employee compensation practices are detached from customer service quality.

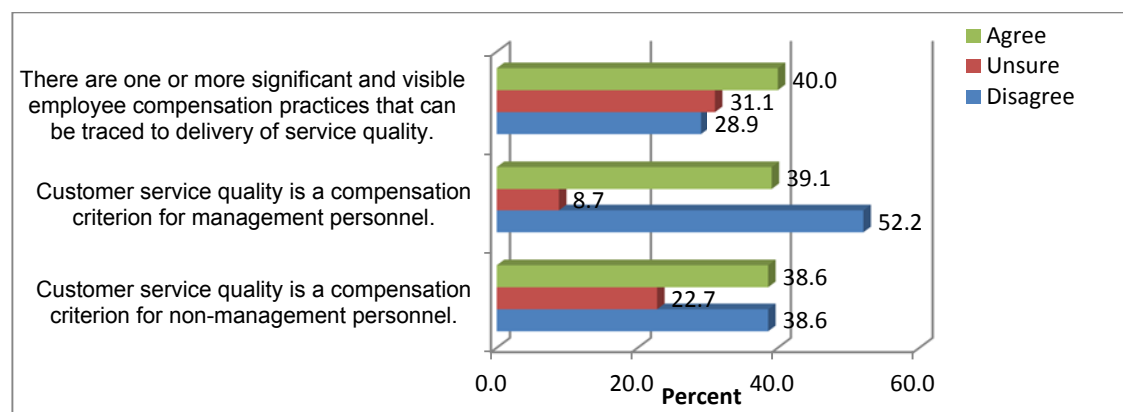


Figure 25 Compensation for quality

Fifteen managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item in Annexure XXVIII. Managers believed that certain conditions must exist for employee compensation to advance service quality. Some managers advanced non-financial recognition of service quality achievement. Of note is that over 16% of managers sought

their organisation's recognition and not monetary compensation for their own achievement.

5.5.2.5.3 Benchmarking

The majority of hotel managers in Figure 26 benchmarked the delivery of accommodation service quality.



Figure 26 Benchmarked accommodation service quality

Over 67% of hotel managers used various forms of external and corporate-wide standards as management tools to establish and continually enhance the quality. These standards had been expressed by the variety of benchmarking practices in figure 27. Most managers benchmarked against best practices and hotel service characteristics.

Twelve managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item in Annexure XXIX. Managers held a variety of perspectives of how benchmarking could promote customer service quality in their hotel. Most managers aspired for best hotel service quality practice. Managers sought congruence with ideal hotel service quality characteristics. It was also necessary for managers to seek out competitor practice.

Open responses of managers indicate that whilst they observe the merits of benchmarking, there are conditions for their successful implementation. Over 17% of the managers set high standards for their cuisine. A similar proportion of managers found use in compliance with guest service quality feedback.

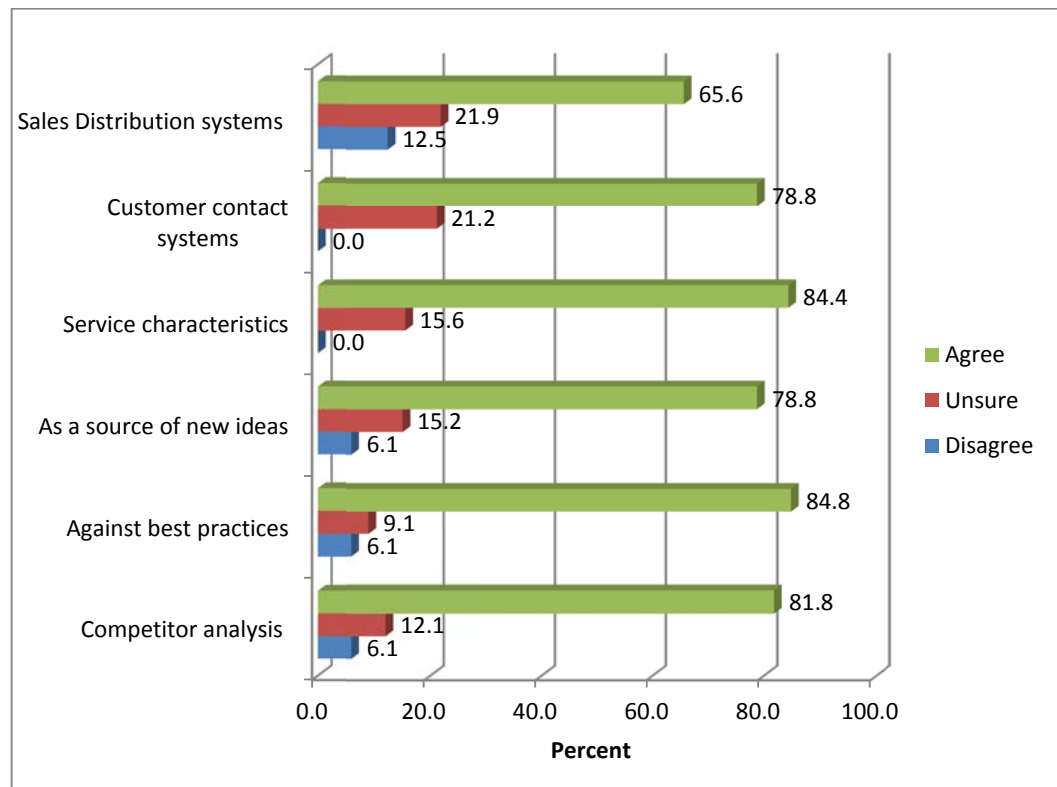


Figure 27 Benchmarking Practices

5.5.2.5.4 Training Management

It can be inferred from Figure 28 that most managers are positive in respect of the contribution that is made by the management of training to customer service quality.

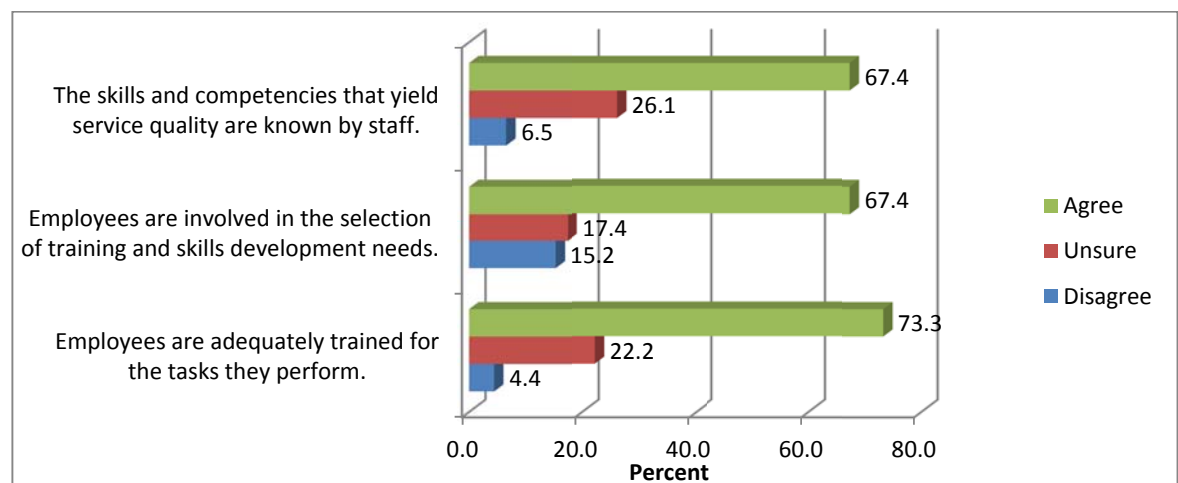


Figure 28 Training Management

However, almost 30% of managers were not satisfied with employee contribution to

customer service quality. It is noteworthy that over 26% of managers are not assured that their employees are adequately trained for the tasks they perform.

Twenty one managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item in Annexure XXX. Almost 30% of managers had communication concerns that arise from staff poor literacy levels and their lack of English proficiency. There was a need for the tracking of the success of training interventions by almost 15% of managers.

Some success indicators in general human resources practices had been reported by some managers by way of job rotation, staff retention strategies, change management and staff appraisal systems.

5.5.2.5.5 Empowerment

Responses from most managers in Figure 29 contended that their staff was well empowered. Below 10% of managers, who responded to this open-ended question, did not perceive their customer contact staff to be sufficiently independent to make decisions to respond to customer requests for advanced hotel services.

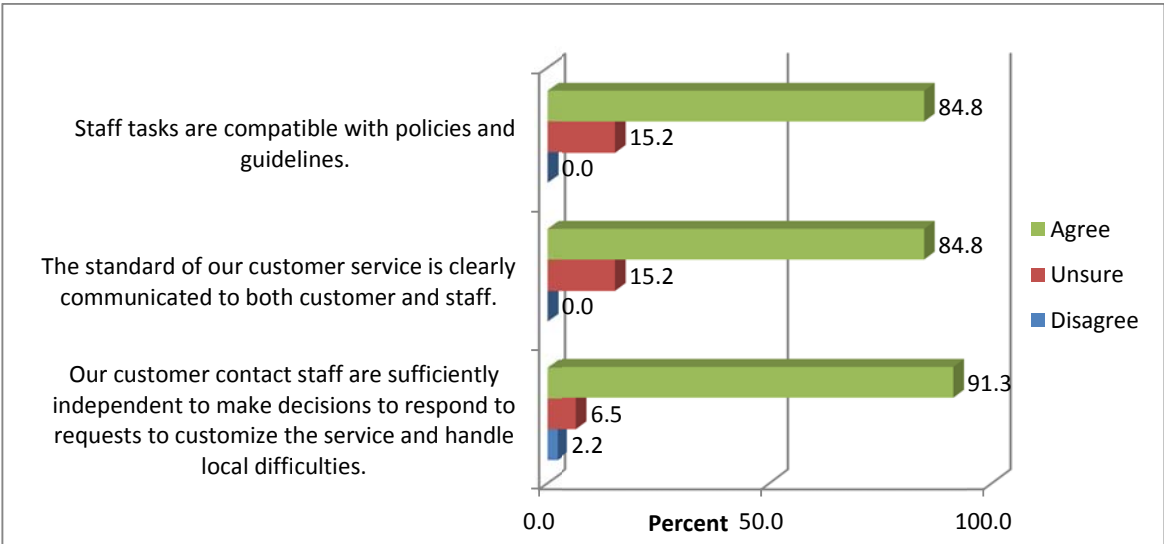


Figure 29 Manager views on employee empowerment levels

Eighteen managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item in Annexure XXX. Managers indicated that ownership, sense of belonging and enhanced self-esteem resulted from empowerment to improve customer service quality. Seven managers perceived that there is empowerment advantage that benefits customer

service quality when “Every employee takes ownership and address customer enquiries at minimum delays”.

5.5.2.5.6 Technology Management

Technology did not appear to constitute a significant driver of customer service quality. More than 55% of managers did not observe innovative adoption of technology for better customer service at their hotels. Figure 30 further indicates that over 53 % of managers observed more, higher technology cost implications than the derived service quality benefits for guests.

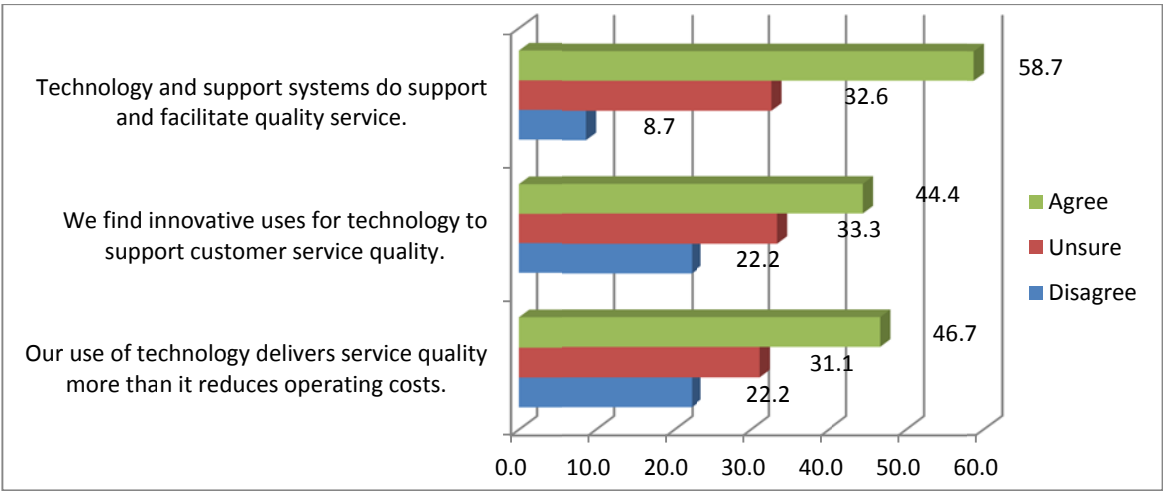


Figure 30 The contribution of technology management

Seventeen managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item in Annexure XXXI. Most managers’ perceived affordability and customer benefit to be the most important condition for the implementation of hotel technology. Some managers defined technology efficiency by its usefulness for tracking of guest satisfaction and relevant alignment of technology with these results. General needs, specifically in respect of conferencing and communication technology, were raised by approximately 25% of respondents to the open-ended question.

5.5.2.5.7 Assessment

Most hotels had a system of assessment to assist managers in the management of service quality. Figure 31 indicates, surprisingly, that a small percentage of hotels did

not favour assessment. The majority of managers adopt a team-assessment approach and base management decisions on delivery of customer service quality on feedback from assessment.

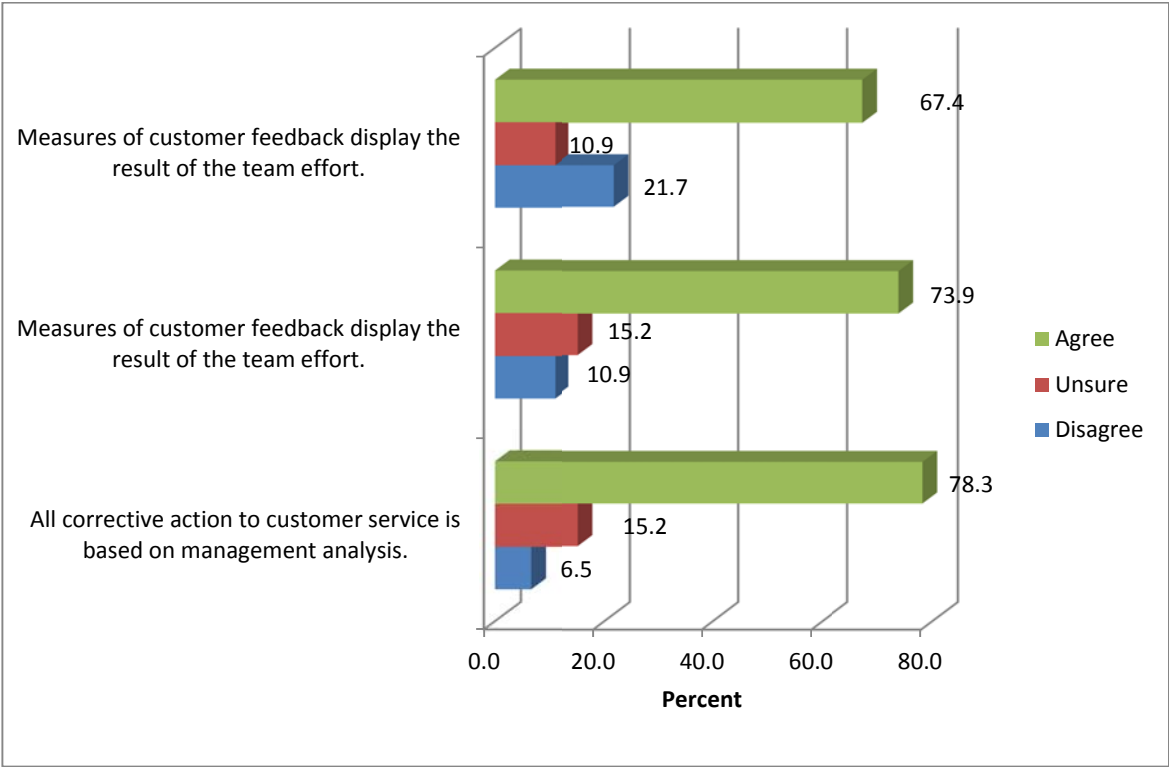


Table 31 Assessment

Eighteen managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item in Annexure XXXIII. It demonstrates the view of managers in regular assessment of customer service quality indicators to promote service quality.

Most respondents checked assessment indicators regularly to inform necessary improvements to ensure customer satisfaction. Almost 20% of managers perceive importance in staff involvement in assessment.

5.5.2.5.8 Process Management

According to figure 32, there seemed to be more emphasis on outgoing expectation from managers than training of employees to meet the expectations. Complaints handling was regarded by over 90% of managers as a significant contributor to value-enhancing tourist services. For the same reason, 87% of managers confirmed that the

organisations' expectations in respect of service quality are clearly communicated to staff.

Sixteen managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item in Annexure XXXIV. Over 50% of these respondents submitted that process management worked in an environment of good communication and alignment with customer satisfaction and service delivery. Additionally, regular monitoring to immediately address variations was necessary.



Figure 32 Management of service process

5.5.2.5.9 Participation

Figure 33 infers that employee participation is considered vital by all respondents.

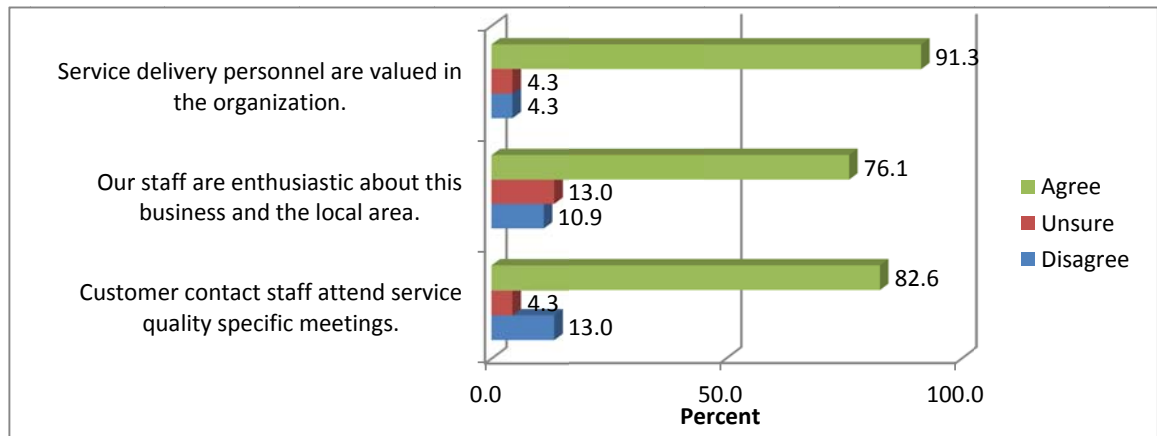


Figure 33 Employee Participation

Over 90% of managers placed significant value on the contribution of their staff to customer service quality. Eleven percent of managers did not believe that their staff did not use their service role to contribute effectively to advancement of the local area.

Nineteen managers responded to the open-ended question requesting conditions for effective employee participation in Annexure XXXV. Twenty six percent of managers perceived that they adequately recognize staff for their participation in customer service quality. Over 10% of managers view participation as the basis of teamwork. Approximately 11% of respondents held that participation must be managed as an outcome of positive employee motivation. On the other hand, over 26% of respondents believed that participation must be managed as a causal factor leading to positive employee motivation.

5.5.2.5.10 Teamwork

Figure 34 indicates that over 90% of managers deemed that their organisations are founded on a service-oriented structure.

Almost 83% of managers consider that departments in their service orientated organisation operate interdependently. Almost 85% of managers share common customer service perspectives. Sixteen managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item in Annexure XXXVI.

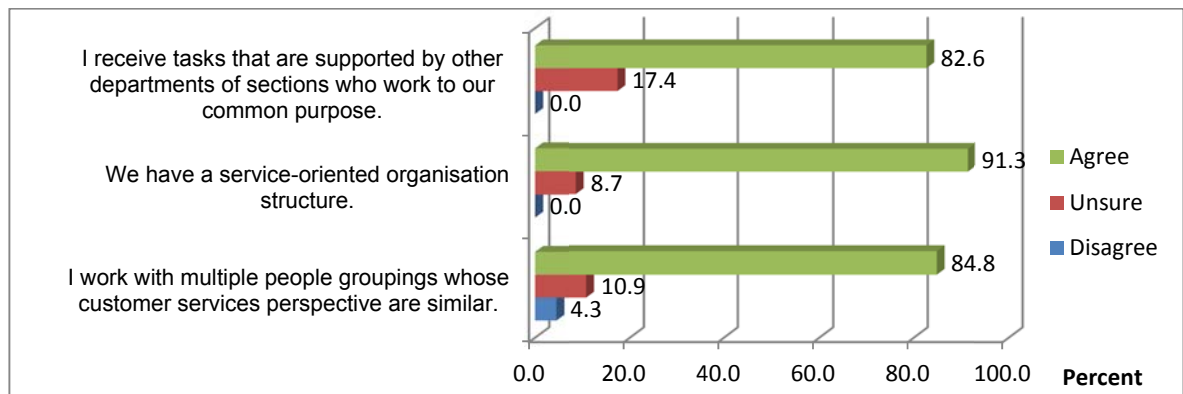


Figure 34 Teamwork contribution to customer service quality

Most responses favour the potential in teamwork to enhance customer service quality, as indicated by 50% of respondents who recognise the crucial role of staff working as a team for service quality. Team commitment, effective team communication and clear, shared understanding of team goals were considered necessary. Eighteen percent of respondents confirm that their hotels provide clear directives to facilitate teamwork.

5.5.2.5.11 Training

All managers responses depicted in Figure 35 do not agree that their employees are capacitated by adequate training to perform to the hotel service level specification.

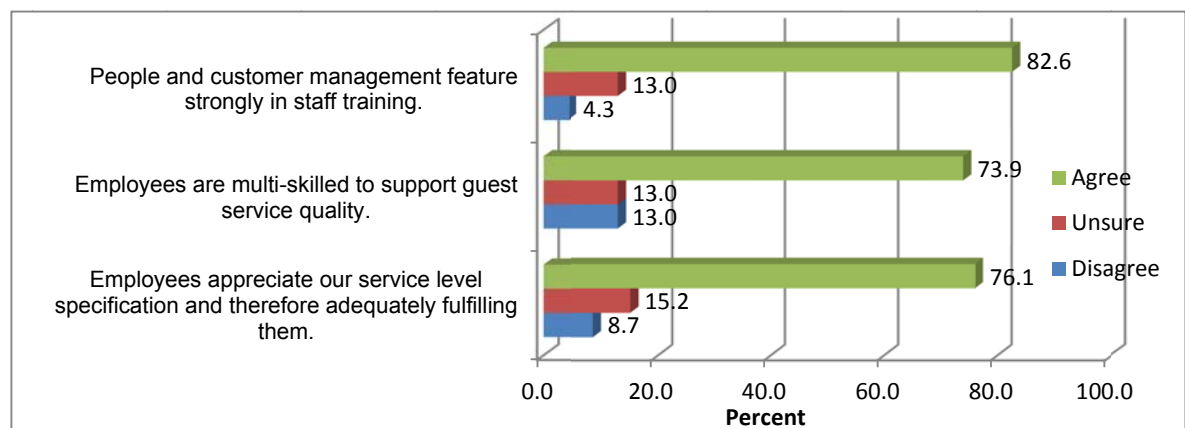


Figure 35 Staff Training

Over 80% of managers in Figure 26 consider their organisation offers staff training for customer management. Most managers are confident of the support given to employees to offer compliant guest service quality.

15 managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item Annexure XXXVI. The graph shows contends that over 33% of managers contend that training is supported by skills development initiatives. Most responses point towards a conducive ethos for customer service quality improvement by training. Approximately 27% of respondents perceived that training is advanced by accurate needs' identification.

5.5.2.5.12 Outcome Measurement

Most managers in Figure 36 have well placed outcome measures to manage customer service quality.

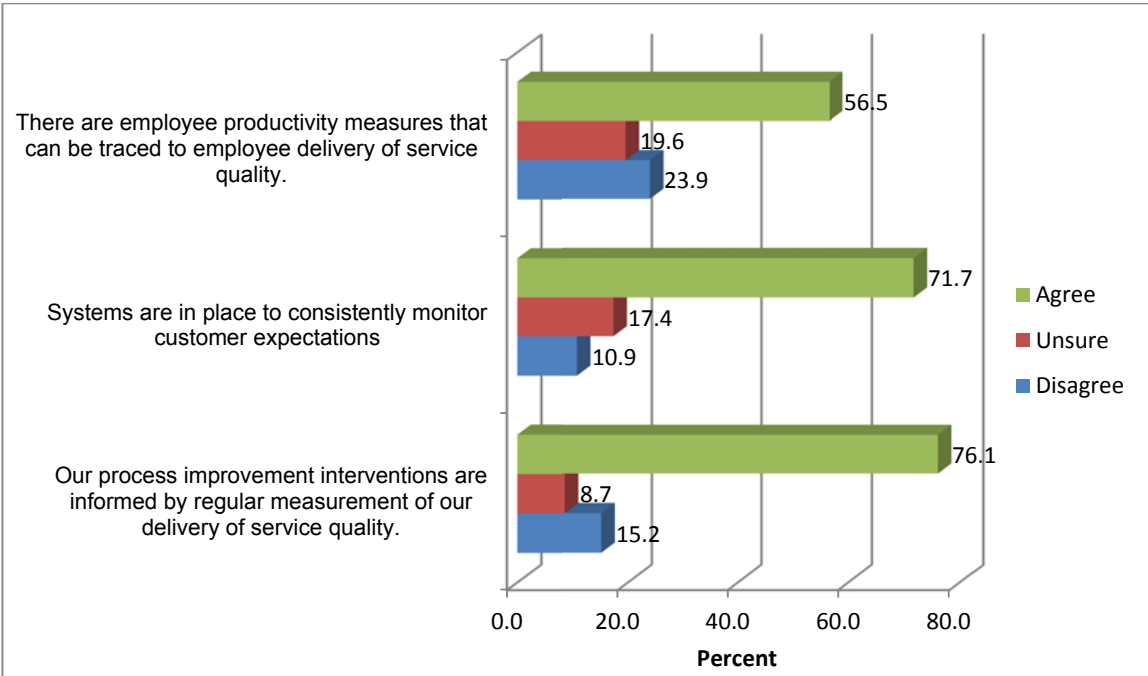


Figure 36 Outcome Measurement

Over 76% of managers use outcome measures to inform management of the hotels performance at predetermined levels of service quality. Surprisingly, the delivery of service quality by employees is not considered significant as a measure of employee productivity by approximately 45% of managers.

Seventeen managers responded to the open-ended question in respect of this item in Annexure XXXVII. Almost 25% of these respondents indicated that outcomes measurement is useful when supported by understanding of customer trends and

systems in place for customer and employee feedback and food supplier relationship. Over 23% of respondents hold positive attitudes toward the contribution of outcome measures to continual improvement of good customer service practice. Eleven percent of managers specify prerequisite enthusiasm for the service quality enhancement project by employers and managers. Over 23% of respondents contend that the success of continual improvement arises from good manager-staff relations.

5.5.2.6 Product service quality from environmental management

This section reports on the five-point Likert scale that requested managers to rate the importance of each element of hotel environmental performance for its contribution to customer service quality in Annexure XII. ‘1’ was representative of most unimportant while ‘5’ represented most important. The scale assessed the extent to which managers perceive a series of management environmental performance indicators as contributing to guest service quality.

5.5.2.6.1 Reliability

Cronbach Alpha values scale produced reliability of measures in excess of 0.82 for service quality improvement practice in Table 36. All Cronbach’s Alpha values lie above the minimum value of 0.70 that had been considered acceptable as a measure of reliability for this type of study (Page and Meyer 2005:198).

5.5.2.6.2 Communalities of measured variables in management survey

As indicated earlier, Costello and Osborne (2005:4) assert that acceptable communalities generally range from low (0.40) to moderate (0.70). The values in the current study range between 67.3 to 93.7%.

Table 36 Environmental measures for service quality

	Communality	Cronbach's
<hr/>		
188 Page		

			Alpha
Architecture and landscape design	Hotel architecture is harmonized with environment	74.2	.836
	Garden planning suitable with environment	75.8	
	Plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment	82.0	
	Mean	77.3	
Energy efficiency	Energy-saver control system in guest rooms	89.2	.934
	Using environmentally friendly energy sources	82.4	
	Purchasing low energy consuming equipment	93.7	
	Mean	88.5	
Waste reduction	Active involvement in recycling hotel waste	84.9	.920
	Solid waste separation at source	92.7	
	Composting the organic and food waste	82.0	
	Mean	86.5	
Water efficiency	Using treated water in garden irrigation	74.7	.822
	Wastewater treatment	74.8	
	Using water-saving measures on linen change	71.7	
	Mean	73.8	
Education and training for environmental awareness	Providing general environmental education to personnel	92.5	.942
	Providing environmental sensitivity training to personnel	95.2	
	Providing environmental education to guests	83.3	
	Mean	90.3	
Communication for environmental awareness	Participating in environmental meetings	86.2	.907
	Brochures with information on environmental protection	92.8	
	Getting guest opinions on environmental activities of hotel	74.6	
	Mean	84.5	
Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection	Knowledge on the ISO	70.5	.779
	Environmental provisions criteria of the TGC	67.3	
	Knowledge on the Blue Flag Project	71.5	
	Mean	69.8	
Overall		81.5	.940

Hence, communalities in Table 36 were considered acceptably high. Of note is a claim by Pearson (2008:7) that when values for communalities are high, the size of the sample has an insignificant effect on the precision of estimated sample loadings; conversely, when communality values are low, the size of the sample becomes influential. The study regards samples below 100 as small. As the current study presents a census of 58 and has substantially high communalities, these are considered acceptable. The two communalities with lower values 67.3% and 69.8% present an exceptionally good fit with the management measure. As indicated earlier, all manager

practices derived from the literature confirm their reliability from the high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient test.

5.5.2.6.3 General pattern of response

There was a perceptible trend in respondent ratings. Table 37 reports the five popular manager-rated items for their 'extremely important' standing in manager practice for customer service quality.

Table 37 Respondent “Extremely Important” Rating

ITEM	Frequency of Respondent “Extremely Important” Rating
i. Garden planning suitable with environment	34
ii. Plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment	33
iii. Hotel architecture is harmonised with the environment	22
iv. Purchasing low energy equipment	17
v. Knowledge of the environmental provisions in accommodation grading criteria of the Tourism Grading Council	17
vi. Providing environmental education to guests	14

The highly-rated items suggest that managers are conscious of the market sector need for service quality attributes that emerge from the environmental dimension. It is important to note that attendant tangible appearance of the hotel is considered to be the greatest contributor to hotel service quality.

Table 38 reports the five popular manager-rated items for their 'Unimportant' standing in manager practice for customer service quality. These elements suggest that manager practices that contribute to environmental performance of hotels but lack guest visibility managers are not regarded as being important for customer service quality. The next section reports details of these and other findings.

Table 38 Respondent “Unimportant” Rating

ITEM	Frequency of Respondent “Unimportant” Rating
i. Using treated water in garden irrigation	18
ii. Knowledge on the Blue Flag Project	16
iii. Wastewater treatment	15
iv. Using water-saving measures on linen change	14
v. Active involvement in recycling hotel waste	14

5.5.2.6.4 Architecture and Landscape Design

From the results of the assessment depicted in Figure 37 almost all respondents considered that architectural design and surrounding gardens were important for their contribution to customer service quality.

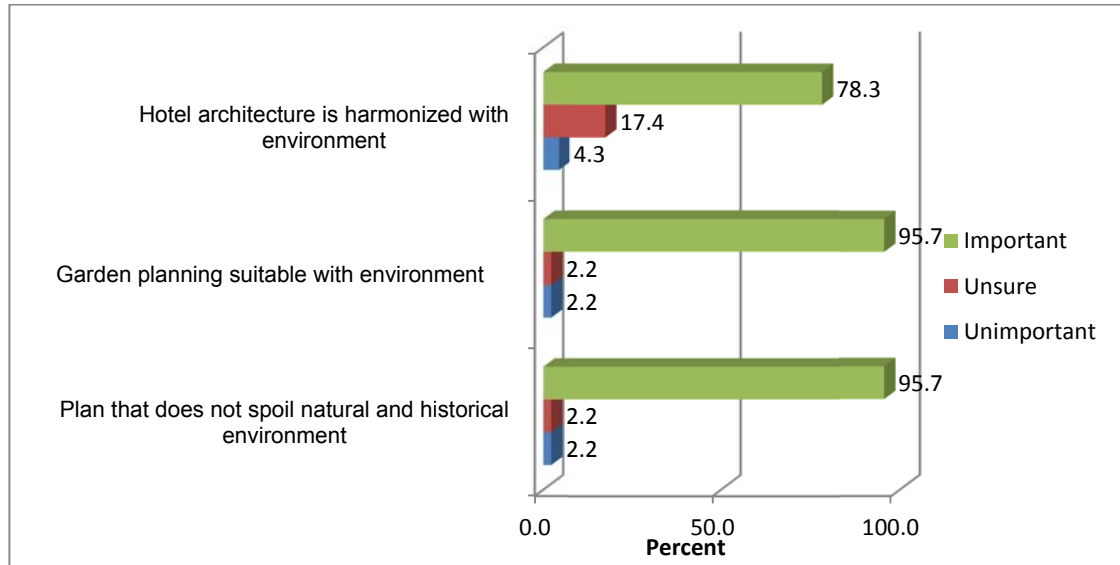


Figure 37 Architecture and Landscape Design

Less than 5% managers did not consider the surrounding environment important for the purpose of customer service quality. Over 78% perceived the congruence of hard hotel structures with the natural environment important for customer service quality. In excess of 95% of managers considered design and preparation of hotel gardens to substantially influence customer service quality.

5.5.2.6.5 Energy Efficiency

The frequency in Figure 38 indicated that respondents do not generally consider energy efficiency to be an important contributor to customer service quality. More than 50% of managers perceived that energy saving and natural energy-generating measures did not contribute to customer service quality. An average of 35% of respondents showed definite rejection of these measures as contributors to customer service quality. Nonetheless, almost 50% of managers considered energy-saving control systems in guest rooms favour positive customers' perceptions of service quality.

