CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW OF GUEST SATISFACTION

Spacious Lush Green Lawn at Hotel Grand Temple View, Khajuraho
1.1. Introduction to Hospitality & Hotel Guest:

The word "hospitality" is used to describe a cluster of service sector activities associated with the provision of food, drink and accommodation (Lashley and Morrison, 2002: 2). The origin of the word "hotel" dates back to the 18th century when an establishment called "hotel garni in which apartments were let by the day, week or month, came into use." Its appearance signified a departure from the customary method of accommodating guests in inns and similar hostelries, into something more luxurious and even ostentatious. Hotels with manager, receptionists and uniformed staff arrived generally only at the beginning of the nineteenth century and until the middle of that century their development was relatively slow. (Medlik, 1998:7)

There have been numerous attempts to define hospitality in the past, when different authors explored various disciplines that to a greater or lesser degree pertain and contribute to hospitality; however none of them combines all the aspects into one concept. For example The Webster Dictionary (1970) identifies hospitality as "the act or practice of being hospitable; the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers, with liberality and goodwill". A thorough definition of hospitality states that: "The outer primary interacting element is that of the social relationship fostered by the warm, friendly, welcoming, courteous, open, generous behavior of the host creating the hospitable social environment. This supports and promotes the positive feeling of security and comfort created by physical structure, design, décor and location of facility. Finally, the provision of accommodation facilities to sleep, eat relax and wash, together with the supply of beverage, service and entertainment" (Burgess, 1982:50)

As per Oxford Dictionary, a "Guest is a person who is invited to another person’s house on a visit or to dine together". The guest and host hold a social relationship where a person is invited and entertained as a social obligation or with a motive. In
India there is an old Sanskrit saying “Atihi Devo Bhava” meaning the guest is like God and as a person offers his best to God, we shall also offer our best to our guest. Hence, we extend warmth and welcome to our friends, relatives, near and dears visiting to us in order to impress upon them with our hospitality and good nature and make their experience as pleasant as possible. There are numerous examples of the same in Hindu mythology and folklores.

A hotel customer is called a guest because the hotel offers homely and professional service to him, and establishes an immediate relationship with him. Thereafter it ensures satisfaction by providing nothing less than ‘A Home Away From Home’. It is like projecting, ‘what is an economic relationship as a personal relationship’. Unlike other business ‘a guest hotel transaction even when complete in all respect is futile, if the guest is not satisfied’. The idea behind referring to hotel customer as guest is, offering homely as well as professional service in order to keep him happy and satisfied and make his experience as memorable as possible. As compared to other industries, hotel industry, which is a service industry, requires greater personal touch and courtesy. A hotel guest is a customer and unlike a family or social guest, he pays for his stay, food and beverage consumption at the hotel.

The hotel guest is one who buys rooms, meeting space, food and beverage services and other services and amenities, etc. from the hotel. He has certain needs and wants which he would like to fulfill. He is someone who, in his mind, is always right, and is the reason for business, rather than an interruption to our work; a person who brings his wants to the hotel. It is hotel’s job to handle him profitably for him and to get patronage in future. A guest is therefore a valued customer who is willing to pay fair price for a quality product and wants to be neither overcharged nor underserved. The guest is not dependent upon hospitality units; on the contrary, hotels are dependent on him. The guest is not someone to argue with or match wits with, nobody ever won an argument with a guest; even if the hotel wins, the hotel and the guest both loose in the end.
Successful hotels are making a concerted effort to develop closer ties to their guests. In earlier days, the industry in general emphasized price competition and put less stress on improving quality of products. Owing to the growing intensity of competition and the dynamic developments in hospitality industry, hotels’ goals have changed over the last few years. While focusing on attracting new guests in the past, the marketing strategies today are concentrated on securing and improving guest satisfaction.

1.2. Defining Guest Satisfaction:

Satisfaction is the reward which people gain from an activity. Satisfaction can therefore be seen as the degree to which one is pleased or content with his/her experiences and situations. This positive feeling of contentment results from the satisfaction of felt or unfelt needs of the individual.

The word ‘satisfaction’ is derived from the Latin words satis (enough), and facere (to do or make) (Oliver, 1993a; Rust and Oliver, 1994). Oliver (1993a, p. 72) states: ‘These terms illustrate the point that satisfaction implies a filling or fulfillment’. This notion of fulfillment has been conceptualized and defined in a variety of ways. Several authors have defined satisfaction in different ways. Following table 1.1 will present some definitions of guest satisfaction that will give us a clear idea about satisfaction concept.