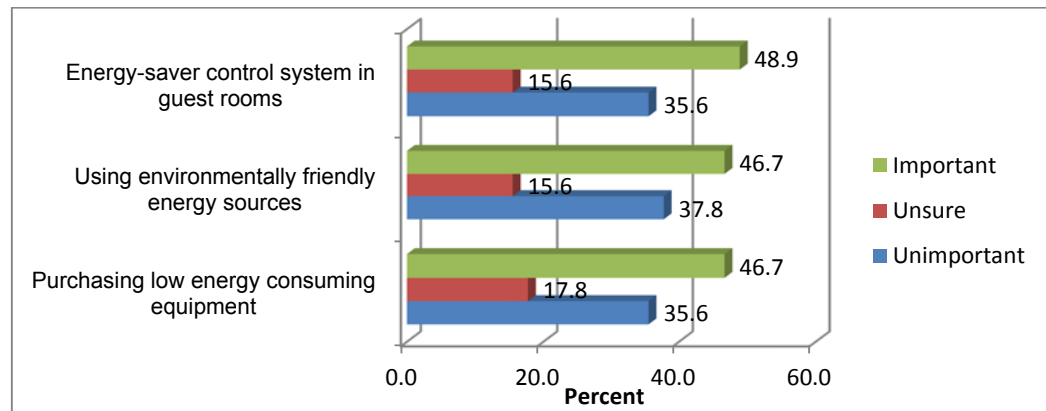


Figure 38 Energy Efficiency

5.5.2.6.6 Waste Reduction

The majority of managers in Figure 39 did not consider waste reduction measures as important to customer service quality.

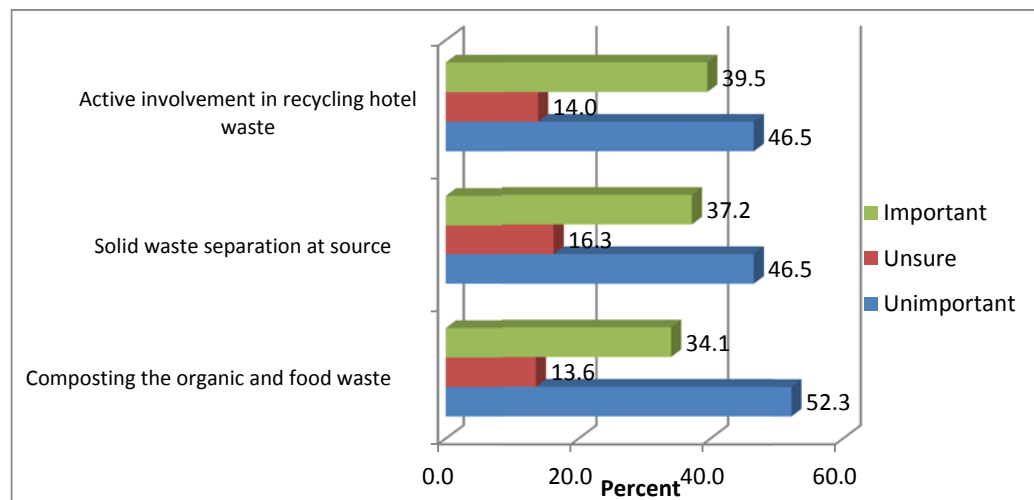


Figure 39 Waste Reduction

Less than 40% of managers considered measures for solid waste separation, composting and waste recycling as being important for customer service quality. Over 50% of respondents confirmed that the composting organic and food waste was not important for customer service quality.

5.5.2.6.7 Water Efficiency

The majority of managers in Figure 40 did not consider measures for water efficiency as important to customer service quality.

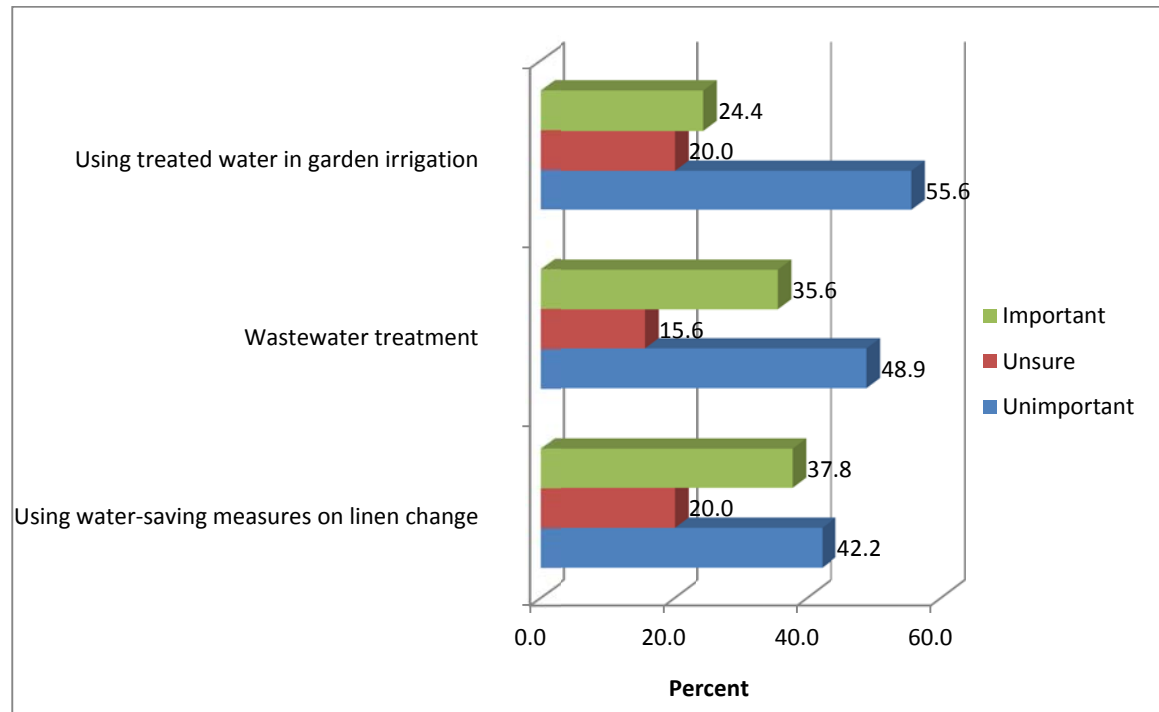


Figure 40 Water Efficiency

From the results of the assessment depicted in Figure 32, most managers did not consider the use of treated water for garden irrigation meaningful to customer service quality. Similarly, the treatment of waste water was not perceived to be of value by managers to customer service quality. There was a more balanced perception in the use of water-saving measures for linen change, with approximately 5% more managers perceiving that this measure was not important for customer service quality.

5.5.2.6.8 Education and Training for Environmental Awareness

Most managers perceived that education and training for environmental awareness of employees rather than guests add to customer service quality. A general environmental education of employees in Figure 41 was considered be a higher contributor to customer service than environmental sensitivity training.

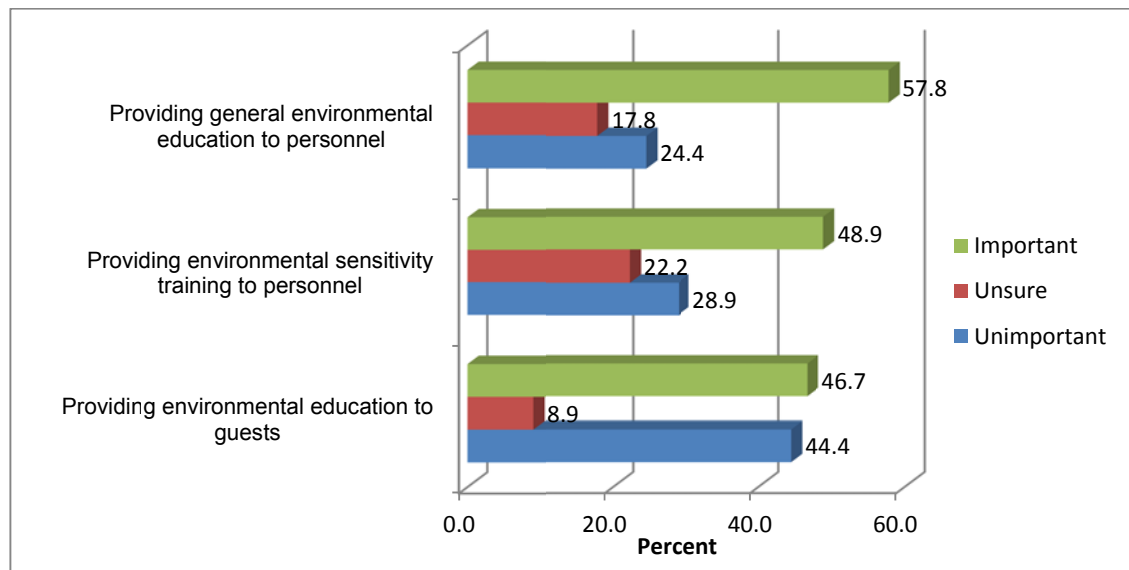


Figure 41 Education and Training for Environmental Awareness

Less than 25% of managers did not recognise general environmental education as important for customer service quality. Over 40% of managers perceived that environmental education to guests did not contribute to customer service quality.

5.5.2.6.9 Communication for Environmental Awareness

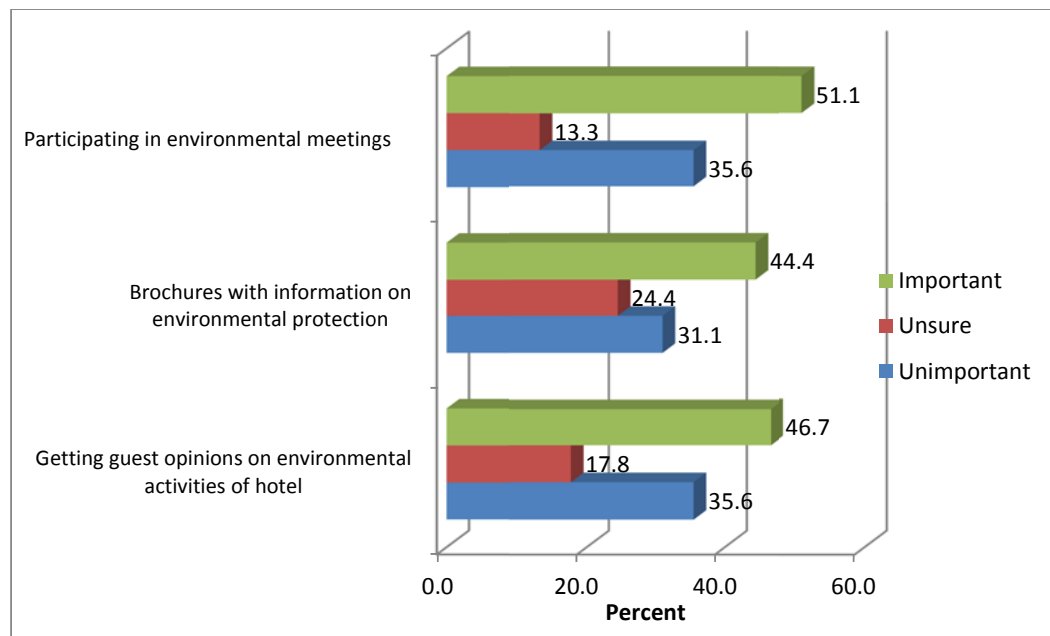


Figure 42 Communication for Environmental Awareness

Overall, in excess of 31% of managers in figure 42 did not perceive communication for environmental awareness to be an important factor in customer service quality. The highest frequency of uncertainty at 24.4% was received for the item assessing the value of environmental awareness brochures in contributing to customer service quality. This item also returned the highest uncertainty perceived by managers amongst all management practices.

5.5.2.6.10 Managerial Knowledge on the Environmental Protection

From the results of the assessment illustrated in Figure 43, knowledge of indirect norms from ISO standards and beach environmental standards are shown not to be as important as direct criteria of the Tourism Grading Council.

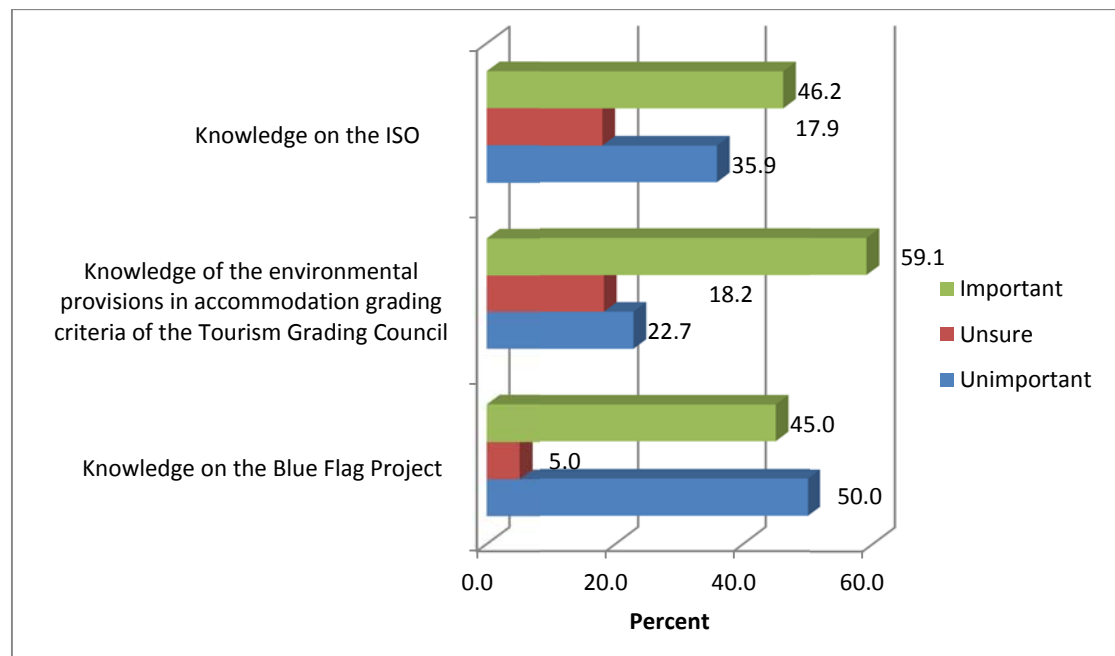


Figure 43 Managerial Knowledge on the Environmental Protection

Almost 60% of managers deemed their familiarity with Tourism Grading Council grading criteria as being important for customer service quality. In excess of 35% of managers did not consider knowledge of ISO standards important for the purpose of customer service quality. Similarly, 50% of managers rejected the notion that knowledge of Blue Flag furthered the project for customer service quality.

5.5.2.6.11 Importance ratings

After identifying the various service quality management practices, managers were requested to weigh these practices in order to provide the study with an overall priority of manager practices. The outcome of mean ranking by managers derived from scale items of 11 generic practices for management of service quality in their hotels resulted in the following sequence of standings :

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Outcome measurement | 7. Participation |
| 2. Teamwork | 8. Training |
| 3. Training management | 9. Compensation for quality |
| 4. Assessment | 10. Empowerment |
| 5. Benchmarking | 11. Process management |
| 6. Technology management | |

The mean ranking by managers in from scale items of 7 practices for environmental management of ecotourist service quality in the following sequence of their standings:

1. Energy efficiency
2. Architecture and landscape design
3. Waste reduction
4. Education and training for environmental awareness
5. Water efficiency
6. Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection
7. Communication for environmental awareness

5.5.2.6.12 Conclusion to objective 2

The evaluation of manager practices indicates that managers attached substantial weight to service quality management practices. This section established there was agreement amongst the majority of managers that they apply most generic service quality management practices to their hotels. This section also established that most managers consider all but two environmental practices important for customer service quality important. The majority of managers did not find value in practices related to

waste reduction, compensation for quality and water efficiency for customer service quality.

5.5.3 Results of statistical analysis for objective three

The focal area of the third objective sought to establish strategies for ecotourism accommodation management that are perceived as important by the managers of hotels serving ecotourist destinations. Crotts et al (2007:5) argue that all aspects of internal management and operations must be in alignment to meet organisations' goals. Such management strategies in ecotourist hotels envisage definite goals. Hence, this section will further examine the earlier discussed generic and environmental practice of managers and the importance they attribute to that practice. It is expected that this analysis will reveal strategies for ecotourism accommodation management.

5.5.3.1 Manager rating of the quality of customer service

A total of 11 respondents rated their hotel services' quality as exceptionally good in figure 44. This represents 23,9% of the respondent hotel managers. A further 52,2% rated their hotels as offering good customer service quality.

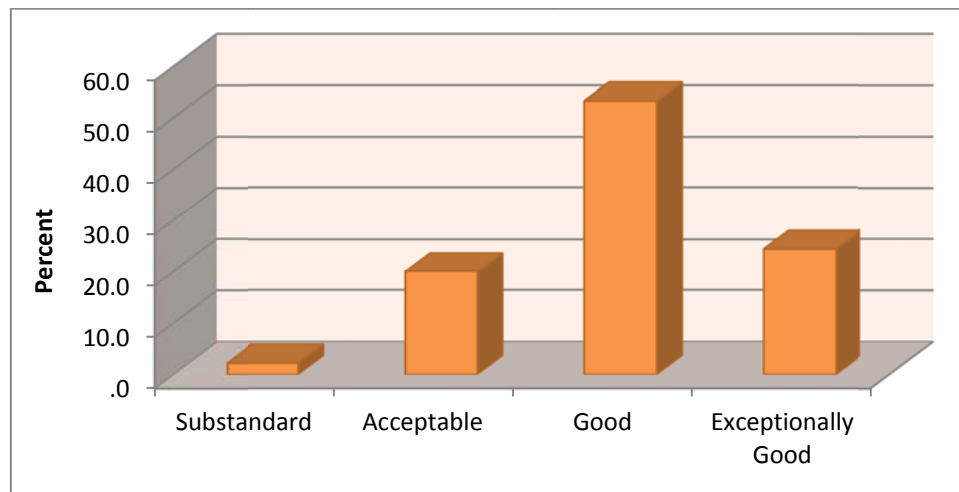


Figure 44 Manager rating of the quality of customer service at their hotels

Only one manager rated the hotel as substandard. Less than 20% of managers perceived their hotel customer service quality as being of 'acceptable' quality. The generally high ratings of hotel customer service quality provided unexpected higher

confidence in the researcher for the proficiency of hotel managers at these hotels to be effective informants.

5.5.3.2 Manager agreement with generic service quality manager scale

Managers allocated especially high agreement ratings for the positive contribution of elements of process management, empowerment, participation and teamwork to customer service quality. Annexures XXXIX and XXII illustrates that technology management is not a popular contributor to hotel customer service quality. Most managers do not agree that compensation contributes to customer service quality.

Less than 40% of manager responses show agreement with the compensation construct contributes to hotel service quality. Coupled with technology management and benchmarking sales distribution, the frequency of six variables was rated below 50% in Annexure XXXIX. This may be interpreted that managers did not agree that these variables contribute to strategy of ecotourism accommodation management to enhance customer service quality. Conversely, managers agreed that the remaining 32 variables contribute to customer service quality by scoring each of them in excess of 3 on the Likert scale. These are more likely to contribute to strategy.

5.5.3.3 Manager environmental practice scale for ecotourist service quality

Along with completion of their experience ratings, guests were requested to complete the corresponding questions to assess the importance of the service quality attribute. Guests were asked to rate the importance of the service quality attribute on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents extremely unimportant and 5 represents extremely important. It was observed that respondents concurred on the importance of six service quality attributes with 50% and above.

Although manager environmental practice did not have equal relevance among managers some common perspectives were evident. Manager environmental practice in Annexure XXXX illustrates in descending order the manager frequency rating of manager practice. These are matched to their respective environmental

practice for ecotourist service quality in Annexure XXXX. Most respondents agreed on the following items:

- garden planning that is suitable with environment;
- plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment;
- hotel architecture is harmonized with environment;
- knowledge of the environmental provisions in accommodation grading criteria of the Tourism Grading Council;
- providing general environmental education to personnel; and
- participating in environmental meetings.

5.5.3.4 Manager ratings of influence of generic management practices in managing service quality at their hotel

After having filled in their level of agreement with the variables of each management practice, managers were requested to rank the top three practices to manage service quality at their hotels. Responses were evaluated and ranked in Table 39.

Table 39 Mean ranking of management practices for ecotourist hotels

Management Practices	Variables with frequency greater than 50%	Mean Rank
Outcome measurement	Our process improvement interventions are informed by regular measurement of our delivery of service quality. Systems are in place to consistently monitor customer expectations There are employee productivity measures that can be traced to employee delivery of service quality.	1.8
Teamwork	We have a service-oriented organisation structure I work with multiple people groupings whose customer services perspective are similar I receive tasks that are supported by other departments of sections who work to our common purpose.	1.8
Training management	Employees are adequately trained for the tasks they perform. The skills and competencies that yield service quality are known by staff. Employees are involved in the selection of training and skills development needs.	1.9
Assessment	All corrective action to customer service is based on management analysis Non-management staff is appraised on service quality performance.	1.9
Benchmarking	Benchmarking against best practices Benchmarking in competitor analysis Benchmarking service characteristics Benchmarking customer contact systems Benchmarking as a source of new ideas	1.9
Technology management	Technology and support systems do support and facilitate quality service.	2.0
Energy efficiency	No practice variables rated above 50%	2.0
Architecture and landscape design	Garden planning suitable with environment Plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment Hotel architecture is harmonized with environment	2.0
Participation	Service delivery personnel are valued in the organisation. Our staff are enthusiastic about this business and the local area.	2.1

	Customer contact staff attend service quality specific meetings Measures of customer feedback display the result of the team effort.	
Training	People and customer management feature strongly in staff training. Employees appreciate our service level specification and therefore adequately fulfilling them. Employees are multi-skilled to support guest service quality.	2.1
Waste reduction	<i>No practice variables rated above 50%</i>	2.5
Compensation for quality	<i>No practice variables rated above 50%</i>	2.6
Empowerment	Our customer contact staff are sufficiently independent to make decisions to respond to requests to customize the service and handle local difficulties. Staff tasks are compatible with policies and guidelines. The standard of our customer service is clearly communicated to both customer and staff.	2.6
Education and training for environmental awareness	Providing general environmental education to personnel	3.0
<i>Water efficiency</i>	<i>No practice variables rated above 50%</i>	3.0
Process management	Enhancing tourist services by complaints handling. The organisations expectations in respect of service quality is clearly communicated to staff. Enhancing tourist services by documentation processing and invoicing. Enhancing tourist services by customer training. Our suppliers heed our service quality targets	3.0
Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection	Knowledge of the environmental provisions in accommodation grading criteria of the Tourism Grading Council	3.0
Communication for environmental awareness	Participating in environmental meetings	3.0

Six generic management practices were rated ahead of environmental performance measures for their contribution to customer service quality. It is interesting to note that energy efficiency, waste reduction, compensation for quality and water efficiency were rated highly despite the lower ratings that were submitted for their component variables. Also, component variables of architecture and landscape design received the highest overall score for their important contribution to customer service quality. On the other hand, the mean ranking of the practice is 2. Another anomaly is demonstrated by a water efficiency mean ranking of 2.5 while all of its component variables scored well below 50%. Ratings of importance in Table XXX, agreement in Table XXX and Mean ranking in Table XXX with manager practices provide an indication of the direction for the development of strategy. The mean ranking by managers from scale items of all 18 practices for management of service quality in their hotels reveal the following sequence in their standings:

1	Outcome measurement	11	Waste reduction
2	Teamwork	12	Compensation for quality
3	Training management	13	Empowerment
4	Assessment	14	Education and training for environmental awareness
5	Benchmarking	15	Water efficiency
6	Technology management	16	Process management
7	Energy efficiency	17	Managerial knowledge on the environmental

8	Architecture and landscape design	18	protection
9	Participation		Communication for environmental awareness
10	Training		

5.5.3.5 Trend in reasoning for management practice

An open-ended question was used to probe the reasoning for manager suggestions on their service quality manager practices. Annexure XXXXI explains that 57% of common responses from the 14 managers, who responded to this open-ended question, supplied the basic market profile of their units. It is evident that ecotourists are one segment of a larger market.

Managers presented singular comments related to delivery of customer service quality and environmental management. Furthermore, six valence factors that constitute an external influence in in the management of hotel customer service quality were reported by managers. Firstly, perceptions of customer service quality are substantially dependent on the effectiveness of municipal service delivery to the hotel. Secondly, manager estimate of the cost of initiation of ecotourism service quality activities is prohibitive. The pricing of hotel products and services must not increase because of environmental management. A respondent indicated care in avoiding environmental management improvements that erode any existing guest service or amenity. It is likely that managers rate hotel environmental performance as important because tourists spend a significant amount of time in the hotel.

Some managers view the ecotourism service context distinctly separate from the hotel service context. These managers reported challenges to employee empowerment, participation, teamwork and staff involvement. Lack of employee support is reported to be restricting ecotourism service quality activities. Additionally, a respondent who is serious about positive environmental improvements and activities is frustrated by the local staff that is drawn from rural areas. Another respondent perceives that environmental management activities should not impact on staff workloads so as to promote longer working hours.

5.5.3.6 Conclusion to objective three

This section employed frequency analysis of prior findings for objective 2 to ascertain strategies that managers perceive as being important for their function in delivering customer service quality. The analysis revealed that strategies informed by superior hotel architecture and landscape design, outcome measurement, teamwork, training management, assessment and benchmarking are considered critically important for the management of customer service quality.

5.5.4 Results of statistical analysis for objective four

Methodologies for the formulation of management strategies for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism were the focus of the fourth objective of the study. Crotts et al (2007:5) affirm that the congruence between beneficial, external potential and prospects and internal management and operations is an established, significant area of research. This section will report on two methodologies that combined both guest (external) and manager responses (internal) and aligned them to inform the formulation of management strategies.

The first section will analyse data collected from hotel management on environmental management and generic management practices for service quality. The second section will analyse data derived from earlier factor analysis of guest data for its congruence with generic management practices.

5.5.4.1 Factor model formulation for environmental management

Pursuant to the development of methodologies for the formulation of management strategies, this section analysed the importance that managers attribute to environmental practice discussed earlier. Strategies for management of hotel service quality were derived from analysing managers' importance of environmental practice by factor analysis.

Factor analysis correlates a number of variables to reveal high inter-correlations and thus new, common underlying variables, factors or construct (Schindler and Cooper 2003:635). According to Emory and Cooper (1991:630) the technique seeks out patterns that extract principal combinations in the original variables. The technique thus promises a systematic basis for inference and analysis of management practices. Hence, factor analysis was considered suitable for manager ratings of their environmental practices at the hotel.

Table 40 Commuality of natural area accommodation management practice and statements

	Commuality (%)
1. Management of Employee Engagement	
Providing general environmental education to personnel	92.5
Providing environmental sensitivity training to personnel	95.2
Providing environmental education to guests	83.3
Participating in environmental meetings	86.2
Brochures with information on environmental protection	92.8
Getting guest opinions on environmental activities of hotel	74.6
Knowledge of the Tourism Grading Council environmental criteria	67.3
2. Management of Environmental-care	
Energy-saver control system in guest rooms	89.2
Using environmentally friendly energy sources	82.4
Purchasing low energy consuming equipment	93.7
Active involvement in recycling hotel waste	84.9
Solid waste separation at source	92.7
Composting the organic and food waste	82.0
Wastewater treatment	74.8
3. Architecture and Landscape Design	
Hotel architecture is harmonized with environment	74.2
Garden planning suitable with environment	75.8
Plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment	82.0
4. Technology Management Manager Training	
Using treated water in garden irrigation	74.7
Using water-saving measures on linen change	71.7
5. Manager Training	
Knowledge on the ISO	70.5
Knowledge on the Blue Flag Project	70.2

It was earlier explained that the communality of variables precedes factor analysis. Communality for a given variable can be interpreted as the amount of variation in that variable explained by the factors that constitute the variable. For example, for Management of Employee Engagement in Table 40, there are seven variables that make up the component as indicated in the component matrix. This reasoning can then be extended to the rest of the model as the communality values are within acceptable norms and therefore suitable for factor analysis.

The procedure for factor analysis was initiated by principal components' analysis as the extraction method. In order to identify the naturally occurring dimensions management all 21 variables were placed into an exploratory principal components analysis. Fabrigar et al (1999:273) advises that the number of variables in the instrument should be at least three times the number of expected common factors. This section of the study was within this parameter as the principal component analysis identified seven components with Eigen values greater than one from the 21 variables.

Secondly, Varimax, with Kaiser Normalization, was engaged as the rotation method. This is an orthogonal rotation method that minimizes the number of variables that have high loadings (correlation coefficients) on each factor. It simplifies the interpretation of the factors.

Thirdly, the adopted PASW Statistics version 18.0 software produces factors with loadings. Factor analysis and its loading show inter-correlations between variables (Emory and Cooper 1991:651).

5.5.4.1.1 Environmental management practice for service quality

All 21 hotel environmental management practices were placed into an exploratory principal components' analysis. Attributes that loaded similarly imply measurement along a similar factor. An examination of the content of

variables loading at or above 0.5 effectively measured along the seven components. Respondents accordingly identified seven broad environmental management practices in Table 41 that determine service quality at ecotourist hotels. Factor loadings provided the clue of the extent to which each variable in a factor is indicative of the factor (Wilkins et al 2007:850). For example, “Brochures with information on environmental protection” and “Providing environmental sensitivity training to personnel” were considered representative of the factor hotel environmental education programme

Table 41 Rotated Component Matrixa

VARIABLES	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hotel architecture is harmonized with environment	.436	.017	.700	.114	.343	.256	.005
Garden planning suitable with environment	.024	.279	.856	-.043	.070	-.051	.159
Plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment	.139	.043	.907	.114	.064	-.014	-.154
Energy-saver control system in guest rooms	.049	.848	.073	.075	-.008	-.123	-.431
Using environmentally friendly energy sources	.355	.793	.110	.222	.163	-.140	-.059
Purchasing low energy consuming equipment	.038	.952	.050	.060	-.008	.030	-.184
Active involvement in recycling hotel waste	.058	.878	.025	.172	.028	.226	.172
Solid waste separation at source	.160	.863	.160	.187	.092	.070	.255
Composting the organic and food waste	.384	.640	.178	.491	.098	.060	.220
Using treated water in garden irrigation	.299	.389	.113	.693	.135	.077	-.252
Wastewater treatment	.317	.571	.169	.344	.054	.524	.068
Using water-saving measures on linen change	.363	.361	.005	.721	.148	.019	.135
<i>Providing general environmental education to personnel</i>	.797	.112	.115	.394	.263	.144	.074
<i>Providing environmental sensitivity training to personnel</i>	.860	.163	.089	.320	.203	.083	.009
<i>Providing environmental education to guests</i>	.862	.240	.186	.153	-.005	.158	.038
Participating in environmental meetings	.895	.164	.106	.117	.123	-.108	.006
<i>Brochures with information on environmental protection</i>	.938	.108	-.014	.130	.168	-.050	.034
<i>Getting guest opinions on environmental activities of hotel</i>	.809	.176	.123	.044	.199	.133	-.239
<i>Knowledge on the ISO</i>	.361	-.004	.178	.056	.804	.224	.083
Knowledge of Tourism Grading Council environmental criteria	.683	-.148	.334	-.008	.346	-.364	.206
<i>Knowledge on the Blue Flag Project</i>	.288	.211	.140	.226	.775	-.264	-.102

According to Floyd and Widaman (1995:295), reporting of all factor loadings enable the reader to gain a more complete understanding. All factor loadings for this study are contained in Table 41. Shaded coefficients in Table 41

indicate good factor loadings. Reliability of factors has been earlier established in Table 36.

However, factors 4, 5 6 and 7 were ignored for the purpose of factor analysis. According to Costello et al (2005:3), factors with fewer than three variables do not present a good fit with the data. Moreover, factor 7 demonstrated low loadings on all its variables and was not carried as a factor. In addition, factor 6 demonstrated a singular factor loading, while factors 4 and 5 demonstrated two factor loadings each. Factors 1, 2 and 3 were identified from their component variables with higher loadings above 0,5 and each with more than three variables were carried as factors.

However, when the factors were rotated, split loadings within the factor were revealed, as indicated in Table 41 and the earlier Table 36.

- Factor 1 combined two factors from Table 36 into a singular factor in Table 41.
- Factor 2 combined two factors from Table 36 into a singular factor in Table 41.
- There was no split in factor 3.

Thus, factor analysis of managers' importance of environmental practice for customer service quality derived three strategies. On the basis of the literature and conceptual understanding of the management of service quality at hotels, each strategy was formed from variables comprising like themes. No variables loaded highly on more than one strategy. Strategies were allocated labels, namely:

- Factor 1 = Hotel Environmental Education programme;
- Factor 2 = Environmental practice; and
- Factor 3 =Environmental Planning

A Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistic of 0,940 across all 21 ordinal scale items was derived. This overall and the individual factor reliability statistics

were considered acceptable as the value is well above the minimum reliability coefficient of 0.70 for this type of study (Page and Meyer 2005:198).

5.5.4.1.2 Correlation of manager service practice in the hotel's environment with hotel service quality attributes.

In order to understand its association with service attributes with the above three factors, namely, hotel environmental education programme, environmental practice and environmental planning were correlated with the hotel service quality attributes in Annexure XXXXVI. The strongest correlation of 0,029 existed between Environmental Practives and the 'The bathroom is clean'. These strength of these correlations will be important in the derivation of Part B of the the 'house of quality' to inform quality function deployment stated in section 3.7.

5.5.4.1.3 Limitations of factor analysis

Costelo and Osborne claim that the accuracy of factor analysis grows with increased respondent to item ratios. The authors found that only 10% of the items produced in a 2:1 respondent to item ratio contains accurate factor structures. The current study of environmental management practice for hotel customer service quality presented a response of 2,9:1.

5.5.4.2 Relationship between guest experiences and importance rating with generic management practice

This section will report on the results of association of data from guests' service quality responses and hotel managers' agreement on generic management practices for service quality. A relationship matrix in Annexure XXXXVII was a representation of the association of relevant service quality management practices and attributes of hotel service quality. This data was essential for Part C of the house of quality in 3.7.

5.5.4.2.1 Correlation in guest experience with generic management practices

Guest experience and generic management practice was valuable to better understand how the dependent variable formed by management practices correlate with independent service quality delivery variables. This relationship links with the purpose of the fourth objective to ascertain strategies for management practice that are aligned to service quality delivery.

Table 42 illustrates correlations between guest experience with individual management practices. The Pearson chi-square test was used to determine whether there were any relationships between guest experience ratings and generic management practices for service quality. In these two categorical variables, the expected values are the values under the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the two variables. Therefore, the chi-square coefficient of two variables is a measure of relationship. It will indicate the dependence of variable on each other.

Four relationships with p – values that surpass the 0.05 level of significance demonstrate that guest experiences correlate strongly with generic service quality management practices. Associations above 0.05 level of significance lacked correlation and are, therefore, omitted in the tables. Four management practices positively correlate with measures of guest experience. This finding suggests that propensity for positive experiences of service were more likely when managers engage in strategies that promote compensation for quality, benchmarking, empowerment and participation. Surprisingly, guest experience did not correlate with several expected managerial practices and where there was a relationship, it was weak. According to Murphy et al (2009:731) indicators that express correlation are reflective constructs while those that could correlate express formative constructs. Measures in formative constructs

configure underlying theory. Thus, although the weak relationships did not benefit the current study, they may be useful in theory building for service quality management practices.

Table 42 Guest experience and management practice

Chi square		Management Practice			
Guest Experience	E	Compensation for quality	Benchmarking	Empowerment	Participation
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient	E6	.018			
The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars	E18		.031		
You appreciated the presence of a car park	E27			.002	
You like the authentic character of the hotel	E31				.027

E = Experience rating

There was a significant association between the variable 'the telephone contact during the booking was efficient' and the variable 'compensation for quality' [$\chi^2(3) = 12.2$ ($p < .05$)]. The greater the chi square value, the greater the dispersion of expected frequencies. Hence, the interpretation is that efficiency in terms of telephone bookings relate directly with compensation for quality, either directly or inversely. This is given by the correlation values in Table 43.

Table 43 Management practice correlation with measures of guest experience

	Correlation Coefficient
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient * Compensation for quality	-.802
The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars* Benchmarking	.880
You appreciated the presence of a car park * Empowerment	-.939
You like the authentic character of the hotel * Participation	.702

The correlation coefficient values give the direction of the relationship. For example, the value between 'The telephone contact during the booking was

efficient' and 'Compensation for quality' is -0.802. This is a negative value indicating that compensation for quality decreases when telephone contact during the booking increases and vice versa.

The positive values indicate a proportional relationship. That is, the variables have a similar directional effect on each other.

Pearson chi-square test, illustrated in Annexure XXXXII determine whether there were any relationships between guest importance ratings and generic management practices for service quality. Six relationships were significantly and positively correlated. These results were somewhat surprising in that popular wisdom has been that these factors would be significantly correlated. Not unlike the finding in the earlier management-experience relationship, guest experience did not correlate with several expected managerial practices, and where there was a relationship, it was also weak. Table 51 selected only those significant correlations between importance of guest experience with individual management practices.

The greater the chi square value, the greater the dispersion of expected frequencies. The chi square test merely permitted the researcher to ascertain whether there was anything other than chance working on the variables of interest.

There was a significant association between the variable you find the surroundings beautiful and variable compensation for quality $\chi^2(3) = 12.2$ ($p < .001$). Table 51 suggests that propensity for positive perceptions of customer service quality was more likely when managers engage in strategies for compensation for quality, benchmarking, empowerment, training management and teamwork. Interestingly, compensation for quality, benchmarking and empowerment also correlated well with guest experiences of service quality at hotels revealed earlier.

Table 44 Importance of service quality attributes and management practice

Pearson Chi-Square - Asymptomatic Significance (2-sided)		Management Practice				
Importance to Guests	I	Compensation for Quality	Benchmarking	Training Management Empowerment	Teamwork	
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient	I6					.015
The price is fair compared with the service provided	I12		.041			
The hotel is appropriately decorated	I24			.024		
You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures	I26					.013
You appreciated the presence of a car park	I27				.031	
You find the surroundings beautiful	I28	.047				

I=guest importance rating of attribute

Correlations in Table 44 were then extracted to ascertain the direction. The sign on the correlation coefficient indicates the direction and the magnitude indicates the strength of the relationship. Values close to 1 are strong (either positive or negative).

The independent variable 'you find the surroundings beautiful' relate directly to the dependent variable 'compensation for quality'. However, correlation does not amount to causality. The direction of relationships in Table 45 illustrates both positive and negative relationships.

For example, +0.824 for compensation for quality is a strong positive relationship (ie. directly proportional to 'you find the surroundings beautiful'), whilst -0.572 Training Management is a strong negative or inverse relationship with 'the hotel is appropriately decorated'.

Table 45 Direction of significant relationships in hotel service attributes and management practices

			Correlation Coefficient
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient	I6	Teamwork	-.050
The price is fair compared with the service provided	I12	Benchmarking	.225
The hotel is appropriately decorated	I24	Training Management	-.572

You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures	I26	Teamwork	.223
You appreciated the presence of a car park	I27	Empowerment	.261
You find the surroundings beautiful	I28	Compensation for quality	.824

I= guest importance rating

5.5.4.2.2 Factor association of guests' service quality responses and hotel managers' agreement on generic management practices for service quality

Earlier in this section, Table 40 identified seven strategies from factor loadings derived from guest importance ratings of service quality attributes:

1. Management of Employee Engagement;
2. Management of Environmental-care;
3. Guest Communication and Information Management;
4. Management of Hotel Operations;
5. Managing Aesthetic Fit;
6. Management of Value Proposition; and
7. Value-adding Structures.

Scrutiny of Table 40 reveals that the identified strategies are nearly identical to the factors proposed by the literature presented earlier. However, in accordance with Costello and Osborne (2005:5), a factor with fewer than three items was regarded as weak and unstable. Hence, the factors "management of value proposition" and "Value-adding structures" were rejected as valid management strategies. Strategies for management practice that are aligned to service quality delivery comprise management of employee engagement, management of environmental-care, guest communication and information management, management of hotel operations and managing aesthetic fit.

5.5.5 Correlation of generic management practice with factor derived management practices from guest perceptions of service quality

As demonstrated earlier, correlation design, using a factor analytic approach was utilised for data analysis and interpretation of the alignment of factors of natural area accommodation management practice. A factor analysis was conducted from survey data to produce natural area accommodation management practice that are aligned with statements in Table 40. The evaluation of the reliability of this factor structure was conducted. The results of these analyses are reported in Table 46.

Pearsons chi square tests of significance extracted from Annexure XXXXIV in Table 46 indicate strong interdependence on 12 factor derived management practices from guest perceptions of service quality and generic management practices. The associations indicated in Annexure XXXXIV will make an integral contribution to quality function deployment examined in section 3.7.

All the highlighted values surpass the 0,05 indicator of significant relationships in this study. The chi square tests of significance of hotel environmental management practices and the seven factors could not be ascertained because of the poor response rates for the hotel environmental management practices. As a result, the interaction between the variables of interest could not be determined.

Despite the rejection of two management practices derived from guest perceptions of service quality, they are shown to have various degrees of interdependent with generic management practices. The 'management of value proposition' empowerment, teamwork and training are shown not to be significantly independent of each other. In addition, 'Value-adding structures', previously rejected, are also shown not to be significantly independent of compensation for quality.

Table 46 Generic management practice vs 7 factors

	COMPENSATION FOR QUALITY	BENCHMARKING	TRAINING MANAGEMENT	EMPOWERMENT	TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT	ASSESSMENT	PROCESS MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPATION	TEAMWORK	TRAINING	OUTCOME MEASUREMENT
Management of Employee Engagement	.635	.169	.005	.018	.861	.031	.277	.432	.026	.000	.213
Management of Environmental-care	.038	.741	.669	.160	.494	.716	.936	.803	.577	.148	.991
Guest Communication and Information Management	.511	.213	.515	.178	.722	.503	.475	.936	.869	.748	.682
Management of Value Proposition	.330	.494	.185	.036	.727	.251	.714	.243	.002	.010	.456
Value-adding structures	.033	.102	.409	.743	.563	.105	.645	.279	.785	.186	.940
Management of Hotel Operations	.275	.217	.020	.512	.872	.514	.648	.646	.440	.018	.779
Managing Aesthetic Fit	.340	.932	.070	.168	.770	.875	.588	.921	.847	.126	.999

Chi tests of significance of correlation values for the significant relationships were applied. Table 47, showing 12 of the lowest values in yellow, indicate, that there are no significant relationships.

Table 47 Chi tests of significance for correlations of guest importance rating with generic management practices

	COMPENSATION FOR QUALITY	BENCHMARKING	TRAINING MANAGEMENT	EMPOWERMENT	TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT	ASSESSMENT	PROCESS MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPATION	TEAMWORK	TRAINING	OUTCOME MEASUREMENT
Management of Employee Engagement			.139	.127		.027			-.076	.119	
Management of Environmental-care	-.083										
Guest Communication and Information Management											
Management of Value Proposition				.0259					.0016	.193	
Value-adding structures	.079										
Management of Hotel Operations			.224							.145	
Managing Aesthetic Fit											

The values in Table 47 indicate that the Spearman correlations are not significant, even though the relationships between the variables are significant. A higher chi square statistic indicates greater variation between observed and expected frequencies. The adopted significance level of .05 means that there is only a 5 percent chance that the statistical significance, if any, resulted from random chance. It is important to note that the association between guest

importance rating with generic management practices was not statistically significant in a vast majority of the correlation tests. Only 3 associations are significant, namely, Management of Employee Engagement and Assessment; Management of Value Proposition and Empowerment and, Management of Value Proposition and Teamwork. The low correlations between these two sources of management practice suggest that they represent separate aspects of management.

5.5.6 Rankings for service quality management practices

The statistical in Annexure XXXXVII was further analysed using the ranking formulae of Das and Mukherjee (2008:6). Namely:

$$A_j = \sum_{i=1}^m R_{ij} C_i$$

A_j = Column vector of final scores for jth descriptors of management practice ($j = 1, 2, \dots, n$)
 R_{ij} = Weights assigned to the relationship matrix ($i = 1, 2, \dots, m, j = 1, 2, \dots, n$)
 C_i = Row vector of importance assigned to the ith hotel service quality attribute ($i = 1, 2, \dots, m$)

A ranking of preferred management practice for the current study was established to inform strategy development. Table 48 depicts the rankings for service quality management practices using quality function deployment derived from the house of quality.

Table 48 Rankings for service quality management practices using quality function deployment

Ranking (Descending)	Service Quality Management Practices	Ranking (Descending)	Service Quality Management Practices
6.554	Management of Hotel Operations	2.370	Training Application
4.611	Management of Employee Engagement	2.204	Hotel Environmental Education programme
4.440	Managing the aesthetic fit	1.950	Outcome Measurement
3.538	Management of Environmental Care	1.943	Benchmarking
3.450	Participation	1.827	Technology Management
3.422	Environmental Practice	1.740	Assessment
3.074	Guest Communication and Information Management	1.537	Compensation for Quality
2.970	Teamwork	1.110	Energy Efficiency
2.958	Environmental Planning	1.110	Architecture and Landscape Design
2.610	Training Management	0.960	Waste Reduction
2.494	Empowerment	-	Process Management

5.5.7 Conclusion to objective 4

This section analysed data previously reported in objectives 1 and 2 with the aim of developing methodologies for formulation of management strategies. It was established that two approaches are feasible.

The first analysed hotel managers' environmental management and generic management practices for service quality. The results showed that a factor analysis methodology using a certain hypotheses regarding the factors that would emerge and then revising these factor structures or reconfirming them can produce successful practices. Exploratory factor analysis established sets of variables to ascertain their underlying structure. Confirmatory factor analysis will confirm particular patterns of relationship predicted by analytic results. The methodology uses regression weights in the form of factor loadings to predict measured variables from the latent variables. A matrix of correlations among measured dependent management practice variables and independent hotel attribute variables identified a set of more latent component or factors that explained the covariances among the measured variables. The deductive model available from factors analysis can be an instrumental methodology for the formulation of management strategies for customer service quality in hotels.

The second section analysed guest data for its congruence with generic management practices by applying chi square tests. The minimal numbers of significant associations indicate that manager practice is not in line with importance ratings provided by their hotel guests.

5.6 Key Findings

The results of the field study generated key areas for consideration in this study. These are enumerated below. The details of key findings are provided in the preceding sections of this chapter. The key findings are as follows:

- i. The majority of guests were South African;

- ii. The reason for residence of a substantial number of hotel-guests at hotels in ecotourism destinations were for reasons other than experience of the natural environment;
- iii. Most guests experienced positive impressions of customer service quality;
- iv. Managers contended that the service quality at their hotels is good and higher;
- v. Most hotel had received quality grading from external agencies;
- vi. Managers agree on the value of the application of most generic service quality management practices to their hotels;
- vii. Managers consider most environmental practices important for the management of customer service quality;
- viii. Compensation for service quality, water efficiency and waste reduction are not accepted by hotel managers as a management practice for customer service quality;
- ix. The derivation of management strategies for customer service quality can be attained by factor analysis methodology; and
- x. Strategies for management practice that are aligned to service quality delivery comprise management of employee engagement, management of environmental-care, guest communication and information management, management of hotel operations, managing aesthetic fit, hotel environmental education programme, environmental practice and environmental planning.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided a systematic analysis of the findings of the field study based on the targeted four objectives of this research. The results in this chapter are relevant to managers responsible for the formulation and implementation of strategies. The results indicate a better understanding of ecotourism service of service quality management practices and the requirements of nature oriented guests. The analysis and examination of the

results were informed by the data needs of each of the study objectives. The evaluation and analysis are applicable only to the sampled respondents. The next chapter will focus on the discussion and interpretation of results.

CHAPTER 6

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 provided a detailed examination of the data and methodological techniques applied to the study instrumentation. This section examines the outcomes of the primary research and assesses the extent to which it is supported. Major findings will be explored and interpreted to facilitate conclusions from this study.

6.2 Patronage at hotels serving ecotourism destinations

The study sought to solicit the responses from ecotourists by way of a screening question in the questionnaire. Kelly et al (2007:379) contend that tourist preferences are affected by the purpose on their stay and the location of accommodation. As the methodology required self-administered questionnaires to be left at hotels' reception counter for guests to complete at check-in, during stay and on departure from the hotel, it was not possible to screen all guests prior to their completion of the questionnaire. As a result of the 587 guest surveys, 366 were completed by guests who indicated that their main purpose for visit was experiences of the natural environment. Therefore, nearly 60% of all respondents who completed the survey, represented that the targeted subgroup for this study. A fifth (19.8%) attended due to work responsibilities while the next significant group were in-transit to another destination. A greater proportion of guests were South African. Most guest stayed at the hotel during their experiences of the natural environment. The natural environment is an essential element of ecotourist requirements (Krider et al 2010:780). Moreover, Mensah (2004), cited by Lee et al (2010:902), affirms that guests prefer those hotels that demonstrate care for the environment. The majority of these guests were adults aged between 31 to 50 years with 5% more male than female guests. Kelly et al (2007:379) contend

that age, gender and normal place of residence affect guest preferences. There must be equivalence of service across all guest origins (Khan and Su 2003:118).

6.3 Managers at hotels serving ecotourism destinations

All of the different managers who responded to the questions are responsible for guest service, albeit in different capacities and managerial levels.

The majority of hotels are compliant with the external quality assurance or grading directive for customer service quality. Service quality and external grading are closely related (Robinot and Giannelloni 2010:163). These present criteria to guide accommodation managers to define and establish their own measures to attain sustained management of service quality (Walker and Johnson 2009:90).

6.4 Objective 1

Objective I of the study set out to determine gaps in service quality delivery to tourists in ecotourism accommodation and to identify the management factors that can influence these gaps.

Consistent with the finding of similar objectives by Liu and Yen (2010:536), Nepal (2007:268) and Khan and Su (2003:118), guest age and gender played a significant role in terms of how respondents answered questions on hotel service quality attributes. Equally, they are significantly associated with the derived management factors of this study.

The high factor loadings for staffing, staff retention practices, staff capability and enthusiasm are indicative of the significance of this factor. The labour-intensive nature of hotel services translates to obvious manager-employee engagement practices. The engagement of hotel staff to contribute to guest enjoyment of the local area is wanting of greater attention. Crotts et al (2007:3)

highlight the significance of employee engagement that is intrinsic to managing guest-contact personnel to meet organisational performance. Moreover, Söderlund and Rosengren (2010:167) argue that, while hotel managers cannot control the guest-employee interfaces, they must be able to formulate methods to assure favourable perceptions of guest service outcomes. In a similar line of enquiry, a wide spectrum study of accommodation by Mola and Jusoh (2011:22) established that knowledge of hotel employees in all aspects of their functions is most highly ranked by guests.

Crotts, Pan and Raschid (2008:463) raise the significant role of product attributes in influencing the extent of delight with hospitality services. The environment is a significant aspect of ecotourist expectation. The derivation of the factor 'management of environmental-care' was, therefore, expected as the setting in which this study was conducted is traditionally thought to attract guests who are interested in enhancing nature. The study finds that awareness of environmental-care, water efficiency and waste-management were experienced at a level lower than the 'very important' rating guests attached to them. Left unchecked, tourist accommodation depletes and destroys the tourist product (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:407). Greater diligence from managers is necessary.

The factor 'guest communication and information management' envisages items that empower guests to enjoy hotel services. This factor may be interpreted as information about guest requirements and communication to guests. In respect of the latter, the World Tourism Organisation (2002:97) points out that hotel service quality is not about the uniform provision of affluence and luxury. It is about the correct comprehension of guest needs and catering for them. Republic of South Africa (n.d. 33) recognises that advances in technology has changed the way tourism conduct business. Proper communications of information on sustainable practices to ecotourists enhance positive perception of visitors' services (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:413). Guest

experiences of all items along this factor are experienced more frequently than its 'very important' rating.

The fourth and fifth factors are named 'management of value proposition' and 'value-adding structures'. Hotel guests perform a value equation that seeks to ascertain the value proposition of the hotel. This observation is congruent with Walker and Johnson (2009:87) that the trade-off between benefits and costs are indicative of the value of the service as subjectively perceived by the customer. All customers base perceptions of value on their perceptions of quality. The categorical weight of the value is determined by the quality of provision. However, Fabrigar et al (1999:273) recommend that a factor is to receive consideration for study when it is in excess of two items. Factors three and four were not considered further.

The findings in this study correspond with the literature in the sixth factor that indicates that service quality cues promote service quality. Functionality of guest facilities in this study are not aligned to the 'very important' rating allocated to it by guests. The management of hotel operations (service quality cues) is intended to avert inadequacies in design, construction and conceptualization of accommodation that have been frequently blamed on service (Brotherton and Wood 2008:384). Chang (2008:76) emphasises that it is the service quality cues that introduce a premeditated resolve of management for the level of service quality in service design.

Khan and Su (2003:121) contend that tangible attributes set the attractiveness, atmosphere, pleasantness and the required ambiance for service quality. The fourth factor in this section of the study locates this element in the factor 'management of hotel operations: Property fittings and fixtures'. Guest processing that permit enjoyment of that room design and layout and the hotel's fit with the pleasant surroundings are important to this factor.

The last factor in this section of the study is management against tainting of the aesthetic fit. Landscape and indigenous dimensions of natural characteristics and design are important (Brady and Cronin 2001:231). In a study in Cheju Island, in southwest Korea, Khan and Su (2003:118) identified the management of environmental degradation as a significant ecotangible of ecotourism service quality. However, all guests in the current study enjoyed experiences above their 'very important' rating.

This objective established that there are mismatches in guest actual experience of the variables of interest for customer service quality and the importance they attach to that variable. Most guests rated their experiences above their importance to them. However, the variables related to guests' experience of the management of environmental-care were generally rated lower than their 'very important' rating. Most guests in this study rated their experiences of attributes of hotel service quality above their 'very important' rating of the respective attributes. This overall result corresponds with guest satisfaction ratings of Nepal (2007:267) study of ecotourism accommodation in Annapurna. Satisfaction ratings of accommodation quality were above the importance guest's attached to respective attributes.

This section identified management factors derived from guest importance ratings of hotel service quality attributes. Wadongo et al (2010:28) observe that the traditional managerial roles have shifted to those that stress the outcomes of managerial roles to the success of the organisation. The current study objective accounted for these by defining the outcomes from hotel attributes that are experienced by customers. In this way, factor analysis of the primary data validated five management factors to manage guest experiences of service quality, namely, management of employee engagement, management of environmental-care, guest communication and information management, management of hotel operations and managing aesthetic fit.

6.5 Objective 2

Objective 2 of the study evaluated the significance of selected quality management practices in the management of the service quality in ecotourism accommodation.

Contrary to the finding of Lau et al (2005:53), guest's perception of service quality is demonstrated in this study to be independent of star ranking. This finding is supported by the assertion of the World Tourism Organisation (2002:97) that hotel service quality is not about the uniform provision of affluence and luxury. It is about the correct comprehension of guest needs and catering for them. In addition, hotel pricing has been found to be most important to guest service quality (Shahin and Dabestani 2010:43).

Chiang and Birtch (2010:632) argue that the labour intensiveness of hotel service quality requires reward systems designed to effectively contribute to the service quality project. The study finds that compensation affects the orientation of hotel employees to service quality in tandem with the positive service quality orientation expected by managers of their employees. In contrast, some managers in the current study contend that desired service quality is achievable without dedicated employee compensation measures. While a few managers believe that these measures are useful most do not associate compensation practices with the management of service quality.

Soltani and Lai (2007:1) contend that manager outlook and method influence the impact of the service quality project in hotels. For this purpose, hotel managers in this study conduct benchmarking, on a range of different levels. This manager practice corresponds with the argument presented in Eraqi (2008:339) that the number of tourism organisations who are formulating their own benchmarks is on the increase. Observable benchmarking variations in the current study emerge from whether the properties are independent of hotels in a group and the size of the hotel. Overall results point to a preoccupation with manager best practice benchmarking also claimed by Eraqi

(2008:339) as a common need within the broader tourism sector. Known best practice benchmarks are also sought by consumers (Walker and Johnson 2009:99). This also suggests that learning from examples of poor practice is important for managers and their staff. Benchmarking need to, however, be integrated in organisational processes. Crotts et al (2007:4) contend that superior service quality arises from consequent tactical actions, system and policy alignment and effective internal processes.

Uden-Holman et al (2005:S110) assert that knowledge development around training needs identification and assessment is vital as it is the base from which all training activity ensues. Most hotel managers in the current study permit involvement of employees in training need's identification. The practice catalyses management support, knowledge support and technical support so critical in enabling employees to deliver on service promises (Grönroos (2007:402-403).

Training for guest care and for environmental-care is of particular importance to this study. Most hotel managers in the current study consider their staff to be adequately trained for their tasks. Chiang and Birtch (2010:638) assert that better service quality arises from the congruence in the perceptions of the service values and behaviours of the organisation and the employee contribute to better service quality. The study further shows that the organisation values and attitudes must be welcomed and blended into the employee psyche. The current study demonstrates that a lack of adequate levels of English communication and service culture hinders training.

Employee empowerment promotes “task certainty” (Stutts and Wortman 2006: 39). The current study illustrates that most managers contend that their staff are adequately independent to cater for guest requirements. Employees take ownership in meeting customer needs. Crick and Spencer (2011:472) contend that hotel employee knowledge, incentives, communication and trust are critical to empowerment enablers. Managers in the current study propose that

service quality empowerment enhances employee ownership, sense of belonging and self-esteem.

However, the high positive weighting to empowerment is not consistent with reported levels of training. Huq (2005:467) states that employee empowerment is ineffective unless continuous, adequate training is administered. Gjerald and Øgaard (2010:484) further caution that despite the unpredictability of guest needs, managers still need to maintain control of the service events. The study suggests that hotel employee empowerment must be balanced with hotel management control.

Crotts et al (2007:5) suggest that an organisation's technology fit with performance objectives significantly bolsters attainment of the objectives. Hotel technology incorporates macro-level technology that range from building structures to micro-levels analogous to hotel room cleaning technology (Brotherton and Wood 2008:385). In contrast, the current study shows that technology is not recognised as a significant management driver of customer service quality. Technology is understood by most managers as information systems used to the extent of a basic support system, mainly in the form of booking and tracking computer software. This understanding accords with the argument by Pizam and Shani (2009:141) that the hotel sector does not need to be as technologically adept as other industries. Moreover, Buckley (2009: 655) contends that low-impact technology is sought in ecotourism. Also, given the human interface in hotel services, Sureschandar et al (2002:79) find it important that total quality service favours 'high-touch' quality management in place of a 'high-tech' quality management.

All hospitality clients do not report dissatisfaction. Therefore, Stan et al (2009: 1516) find that drawing out such experiences may be one more target of assessment. Vrtiprah (2001:111-126) envisages assessment as being directed at realization of policies and set objectives, and on the corrective measures. These are based on guest satisfaction surveys, complaint analysis; critical

incident reporting and employee evaluation. The majority of managers in this study adopt a team-assessment approach. Managers' decision on the delivery of customer service quality is based on feedback from assessment. Performance dimensions generally correspond with team effort in meeting customer needs.

Severe limitations in the level of control over the process of service quality exist in hotels (Soltani and Lai 2007:3). Chang (2008:82) contends that a large part of service design is its processes. These must demonstrate service quality intentions of the organisation. Hence, Yang (2006:1135) considers standardised operating procedures, design of service delivery and support system, input control, marketing process control, service delivery control, service design control and daily information analysis as important elements of process management. The current study demonstrates that complaints' handling is the most significant component of hotel process management and that good communication and alignment with customer satisfaction and service delivery is imperative.

Most managers in the current study found significant value on the participation of their staff in contributing to customer service quality. Some managers report giving recognition to those who participate meaningfully. Vrtiprah (2001:111-126) considers hotel employees' participation as being dependent on clarity of how their contribution affect the rest of the team and their role in promoting cooperation and discipline. Employee participation does not materialise in an environment of fear and anxiety (Scarnati and Scarnati 2002:113).

Hu et al (2009: 49) contend that there is evidence that the quality of outputs in hospitality depend on quality teamwork rather than just individuals giving off their best. For the purpose of this study, teams are co-workers who function as a unit to collectively provide customer service. Many managers consider team commitment, effective team communication and clear, shared understanding of team goals to be necessary elements of effective teamwork. Gjerald and

Øgaard (2101:476) contend that the low ranking and consequent poor perceptual image of junior hotel staff is a deterrent to service quality in hotels. The study suggests that management may ameliorate the position by promoting positive assumptions among staff by ensconcing a teamwork focus. Pizam and Shani (2009:145) argue that accommodation managers must support and nurture teamwork. Moreover, Hu et al (2009:41) suggest that service innovation is enhanced by teamwork.

Urban (2009:77) considers training in service skills, service encounter practices and service standards' communication as important facets of service quality training. Most managers in this study consider that their staff training for customer management is appropriately strong. Most managers are confident of the training support given to employees to offer compliant guest service quality. Khan and Su (2003:122) identified that training of guest contact staff is imperative to perceptions of individualised personal service to the guests for ecotourism service quality. The study also draws attention to multi-skilling of employees and greater consciousness of organisation tasks that individually and collectively produce positive guest assessment of service quality. In the current study, up-skilling and multi-skilling are supported by skills development type initiatives. Such initiatives are considered vital for Kasper et al (2006:377) argument to continually extend employees to improvement, job enlargement and job enrichment. The author argues that inadequate training turn employees into liabilities.

The measurement of outcomes is a basic principle to quality management which contends that quality can be improved only after it is measured (Caro and Garcia 2008:714) Jusoh and Parnell (2008:5) state that performance outcomes must combine multiple measures that encompass both financial and non-financial measures. Most managers in the current study have well placed outcome measures to manage customer service quality. Eraqi (2008:342) argues that comparative studies against key indicators, drawn from internal

and external sources, provide a basis for analysis and feedback to managers. However, Oakland (1993:166) shows that no generic list of measures exists. Outcome measures are formulated on what management and owners want. Managers are satisfied that the measures inform them of the hotels' performance at predetermined levels of service quality. Surprisingly, the delivery of service quality by employees is not considered significant as a measure of employee productivity by approximately 45% of managers.

Manager surveys illustrate that practices that contribute to environmental performance of hotels are regarded as being important for customer service quality. Specifically, comparatively high importance is placed on gardens and the natural and historical environment elements of the property. This practice is consistent with a call by South African National Parks for buildings to blend into and add value to the natural landscape Phillips (2005). Moreover, Bewsher (2005) asserts that business activity must defend the natural and cultural landscapes and simultaneously offer desired experiences to visitors. Ecotourists find higher gratification in properties with higher percentages of protected landscape set aside for the natural ecology (Kelly et al 2007:384). Architecture and landscape design can, therefore, be considered to be substantial element in the management of ecotourist service quality at hotels.

Fennel (2002:23) contends that the demand for ecotourism can be strongly linked to outdoor education and environmental education. However, most managers perceive that education and training for environmental awareness is better directed to their employees rather than guests to favour the delivery of customer service quality. A general environmental education is perceived by managers to be a higher contributor to good customer service than environmental sensitivity training. This practice corresponds with the "Green Partnership Program" of Fairmont Hotels and Resorts (World Travel and Tourism Council n.d.). According to Erdogan and Baris (2007:608), enhanced environmental education and training to staff education is derived from a written environmental policy, a written environmental programme, the inclusion

of environmental statements in work definition and proactive staff participation in environmental meetings.

Wadongo et al (2010:29) observe that managers are coerced towards developing their capabilities by their own intention to meet the pressures of managing hospitality organisations. Congruence in the perceptions of the service values and behaviours of management and the employee contribute to better service quality. This observation corresponds with existing managers reasoning that their familiarity with Tourism Grading Council grading criteria is important for customer service quality.

Erdogan and Tosun (2009:406) assert that managers of tourist accommodation must exhibit sustainable short- and long-term strategies to sustain their environmental performance from an ecological perspective. The significance of the high rating of the importance of management care items such as water and energy efficiency by hotels' guests in this study and, by the suggested preference in the literature of ecotourist affinity for unspoiled environments, is not congruent with the existing manager practice. This is evident from the low overall manager ratings for water and energy efficiency, communication for environmental awareness and waste reduction that are not considered as management practices for customer service quality by managers in this study. This position contrasts with that of Masau and Prideaux (2003:201) where there is propensity for tourist to seek out and even pay more for environmentally-friendly accommodation.

The second objective of this study evaluates the magnitude of selected quality management practices in the management of the service quality in ecotourism accommodation. Compensation for quality, technology management, water efficiency, energy efficiency, communication for environmental awareness and waste reduction are not recognised by managers as significant management practices for hotel service quality. There is agreement amongst the majority of managers that they apply most generic service quality management practices to their hotels. The evaluation of generic manager practices indicates that

managers attached substantial weight to these service quality management practices. This section also established that most managers consider all but three environmental practices unimportant for customer service quality important.

6.6 Objective 3

Objective 3 of the study is to ascertain possible strategies that ecotourism accommodation managers perceive as being critically important in achieving quality related objectives. Those management practices that ecotourism accommodation managers perceive as being critically important in achieving service quality related strategy were examined.

It was found that every existing management practice in service quality for ecotourist hotels contributes to strategy. A strategy may be construed as a plan with a scheme and approach defined by tactical actions. A service quality strategy is inherently useful to managers of hotels. Strategy is not transferable. According to Jusoh and Parnell (2008:9), each business strategy is uniquely influenced by unit performance measures and targets.

An array of significant management practices proposed in prior literature has been identified by managers and is, therefore, for inclusion in service quality strategy. It is important to note that these manager ratings are robust as the views originate from in excess of 95% of managers who rate their hotel service upward from levels expressed as 'acceptable'. Objective 2 established that service quality management practices that are favoured by managers in this study are architecture and landscape design, employee education and training for environmental awareness, managerial knowledge of environmental protection, benchmarking, training management, employee empowerment, assessment, process management, employee participation, teamwork, training and outcome measurement.

The manager study demonstrates that environmental-care strategies that find harmony and compatibility with the immediate gardens, and blend with the

natural and historical environment are sought by managers. Visual and perceptual aspects improve guest perceptions of service quality. The selected service quality strategy must not undermine the pristine state, features and visual appeal of the scenic landscape. Gardens must follow natural forms of the surrounding landscape (Hussien and Mohammed 2006:116).

The inclusion of complaints management in service quality strategies is recognised as highly important by managers. Stan et al (2009:1519) contend that complaints' handling is an essential element of hospitality service quality. Guest complaints can arise from service failures, failures of guest facility and equipment, and failures by other guests in co-creating service quality. Specific complaints' handling practice in the ecotourism context is presented in partiality for complaints over hotel environmental practices (Penny 2007:291). Grönroos (2007:130) argues for prompt correction and effective service recovery. Strategy has, therefore, to take account of investigations in the areas in the hotel that are causing concern, guest liaison and documentation. Hotel staff must demonstrate willingness to listen to customer complaints and suggestions. Documentation will include complaint policies and practices, complaints, log and a quality performance indicator journal.

A model proposed by Torres and Kline (2006:298) founded on the behavioural characteristics of employees moves guests from base-level service satisfaction to being delighted. Correspondingly, teamwork, training management, empowerment and participation are regarded by most managers in the current study as crucial to hotel employees' delivery of guest service quality

These elements are also in need of integration into a service strategy. Sosteric (as cited by Brotherton and Wood 2008:265) argues for the need to capacitate hospitality employees to use opportunities to bring their own characteristics and approach to customer interfaces. Thoughtful use of these opportunities advances improved attitudes, service commitment and behaviour from employees.

Table 49 Management practices within an integrated service strategy

MANAGER RATING	MANAGER PRACTICE	CORRESPONDING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION EVENT (CANDIDO AND MORRIS 2001:828)	
		COMPONENT OF STRATEGY	SEQUENCE
1	Outcome Measurement	Stimulus – awareness of the issue/need for change;	1
		Assessment of the degree of change required/impact of the	2
4	Assessment	issue;	
		Assessment of the time available, time required and urgency;	3
		Behavioural diagnosis;	6
		Monitoring, controlling the process and refining	14
2	Teamwork	Choice of management style(s);	4
3	Training Management	Building a supportive climate;	7
9	Participation	Realigning organisational dimensions to create competencies &	13
10	Training	behaviours;	
12	Compensation for quality	Rewarding and recognition	15
13	Empowerment		
14	Education and training for environmental awareness		
5	Benchmarking	Stimulus – awareness of the issue/need for change;	1
		Definition and clarification of the mission and strategy contents	5
6	Technology Management	Building a supportive climate;	7
		Realigning organisational dimensions to create competencies &	13
		behaviours	
7	Energy Efficiency	Realigning organisational dimensions to create competencies &	13
		behaviours	
8	Architecture and Landscape Design	Building a supportive climate;	7
		Realigning organisational dimensions to create competencies &	13
		behaviours	
11	Waste Reduction	Realigning organisational dimensions to create competencies &	13
		behaviours	
15	Water Efficiency	Realigning organisational dimensions to create competencies &	13
		behaviours	
16	Process Management	Organisational flux (debate);	8
		Information building;	9
		Building implementability into planning;	10
		Monitoring, controlling the process and refining	14
17	Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection	Choice of management style(s);	4
		Building a supportive climate	7
18	Communication for environmental awareness	Definition and clarification of the mission and strategy contents;	5
		Realigning organisational dimensions to create competencies &	
		behaviours	13

Employee performance must align with organisations' policies, procedures and values. However, strategy must be cognisant that the mobilisation of staff with

low dedication and distant affinity to deliver consistent customer service quality has long challenged the hotel sector (Crotts et al 2007:3).

The development of strategy that ecotourism accommodation managers perceive as being critically important in achieving quality related objectives is service performance based. The service strategy sits within the overall business strategy. Exploratory business strategy studies by Jusoh and Parnell (2008:8) suggest a typology for strategy may be informed by performance. Ruin (2004) claims that a service strategy should present organisations' philosophy, policy and procedures for service. Many managers in the current study indicate that their application of service quality management is influenced by the market mix and guest profiles. Strategy frameworks will therefore, need to be robust.

Candido and Morris (2001:828) account for change in their dynamic models of strategy that enables managers to follow, scrutinise or remediate progressive change at selected stages. Annexure XXXXIII is a consonant 3 stage strategy design and implementation model. Consistent with Jusoh and Parnell (2008:8), objective 4 of this study is informed by management performance. Table 49 illustrates the relative position of each management practices within an integrated service strategy.