Guest Satisfaction can be defined by the two approaches according to Mannell and Kleiber (1997). One approach is a need-based definition in which satisfaction is seen to be closely related to motivation, so satisfaction results from corresponding needs or motives being met. Need satisfaction has been conceptualized as the fulfillment of drives, motives, or needs. An early example of this conceptualization is Stankey’s (1972, p. 93) suggestion that quality of a hospitality experience ‘can be judged only by examining the extent to which the motivations and objectives of the guests are fulfilled’.
Table: 1.1 Some Definitions of Guest Satisfaction

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<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Satisfaction is a person’s feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product’s perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectation”.</td>
<td>Kotler (2000, p.36)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guest Satisfaction is collective outcome of perception, evaluation and psychological reactions to consumption experience with a product/service.</td>
<td>Yi (1990)</td>
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<td>Satisfaction is a function of guest’s belief that he or she was treated fairly.</td>
<td>Lewis, R.C (1987)</td>
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The alternative approach is unrelated to needs or motives and is termed appraisal satisfaction. It refers to a form of assessment or evaluation of the extent to which an individual’s perceived reality meets with his or her current expectations (Bultena and Klessig, 1969; LaPage, 1983). This approach appears to have been first proposed by Bultena and Klessig, (1969, p. 349): ‘satisfaction is a function of the degree of congruency between aspirations and the perceived reality of experiences’. This alternative has emerged as the dominant conceptualization of satisfaction in the hospitality industry (Williams, 1988).

The appraisal approach is formally defined by the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980), which is derived from two processes: development of expectations of service outcomes, and the disconfirmation judgment that results from guests’ comparing the outcome against these expectations. When the actual performance matches initial expectations, confirmation results. When the actual performance exceeds or falls short of expectations, then positive or negative disconfirmation occurs. Positive disconfirmation leads to satisfaction, while negative disconfirmation leads to dissatisfaction.
The need-based definition describes satisfaction as a static state of fulfillment of needs, while the appraisal approach attempts to understand satisfaction as a process. Satisfaction is perceived to be related to psychological outcomes. Mannell and Kleiber (1997, p. 185) noted that ‘psychological outcomes and benefits’ have been used by researchers to describe the social psychological process that satisfaction represents. Thus, guest satisfaction is determined by the extent to which desired outcomes or benefits are realized by the hotel customers.

Guest satisfaction can also be defined as satisfaction based on an outcome or a process. Vavra’s (1997, p. 4) outcome definition of guest satisfaction characterizes satisfaction as the end-state resulting from the experience of consumption. This end state may be a cognitive state of reward, an emotional response to an experience or a comparison of rewards and costs to the anticipated consequences. Vavra (1997, p. 4) also puts forth a definition of guest satisfaction based as a process, emphasizing the perceptual, evaluative and psychological processes contributing to guest satisfaction. In this definition, assessment of satisfaction is made during the service delivery process.

A minority of researchers perceive the satisfaction process to be subjective in expectations but objective in the perceptions of the product attributes, or outcome. Thus, Klaus (1985, p. 21) defines satisfaction as “the guest’s subjective evaluation of a consumption experience, based on some relationship between the guest’s perceptions and objective attributes of the product”. Others point out that both what is perceived (outcome) and what is expected are subjective and therefore psychological phenomena - not reality (Maister, 1985). The importance of the subjective nature of the process cannot be overstated.

Since both expectations and perceptions are psychological phenomena, they are both susceptible to external influences and manipulation. As an illustration of how expectations can be explicitly manipulated Sasser et al. (1979, p. 89) note that:
“Some restaurants follow the practice of promising guests a waiting time in excess of the “expected time”. If people are willing to agree to wait this length of time, they are quite pleased to be seated earlier, thus starting the meal with a more positive feeling” (Maister, 1985, p.114). Manipulating perceptions of outcome is also a common practice in some hotels where front office clerks mention nonchalantly that a particular suite in the hotel is a favorite of a famous personality. The intention here is to influence the perception of the guest and suggest that the hotel must be good since an “expert” regularly frequents it.

Satisfaction is neither a universal phenomenon and nor everyone out of the same hospitality experience. The reason is that guests have different needs, objectives and past experiences that influence their expectations. To a student on a limited budget, a lunch composed of fast food items at the crowded and noisy school cafeteria may be a highly satisfying experience, while the same experience may be perceived as totally dissatisfying to an affluent executive discussing a business transaction. The same guest may also have different needs and expectations on different meal occasions, or at different times of the day (Davis and Stone, 1985, p. 31). The student in the previous example will not be highly satisfied when his college friends take him out for a “birthday” meal celebration at the school cafeteria. Therefore it is important to gain a clear idea of the guest needs and objectives that correspond to different kinds of satisfactions. This necessitates the segmentation of the market, because no service or product can offer everyone the same degree of satisfaction (WTO, 1985).