This section employed frequency analysis of prior findings from objective 2 to ascertain strategies managers perceive as being important for their function in delivering customer service quality. The analysis resonated with the second stage of a process for service strategy development (Juran and Blanton 2001:25.3). The data revealed that strategies informed by superior hotel architecture and landscape design, outcome measurement, teamwork, training management, assessment and benchmarking are considered critically important for the management of customer service quality.

6.7 Objective 4

The last objective is to develop methodologies for the formulation of management strategies for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism. This objective examined data previously reported in objectives 1 and 2 with the aim of interpreting the methodology for formulation of management strategies. Congruency in the aspects external to organisations such as guests' requirements with those inside of the organisation such as manager practices are typical of better performing organisations (Crotts et al 2007:5).

As indicated in the analysis of objective 3, strategy is not static. Moreover, all organisations are at different points in organisational alignment with their performance objectives (Crotts et al 2007:3). Consequently Nicolau and Sellers (2010:834) claim superiority of those approaches that subjectively account for the study of service quality. Therefore, the current study supports individualised, organisation based study to produce management strategy.

Most of the theory of hotels' service strategy presents simple descriptive measures or prescriptive theory drawn from the management discipline. Crotts et al (2007:3) suggest that there is a multitude of sentiments of how service quality is to be achieved. However, consistent with the assertion of Juran and Blanton (2001:25.3), this study has established that two systematic approaches for the development of methodologies for the formulation of management strategies are feasible. The remainder of this section will present these two approaches.

The initial scrutiny for objective 4 examined the methodology of hotel managers' environmental management and generic management practices for service quality analysed in objectives one and three. The propensity for positive perceptions of customer service quality was found to be more likely when managers engage in generic management strategies. The second section in the analysis examined guest data for its congruence with generic

management practices by applying chi tests of significance. The low correlation between these two sources of management practice suggests that guest-derived management practice represents a different focal area of management. As contended in 4.12.2 these results show that a factor analysis methodology using a certain hypothesis regarding the factors that would emerge and then revising these factor structures or reconfirming them can produce successful strategies. However, business strategy is uniquely influenced by unit performance measures and targets (Jusoh and Parnell 2008:9). While strategy may be different, there is a shared methodology between business strategy and unit performance. Formulation of the methodology requires unit hotel managers to decide and implement in the given sequence:

- i. what service quality and management variables to include in the methodology development;
- ii. the sample size;
- iii. nature of the sample;
- iv. procedure to fit the exploratory factor model;
- v. how many factors should be included in the model;
- vi. select a method for rotating the initial factor analytic; and
- vii. method to rotate the initial factor analysis to a final management framework that can be more readily interpreted.

The availability of computer-assisted capability can speed up processes in the formulation of service quality management framework

The analysis of objective 4 has demonstrated that there are specific new service quality management practices at ecotourist hotels that are unrelated to accepted generic practices in the literature. The low correlations between the generic practices and guest derived management of employee engagement, management of environmental-care, guest communication and information management, management of value proposition, Value-adding structures,

management of hotel operations and managing aesthetic fit need to be accounted for. A wide range of multi-departmental hotel service outputs are needed.

Consistent with Part A of Figure 17 a listing of hotel service quality attributes, also called the voice of the customer or 'whats' was made in the quest survey in 4.9.2 (Annexure XXXXV). Khan and Su (2003:116) argue that management passion to fulfil the needs of the customers will necessitate knowledge of customer service quality expectations. The authors caution that key dissatisfaction factors must be identified and retained. Part B of Figure 17 will cover the management practices, also called the 'hows', synthesised from literature and subsequent statistical processes in Chapter 5. This section seeks to identify the essential practices of hotel managers in ecotourism destinations that are frequently cited as foundational practices that capture the essence of manager practices for service quality in hotels at serving ecotourists. Identification of these practices provide a conceptual basis for the generation of a scale to contribute to part C. Part C is the part of the relationship matrix which indicates how much each 'how' affects each 'what'. Values are given for example, a relationship is defined as strong (7 points), moderate (3 points), and weak (1 point). Part D is the degree of importance to which each guest was asked to rate the importance in a 1 to 5 Likert scale. Part E addresses the importance of the management practice which is achieved to multiply each contact element's relationship key by the degree of importance of the hotel service quality attribute. The final score is the ranking of each contact element for customer requirements. The ranking of the importance of management practice provides hotel managers with a guide for service quality strategy.

Perceptions of service change over time (O'Neill and Palmer 2001:187). Repetition of the factor analysis and house of quality exercises are therefore necessary. Customer service strategy is underpinned by organisational

alignment with service attribute that emerges as part of the product planning cycle or of annual review (Juran and Blanton 2001:25.3).

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter examined the findings in the variables of interest within each objective. Findings of the empirical study were aligned to particular aspects of the literature.

The next chapter will examine the conclusions that can be drawn from the study and propose recommendations and implications for further research.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the summary finding of each of the objectives of the study. It will also present the study limitations and propose contributions, recommendations and implications of the study for further research.

It is worth noting in this chapter that there has been no prior attempt to systematically review and assess management of service quality at hotels in ecotourist destinations. Relationships between the management of service quality at different hotel locations presenting differing service settings and environments remain arbitrary.

This survey based empirical study is snapshot of the guest service quality and service quality management practices at ecotourist hotels. Generally, the results of this study for objective one appear to support the results reported in the literature. However, objectives two, three and four could not be confirmed by literature as scholarly work in management practices and strategies for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism is not available. As a pioneering study, the empirical study survey sheds some light on the shared features and peculiarities of management practices in ecotourist hotels.

7.2 Objective One

The study first set out to determine gaps in service quality delivery to tourists in ecotourism accommodation and to identify the management factors that can influence these gaps.

7.2.1 Findings from the literature

The first research objective utilises ecotourist experiences to ascertain the adequacy of required management practices of for service quality attributes in ecotourist hotels. As indicated in section 1.9, gaps in service quality perception of hotel accommodation providers and of their guests' results in management failure to facilitate customer service quality (Min and Min 2005:54).

Sections 2.4 and 3.5 trace that the conceptualization and operationalisation of management factors for customer service quality is a distinctive management competence. Specifically, section 2.4.3 identifies that hotel attributes and guest importance-experience ratings of these attributes offer powerful guidance to managers. The dynamic nature of these attributes in 2.2.6 is among the primary challenges to the sustainability of service quality. Moreover, the specific requirements of the ecotourist market in 2.2.8 and 2.3 increases the scope of the challenge. Accordingly, sections 2.3.4 and 2.3.5 locate particular ecotourist preferences for accommodation. The operationalization of management practices for service quality is significantly influenced by the role of externalities in section 2.3.6 that are shown to affect both organizational and managerial capabilities. In particular, importance gaps in service quality will arise when accommodation providers focus on their provision while ignoring the broader tourism industry and the activities in which tourists wish to engage. While organisational capabilities are outside the scope of the current research, a study into the mechanisms by which distinctive management practices can influence mismatches is considered by the researcher to be an important objective. The investigation of mismatches in section 2.9 provides a basis for assessment and consequent gap-closing effort by managers.

7.2.2 Findings from empirical study

The empirical study of this objective established that there are mismatches in guest actual experience of the variables of interest for customer service quality and the importance they attach to that variable. The value of importance-

experience rankings have permitted the allocation of weightings that enable managers to improve weaknesses, promote strengths and come closer to maintain delighted customers.

The experience-importance investigations conclude that most guests rated their experiences above the importance they attach to those experiences. The results suggest that managers rate some attributes of service quality higher than the level of importance attached to it by their guests. The attention paid to more highly-valued attributes is likely to be impaired by the emphasis on less important service quality attributes. For example, the variables related to guests' experience of the management of environmental-care were generally rated lower than its importance to guests.

Factor analysis measures and exploration of importance ratings of service quality attributes locate five management practices for superior guest experiences and perceptions of service quality. The empirical findings are corroborated by the literature. Firstly, the management of employee engagement is well described in the literature in 2.4.4 as a guest expectation and, in 3.5 as part of management practice. Secondly, the management of environmental-care is identified in 2.3.2 and in 2.3.5 as a guest expectation and, in 3.3.3 as part of management practice. Thirdly guest communication and information management are examined in 2.4.4 from a guest perspective and, as a management practice in 3.3.3.3 and 3.5.7. Finally, the management of hotel operations are presented in 2.4 and the management of aesthetic fit in 3.3.3.

7.2.3 Conclusions in respect of objective one

The main result of the investigation of this objective indicates that service quality attributes in the study are overrated by managers. Manager efforts may consequently be misguided and wasteful. It is, therefore, recommended that managers place greater emphasis on ecotourist-market knowledge, select

ecotourist choice of experiences and activities and plan structural designs that meet ecotourist levels of service and standards. In the light of the disjuncture in the management of environmental-care, particular emphasis is needed in the area of ecotangibles to ensure that physical facilities and equipment are visually aligned and in good condition, there is comfortable access to hotel facilities and equipment and practices to ameliorate change to existing landform and vegetation. The distinctive management practices required in the ecotourist accommodation quality sets it apart from the generic management practices. These practices play a vital role for its potential capacity for sustainable service quality.

However, whilst customer based gap studies in 2.9.2 assist in tracking and correcting deviations, attributes affecting service quality that are not visible or appreciated by the customer may be missed.

7.2.4 Opportunities for further research arising from objective one

Managerial practices are often based on the absence of objective data. A considerable amount of work needs to be done to delimit and appraise dynamic practices for service quality in ecotourist destinations. Also, against a background of the growing numbers of 'green' tourists, the management of the service quality perceptions of each typology of ecotourists require further investigation.

7.3 Objective Two

The second objective of the study evaluated the significance of selected quality management practices proposed in the literature for management of the service quality in ecotourism accommodation.

7.3.1 Findings from the literature

The feasibility, application and effectiveness of eleven generic management practices and seven sector specific environmental practices for the management of the service quality to commercial accommodation in ecotourism areas is the fundamental focus of objective 2 of this study. The literature shows that relationships between the management of service quality at different hotel locations presenting differing service settings and environments remain arbitrary. This is especially so for ecotourism.

Ecotourists are a category of nature tourists who place value on the integrity of the natural environment. The benefit of knowing that their stay in a natural area destination is not adding to environmental degradation is well described by in sections 3.3.3.1, 3.3.3.2 and 3.3.3.5. Such knowledge is especially important is hotel waste reduction, energy efficiency and water efficiency. Section 3.3.3.3 highlights the importance of management practices that communicate environmental awareness. Improved knowledge on the part of the provider and guests leads to improved positive perceptions of the quality of service. The examination of literature in section 3.3.4 stresses that architecture and landscape design are to be congruent with the environment and reveal the local influence. Architecture, style and layout contribute significantly to the hotel ambience and may well be a determining variable for perception of service quality. Service quality from effective environmental management can be realised only from informed manager practice. The literature in section 3.3.3.6 stresses the need for the development of managers.

The literature review in section 3.5.1 underlines compensation as a vital catalyst for service quality and a primary building-block for a service quality culture. Process management is indispensable to the seamless delivery of service quality. It is evident from section 3.5.2 that this is achieved by setting controlled systems and processes. Individual hotel benchmarks that comprise of internal and external platforms assist managers to deliver superior quality service. Section 3.5.3 illustrates that benchmarking practices are integral to the initiation and maintenance of superior quality. Since training is fundamental to

service quality, the management of training in section 3.5.4 of the literature review acknowledges that the management of training is a strategic imperative. The labour intensiveness of service quality in hotels demands that managers' guard against defective design, poor-user orientation and deficiencies in implementation. Section 3.5.5 accordingly accounts for the need by managers to recognise and cater for the wider scope of training required at ecotourist hotels. Consequently, section 3.5.6 confirms the vital role of employee empowerment to underline the benefits for service quality that come from enhanced capability, improve attitudes, deeper commitment and guest-friendly behaviour among employees. Section 3.5.7 recognises that technology management practices are not considered to be a significant factor in guest service quality. The research in hotel technology-guest interfaces is thin. The important role of participation as a management practice is well described in the literature in 3.5.8 for its ability to meaningfully engage employees and guests, improve pride in employee productivity and creativity and foster positive internal marketing. A natural result is a positive team culture described in 3.5.9. Effective teams are shown to share priorities, are clear about their tasks, have no inter-team tensions and are supported by managers. The examination of the literature in section 3.5.10 confirms that astute quality measurement results in proper manager responses to the service quality management project. Similarly, the literature in section 3.5.11 acknowledges the important role of staff assessment practices. It is important that the assessment system and its instruments are appropriately designed to account for critical aspects of customer expectation.

7.3.2 Findings from empirical study

Manager practices for service quality comprise of generic and sector specific management practices. It is crucial to identify the relative impact of manager practices for service quality so that managers can take effective decisions and effort and resources may be correctly deployed.

Overall, managers contend that the generic management practices for service quality contribute more significantly to guest service quality than the sector specific practices. The evaluation of manager practices indicates that managers attached substantial weight to all generic service quality management practices. Despite the recognition by hotel managers that their hotel services and facilities would influence the natural surroundings and that wholesome environmental practice enhance perception of service quality, this is not always translated into actions.

The results of the empirical study demonstrate that substantially more importance is placed by managers on outcome measurement for its regularity of service quality measurement and its tracking of delivery by hotel personnel. Teamwork is identified as an equally important management practice as hotel service offerings are dependent on multiple staff groupings. Secondly, managers perceived equal significance for training management, assessment and benchmarking.

The empirical study also establishes that most managers consider all but two environmental practices important for customer service quality important. The majority of managers did not find value in practices related to waste reduction, compensation for quality and water efficiency for customer service quality. On the other hand, energy efficiency, architecture and landscape design and waste reduction are regarded as highly significant management practices for service quality.

The open-ended questions yielded noteworthy insights that affect management practice. Managers are cautious that care of the environment should not place an additional price burden or loss of expected service or amenity to their guests.

7.3.3 Conclusion in respect of objective two

Service quality is affected by manager perception of the contribution of their practice to its delivery. In this regard, investigation of objective 2 offers several important contributions to both theory and practice. Firstly, the conclusions of the empirical study corroborate the literature study in respect of outcome measurement, teamwork, training management, assessment and benchmarking. Each of these is highly prized in the literature. Secondly, and also consistent with the literature, technology management is not regarded by hotel managers as a significant management practice for service quality. Thirdly, and contrary to the literature, compensation for quality is not viewed by hotel managers as a significant management practice for guest service quality. In this regard, the testing of employee evaluation may provide alternate directions for investigations of this management practice. However, employee evaluations are not within the scope of the current study.

The findings are particularly relevant to ecotourist hotels that are keen to enhance their quality of guest services. It is suggested that the management practices raised in this research can be used to create, track and sustain higher levels of guest service quality at hotels serving ecotourists. The installation of appropriate management practices is especially important to ecotourist hotels given the critical natural environmental issues of concern to this market.

7.3.4 Opportunities for further research arising from objective two

Compensation for quality has not been viewed by hotel managers to be a significant management practice for guest service quality. In this regard, the testing of employee evaluation may provide alternate directions for investigations of this management practice.

Despite the considerable interest in service quality at hotels among practitioners, limited empirical research has been conducted in natural area settings. While an important body of relevant research exists in more general

disciplines such as marketing, environmental conservation and quality, systematic research is still needed to study tourist accommodation provision in the context of hospitality management. An additional study of different hotel types in the context of ecotourism is needed. In particular, there is a need for guidance to ecotourism hospitality managers in their efforts to improve the perceptions of service quality across the range of ecotourist typologies.

Further research is also necessary to validate the results of this objective. There are also several opportunities to extend this study. For example, further studies on manager practices for service quality must focus on issues of how different socio-demographic variables affect service quality dimensions. Another factor that might have to be considered in future research is whether the factor structure proposed in this study is valid in other ecotourist destinations.

7.4 Objective Three

Understanding of the management of service quality specifically in the context of hospitality is an important foundation of any successful service strategy in ecotourist hotels. The third objective sought to investigate possible strategies that ecotourism accommodation managers perceive as being critically important in achieving quality related objectives were derived. Exploring and clarifying the primary relationships between the guest service quality and management constructs from different theoretical perspectives were undertaken to investigate the current state of knowledge and provide insights into service management practice in hotels at ecotourist destinations.

7.4.1 Findings from the literature

There is consensus in the literature to indicate that development of affable relationships between the people, resources and tourism is unlikely to occur without implementation of management strategies to set-up, support and

maintain the quality of ecotourism services. The development of services strategies in the service sector have advanced to a stage where multiple options referred to in section 2.2.4 are maturing to the point of manager aspiration to go beyond superior service to customer delight as proposed in the literature in section 2.2.7. However, investigation of the extent to which management can sustain guest service quality at hotels serving ecotourists and meet best practice in hotel environmental management in ecotourism literature is not available. This void fosters downstream knowledge gaps that frustrate the envisaged strategic alignment of hotel systems, structure and personnel in section 2.4.4 to advance customer delight with service quality.

Section 2.4.4 has argued that customer delight can only materialize from the strategic alignment of hotel systems, structure and personnel. The literature in section 3.3 contends that the development for hotel service quality in nature based destinations require a strategy for environmental guardianship. The need for a strategic approach in services is further prompted by literature that acknowledges the demanding customer base in section 2.2.

7.4.2 Findings from the empirical study

The empirical study establishes that all management practices for service quality at ecotourist hotels extracted from the literature contributes to strategy. The integration of each of these management practices within an integrated service strategy was sought.

The investigation intended to move the emphasis on various service quality management practices to discrete collections of practice that suggest strategic direction to achieve service quality-related objectives. However, there is no strong evidence from the empirical study to suggest that any particular strategy is common across hotels. This result may arise from the small census of managers. Generalisations cannot, therefore be made. An alternate reason for diversity in the small population is the individuality of each hotel. Strategy is

exclusively influenced by unique unit performance measures and targets each hotel (Jusoh and Parnell 2008:9).

Nonetheless, the researcher advocates that there is a tendency among ecotourist managers for management strategies to be informed by superior hotel architecture and landscape design, outcome measurement, teamwork, training management, assessment and benchmarking. These are considered critically important by managers for the management of customer service quality. However, the derived management strategy must not undermine the pristine state, features and visual appeal of the scenic landscape. Therefore, garden planning is to be appropriate to the environment and demonstrate respect for the features of the natural and historical environment. The congruence of the hotel architecture with environment and hotel practices is elevated by knowledge of the environmental provisions in accommodation-grading criteria of the Tourism Grading Council, general environmental education to personnel and participation in environmental meetings.

7.4.3 Conclusion in respect of objective three

This study has revealed eight new manager practices for service quality in ecotourist hotels that assimilate 17 of the eighteen practices proposed by the literature (Annexure XXXXVIII). The investigation of this objective however, demonstrates that not all management practices in the literature are strategically relevant for service quality in ecotourism accommodation. Strategic value is shown in the literature to be derived from unique unit performance measures and targets. The relevance in this broad study of ecotourist hotels lies in the identification of management practices common to specific management strategies to address fundamental guest service requirements of the ecotourism market.

The first of these practices stipulate superior hotel architecture and landscape design for its capacity to build a supportive climate and align organisational

dimensions in a manner that creates desirable staff competencies and behaviours. Secondly, integration of monitoring and control by way of assessment and outcome measurement highlight matters in need of change, the scope of change and its urgency. Specific, immediate benefits for customer service quality management arise from behavioural diagnosis. Thirdly, teamwork and effective training management also contribute to a supportive climate for guest service quality especially from desirable staff competencies and behaviours. Fourthly, the inclusion of benchmarking exercises contributes tremendously to the clarification of strategic intent and organisation service quality mission. Awareness of issues and any need for change are highlighted.

The strategic alignment of hotel systems, structure and personnel is necessary. This alignment is unique to ecotourist hotels for the combination of high service quality that come from hotel attributes and their environmental performance. Of necessity, integrated in-house systems that include the organizational structure, profiles of accountability and responsibility, policies, practices, procedures, processes and resources are necessary.

7.4.4 Opportunities for further research arising from objective three

It is only through the formulation of a well construed strategy can guest service quality in ecotourist hotels be assured. However, the limited census of managers seriously undermined the identification of a statistically adequate collection of shared management practices that constitute strategy. Future works to identify common elements of management strategies must be spread over a larger ecotourism geographical region. There was no distinction in hotel classification and ecotourist type in this study. Different results are likely when cognisance is given to these variations and unique unit performance measures and targets in hotels.

7.5 Objective Four

A methodology for the formulation of management strategy for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism is the focus of the investigation of objective four. The information from manager and guest surveys were used by this study as a basis to propose a methodology through subsequent statistical analysis to formulate management strategies for service quality at hotel serving ecotourism destinations.

7.5.1 Findings from the literature

The scholarly development of management strategies for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism is not available in the literature. The current pockets of descriptive literature are anecdotal. However, from the scholarly methodologies in the wider literature, factor analysis in section 4.12.2 and quality function deployment in sections 2.4 and 3.7 support the formulation of management strategies for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism. While neither of the techniques has been used for strategy development for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism, they show potential to help hotel managers' plan, improve and maintain service quality. The review of these techniques sought to identify a methodology to determine the essential practices of hotel managers in ecotourism destinations that are frequently cited as foundational practices to capture the essence of manager practices for service quality in hotels at serving ecotourist destinations. It was expected that the identification of these practices provides a conceptual basis for the generation of a scale.

Section 3.7 shows that prior use of quality function deployment to lower the number of service failures has established, expanded and still preserves ideal hotel-guest service. Benefits arise primarily from a deeper understanding of guests' requirements. QFD is a significant tool to guide hotel managers to attain planned levels of guest service quality. The technique adopts a paradigm that seeks information from both external and internal drivers and elements of service quality to establish and rate a base to challenge and to

innovate practice. Specifically, the environmental prescriptions of market and the generic attributes of hotel service quality can be translated into product specifications. Hence, hotel managers can construct a well-informed and systematic framework that will advance strategies for service quality enhancement.

Consistent with the literature in sections 4.12.2 and 5.5.1.2, factor analysis was also considered suitable to derive manager and guest ratings of the services they experienced at the hotel. This information will feed into strategy.

7.5.2 Findings from the empirical study

The methodology proposal for the formulation of management strategies for tourist service quality in the accommodation sector of ecotourism displays several advantages. The proposal also provides ground for the added value of this study to general sector management.

Firstly, the quality function deployment framework developed in the present work helps managers to evaluate the realities of customer needs from the perspective of hotel guest and subsequently makes manager practices for service quality far-reaching in by addressing very relevant service attributes at an ecotourist hotel. The results of the primary study show that after aligning the service quality attributes with identified management practice, hotels would have powerful information to formulate strategy.

A static approach that views opinions and perceptions as established and fixed is inappropriate when behaviours are constantly changing. Quality function deployment has, therefore, been proposed as a significant tool to guide hotel managers to attain planned levels of guest service quality. The technique adopts a paradigm that seeks information from both external and internal drivers and elements of service quality to establish and rate a base to challenge and to innovate practice. Specifically, the environmental prescriptions of market and the generic attributes of hotel service quality can

be translated into product specifications. Hence, hotel managers can construct a well-informed and systematic framework that will advance strategies for service quality enhancement. Thus, a rationale and methodology for the development an organisation based model was presented.

The quality function deployment framework using the 'house of quality' model derived in this study demonstrates the methodical planning, goals and standards setting within a strategic approach. The outcome of 'house of quality' analysis provides managers with critical information and meaningful insight for the decisions on customer service strategy. Critical service quality hotel attributes and manager practices are used to ascertain a methodology for the formulation of management strategy for guest service quality. The methodology determines and quantifies the prioritisation of manager practices to inform strategy development. Unlike factor analysis, both the outcome and the process to attain service quality are offered by this methodology.

However, the compilation of the house of quality is no guarantee of success. Barriers may arise from factors such as change and apathy. Guest service quality is a target that is constantly shifting and hotel employee attitudes are often not constant. Successful implementation involves imbibing the strategy into the broader business strategy of the hotel and could well represent a change in the way things were done in the past.

Secondly, the multidimensional aspects necessary for strategy formulation involves multiple manager practices. Factor analysis techniques were moulded to develop an understanding of the underlying service quality management concepts and practices of the ecotourism hotel sector. Factor analysis was conducted on both manager and guest data sets. The results of the combined data illustrate that factor analysis methodology using a certain hypothesis regarding the factors contributes to successful service quality management strategies.

Exploratory factor analysis summarises and reduces vast data. The factors derived from exploratory factor analysis should be subjected to correlation and alpha reliability to ascertain its suitability. Criteria for the number of extracted factors must be based on the characteristic value, variance percentage, factor importance and factor structure. Confirmatory factor analysis can furthermore be used to test the strategy model separately for each construct prior to simultaneous estimation of the structural model. In the current business environment, where all ecotourists have many options available to them, factors that enable managers to attract and retain guests should be seriously studied. Derived factor models take account of hotel-guest prioritisation of their service quality needs. It contributes to the broader discussion of hotel service quality and addresses the criticism of limited contextual studies, and the one size fits all option.

7.5.3 Opportunities for further research arising from objective four

Since this study was applied to the complement of ecotourist hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, the researcher believes that it will be more beneficial if studies for strategy development are completed in singular hotels. Future studies on singular organisations can produce more explicit guest needs and develop more focussed service strategies and consequent management practices to gain the optimal benefits from each of the methodologies. However, the use of of factor analysis and quality function deployment for strategy development is exploratory. There is a need for refinement and empirically testing over multiple ecotourist- hotel properties.

7.6 Study Limitations

This study recognises the shortcomings of exploratory, cross-sectional research in that a study of this nature cannot achieve the same outcomes, in terms of generalisability, as that of a more large-scale approach. This study has been presented with some inherent flaws.

There are three overarching limitations that prevent generalisation of the findings in this study. These are concerned with the small manager census and the short period of data collection from hotels from only one province. Consequent bias may have been introduced in unevenness in guest patronage and differing hotel circumstances. Also, while the theme of the research is on management of service quality in ecotourist accommodation, the instruments and the study has been confined to the hotel sector of ecotourism. Nonetheless, this study will contribute to improving customer perceptions of the service quality as well as enhancing organisation strategy for service quality and the ensuing manager practice.

Factor analysis produced regression weights in the form of factor loadings to predict measured variables from the latent variables. Floyd and Widaman (1995:289) suggest that a respondent to item ratio of 4:1 or 5:1 is the adequate ratio for exploratory factor analysis. The manager census presented a response rate of 1:1,5. Some chi square tests of significance of hotel environmental management practices and the seven factors could not be ascertained because of the poor response rates for the hotel environmental management practices. As a result, the interaction between the variable of interest could not be determined.

Heitman (1997:549) urges scholars to establish reasons for missing observations and state how these are likely to affect analyses. The reason for the low census of managers is that there are a limited number of hotels serving ecotourist destinations.

A larger sample of managers would have enhanced the findings in this study. In addition, since this study represents a set of managers, hotels and ecotourist types that may not found in other ecotourist destinations, generalisations should be made cautiously. Replications in different countries are needed in order to generalize the results. The study assumptions are also

constrained by time and location; at other times and in other places, the results may change. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that, based on the variables collected, these management practices may approximate true groups in the population, each with distinct characteristics. The results of this study are unusually practical. The findings indicate that determining what factors are important to guests, and then managing those factors, is likely to enhance guest perceptions of the hotel's service quality.

7.7 Future Research

Additional research is needed to clarify potential applications of service quality management practices in hotels located in natural areas. First, a wide range of case studies for important service attributes and different destinations are needed to test the congruence between importance of hotel service quality attributes and the management practice to deliver on them. Second, researchers should examine the multi-dimensional aspects of the needs of different ecotourist typologies using a variety of other statistical analyses. Third, research should assess reasons for change from the management of ecotourist hotels to those of other tourist typologies.

7.8 Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the impact of quality management practices on service quality in hotels serving ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal. Hotel service quality research has focused mainly on measurement and customer expectations. Little attention has been attributed to quality-related performance (Nicolau and Sellers 2010:835). This study fills this gap by finding congruent hotel service quality attributes and relating these to management performance by analysing the importance of these attributes for hotel-guests seeking experiences of the natural environment.

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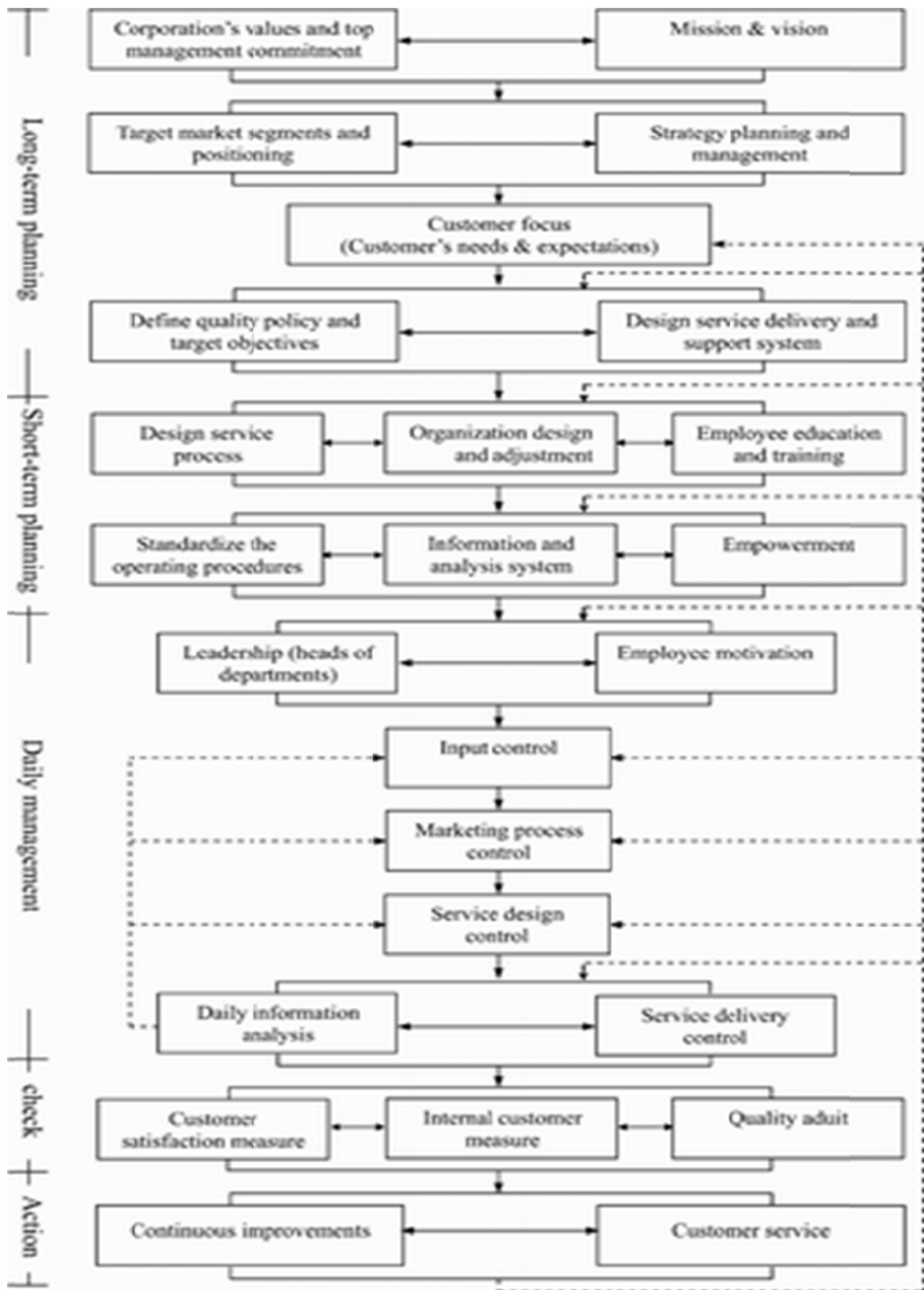
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ANNEXURE 1 Quality Management System for Services (Yang 2006: 1137)



ANNEXURE 2

The critical factors of customer-perceived service quality (Sureshchandar, Rajendran and Anantharaman 2002: 379)

Sl. no.	Critical factors	Explanation of the critical factors
1	Core service or service product	The core service portrays the “content” of a service. It portrays the “what” of a service, i.e. the service product is whatever features that are offered in a service
2	Human element of service delivery	This factor refers to all aspects (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, moments of truth, critical incident and recovery) that will fall under the domain of the human element in the service delivery
3	Systematization of service delivery: non-human element	The processes, procedures, systems and technology that would make a service a seamless one. Customers would always like and expect the service delivery processes to be perfectly standardized, streamlined, and simplified so that they could receive the service without any hassles, hiccups or undesired/inordinate questioning by the service providers
4	Tangibles of service – servicescapes	The tangible facets of the service facility (equipment, machinery, signage, employee appearance, etc.) or the man-made physical environment, popularly known as the “servicescapes”
5	Social responsibility	Social responsibility helps an organization to lead as a corporate citizen in encouraging ethical behaviour in everything it does. These subtle, but nevertheless forceful, elements send strong signals towards improving the organization’s image and goodwill and consequently influence the customers’ overall evaluation of service quality and their loyalty to the organization

Table I. The critical factors of customer-perceived service quality

ANNEXURE 3

Mapping of most highly-rated attributes expected by ecotourists at service businesses in ecotourism destination

	Khan (2003:117)	Khan and Su (2003:120)	Said et al (2009: 81)	Rahman et al (2010: 50)	Nepal (2007:266)
Employee Engagement	Instil confidence in customers	Instil confidence in customers	Employees consistently courteous with customers	Staff give prompt services	
	Consistently courteous with customers	Consistently courteous with customers	Employees always willing to help	Staff provide services at promised time	
	Provide services at promised time	Services promised at a certain time		Staff willing to assist tourists	
	Promise to do service by a certain time	Insist on error free service		Staff never too busy to respond to tourist's question(s)	
	Show interest in solving a problem			Staff have knowledge to answer questions	
	Employees always willing to help			Staff give tourist personal attention	
	Employees giving prompt service to customers				
Management of environmental-care	Facilities appropriate to environment		Equipment that minimises degradation	Emphasises tourist to recycle and reuse product	Good views of mountain and scenery
	Equipment that minimises degradation		Facilities environmentally safe	Minimal change to existing land form	
	Facilities environmentally safe				
Guest Communication and Information Management	Provide the necessary information	Have knowledge to answer questions	Have knowledge to answer questions	Staff inform tourist of the exact services and products offered	Suggestions from local porters and guides
	Have knowledge to answer questions				
Management of Value Proposition					Overall environmental quality
Value-adding Structures	Feel safe in their transaction	Feel safe in their transaction		Tourist feel safe and secure	Availability of a double bed
				Adequate transport systems	Suggestions from fellow trekkers
Management of Hotel Operations				Convenient location of facilities and equipment	
Managing Aesthetic Fit	Facilities reflect local influence	Facilities visually appealing			
		Facilities reflect local influence			
		Materials reflect local influence			
		Materials visually appealing			

ANNEXURE 4

Environmental Management Measures by US Hotels (Mensah 2004)

Hotel	Practice Initiated
Westin, Seattle	Changed incandescent bulbs to energy saving compact fluorescent light bulbs and improving control mechanisms
Apple Farm Inn and Restaurant, California	Uses discharged water from washing machines to flush toilets
Disney World, Florida	Recycles 15.2 million liters (4 million gallons) of wastewater a day for irrigation of landscaping and golf courses.
Hotel Bel Air,	Undertook a comprehensive environmental program
Hyatt Regency, Chicago	A comprehensive waste reduction and recycling program.
Inter-Continental, LA	Installed a power monitoring system
Intercontinental, Miami	Recycling program involving 30 materials.
	Recycling waste water for watering gardens as well as use of aerators on water outlets
	Reduced energy consumption by using energy efficient appliances
Habitat Suites Hotel, Austin, Texas	Water conservation programmed such as use of low-flow sink and shower aerators, water-saving toilets and water saving sprinklers.
	Use of fluorescent and air-conditioning units
Boston Park Plaza	Installed 1,686 thermopane windows at a cost of \$1.2 million.

ANNEXURE 5

Researcher illustration of theoretical comparisons with practice of hotel environmental performance categories and indicators.

Performance Categories and Indicators (Erdogan and Tosun 2009:410)	Customer tourist site and hotel selection criteria (Uriely et al 2007:168)	Consumer attitude towards green practices in the lodging industry (Manaktola and Jauhari 2007:367)
Energy efficiency Using key-card control system in guest rooms Energy-saver control system in guest rooms Using solar energy Using photocell lighting in washrooms Using phosphorus cat-eye in lighting outside Purchasing low energy consuming materials Using the energy-saving light bulbs in rooms		Use sensors or timers to save electricity in intermittent use areas Having energy-saving light bulbs in all rooms
Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection Knowledge on the ISO Knowledge on the Pine Awards Knowledge on the Blue Flag Project	Is environmentally sensitive Strictly adheres to environmental rules and regulations Controls the number of visitors Is a fair employer Employs local residents	Participate in environmental partnership or certification Encourage business with environmentally friendly service providers
Architecture and landscape design Using local material in construction Hotel architecture harmonized with environment Garden planning suitable with environment Plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment	Is built in a way compatible with the natural landscape	
Education and training for environmental awareness Providing general environmental education to personnel Providing environmental sensitivity training to personnel Providing environmental education to guests Participating in environmental meetings	Educates to preserve the quality of the environment	Train employees for better environmental Performance Utilise environmentally responsible cleaners throughout the property
Waste reduction Solid waste separation at source Using recycled paper in brochures Composting the organic and food waste Purchasing materials with recyclable feature Cooperation with recycling organisations	Recycles waste Recycles paper	Establish active recycling program for materials in all sections of the hotel Establish system for prompt disposal of packaging materials and crates to reduce wastage
Communication for environmental awareness Brochures with information on environmental protection Getting guest opinions on environmental activities of hotel Reflecting guest opinions about environment to hotel activities Encouraging guests to use mass transportation Posting educational posters for customers	Provides information about the nature and landscape of the area Provides information about the quality of the local environment Uses responsible and honest marketing	Have visible communications about green practices Provide environmentally friendly products (i.e. low toxicity, organic or locally grown/made)
Water efficiency Using treated water in garden irrigation Wastewater treatment Using photocell water armatures Using water-saving measures on linen change		Offer a linen reuse option to multiple night guests Have an active system to detect and repair water leakage in toilets, faucets and shower heads

ANNEXURE 6

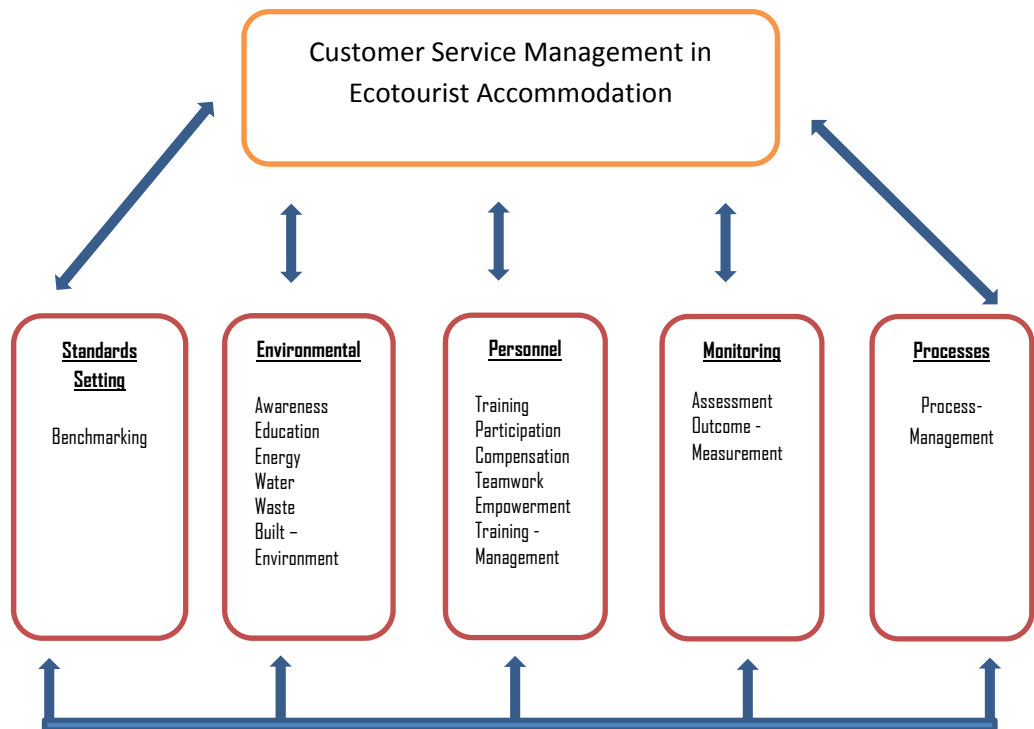
Comparative Summary by Researcher of Outcomes and Tasks Associated with the Management of Service Quality

Quality Management Practices in Services (Behara and Gundersen 2001:592-3)	Dimensions and attributes of organisational service orientation (Urban 2009:77)	Service System Elements (Kaner and Karni 2007:263)	Quality Practices (Yang 2006:1135)	Critical Dimensions of Total Quality Service (Sureshchander et al 2001:352-4)	Managerial Tasks (Brogowicz, Delene and Lyth, 1990:41)
1. Compensation (practices for non-management, middle, senior and teams)	Service rewards; Human resource management practices.	Payment factors; Financial factors; Human Factors.	Employee motivation.	Human Resource Management; Employee satisfaction.	Quality and performance incentives; Individual and team performance criteria; compensation
2. Benchmarking (best in class competitor source of new ideas, service design, customer contact systems and delivery and distribution)	Service vision; Customer treatment; Service failure recovery; Service leadership practices.	Product Configuration; Costs, prices and charges; procedures and processes; Customer organisation, features, association, attitudes, relationships and preferences.	Define quality policy and target; Mission and vision; strategy planning and management; design service systems; organisation design and adjust.	Benchmarking.	Service mix design; information system design; production and supply resource; facility layout; service portfolio; Site selection;
3. Training Management (alignment, inclusivity, skills, delivery, extent of investment)	Human resource management practices.	Enterprise culture.	Design service delivery and support system.	Human Resource Management; Service Culture.	Skills inventory; job design; policy and procedure setting ; employee evaluation.
4. Empowerment (of self-managed work teams, customer contact teams and autonomous teams, independence, decision-making)	Employee Empowerment; Service leadership;	Employee management, culture and competence; Providers of service and support; promotion.	Empowerment.	Human Resource Management; Social Responsibility.	Train; internal marketing; personnel assignment; marketing research;
5. Technology Management (innovation, cost reduction and technology procurement for service quality enhancement)	Service Technology.	Informatic inputs; service centre, facilities, amenities, equipment, furnishings, information technology and access.	Information Systems and analysis.	Information and analysis systems; Serviscapes.	Information system design; production and supply resource; facility layout; system capacity; system upgrade; maintenance; resource allocation; build; manufacture.

6. Assessment (team emphasis, using quality criterion, application to middle and senior management)	Human resource management practices. Customer Treatment.	Culture and Competence; Planning and Control.	Customer focus: Customer satisfaction measures; Employee motivation; Internal customer measures.	Human Resource Management. Customer focus.	Human Resource Management. Critical incident reporting; employee evaluation.
7. Process Management (evaluating cost of quality, cycle time and customer complaints)	Service system practices; Service failure recovery.	Service configuration, Physical, employee, customer and financial inputs; Service variability, initiation, provision, operations, delivery, payment, support and recovery.	Standardize the operating procedures; design service delivery and support system; input control; marketing process control; service delivery control; service design control; daily information analysis.	Technical System.	Policy and procedures setting; scheduling criteria; hours of operation; employee recruitment and selection; service delivery; pricing and promotion decisions; expediting.
8. Participation (of non-management, middle and senior management, general and problem specific contribution)	Human resource management practices.	Human factors; decision support; service support; product/service information.	Design service delivery and support system; Design of service process.	Human Resource Management. Union recognition.	individual and team performance criteria
9. Teamwork (cross functional, inclusivity, methods)	Organisational service orientation.	Human Factors; Employee Culture; Decision Support.	Employee motivation; Customer Service focus. Top management commitment	Human Resource Management. Top management commitment	Personnel assignment; individual and team performance criteria; expediting; internal marketing
10. Training (of non-management, middle and senior management, inclusivity)	Service training; Service encounter practices; Service standards communication.	Service Provision, delivery, support and operations; customer contact; Employee culture and competence.	Employee education and training.	Human Resource Management.	Training
11. Outcome Measurement (measurement and improvement from labour productivity, process variation, customer feedback and resource usage)	Service failure prevention.	Performance Measures Strategic service Customer and economic goals.	Quality Audit; Continuous Improvement.	Continuous Improvement.	Facility evaluation; customer satisfaction research; system failure analysis; 'blueprinting'; complaint analysis;

ANNEXURE 7

Component perspective for ecotourist service quality management in accommodation by researcher



ANNEXURE 8

Formulation of a typical house of quality (Das and Mukherjee 2008: 5)

Step 1: To identify customer needs (WHATs).

Step 2: To prioritize customer needs.

Step 3: To compare the product under study with other competitive products on different attributes (WHATs).

Step 4: To list technical descriptors, i.e., HOWs, which will address each customer need.

Step 5: To develop a relationship matrix between customer WHATs and HOWs.

Step 6: To develop an interrelationship matrix between HOWs.

















Step 7: To compare the product under study with other competitive products on technical descriptors, i.e., HOWs.














Step 8: To prioritize technical descriptors, i.e., HOWs.

ANNEXURE 9

Mapping of customer expectation of hotel service quality with management practices by researcher.

Framework of the Study

Attributes that contribute to Satisfaction with Guest Services Robinet and Giannelloni (2008: 161)		Classification of Practice by Management to meet attributes for satisfaction with Customer Service Quality Behara and Gundersen (2001:589); Erdogan and Tosun (2009: 412)	
Dependent variable		Independent variable	
		PRIMARY	SECONDARY
You did not have to wait to make your booking		Process Management	Management of Technology Teamwork Empowerment
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient		Training Management	Management of Technology Empowerment Teamwork
You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail		Process Management	Training Teamwork
The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate		Process Management	Management of Technology Empowerment Teamwork
The hotel was well signposted		Process Management	Management of Technology
You appreciated the presence of a car park		Process Management	Management of Technology
The reception staff were attentive		Training	Empowerment Assessment and appraisal Teamwork
The room is pleasant		Architecture and landscape design	Energy efficiency Benchmarking Process Management Outcome Measurement
The bedding is comfortable		Benchmarking	Management of Technology Process Management
You like the way the room is decorated		Architecture and landscape design	Outcome Measurement
The bathroom is clean		Process Management	Empowerment Assessment and appraisal Teamwork Training
The hotel is appropriately decorated		Architecture and landscape design	Managerial knowledge on environmental protection. Education and Training for environmental awareness.
The staff told you about things to do in the area		Empowerment	Training Management
You like the authentic character of the hotel		Architecture and landscape design	Education and Training for environmental awareness Water efficiency Waste reduction Energy efficiency Managerial knowledge on environmental protection Communication for environmental awareness
The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant		Managerial knowledge on environmental protection	Education and Training for environmental awareness Water efficiency Waste reduction Energy efficiency Architecture and landscape design Communication for environmental awareness.
You do not have to wait to get your keys		Process Management	Empowerment Assessment and appraisal Teamwork Training

You find the surroundings beautiful		Communication for environmental awareness	Education and Training for environmental awareness Water efficiency Waste reduction Energy efficiency Architecture and landscape design Managerial knowledge on environmental protection
You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff		Teamwork	Compensation Participation
The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars		Benchmarking	Management of Training Managerial knowledge on environmental protection. Architecture and landscape design. Management of Technology Process Management Outcome Measurement.
The price is fair compared with the service provided		Benchmarking	Process Management Outcome Measurement
You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel (ISO, Quality Charter, etc.)		Managerial knowledge on environmental protection	Education and Training for environmental awareness Water efficiency Waste reduction Energy efficiency Architecture and landscape design Communication for environmental awareness.
The available leisure facilities are pleasant (swimming pool, sauna, etc.)		Management of Technology	Architecture and landscape design Training Management
You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels).		Communication for environmental awareness	Energy efficiency Managerial knowledge on environmental protection Education and Training for environmental awareness Water efficiency Waste reduction Architecture and landscape design Communication for environmental awareness
You appreciate the fact that hotel uses clean or renewable energies (solar, wind, power, etc.)		Energy efficiency	Management of Technology Managerial knowledge on environmental protection Education and Training for environmental awareness Water efficiency Waste reduction Architecture and landscape design Communication for environmental awareness
The staff are competent		Training Management	Teamwork Participation Empowerment Assessment
The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work		Management of Technology	Training Management Process Management
The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere		Benchmarking	Outcome Measurement Process Management
You find the hotel charming		Architecture and landscape design	Benchmarking Outcome Measurement Managerial knowledge on environmental protection.
Your room is quiet		Benchmarking	Communication for environmental awareness Education and Training for environmental awareness Architecture and landscape design

ANNEXURE 10

Researcher illustration of theoretical and case-study comparisons with empirically derived practice of hotel environmental performance categories and indicators.

Environmental Management Methods (Erdogan and Tosun 2009: 410)	Examples of Practice (World Travel and Tourism Council undated)			
	Marriot International Inc. "Spirit to Preserve the Rainforest"	Jones Lang LaSalle Hotels "Sustainability Analysis"	Fairmont Hotels and Resorts "Green Partnership Program"	Accor "Hotels Environment Charter"
Energy efficiency Using key-card control system in guest rooms Energy-saver control system in guest rooms Using solar energy Using photocell lighting in washrooms Using phosphorus cat-eye in lighting outside Purchasing low energy consuming materials Using the energy-saving light bulbs in rooms	Reduced energy consumption; Expansion of leadership in energy and environmental design	Energy and water conservation protocol Initiation of on-line Green Globe technology platform to assess energy and sustainability	Energy and carbon management programme; Technology Infrastructure and Information Technology Applications	Promote renewable energy sources and equip hotels with efficient energy systems; Equip hotel faucets with flow regulators, monitor and recover wastewater, and raise customer awareness
Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection Knowledge on the ISO Knowledge on the Pine Awards Knowledge on the Blue Flag Project	Wildlife preservation; Use of greener products ; Rainforest protection		Green supply chain, technology installation and infrastructure	
Architecture and landscape design Using local material in construction Hotel architecture harmonized with environment Garden planning suitable with environment Plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment	Expansion of leadership in energy and environmental design	Performance measures for buildings	Sustainable design and construction	
Education and training for environmental awareness Providing general environmental education to personnel Providing environmental sensitivity training to personnel Providing environmental education to guests Participating in environmental meetings	Environmental education of employees and guests		Sustainable best practice guidebook; On site employee green teams	Create partnerships with specialized associations to build awareness and protect endangered species.
Waste reduction Solid waste separation at source Using recycled paper in brochures Composting the organic and food waste Purchasing materials with recyclable feature Cooperation with recycling organisations	Waste-management; Smoke Free Policy	Waste-management protocol; Air quality monitoring	Technology Infrastructure and Information Technology; Applications Emission reduction	Recycle more and better, and reduce wastage

Communication for environmental awareness Brochures with information on environmental protection Getting guest opinions on environmental activities of hotel Reflecting guest opinions about environment to hotel activities Encouraging guests to use mass transportation Posting educational posters for customers	Improving communication system			Equip hotel faucets with flow regulators, monitor and recover wastewater, and raise customer awareness
Water efficiency Using treated water in garden irrigation Wastewater treatment Using photocell water armatures Using water-saving measures on linen change		Energy and water conservation protocol		Equip hotel faucets with flow regulators, monitor and recover wastewater, and raise customer awareness

ANNEXURE 11

Hotel-guest Questionnaire

Dear Visitor

My name is Krish Naidoo and I am conducting research for my DTech degree in the management of ecotourism accommodation in KwaZulu-Natal. It will be appreciated if you would complete the attached questionnaire designed to study aspects of ecotourism service quality.

The information you provide will help me better understand management of tourist accommodation for ecotourists. Because you are the one who can give me the correct picture of how you experience the service quality of accommodation services at our ecotourism destinations, I request that you respond to the questions frankly and honestly.

Your response will be kept strictly confidential. Only my supervisors and I have access to the information you give. The numbers, names, or completed questionnaires will not be made available to anyone other than the mentioned research team.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation. I greatly appreciate your help in furthering this research endeavour.

Yours sincerely

Krish Naidoo

1. Please indicate the main reason for visit to this hotel

- ☐ Experience of natural environment
- ☐ Overnight stopover
- ☐ Course of your business/ employment

Other (please state)

.....

2. Against each of the attributes/ statements listed below please -
rate your experience of it on the left, and,
thereafter their importance to you during your stay at a hotel serving an
ecotourist destination on the right.

Your Experience			Extremely Unimportant			Extremely Important	
Yes	No		1	2	3	4	5
		2.1 Personnel					
		The reception staff were attentive					
		The staff told you about things to do in the area					
		You did not have to wait for check-in.					
		The telephone contact during the booking was efficient					
		You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff					
		The staff are competent					
		2.2 Systems					
		You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail					
		The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate					
		The hotel was well signposted					
		The price is fair compared with the service provided					
		You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel (ISO, Quality Charter, etc.)					
		The bathroom is clean					
		The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work					
		You do not have to wait to get your keys					

		You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels						
		The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars						
		2.3 Ambiance						
		You find the hotel charming						
		The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere						
		The room is pleasant						
		The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant						
		The bedding is comfortable						
		The hotel is appropriately decorated						
		You like the way the room is decorated						
		2.4 Property Appeal						
		You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures						
		You appreciated the presence of a car park						
		You find the surroundings beautiful						
		You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency						
		You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal						
		You like the authentic character of the hotel						
		The hotels communication for environmental awareness is of value to me						

3. How well do you think that hotel/s you have stayed in at ecotourism destinations in KwaZulu-Natal fulfil your need? Please circle the appropriate rating on the scale below where 1 = extremely poorly and 7 = exceptionally well.

Extremely Poorly

Exceptionally Well

1 2 3 4 5

Please comment on your response

4. What is your age? Please circle.

Under 20

20-30

31-40

41-50

51-60

Over 60

5. Which gender are you? Please circle.

Male

Female

6. What is your nationality?

I sincerely appreciate your time and cooperation. Please check to make sure that you have not skipped any questions inadvertently.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely

Krish Naidoo

ANNEXURE 12

Hotel Manager Questionnaire

Dear Manager

My name is Krish Naidoo and I am conducting research for my DTech degree in the management of ecotourism accommodation in KwaZulu-Natal. The information you provide will help me better understand the management of tourist accommodation for ecotourists. Because you are the one who can give me the correct picture of how you experience your work, I request that you respond to the questions frankly and honestly in respect of yourself and the organisation you work at.

Your response will be kept strictly confidential. Only my supervisors and I have access to the information you give. In order to ensure the utmost privacy, we have provided an identification number for each participant. This number will be used only by me for follow up procedures. The numbers, names, or completed questionnaires will not be made available to anyone other than the mentioned research team. A summary of the results will be mailed to you after the data is analysed.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation. I greatly appreciate your organisation's and your help in furthering this research endeavour.

Yours sincerely

Krish Naidoo

QUESTIONNAIRE TO ACCOMMODATION MANAGERS

Please indicate your job title _____.

Please indicate the regional district location of the hotel you manage.
Use ✓ to denote the district.

Sisonke	Umgungundlovu	Umkhanyakude	Uthekela	Uthungulu	Zululand
---------	---------------	--------------	----------	-----------	----------

SECTION A

Please tick the appropriate block that best describes the accommodation organisation you work at. Where necessary, provide a written response under 'Further Comment'

	◀Disagree ----- Agree▶				
	1	2	3	4	5
1) COMPENSATION FOR QUALITY					
1.1 Employee compensation practices at this hotel can be traced to delivery of service quality.					
1.2 Customer service quality is a compensation criterion for management personnel.					
1.3 Customer service quality is a compensation criterion for non-management.					
Complete the sentence. Hotel managers can get compensation to work for service quality if :					
2) BENCHMARKING					
2.1 Is the delivery of accommodation service quality benchmarked? <div style="text-align: center;">YES NO</div>					
2.2 If 'yes' please answer 2.2.1 – 2.2.6. The following are used to benchmark practices at this hotel:					
2.2.1 Sales Distribution systems					
2.2.2 Customer contact systems					
2.2.3 Service characteristics					
2.2.4 As a source of new ideas					
2.2.5 Against best practices					
2.2.6 Competitor analysis					
Complete the sentence. Benchmarking can promote customer service quality in the hotel if :					

3) TRAINING MANAGEMENT					
3.1 The skills and competencies that yield service quality are known by staff.					
3.2 Employees are involved in the selection of training and skills development needs.					
3.3 Employees are adequately trained for the tasks they perform.					
Complete the sentence. The most complicated aspect of training staff for service quality is :					
4) EMPOWERMENT					
4.1 Staff tasks are compatible with policies and guidelines.					
4.2 The standard of our customer service is clearly communicated to both customer and staff.					
4.3 Our customer contact staff are sufficiently independent to make decisions to respond to requests to customize the service and handle local difficulties.					
Complete the sentence. Empowerment of hotel employees promote service quality because :					
5) TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT					
5.1 Technology and support systems do support and facilitate quality service.					
5.2 We find innovative uses for technology to support customer service quality.					
5.3 Our use of technology delivers service quality more than it reduces operating costs.					
Complete the sentence. Hotel managers can get technology to work for service quality if :					
6) ASSESSMENT					

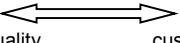
6.1 Non-management staff are appraised on service quality performance.					
6.2 Measures of customer feedback display the result of the team effort.					
6.3 All corrective action to customer service is based on management analysis.					
Complete the sentence. Regular assessment of customer service quality indicators can promote for service quality only if :					
7) PROCESS MANAGEMENT					
7.1 The organisations expectations in respect of service quality is clearly communicated to staff.					
7.2 Our suppliers heed our service quality targets					
7.3 The following are among our value enhancing tourist services					
7.3.1 Documentation Processing and Invoicing.					
7.3.2 Complaints Handling.					
7.3.3 Customer Training.					
Complete the sentence. The management of processes in the hotel to advance service quality work when::					
8) PARTICIPATION					
8.1 Service delivery personnel are valued in the organisation.					
8.2 Our staff are enthusiastic about this business and the local area.					
8.3 Customer contact staff attend service quality specific meetings.					
Complete the sentence. Hotel managers can get staff participation to work for service quality if :					
9) TEAMWORK					
9.1 I receive tasks that are supported by other departments of sections who work to our common purpose.					

9.2 We have a service-oriented organisation structure.					
9.3 I work with multiple people groupings whose customer services perspective are similar.					
Complete the sentence. Teamwork promotes service quality when :					
10) TRAINING APPLICATION					
10.1 People and customer management feature strongly in staff training.					
10.2 Employees are multi-skilled to support guest service quality.					
10.3 Employees appreciate our service level specification and therefore adequately fulfilling them.					
Complete the sentence. Training for service quality is advanced by :					
11) OUTCOME MEASUREMENT					
11.1 There are employee productivity measures that can be traced to employee delivery of service quality.					
11.2 Systems are in place to consistently monitor customer expectations					
11.3 Our process improvement interventions are informed by regular measurement of our delivery of service quality.					
Complete the sentence. Hotel managers can get continual improvement to work for service quality if :					

Thank you for completing this section. Please take a moment to consider the following short questions on environmental guardianship.

SECTION B

Please tick (✓) the appropriate block that best describes the importance of specific environmental practices to customer service quality in the hotel you work at. Where necessary, provide a written response under 'Additional Comments'.

Important quality	Unimportant  Extremely				
	for customer service quality for customer service				
	1	2	3	4	5
ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN					
1. Hotel architecture is harmonized with environment					
2. Garden planning suitable with environment					
3. Plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment					
ENERGY EFFICIENCY					
4. Energy-saver control system in guest rooms					
5. Using environmentally friendly energy sources					
6. Purchasing low energy consuming equipment					
WASTE REDUCTION					
7. Active involvement in recycling hotel waste					
8. Solid waste separation at source					
9. Composting the organic and food waste					
WATER EFFICIENCY					
10. Using treated water in garden irrigation					
11. Wastewater treatment					
12. Using water-saving measures on linen change					
EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS					
13. Providing general environmental education to personnel					
14. Providing environmental sensitivity training to personnel					
15. Providing environmental education to guests					
COMMUNICATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS					
16. Participating in environmental meetings					
17. Brochures with information on environmental protection					
18. Getting guest opinions on environmental activities of hotel					
MANAGERIAL KNOWLEDGE ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION					
19. Knowledge on the ISO					
20. Knowledge on the Pine Awards					
21. Knowledge on the Blue Flag Project					

Thank you for completing this section. Do take a moment to consider the following general questions with a short response.

22. Please rank your top 3 factors from the following list based on their influence in managing service quality at your hotel:

- _____ Compensation for quality
- _____ Benchmarking
- _____ Training management
- _____ Empowerment
- _____ Technology management
- _____ Assessment
- _____ Process management
- _____ Participation
- _____ Teamwork
- _____ Training
- _____ Outcome measurement
- _____ Energy efficiency
- _____ Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection
- _____ Architecture and landscape design
- _____ Education and training for environmental awareness
- _____ Waste reduction
- _____ Communication for environmental awareness

23. Please indicate the Tourism Grading Council grade of your hotel by ticking ONE of the boxes below.

	Tick √
One star	
Two Star	
Three Star	
Four Star	
Five Star	
Ungraded by Tourism Grading Council	

24. Please indicate whether your hotel has alternative external rating system for service quality.

Yes	No

25. If so, what is/are the rating system/s called? _____

26. What is the grade allocated to your hotel _____

27. The questions in this survey may not be all-embracing and comprehensive. It may not have afforded you the opportunity to report some thing you may want to say about your job, organisation, or yourself. Please make any additional comments needed in the space provided or, add on a fresh sheet.

I sincerely appreciate your time and cooperation. Please check to make sure that you have not skipped any questions inadvertently, and then drop the completed questionnaire in the locked box, clearly marked for this purpose, at the reception counter.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely

Krish Naidoo

ANNEXURE 13

Manager Profiles

		Frequency	Percentage
Job Title	General Manager	23	50
	Front Office Manager	6	13,4
	Operations Manager	6	13,4
	Managing Director	3	6,5
	Owner	1	2
	Assistant General Manager	2	4,1
	Rooms Division Manager	3	6,5
	Unstated	2	4,1
	Total	46	
Regional District	Sisonke	2	4,1
	Umgungundlovu	8	17,4
	Umkhanyakude	6	13,4
	Uthekela	17	37
	Uthungulu	5	10,8
	Zululand	5	10,8
	Unstated	3	6,5
	Total	46	
Manager opinion of service quality	Substandard	1	2
	Acceptable	9	19,6
	Good	24	52,2
	Exceptionally Good	11	24
	No response	1	2
	Total	46	

Annexure 14

Hotel Profiles

			No.	%
Hotel Grading System adopted	Tour Grading Council of South Africa		35	71,4
	AA Travel Guide Hall of Fame		7	14,3
	Portfolio		1	2
	Resort Condominiums International (RCI)		1	2
	Fair Trade South Africa		1	2
	Heritage		1	2
	Emvelo		1	2
	Ungraded		2	4.1
	Total		49	
Grades of hotel	Tourism Grading Council			
		2 star	2	4,1
		3 star	18	36,7
		4 star	14	28,6
		5 star	1	2
	AA	Recommended	1	2
		Highly Recommended	1	2
		Superior	2	4,1
	Portfolio	Great Comfort	1	2
		Luxury	1	2
	Heritage	Platinum	1	2
	Emvelo	Best overall environmental management system	1	2
		Best single resource management programme – waste-management	1	2

ANNEXURE 15

Influence of biographical data on hotel-guest responses.

The chi square test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables (rows vs columns).

Hotel Service Quality Attributes

	Guest experience of attribute - E	Importance of attribute to guest- I	Pearson Chi-Square Significance	
			Age	Gender
The reception staff were attentive		I3	.005	
The staff told you about things to do in the area		E4	.001	.036
The staff told you about things to do in the area		I4	.000	
You did not have to wait for check-in.		E5	.000	
You did not have to wait for check-in.		I5	.000	
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient		I6	.000	.000
You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff		I7	.008	0.09
The staff are competent		E8	.002	.035
The staff are competent		I8	.000	
You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail		I9	.001	.000
The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate		E10	.002	
The hotel was well signposted		E11	.011	
The hotel was well signposted		I11	.000	
The price is fair compared with the service provided		E12	.000	.003
The price is fair compared with the service provided		I12		.039
You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel (ISO, Quality Charter, etc.)		I13	.014	
The bathroom is clean		E14	.000	
The bathroom is clean		I14		.033
The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work		E15	.000	
The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work		I15	.000	
You do not have to wait to get your keys		E16	.000	
You do not have to wait to get your keys		I16	.000	.001
You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels		E17	.000	
You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels		I17	.000	.000
The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars		I18	.002	.029
You find the hotel charming		E19	.000	
You find the hotel charming		I19	.000	.004
The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere		I20	.042	
The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant		I22	.000	.010

The bedding is comfortable	E23	.000	.004
The hotel is appropriately decorated	E24	.001	
The hotel is appropriately decorated	I24	.000	.003
You like the way the room is decorated	E25	.024	
You like the way the room is decorated	I25	.000	.006
You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures	I26	.000	
You appreciated the presence of a car park	I27	.000	0.11
You find the surroundings beautiful	I28	.000	.001
You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency	E29	.000	0.273
You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency	I29	.000	.000
You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal	E30	.001	0.288
You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal	I30	.000	.008
You like the authentic character of the hotel	E31	.004	0.688
You like the authentic character of the hotel	I31	.000	.000
The hotels communication for environmental awareness is of value to me	E32	.000	

The results indicate that there is a relationship between the column and row variables. For example, the p-value for “Age” association with “The reception staff was attentive I3” is 0.005. Equally, the experience of hotels communication for environmental awareness was significantly related to age guest nationality and the importance of the signs about reusing bed linen and towels was significantly related to guest age and gender.

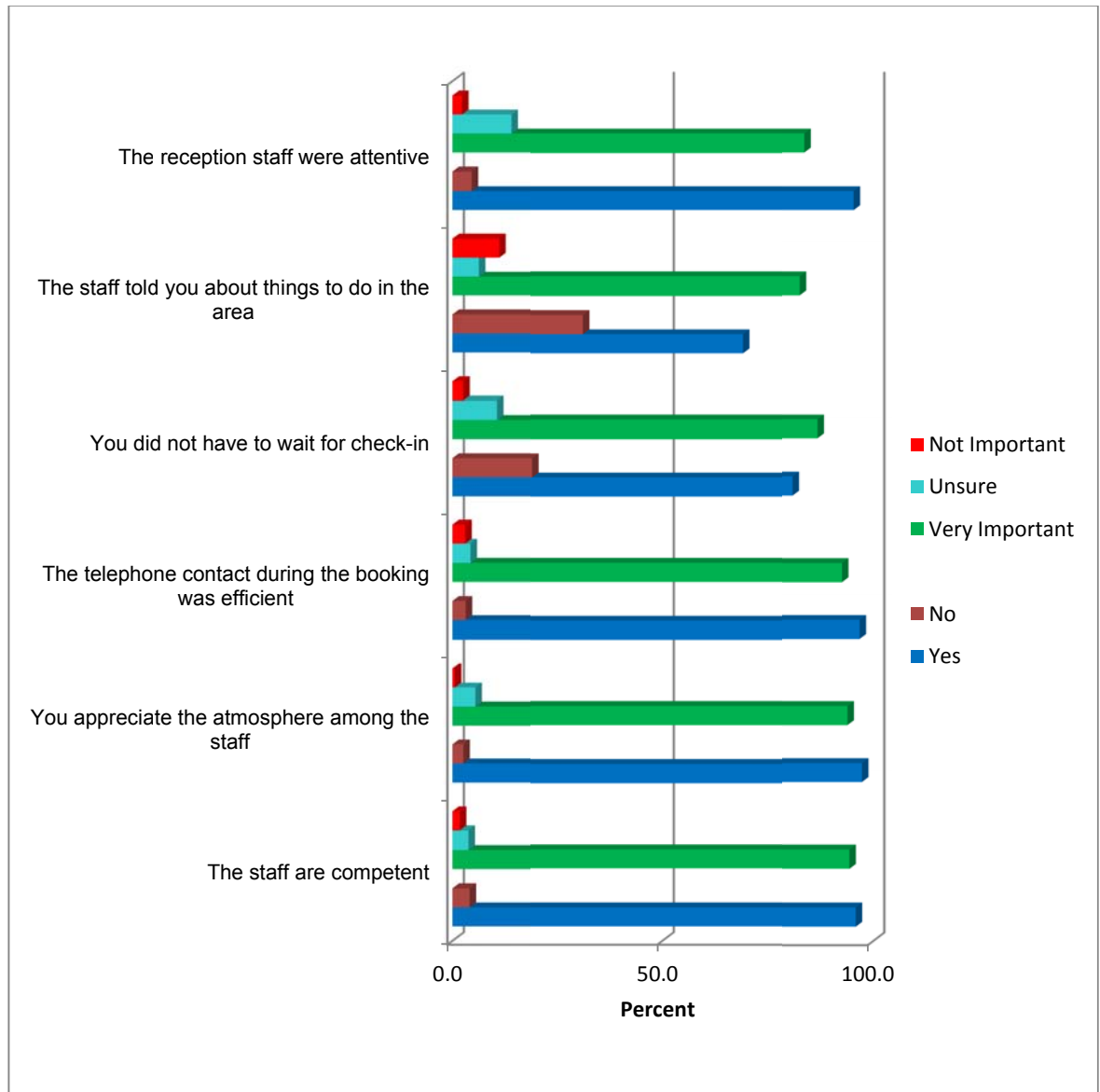
Annexure 16

Pearson chi-square tests of factor association with guest biographical information descriptors of age, gender and nationality with 7 management factors

		Age	Gender	Nationality
Management of Employee Engagement	Chi-square	202.257	36.301	656.301
	df	105	21	210
	Sig.level	.000 [*]	.020 [*]	.000 [*]
Management of Environmental-care	Chi-square	192.855	57.704	409.327
	df	120	24	240
	Sig.level	.000 [*]	.000 [*]	.000 [*]
Guest Communication and Information Management	Chi-square	111.997	34.749	157.724
	df	60	12	120
	Sig.level	.000 [*]	.001 [*]	.012 [*]
Management of Value Proposition	Chi-square	77.152	19.739	178.380
	df	40	8	80
	Sig.level	.000 [*]	.011 [*]	.000 [*]
Value-adding structures	Chi-square	105.429	17.061	183.412
	df	35	7	70
	Sig.level	.000 [*]	.017 [*]	.000 [*]
Management of Hotel Operations	Chi-square	250.383	57.975	685.640
	df	150	30	300
	Sig.level	.000 [*]	.002 [*]	.000 [*]

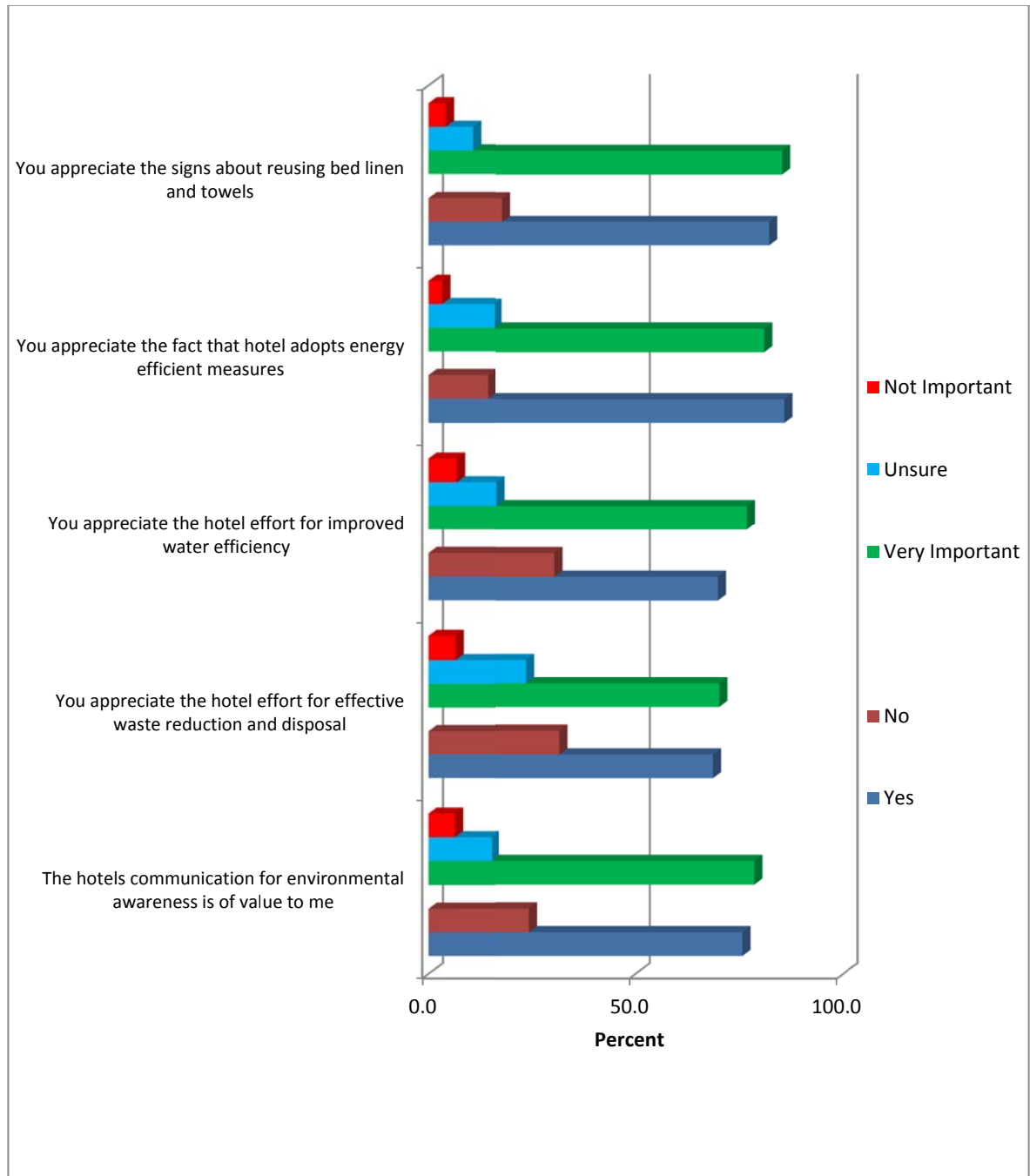
Annexure 17

Management of Employee Engagement



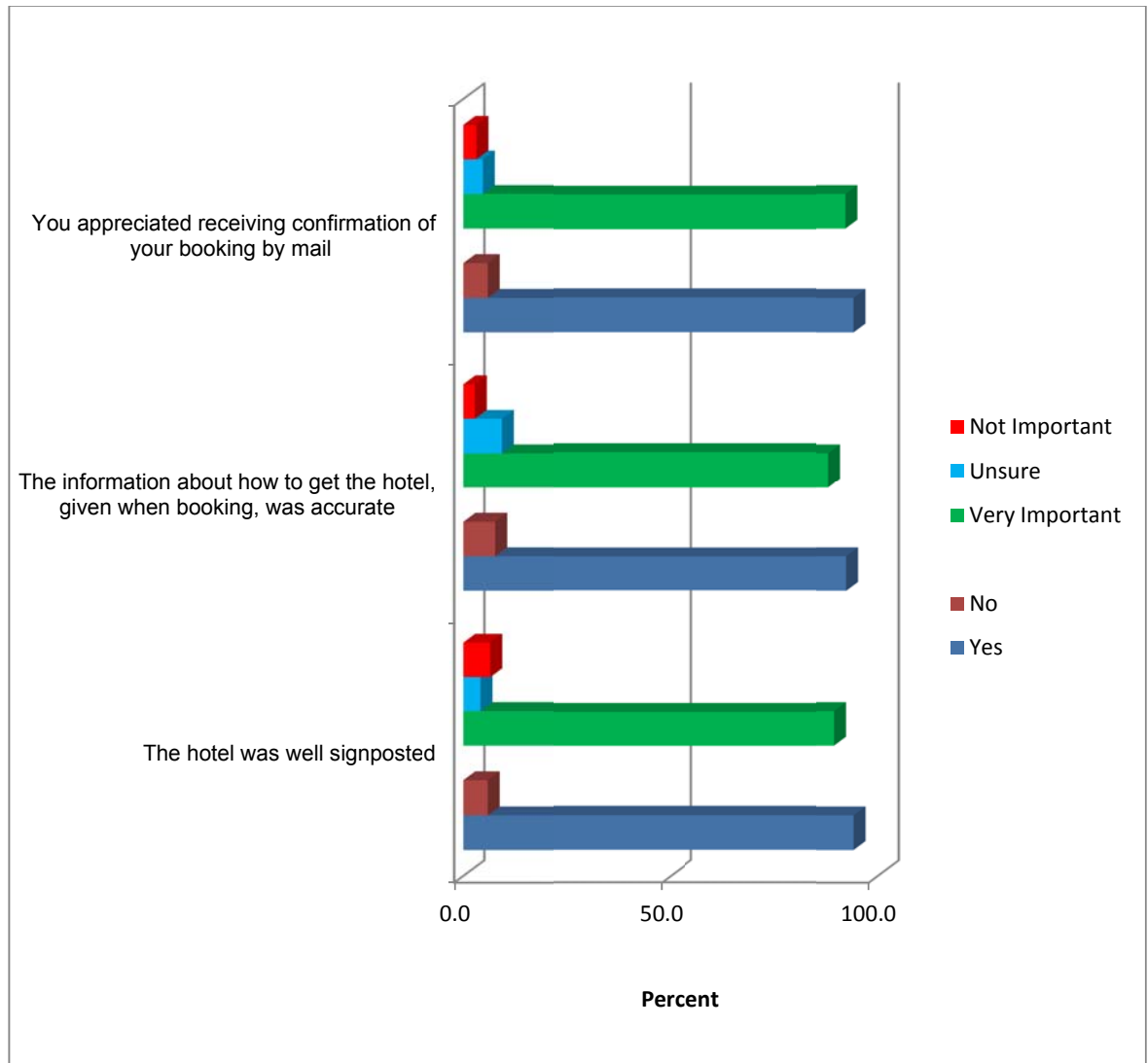
Annexure 18

Management of Environmental-care



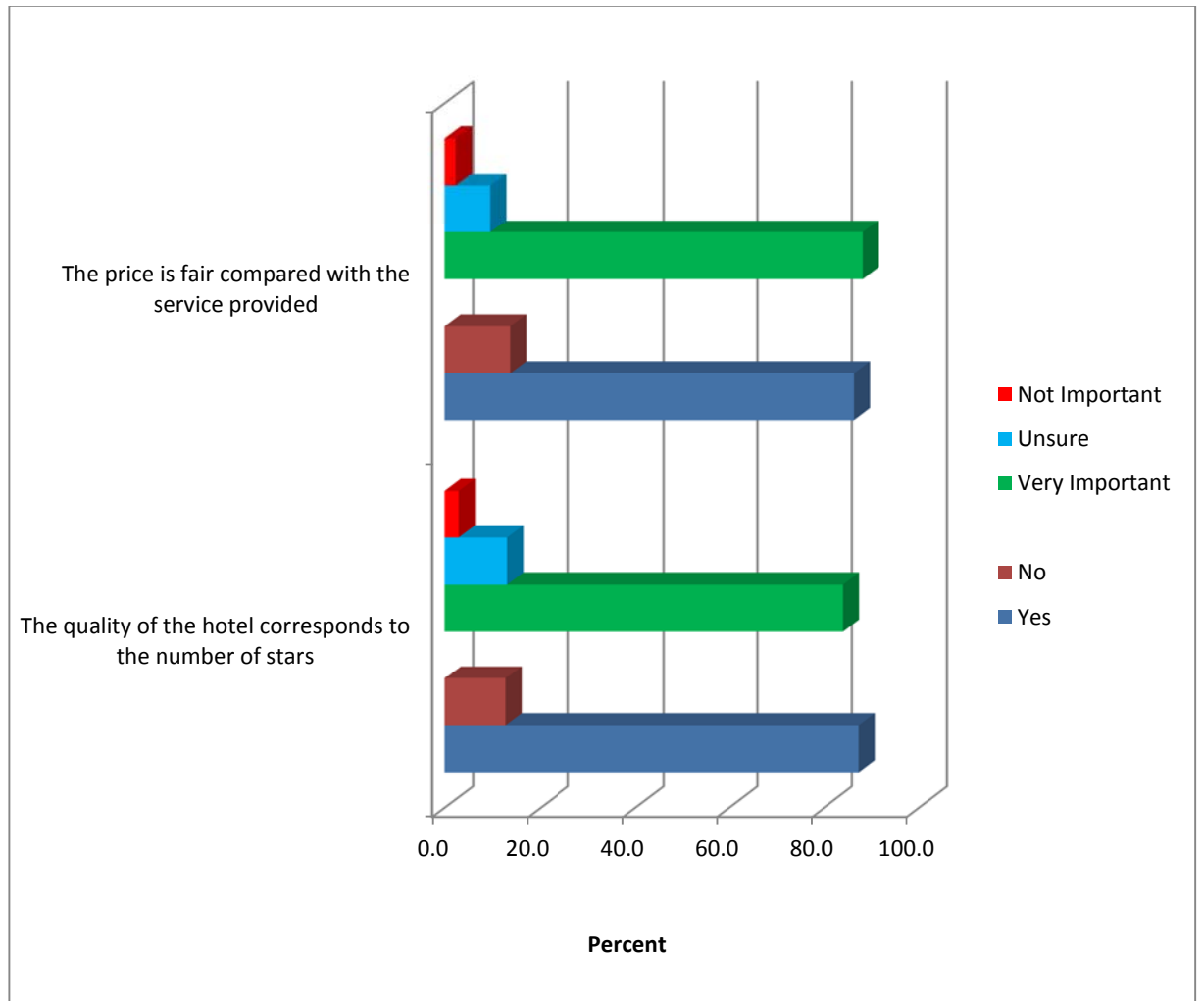
Annexure 19

Guest Communication and Information Management



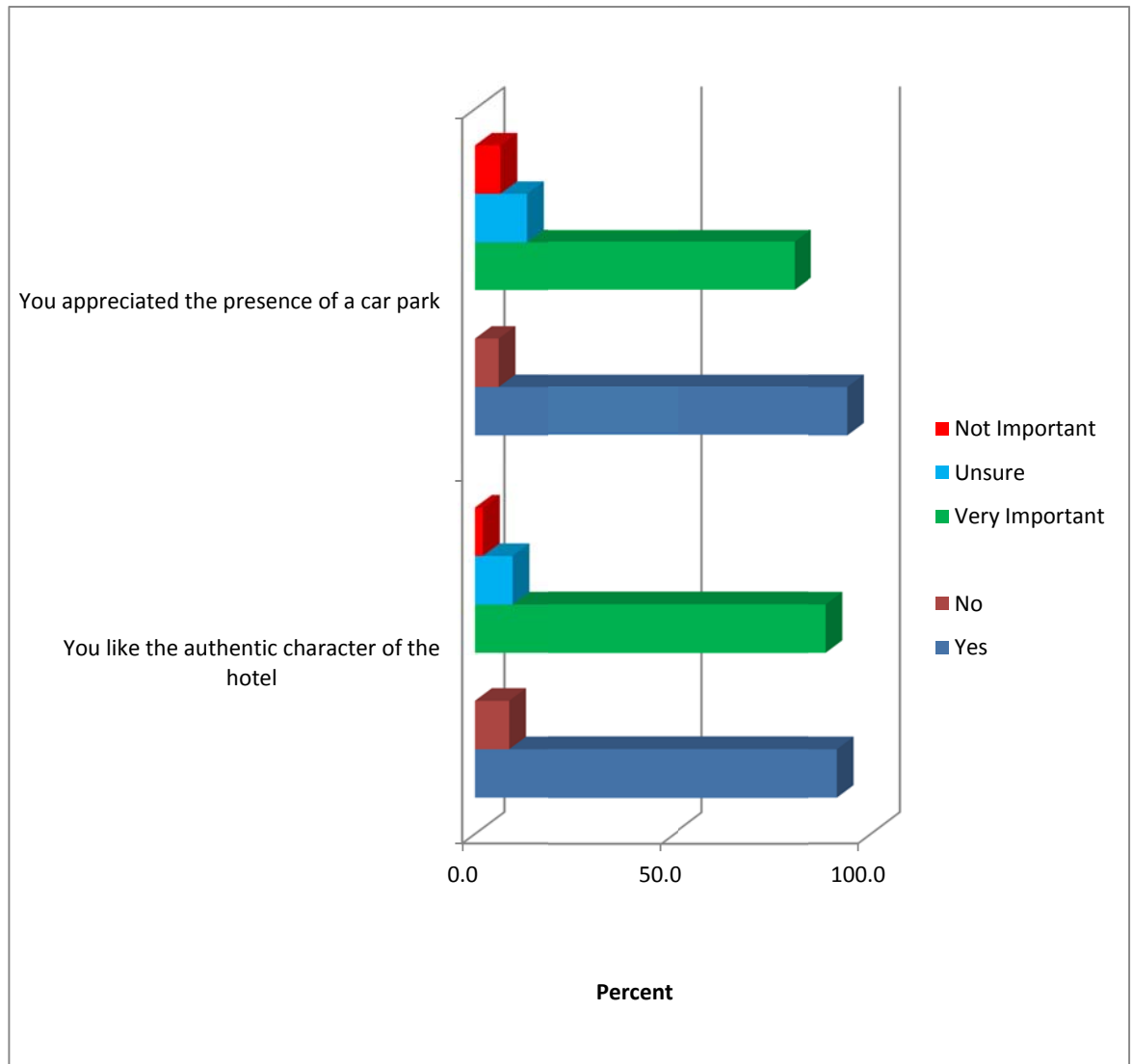
Annexure 20

Management of Value Proposition



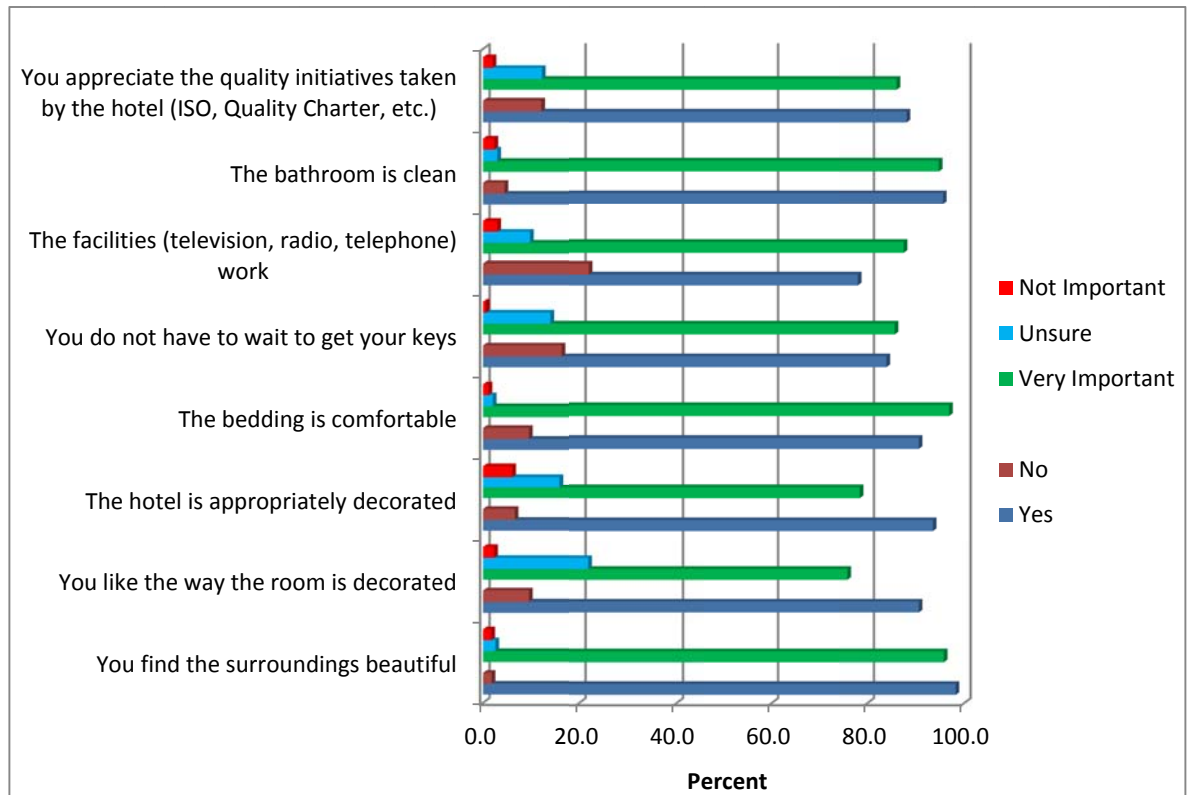
Annexure 21

Value-adding structures



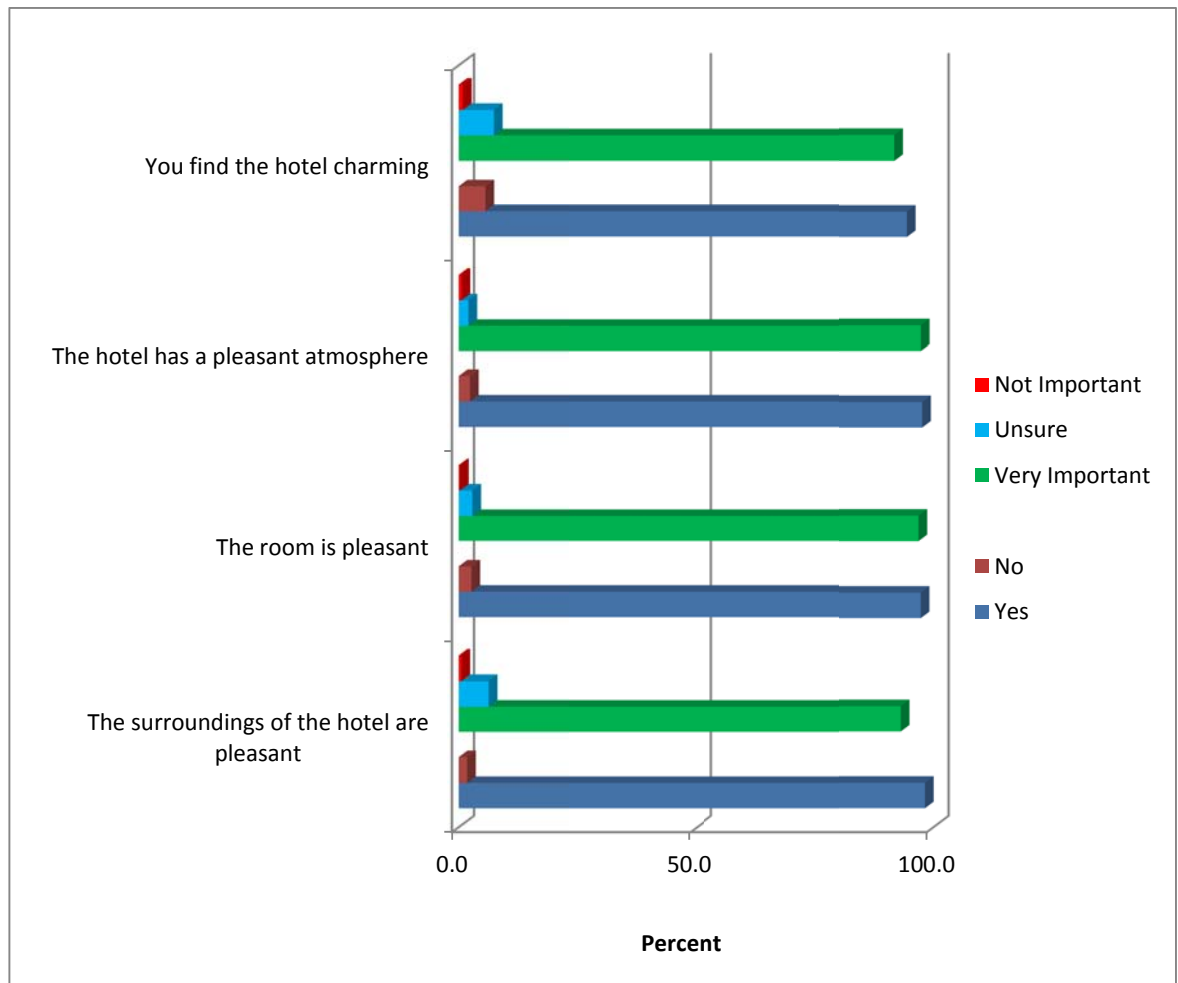
Annexure 22

Management of Hotel Operations



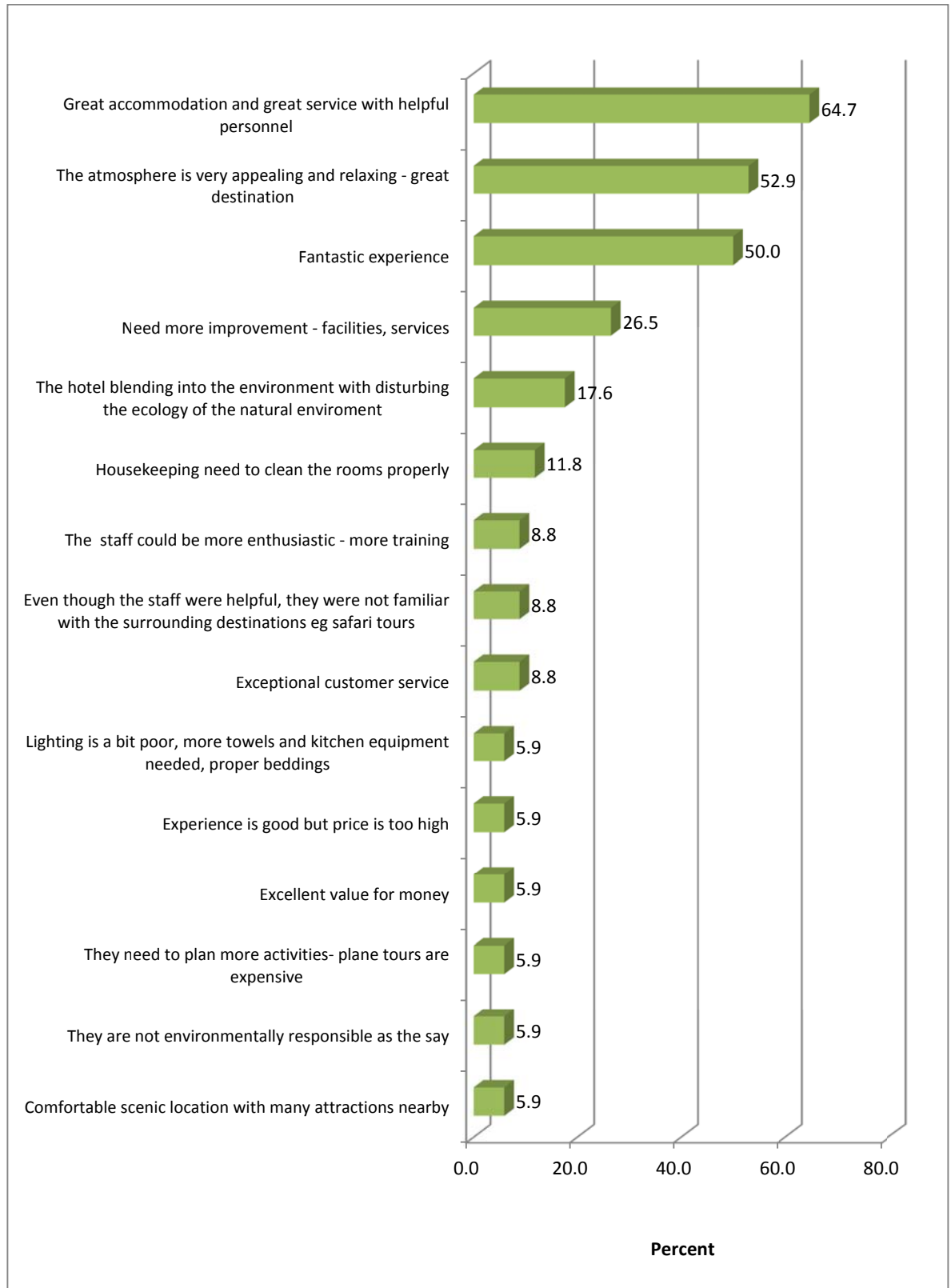
ANNEXURE 23

Managing Aesthetic Fit



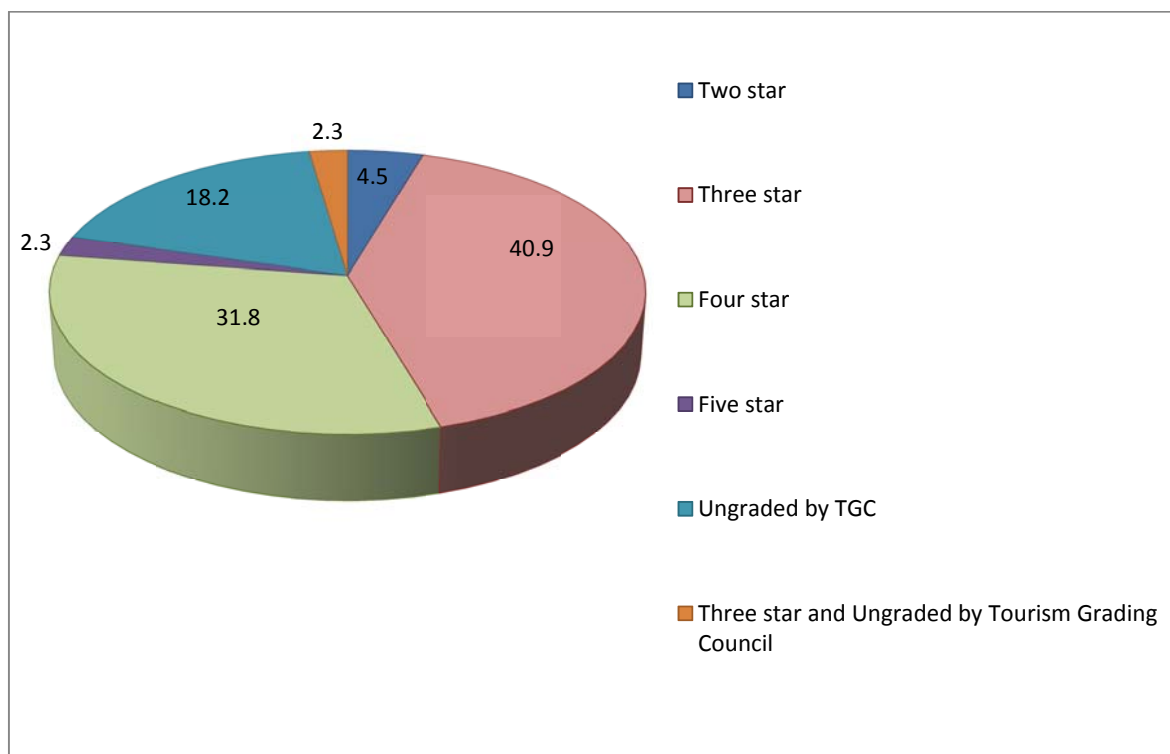
ANNEXURE 24

Guest Open Comments



ANNEXURE 25

Hotel ranking by Tourism Grading Council of South Africa



ANNEXURE 26

Spearman's rho correlation of hotel grade, location and perceived quality of customer service

			District	What is the grade allocated to the hotel?	Rate the quality of customer service at the hotel.
Spearman's rho	District	Correlation Coefficient	1.000		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.		
		N	43		
	What is the grade allocated to the hotel?	Correlation Coefficient	-.949	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	.	
		N	4	5	
	Rate the quality of customer service at the hotel.	Correlation Coefficient	.025	-.740	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.873	.152	.
		N	42	5	45

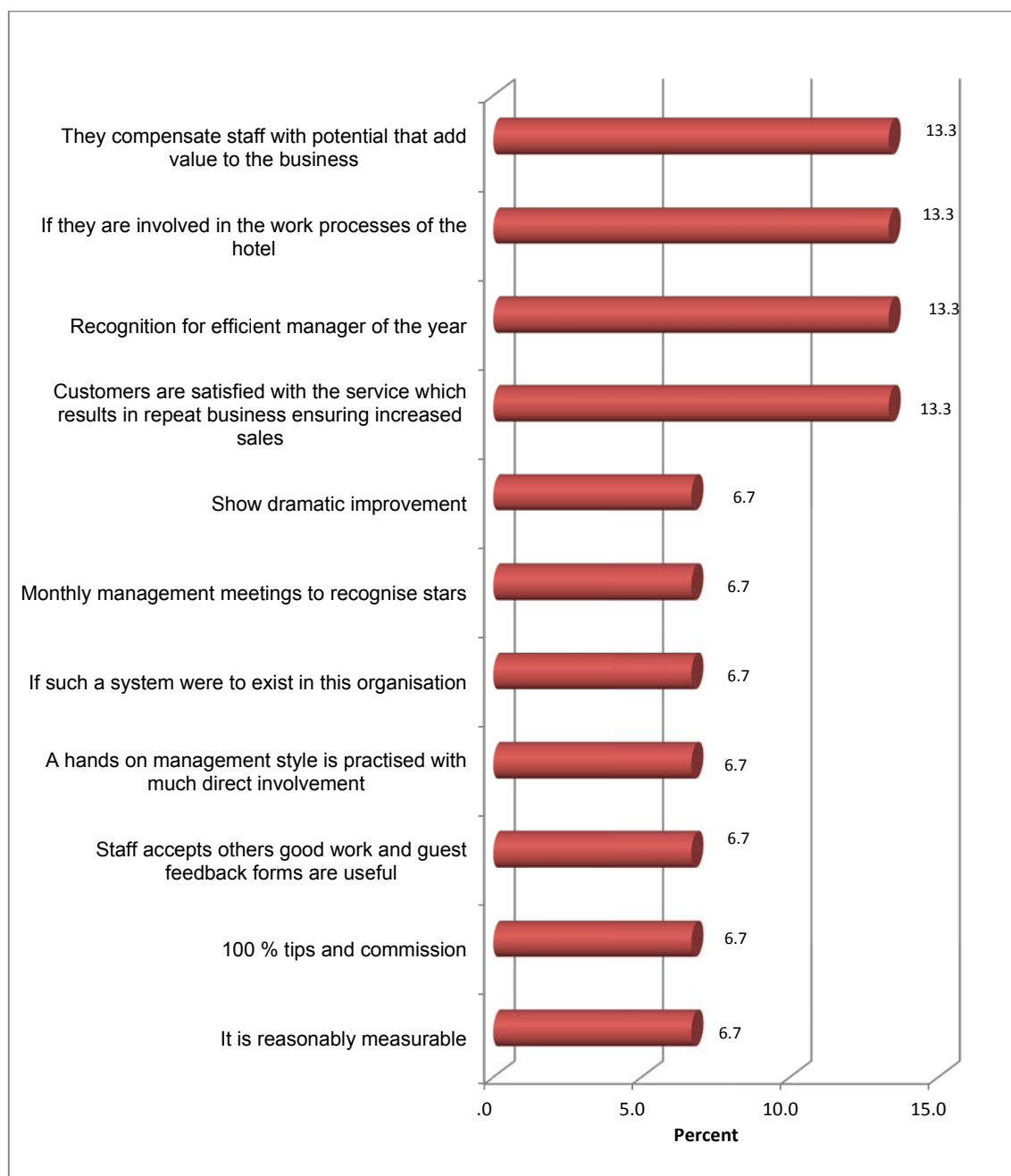
ANNEXURE 27

Alternate and additional hotel ranking

			What is it called?			Total
			AA Travel Guide Hall of Fame	AA and TGCSA	RCI, Emvelo and Heritage Resort	
What is the grade allocated to the hotel?	Superior	Count	2	0	0	2
		% of Total	50.0%	.0%	.0%	50.0%
	4 Star Hotel	Count	0	1	0	1
		% of Total	.0%	25.0%	.0%	25.0%
	AA and Fair Trade Grading	Count	0	0	1	1
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	25.0%	25.0%
Total		Count	2	1	1	4
		% of Total	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%

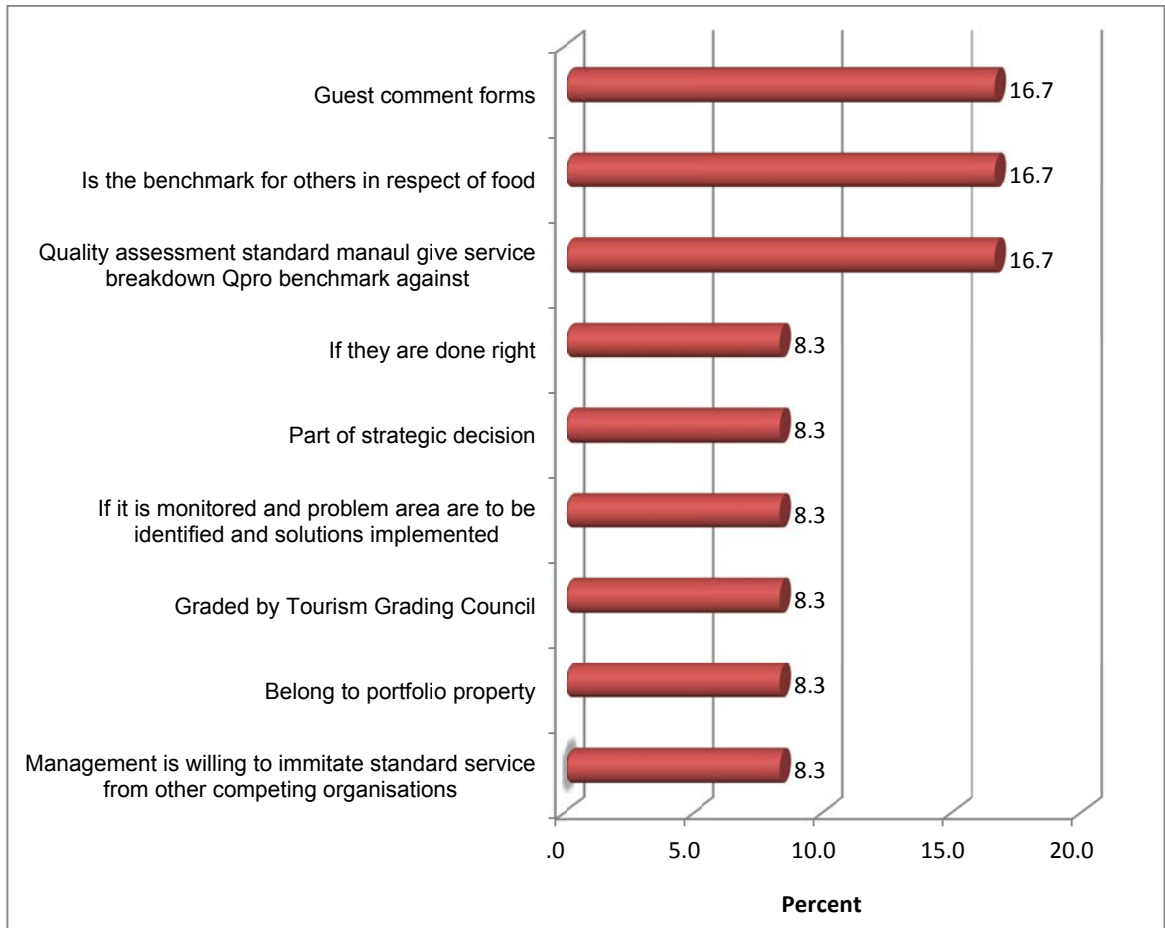
ANNEXURE 28

Manager opinion of conditions for Compensation for Quality



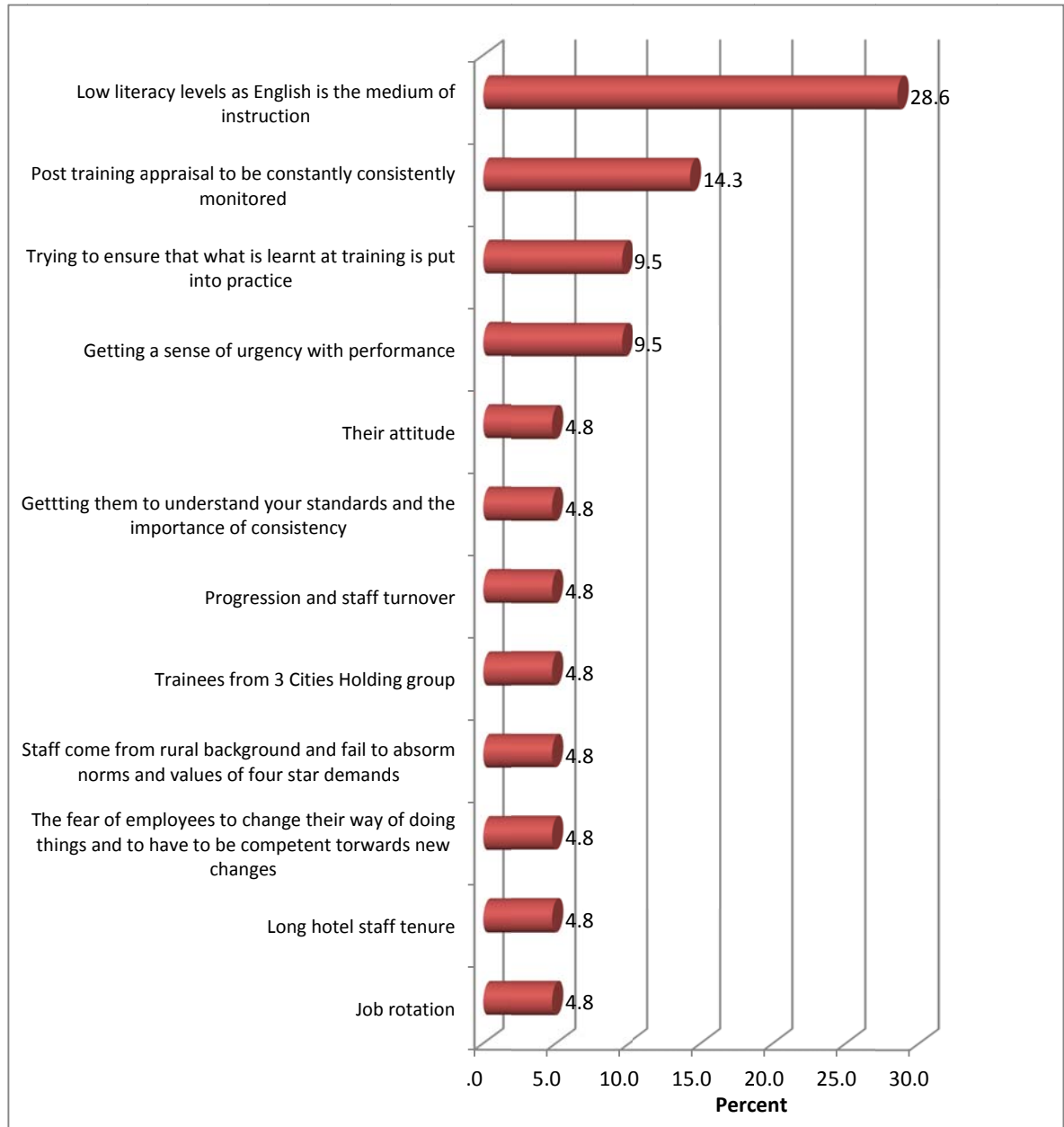
ANNEXURE 29

Manager opinion of how benchmarking may promote customer service quality



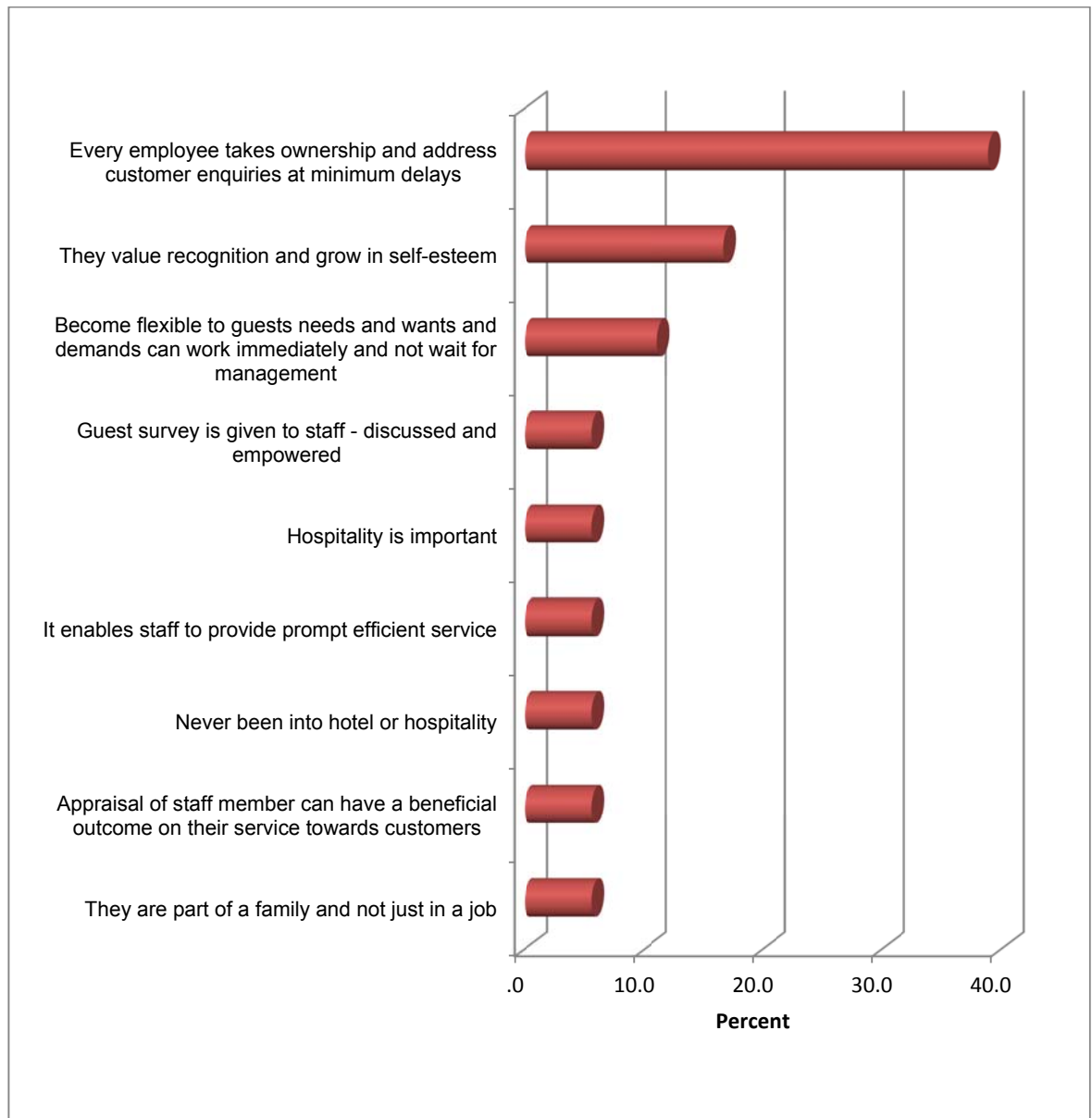
Annexure 30

Manager opinion of challenges in training of hotel staff



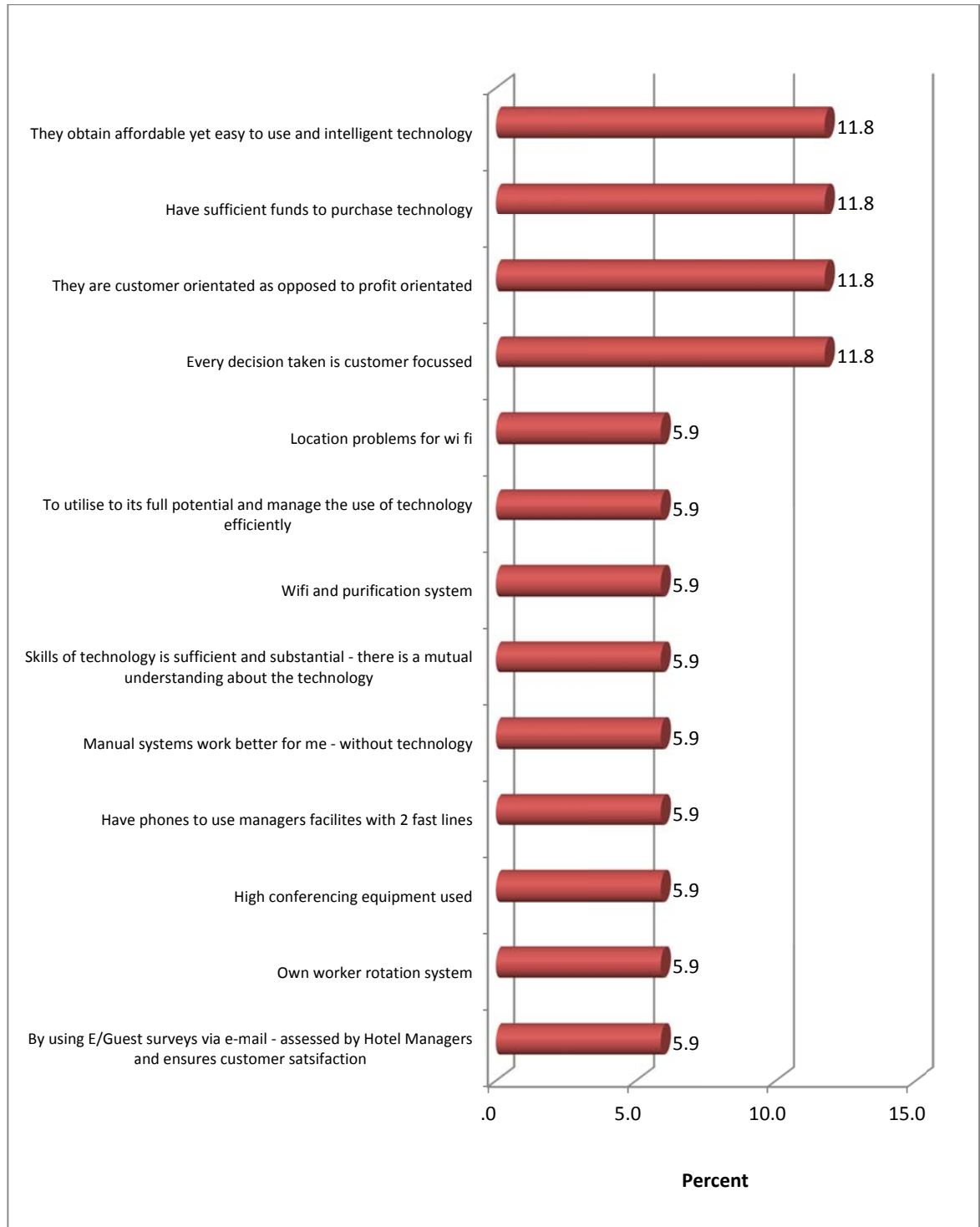
ANNEXURE 31

Manager opinion of why employee empowerment levels improve customer service quality



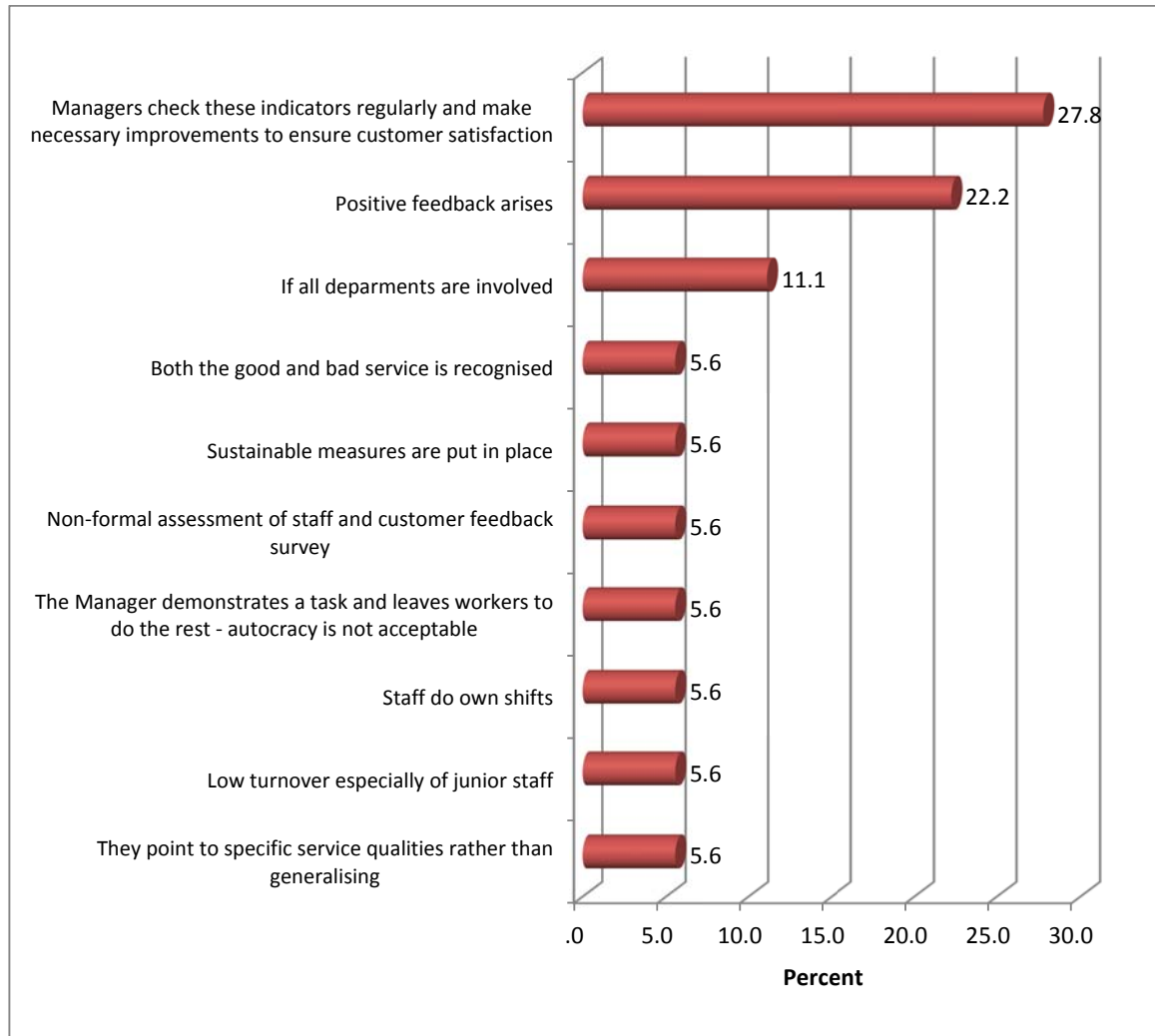
ANNEXURE 32

Manager opinion of how to harness technology to promote service quality



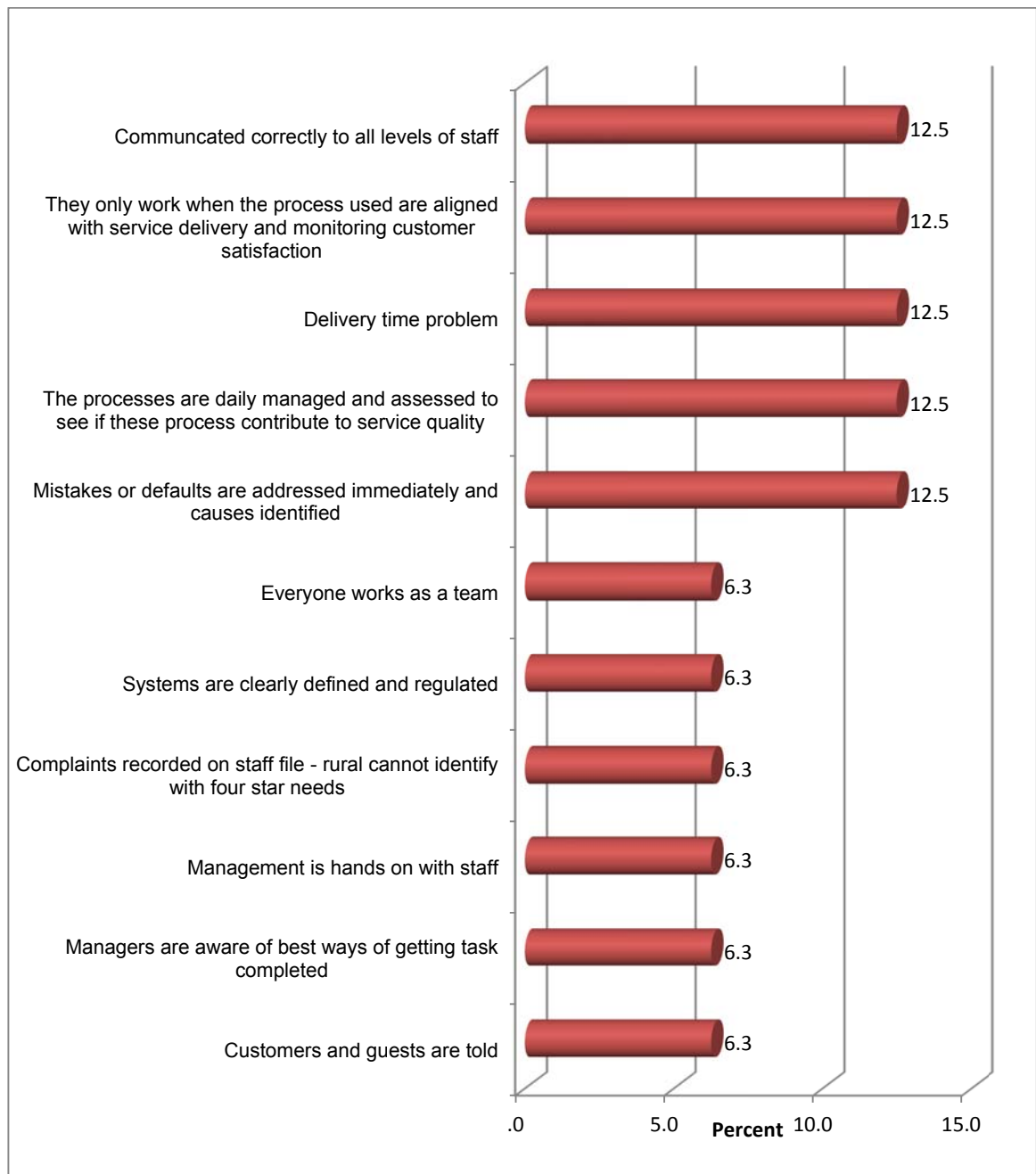
ANNEXURE 33

Manager opinion on conditions to reap benefits of assessment practices



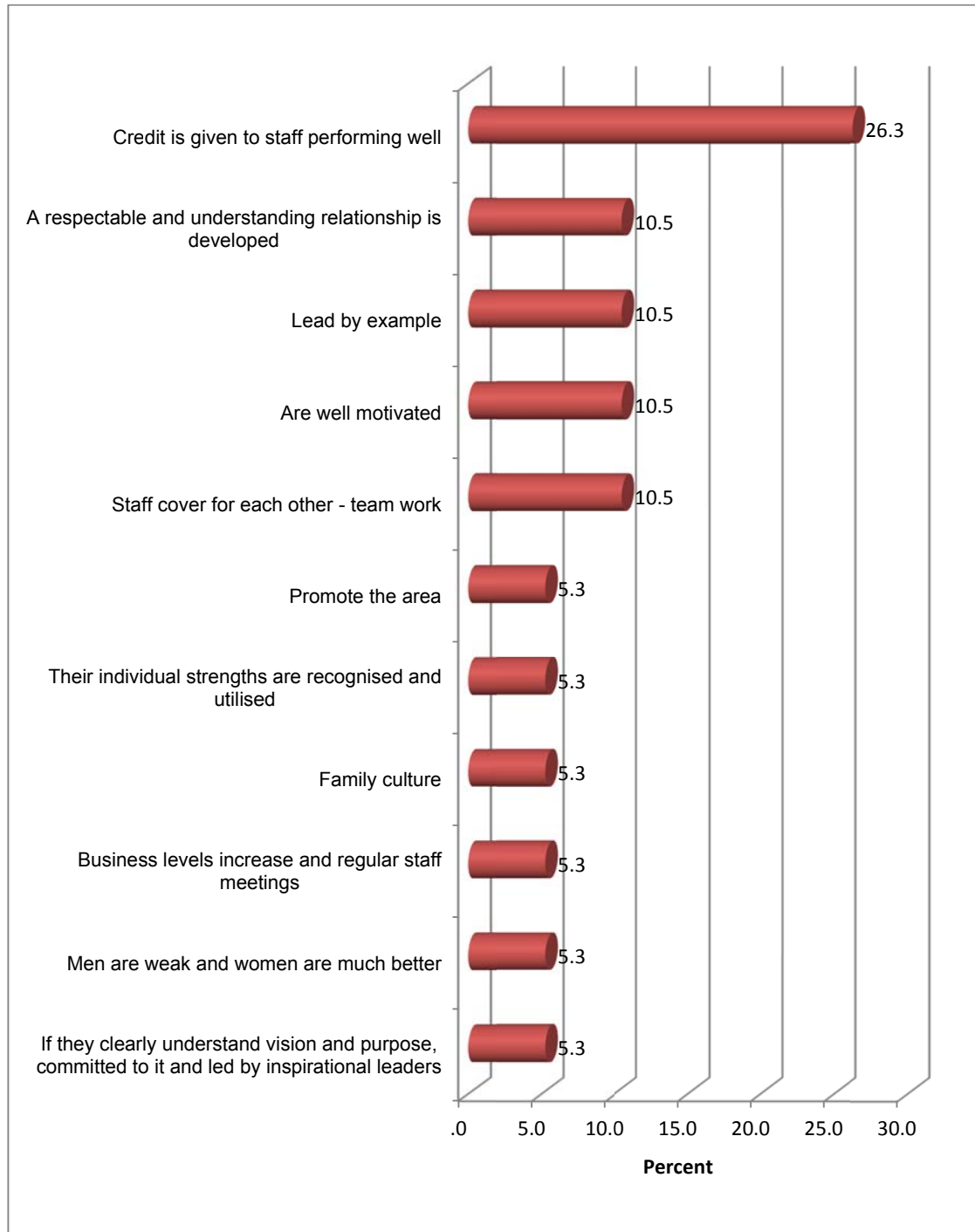
Annexure 34

Manager opinion on conditions for effective process management



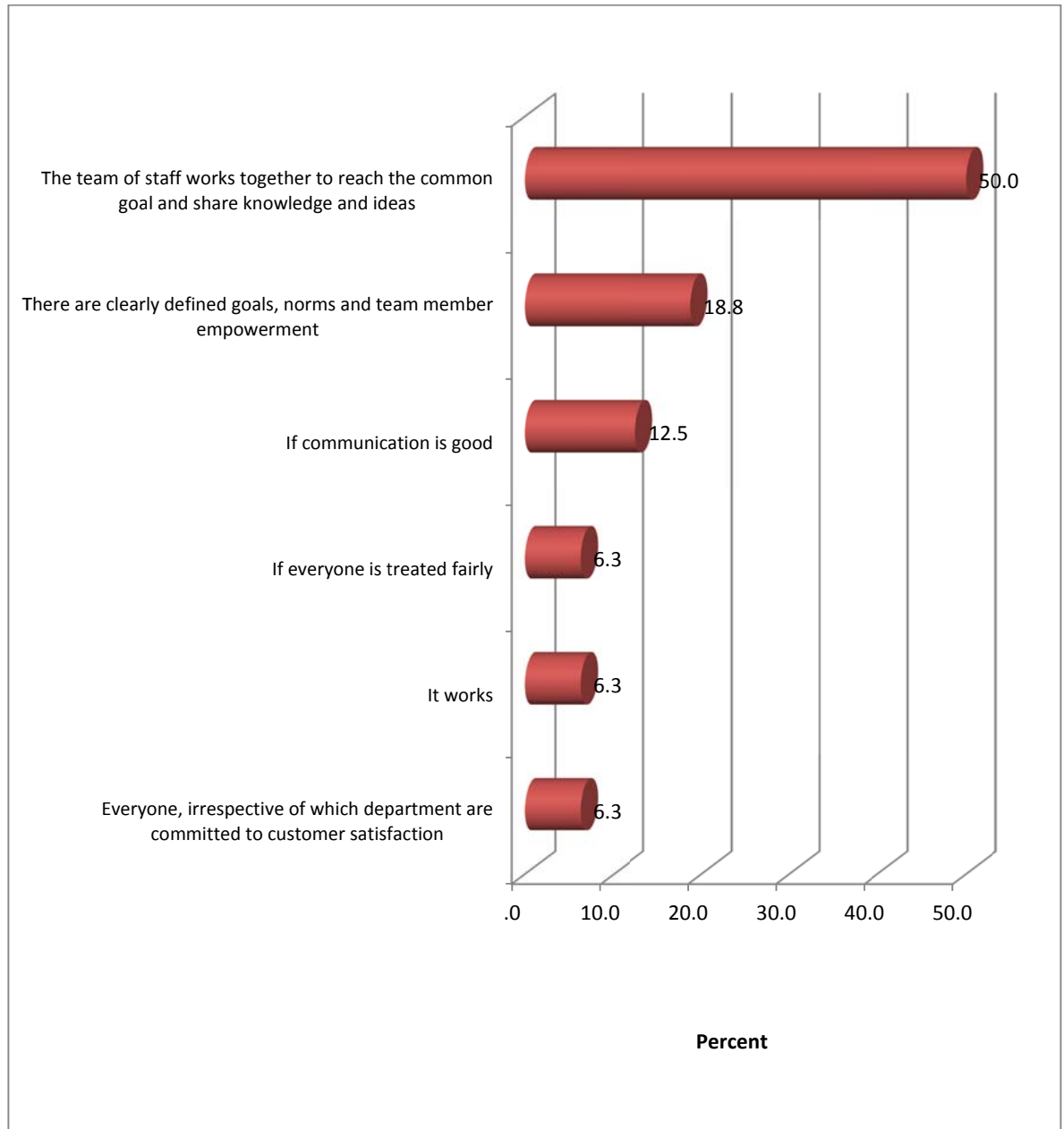
ANNEXURE 35

Manager opinion on conditions for effective employee participation



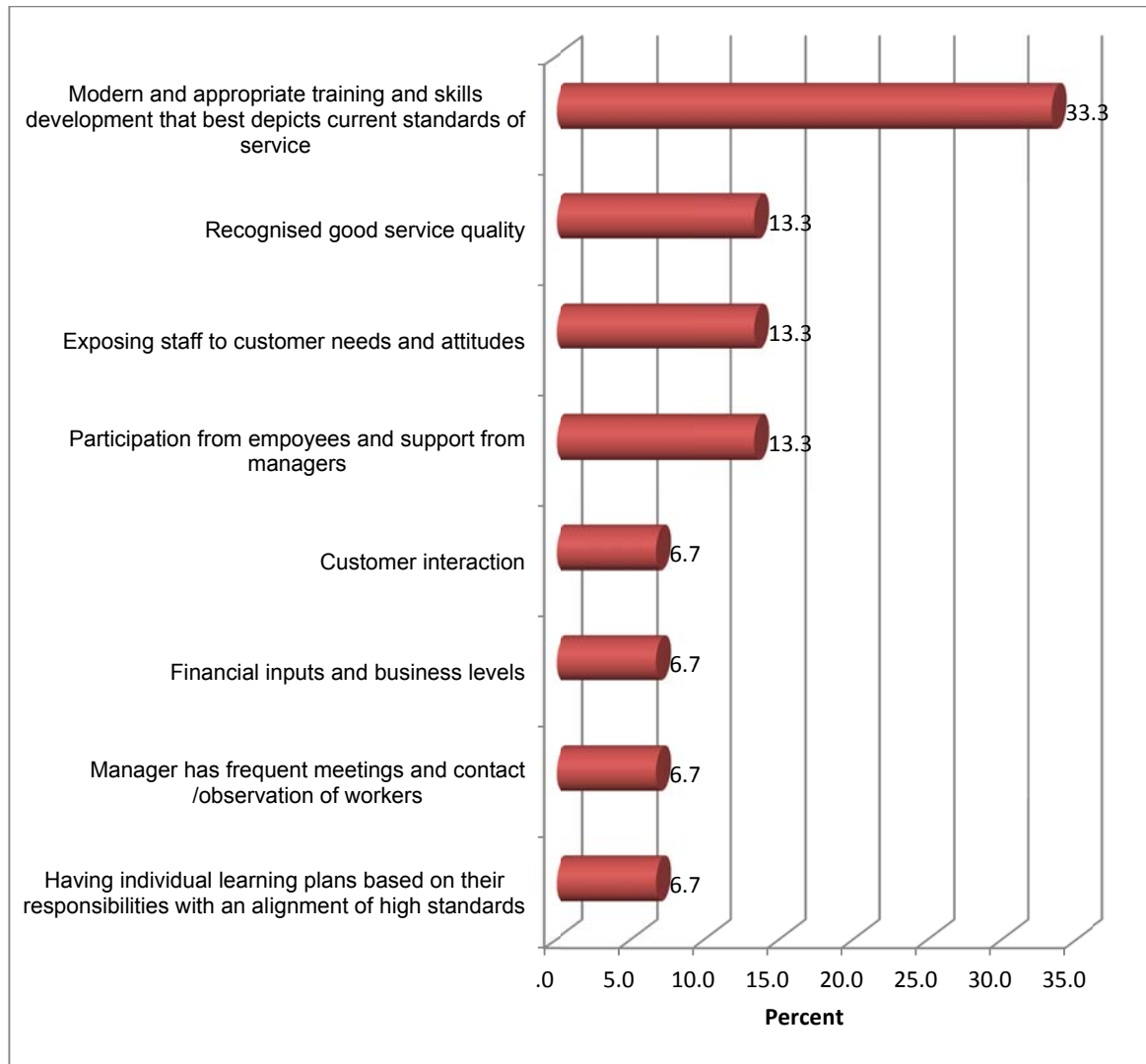
Annexure 36

Teamwork contribution to customer service quality



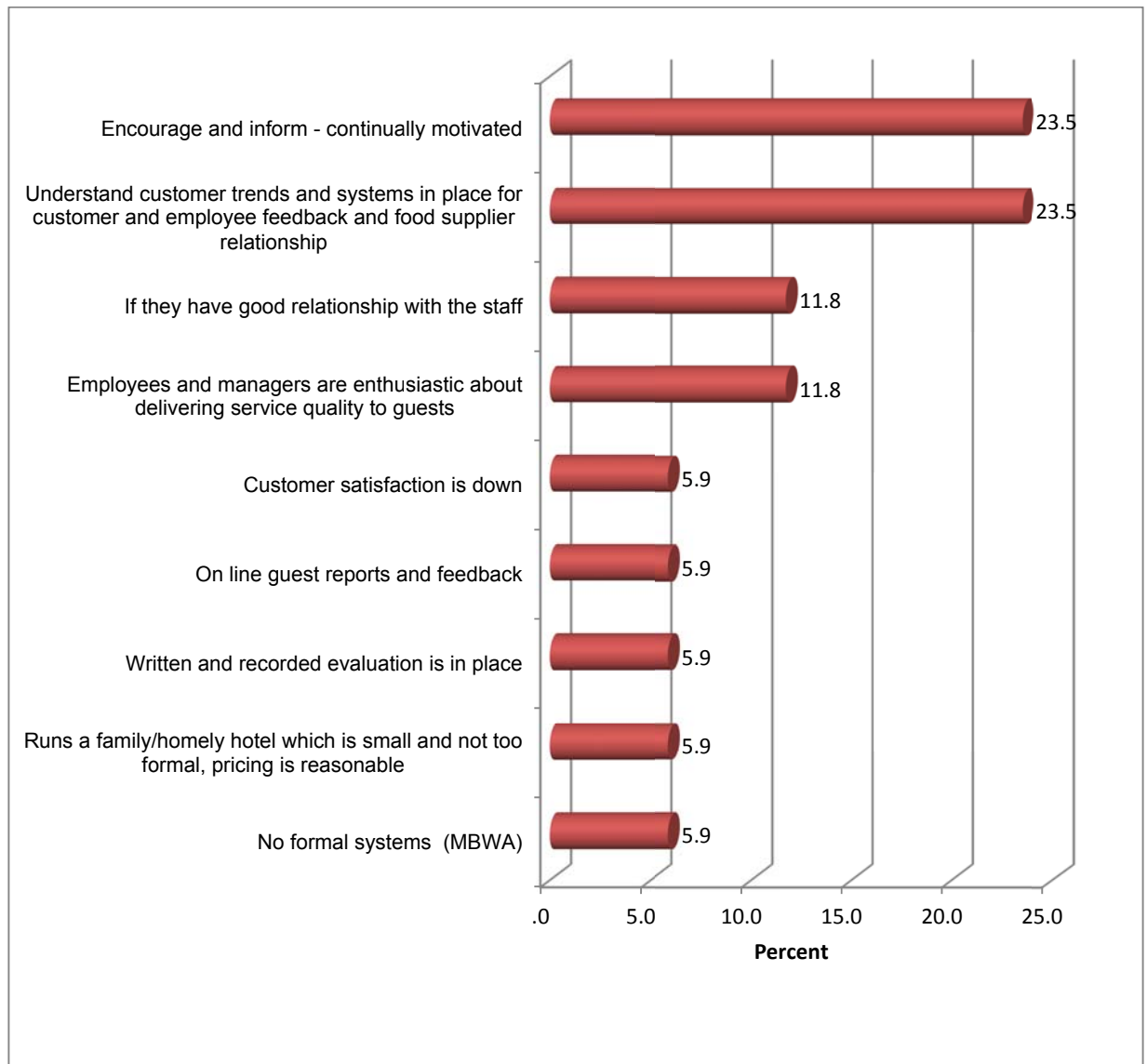
ANNEXURE 37

Manager opinion on the nature of support for staff training



ANNEXURE 38

Manager opinion of contribution of outcome measurement to service quality



ANNEXURE 39

Manager agreement with generic service quality manager scale

	Frequency of Agreement (%)	Service Quality Management Practice
Enhancing tourist services by complaints handling.	93.5	Process Management
We have a service-oriented organisation structure.	91.3	Teamwork
Our customer contact staff are sufficiently independent to make decisions to respond to requests to customize the service and handle local difficulties.	91.3	Empowerment
Service delivery personnel are valued in the organisation.	91.3	Participation
The standard of our customer service is clearly communicated to both customer and staff.	84.8	Empowerment
I work with multiple people groupings whose customer services perspective are similar.	84.7	Teamwork
The organisations expectations in respect of service quality is clearly communicated to staff.	87.0	Process Management
Staff tasks are compatible with policies and guidelines.	84.7	Empowerment
Customer contact staff attend service quality specific meetings.	82.6	Participation
People and customer management feature strongly in staff training.	82.6	Training
I receive tasks that are supported by other departments of sections who work to our common purpose.	82.6	Teamwork
Enhancing tourist services by documentation processing and invoicing.	80.4	Process Management
All corrective action to customer service is based on management analysis.	78.2	Assessment
Employees appreciate our service level specification and therefore adequately fulfilling them.	76.1	Training
Our process improvement interventions are informed by regular measurement of our delivery of service quality.	76.1	Outcome Measurement
Our staff are enthusiastic about this business and the local area.	76.1	Participation
Our suppliers heed our service quality targets	76.1	Process Management
Measures of customer feedback display the result of the team effort.	73.9	Participation
Employees are multi-skilled to support guest service quality.	73.9	Training
Systems are in place to consistently monitor customer expectations	72.8	Outcome Measurement
Employees are adequately trained for the tasks they perform.	71.7	Training Management
The skills and competencies that yield service quality are known by staff.	67.4	Training Management
Employees are involved in the selection of training and skills development needs.	67.4	Training Management
Non-management staff is appraised on service quality performance.	67.4	Assessment
Enhancing tourist services by customer training.	67.4	Process Management
Benchmarking against best practices	60.8	Benchmarking
Benchmarking in competitor analysis	58.7	Benchmarking
Technology and support systems do support and facilitate quality service.	58.7	Technology Management
Benchmarking service characteristics	58.7	Benchmarking
There are employee productivity measures that can be traced to employee delivery of service quality.	56.6	Outcome Measurement
Benchmarking customer contact systems	56.5	Benchmarking
Benchmarking as a source of new ideas	56.5	Benchmarking
We find innovative uses for technology to support customer service quality.	43.5	Technology Management

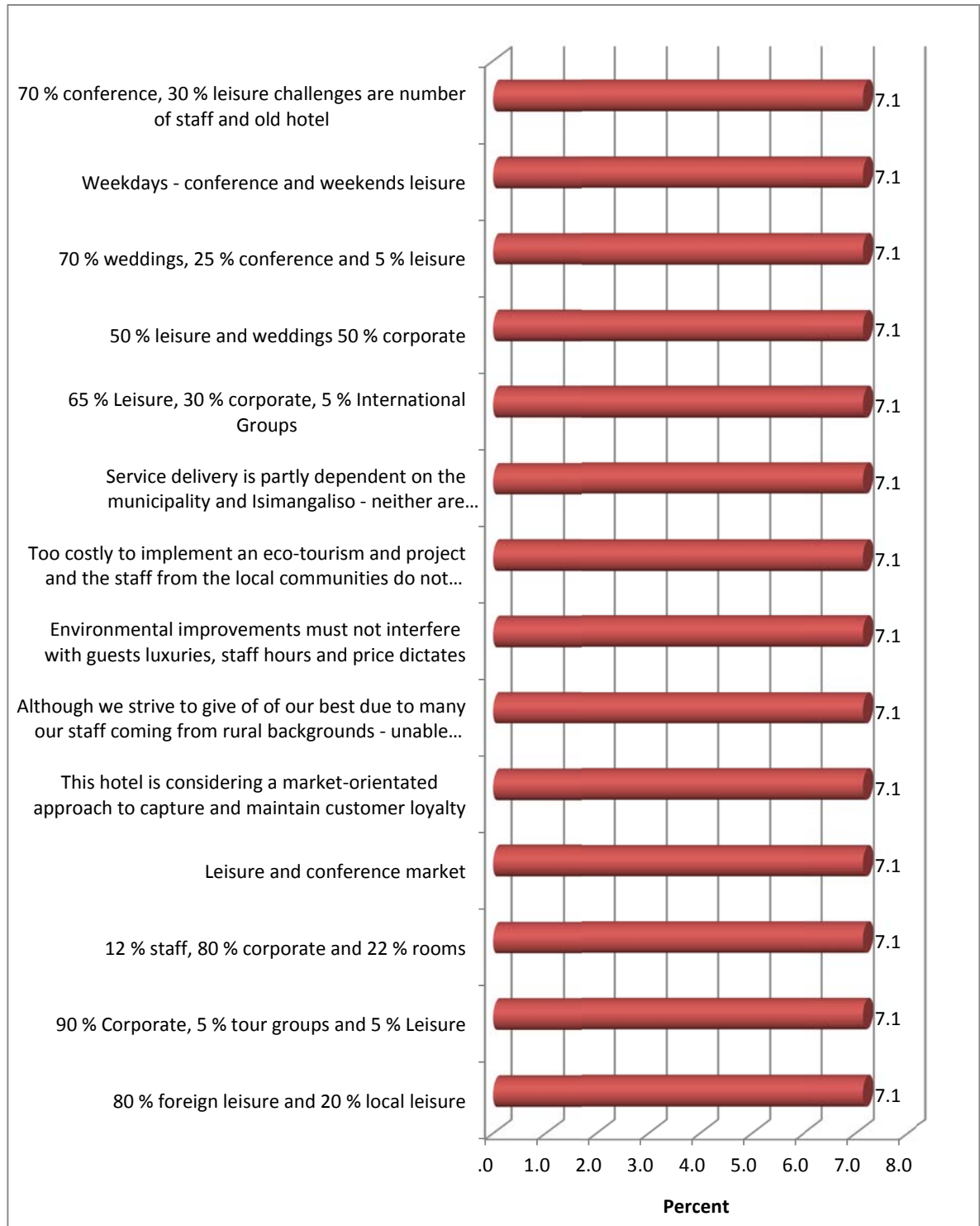
Our use of technology delivers service quality more than it reduces operating costs.	45.9	Technology Management
Benchmarking Sales Distribution systems	45.6 5	Benchmarking
There are one or more significant and visible employee compensation practices that can be traced to delivery of service quality.	39.2	Compensation
Customer service quality is a compensation criterion for management personnel.	39.2	Compensation
Customer service quality is a compensation criterion for non-management personnel.	37.0	Compensation

ANNEXURE 40

Manager environmental practice for ecotourist service quality

Manager environmental practice	Frequency of Importance rating (%)	Service Quality Management Practice
Garden planning suitable with environment	95.6	Architecture and landscape design
Plan that does not spoil natural and historical environment	95.6	Architecture and landscape design
Hotel architecture is harmonized with environment	73.8	Architecture and landscape design
Knowledge of the environmental provisions in accommodation grading criteria of the Tourism Grading Council	56.6	Managerial knowledge on environmental protection
Providing general environmental education to personnel	56.6	Education and training for environmental awareness
Participating in environmental meetings	50.0	Communication for environmental awareness
Providing environmental sensitivity training to personnel	47.9	Education and training for environmental awareness
Energy-saver control system in guest rooms	47.8	Energy efficiency
Providing environmental education to guests	45.6	Education and training for environmental awareness
Getting guest opinions on environmental activities of hotel	45.6	Communication for environmental awareness
Using environmentally friendly energy sources	45.7	Energy efficiency
Purchasing low energy consuming equipment	45.7	Energy efficiency
Brochures with information on environmental protection	43.5	Communication for environmental awareness
Knowledge on the ISO	39.1	Managerial knowledge on environmental protection
Knowledge on the Blue Flag Project	39.1	Managerial knowledge on environmental protection
Active involvement in recycling hotel waste	37.0	Waste reduction
Using water-saving measures on linen change	36.9	Water efficiency
Solid waste separation at source	34.8	Waste reduction
Wastewater treatment	34.8	Water efficiency
Composting the organic and food waste	32.6	Waste reduction
Using treated water in garden irrigation	23.9	Water efficiency

ANNEXURE 41 Manager rationale for adoption of a management practice



ANNEXURE 42

Relationships between guest importance ratings and generic management practices for service quality

Chi-Square Tests The telephone contact during the booking was efficient* Teamwork

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.267	4	.015
Likelihood Ratio	15.064	4	.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	.065	1	.799
N of Valid Cases	27		

Chi-Square Tests The price is fair compared with the service provided* Benchmarking

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.943	4	.041
Likelihood Ratio	11.802	4	.019
Linear-by-Linear Association	.555	1	.456
N of Valid Cases	12		

Chi-Square Tests The hotel is appropriately decorated* Training Management

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.200	4	.024
Likelihood Ratio	11.206	4	.024
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.250	1	.039
N of Valid Cases	14		

Chi-Square Tests You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures* Teamwork

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.605	4	.013
Likelihood Ratio	16.223	4	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.293	1	.256
N of Valid Cases	27		

Chi-Square Tests You appreciated the presence of a car park* Empowerment

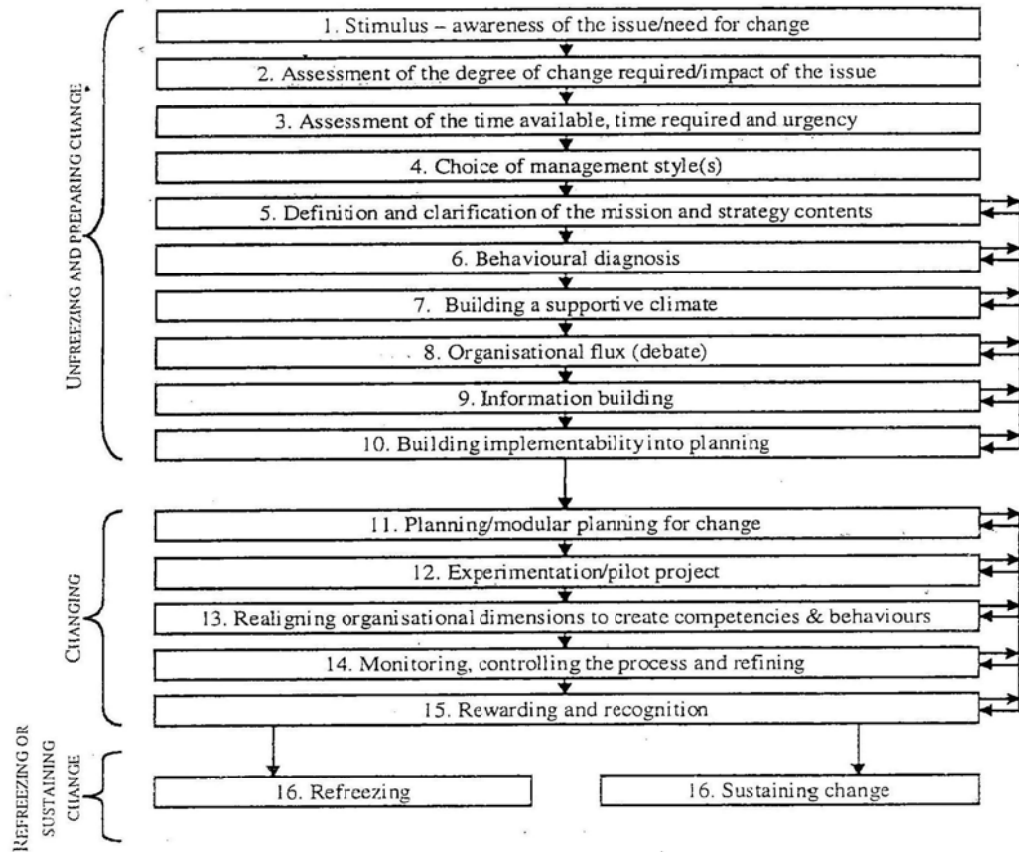
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.852	6	.031
Likelihood Ratio	9.385	6	.153
Linear-by-Linear Association	.683	1	.408
N of Valid Cases	11		

Chi-Square Tests You find the surroundings beautiful* Compensation for quality

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.107 ^a	2	.047
Likelihood Ratio	6.762	2	.034
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.429	1	.020
N of Valid Cases	9		

ANNEXURE 43

Dynamic Strategy Implementation Model (Cândido and Morris 2001:828)



ANNEXURE 44

Association of the derived management practice from the current study with generic management practice

Part B of the House of Quality

Pearson Chi-Square Tests												
		COMPENSATION FOR QUALITY	BENCHMARKING	TRAINING MANAGEMENT	EMPOWERMENT	TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT	ASSESSMENT	PROCESS MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPATION	TEAMWORK	TRAINING	OUTCOME MEASUREMENT
Management of Employee Engagement	Chi-square	136.607	159.143	160.625	106.408	124.808	132.606	98.504	105.804	119.103	173.312	169.807
	df	143	143	117	78	143	104	91	104	91	104	156
	Sig.	.635	.169	.005*	.018*	.861	.031*	.277	.432	.026*	.000*	.213
Management of Environmental Care	Chi-square	162.255	144.198	101.052	83.868	131.595	87.676	65.192	84.063	80.862	110.521	106.967
	df	132	156	108	72	132	96	84	96	84	96	144
	Sig.	.038*	.741	.669	.160	.494	.716	.936	.803	.577	.148	.991
Guest Communication and Information Management	Chi-square	65.007	87.667	46.965	43.671	58.835	47.269	41.905	34.040	31.978	35.574	65.841
	df	66	78	48	36	66	48	42	48	42	42	72
	Sig.	.511	.213	.515	.178	.722	.503	.475	.936	.869	.748	.682
Management of Value Proposition	Chi-square	59.037	64.518	53.327	45.382	48.292	45.581	29.864	45.837	63.422	63.554	60.541
	df	55	65	45	30	55	40	35	40	35	40	60
	Sig.	.330	.494	.185	.036*	.727	.251	.714	.243	.002*	.010*	.456
Value adding structures	Chi-square	88.595	87.600	55.745	30.149	63.532	60.581	38.049	53.264	34.591	56.560	54.327
	df	66	72	54	36	66	48	42	48	42	48	72
	Sig.	.033*	.102	.409	.743	.563	.105	.645	.279	.785	.186	.940
Management of Hotel Operations	Chi-square	198.125	210.192	191.113	100.920	165.270	134.741	112.593	129.286	120.660	172.691	188.254
	df	187	195	153	102	187	136	119	136	119	136	204
	Sig.	.275	.217	.020*	.512	.872	.514	.648	.646	.440	.018*	.779
Managing Aesthetic Fit	Chi-square	81.537	71.762	80.300	50.716	67.586	44.109	46.187	41.771	38.959	68.243	48.207
	df	77	91	63	42	77	56	49	56	49	56	84
	Sig.	.340	.932	.070	.168	.770	.875	.588	.921	.847	.126	.999

ANNEXURE 45

GUEST RATINGS OF THE DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE QUALITY ATTRIBUTES

Part A of the House of Quality

	Frequency %	Rating (ascending)
The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere	97.4	1.
The bedding is comfortable	96.9	2.
The room is pleasant	96.9	3.
You find the surroundings beautiful	95.8	4.
The bathroom is clean	94.8	5.
The staff are competent	94.4	6.
You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff	94.0	7.
The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant	93.2	8.
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient	92.7	9.
You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail	92.3	10.
You find the hotel charming	91.8	11.
The hotel was well signposted	89.6	12.
You like the authentic character of the hotel	88.7	13.
The price is fair compared with the service provided	88.2	14.
The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate	88.1	15.
The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work	87.5	16.
You did not have to wait for check-in.	86.9	17.
The reception staff were attentive	86.8	18.
You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel	86.0	19.
You do not have to wait to get your keys	85.6	20.
You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels	85.3	21.
The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars	84.1	22.
You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures	81.1	23.
You appreciated the presence of a car park	80.8	24.
The staff told you about things to do in the area	82.7	25.
The hotels communication for environmental awareness is of value to me	78.7	26.
The hotel is appropriately decorated	78.4	27.
You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency	76.9	28.
You like the way the room is decorated	75.8	29.
You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal	70.1	30.

ANNEXURE XXXXV

RELATIONSHIP MATRIX BETWEEN MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND CUSTOMER IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE QUALITY ATTRIBUTES

Part A of the House of Quality

SERVICE QUALITY ATTRIBUTES		Management of Hotel Operations	Managing the aesthetic fit	Guest Communication and Information Management	Management of Environmental Care	Management of Employee Engagement	Hotel Environmental Education programme	Environmental Practice	Environmental Planning	Compensation for Quality	Benchmarking	Training Management	Empowerment	Technology Management	Assessment	Process Management	Participation	Teamwork	Training Application	Outcome Measurement	Energy Efficiency	Architecture and Landscape	Waste Reduction	DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE QUALITY ATTRIBUTES
CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS	The reception staff were attentive	5	3	4	1	7	2	2	1	-	3	1	2	3	2	-	3	2	2	-	-	-	-	18
	The staff told you about things to do in the area	2	3	3	5	7	1	2	1	1	3	2	2	3	2	-	2	2	3	-	-	3	-	25
	You did not have to wait for check-in.	5	5	4	1	7	1	2	3	1	2	1	6	3	2	-	2	2	2	-	-	3	-	17
	The telephone contact during the booking was efficient	5	-	5	-	7	1	2	2	7	3	-	1	-	3	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	9
	You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff	4	-	4	-	3	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
	The staff are competent	4	-	5	4	1	1	2	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	6
	You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail	5	-	7	-	4	1	1	6	-	-	2	-	3	-	-	2	2	1	2	-	-	-	10
	The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate	5	3	7	-	5	1	1	1	-	-	2	1	3	2	-	2	2	1	-	3	-	3	15
	The hotel was well signposted	3	4	6	-	2	3	1	1	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	12
	The price is fair compared with the service provided	5	-	2	-	3	1	3	1	2	1	6	-	3	2	-	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	14
	You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel (ISO, Quality Charter, etc.)	7	3	-	5	1	1	2	1	2	1	3	6	-	2	-	2	2	2	-	3	-	3	19
	The bathroom is clean	7	5	2	-	5	1	7	1	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	5
	The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work	7	1	-	-	4	2	2	3	2	3	2	-	-	2	-	3	2	2	-	-	-	-	16
	You do not have to wait to get your keys	7	1	5	-	5	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	-	2	3	3	2	3	2	-	20
	You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels	5	-	-	7	4	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	3	3	-	2	3	2	3	-	2	-	21
	The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars	4	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	2	7	6	2	3	3	-	2	1	2	3	-	2	3	22
	You find the hotel charming	3	7	-	-	-	2	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	2	1	-	-	-	-	11
	The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere	3	7	-	5	-	1	1	1	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	2	3	1	-	-	-	-	1
	The room is pleasant	3	7	-	2	-	1	3	1	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	-	-	-	-	3
	The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant	2	7	-	2	-	2	1	2	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	2	1	2	3	-	-	-	8
	The bedding is comfortable	7	3	-	1	-	2	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3	-	-	-	2
	The hotel is appropriately decorated	7	4	-	-	-	2	2	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	3	-	-	-	27
	You like the way the room is decorated	7	2	-	-	2	2	3	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	3	-	-	-	29
	You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures	3	2	-	7	3	1	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	23

You appreciated the presence of a car park	2	2	-	-	2	2	2	2	-	-	2	7	-	-	-	2	2	2	3	-	-	-	24
You find the surroundings beautiful	7	5	-	5	1	2	1	2	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	4
You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency	1	3	1	7	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	3	3	-	3	2	2	3	3	3	-	28
You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal	1	3	1	7	3	1	2	1	-	3	2	2	-	1	-	1	1	2	3	3	-	3	30
You like the authentic character of the hotel	1	3	1	3	4	1	3	1	2	3	2	3	3	2	-	7	2	1	3	3	3	3	13
The hotels communication for environmental awareness is of value to me	1	1	3	7	5	1	6	1	1	3	3	2	3	2	-	3	2	1	3	3	3	3	26

Annexure XXXXVI

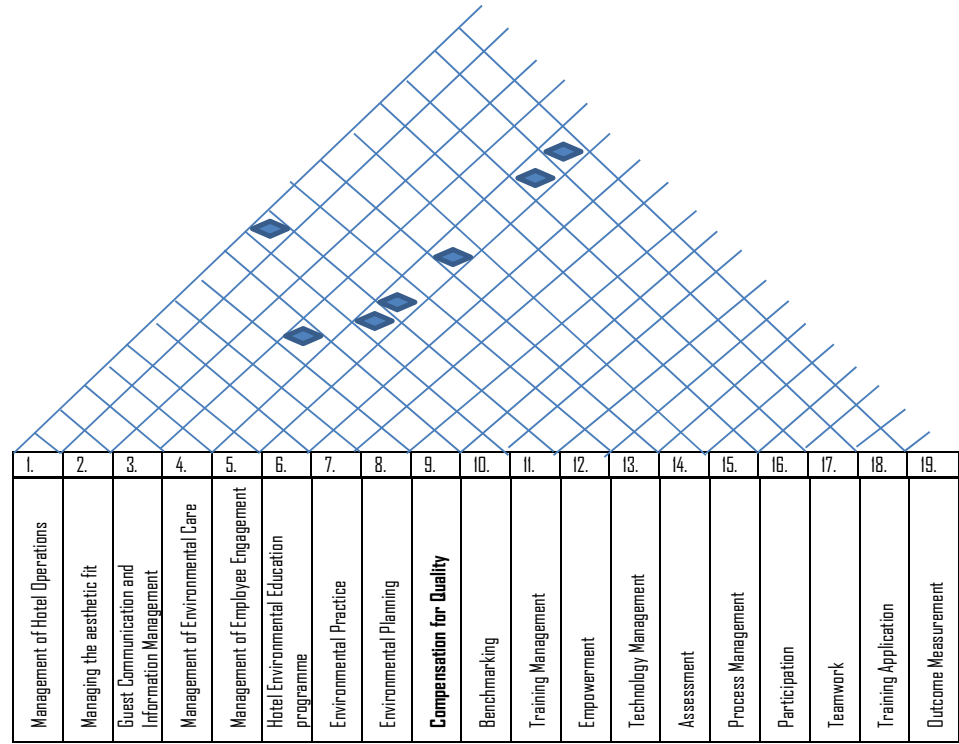
Correlation of manager service practice in the hotel's environment with hotel service quality attributes

Part B of the House of Quality

Pearson Chi-Square Tests		Hotel Environmental Education programme	Environmental practice	Environmental Planning
The reception staff were attentive I3	Chi-square	16.346	32.494	23.999
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.568	.492	.972
The staff told you about things to do in the area I4	Chi-square	12.861	31.875	31.528
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.800	.523	.797
You did not have to wait for check-in. I5	Chi-square	16.583	39.924	56.897
	df	24	44	52
	Sig.	.866	.647	.298
The telephone contact during the booking was efficient I6	Chi-square	12.784	47.526	56.063
	df	24	44	52
	Sig.	.970	.331	.325
You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff I7	Chi-square	14.021	34.204	26.339
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.728	.410	.939
The staff are competent I8	Chi-square	11.764	32.712	28.913
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.859	.481	.881
You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail I9	Chi-square	5.272	13.307	37.149
	df	12	22	26
	Sig.	.948	.924	.072
The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate I10	Chi-square	12.034	21.255	32.266
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.845	.943	.769
The hotel was well signposted I11	Chi-square	15.027	17.250	20.861
	df	12	22	26
	Sig.	.240	.749	.749
The price is fair compared with the service provided I12	Chi-square	14.506	40.971	28.110
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.696	.161	.902
You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel (ISO, Quality Charter, etc.) I13	Chi-square	17.239	43.386	39.292
	df	24	44	52
	Sig.	.838	.498	.903
The bathroom is clean I14	Chi-square	11.315	50.059	20.721
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.881	.029*	.993
The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work I15	Chi-square	22.088	42.749	57.808
	df	24	44	52
	Sig.	.574	.525	.269
You do not have to wait to get your keys I16	Chi-square	11.161	34.345	41.041
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.887	.403	.381
You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels I17	Chi-square	16.197	44.513	38.749
	df	24	44	48
	Sig.	.881	.450	.827
The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars I18	Chi-square	14.690	32.352	26.678
	df	18	33	36
	Sig.	.683	.499	.871

You find the hotel charming I19	Chi-square	13.801	25.271	26.382
	df	12	22	24
	Sig.	.314	.284	.334
The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere I20	Chi-square	12.027	12.428	17.106
	df	12	22	26
	Sig.	.444	.948	.906
The room is pleasant I21	Chi-square	6.781	25.835	15.344
	df	12	22	26
	Sig.	.872	.259	.951
The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant I22	Chi-square	10.103	15.328	24.504
	df	12	22	26
	Sig.	.607	.848	.547
The bedding is comfortable I23	Chi-square	13.687	18.077	25.285
	df	12	22	26
	Sig.	.321	.701	.503
The hotel is appropriately decorated I24	Chi-square	15.135	31.066	51.177
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.653	.564	.092
You like the way the room is decorated I25	Chi-square	18.493	40.968	51.560
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.424	.161	.086
You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures I26	Chi-square	6.803	20.047	30.513
	df	12	22	26
	Sig.	.870	.580	.247
You appreciated the presence of a car park I27	Chi-square	16.884	30.572	36.215
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.531	.589	.598
You find the surroundings beautiful I28	Chi-square	20.247	24.265	34.423
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.319	.865	.679
You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency I29	Chi-square	24.190	46.265	38.654
	df	24	44	52
	Sig.	.451	.379	.915
You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal I30	Chi-square	10.512	36.422	30.168
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.914	.312	.844
You like the authentic character of the hotel I31	Chi-square	13.767	39.260	33.112
	df	18	33	39
	Sig.	.744	.210	.735
The hotels communication for environmental awareness is of value to me I32	Chi-square	19.103	59.809	35.122
	df	24	44	52
	Sig.	.746	.056	.965

Part B of the House of Quality



Roof of the House of Quality

= Strong association with management factors

ANNEXURE XXXXVII

Relationship matrix of service quality management practices and attributes of hotel service quality

SERVICE QUALITY ATTRIBUTES		Management of Hotel Operations	Managing the aesthetic fit	Guest Communication and Information Management	Management of Environmental Care	Management of Employee Engagement	Hotel Environmental Education programme	Environmental Practice	Environmental Planning	Compensation for Quality	Benchmarking	Training Management	Empowerment	Technology Management	Assessment	Process Management	Participation	Teamwork	Training Application	Outcome Measurement	Energy Efficiency	Architecture and Landscape Design	Waste Reduction	Σi	Guest Importance Rating
CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS	The reception staff were attentive	5	3	4	1	7	2	2	1	-	3	1	2	3	2	-	3	2	2	-	-	-	-	0.279	18
	The staff told you about things to do in the area	2	3	3	5	7	1	2	1	1	3	2	2	3	2	-	2	2	3	-	-	3	-	0.305	25
	You did not have to wait for check-in.	5	5	4	1	7	1	2	3	1	2	1	6	3	2	-	2	2	2	-	-	3	-	0.338	17
	The telephone contact during the booking was efficient	5	-	5	-	7	1	2	2	7	3	-	1	-	3	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	0.318	9
	You appreciate the atmosphere among the staff	4	-	4	-	3	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.156	7
	The staff are competent	4	-	5	4	1	1	2	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	0.156	6
	You appreciated receiving confirmation of your booking by mail	5	-	7	-	4	1	1	6	-	-	2	-	3	-	-	2	2	1	2	-	-	-	0.234	10
	The information about how to get the hotel, given when booking, was accurate	5	3	7	-	5	1	1	1	-	-	2	1	3	2	-	2	2	1	-	3	-	3	0.273	15
	The hotel was well signposted	3	4	6	-	2	3	1	1	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	0.182	12
	The price is fair compared with the service provided	5	-	2	-	3	1	3	1	2	1	6	-	3	2	-	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	0.221	14
	You appreciate the quality initiatives taken by the hotel (ISO, Quality Charter, etc.)	7	3	-	5	1	1	2	1	2	1	3	6	-	2	-	2	2	2	-	3	-	3	0.299	19
	The bathroom is clean	7	5	2	-	5	1	7	1	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	0.240	5
	The facilities (television, radio, telephone) work	7	1	-	-	4	2	2	3	2	3	2	-	-	2	-	3	2	2	-	-	-	-	0.227	16
	You do not have to wait to get your keys	7	1	5	-	5	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	3	2	-	3	3	2	3	2	-	0.325	20
	You appreciate the signs about reusing bed linen and towels	5	-	-	7	4	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	3	3	-	2	3	2	3	-	2	-	0.299	21
	The quality of the hotel corresponds to the number of stars	4	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	2	7	6	2	3	3	-	2	1	2	3	-	2	3	0.292	22
	You find the hotel charming	3	7	-	-	-	2	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	2	1	-	-	-	-	0.149	11
	The hotel has a pleasant atmosphere	3	7	-	5	-	1	1	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	1	-	-	-	-	0.182	1
	The room is pleasant	3	7	-	2	-	1	3	1	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	-	-	-	-	0.162	3
	The surroundings of the hotel are pleasant	2	7	-	2	-	2	1	2	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	2	1	2	3	-	-	-	0.182	8
	The bedding is comfortable	7	3	-	1	-	2	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3	-	-	-	0.136	2
	The hotel is appropriately decorated	7	4	-	-	-	2	2	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	3	-	-	-	0.195	27
	You like the way the room is decorated	7	2	-	-	2	2	3	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	3	-	-	-	0.188	29
	You appreciate the fact that hotel adopts energy efficient measures	3	2	-	7	3	1	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	0.175	23
	You appreciated the presence of a car park	2	2	-	-	2	2	2	2	-	-	2	7	-	-	-	2	2	2	3	-	-	-	0.195	24
	You find the surroundings beautiful	7	5	-	5	1	2	1	2	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	0.221	4
	You appreciate the hotel effort for improved water efficiency	1	3	1	7	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	3	3	-	3	2	2	3	3	3	-	0.312	28
	You appreciate the hotel effort for effective waste reduction and disposal	1	3	1	7	3	1	2	1	-	3	2	2	-	1	-	1	1	2	3	3	-	3	0.260	30
	You like the authentic character of the hotel	1	3	1	3	4	1	3	1	2	3	2	3	3	2	-	7	2	1	3	3	3	3	0.351	13
	The hotels communication for environmental awareness is of value to me	1	1	3	7	5	1	6	1	1	3	3	2	3	2	-	3	2	1	3	3	3	3	0.370	26
	Σm	0.610	0.400	0.286	0.329	0.429	0.205	0.319	0.276	0.143	0.181	0.243	0.233	0.171	0.157	-	0.310	0.267	0.214	0.176	0.100	0.100	0.086		
	ij	0.226	0.148	0.106	0.122	0.159	0.076	0.118	0.102	0.053	0.067	0.090	0.086	0.063	0.058	-	0.115	0.099	0.079	0.065	0.037	0.033	0.042		
	Ranking	6.554	4.440	3.074	3.538	4.611	2.204	3.422	2.958	1.537	1.943	2.610	2.494	1.827	1.740	-	3.450	2.970	2.370	1.950	1.110	1.110	0.960		

ANNEXURE XXXXVIII

Alignment in derived importance of management practice from current study with generic management practice by researcher in determining the composite technical specification for management practice for service quality at hotels serving ecotourism destinations.

DERIVED MANAGEMENT PRACTICE FROM CURRENT STUDY	GENERIC MANAGEMENT PRACTICE
Management of Hotel Operations	Process management; Outcome measurement; Technology management
Managing the aesthetic fit	Architecture and landscape design
Guest Communication and Information Management	Communication for environmental awareness
Management of Environmental Care	Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection
Management of Employee Engagement	Teamwork; Training Management; Assessment; Participation; Training; Compensation for quality; Empowerment
Hotel Environmental Education programme	Education and training for environmental awareness
Environmental practice	Energy efficiency; Waste reduction; Water efficiency
Environmental Planning	Nil
Nil	Benchmarking