An individual’s satisfaction with outcomes received from a hospitality experience results from a comparison of these outcomes with expectations. Expectations can be described as a mutable internal standard which is based on a multitude of factors including needs, objectives, past personal or vicarious experiences with the same establishment restaurant, with similar establishments, and the availability of alternatives (i.e. are there any other establishments in town?). This view is
supported by Mazursky who suggests that: *Experiences beyond those with the focal brands may lead to different normative standards employed by guests in evaluating performance. Possible norms, according to this view, include perceived best brand, the most recently used brand, a brand used by a reference person, products competing for the same needs, and the like* (p. 338).

Changes in satisfaction with the meal experience may result from changes in the perception of the actual quality of outcomes received, or from changes in the expectations against which these outcomes are compared. Alterations in the expectations can result from *change in needs* (i.e. hungry versus full; tired versus rested) *change of objectives* (i.e. business trip vs leisure trip), and *new personal or vicarious experiences* (i.e. recently had a superb hospitality experience at another hotel).

In this highly competitive hospitality industry, where guest expectations are constantly rising, the benefits of focusing on (and improving) guest satisfaction cannot be underestimated. Successful hotel chains make guest satisfaction an integral part of their entire operation - from check-in and amenities to room service and departure. It provides a benchmark to measure guest retention rates, service improvement initiatives, and hotel chain performance. The main reason for this new emphasis is the awareness of the economic consequences of guest satisfaction and guest loyalty (*Fornell et al., 1995; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990*). Companies with a bigger share of loyal guests profit from increasing repurchase rates, increasing cross-buying potential, higher price willingness, positive recommendation behavior and less switching tendency.

Therefore today, hospitality industry begins to consider guest satisfaction as one of the most important sources of their competitive advantage (*Bieger 1998; Kozak and Rimmington 1998; Ritchie and Crouch 2000; Fuchs, Peters, and Weiermair 2002*). Pursuing this vein of analysis, guest satisfaction is regarded as a guest-
driven measure of hotel performance, with the guest remaining the main source of information for identifying those standards that must be established to close potential performance gaps. The study on guest satisfaction would be helpful to the hotels by the following manner:

1. Establish guest satisfaction goals that support guest satisfaction enhancement programs
2. Enhance brand reputation for quality and responsiveness
3. Design brand improvements based on guest feedback
4. Increase occupancy rates and operational efficiency
5. Improve guest satisfaction and intent to return (brand loyalty)
6. Gain insights for marketing and strategic planning
7. Improve effectiveness of advertising and marketing expenditures
8. Understand guest demographics

1.3. Theoretical Basis of Guest Satisfaction:

Social scientists, marketing researchers, and students of consumer behavior, have extensively studied the concepts of guest satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Various satisfaction/dissatisfaction theories applied guests’ judgment on satisfaction with product/service. Most of the early studies focused on approach to products only using comparison with their expectations about the product performance.

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction theories that frequently have been cited include Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), Contrast Theory (Engel and Blackwell, 1982; Howard and Sheth, 1969; Cardozo, 1965), Assimilation-Contrast Theory (Oliver, 1997), Expectation – Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver and Desarbo, 1988), Generalized Negativity Theory (Yi, 1990), Level of Aspiration (Loa) Theory (Yi, 1990), and Adaptation Level Theory (Helson, 1948, 1959, and 1964), etc. Other theories such as Comparison-Level Theory, Equity
Theory, and Value-Percept Disparity Theory have been applied for explaining the expectation-disconfirmation paradigm.

According to the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, disconfirmed expectations create a state of dissonance or psychological discomfort (Festinger, 1957). The theory states that dissonant or inconsistent states may exist and are a source of psychological tension to the person perceiving them. This tension will lead to efforts to reduce dissonance and restore consistency. Mechanisms to reduce dissonance include changes in behavior or attitudes, or selective distortion of perceptions (Festinger, 1957). The Contrast Theory presumes that when product expectations are not matched by actual performance, the contrast between expectation and outcome, or the surprise effect, will cause the guest to exaggerate the disparity (Engel and Blackwell, 1982; Howard and Sheth, 1969; and Cardozo, 1965). Similarly, Assimilation-Contrast Theory (Oliver, 1997) found that expectation and disconfirmation were independently related to the post-exposure ratings.

Another theory support for guest satisfaction is called the Adaptation Level Theory (Helson, 1964), which posits that one perceives stimuli only in relation to an adapted standard (Yi, 1990). Adaptation level theory says that if the original expectations were to change, the guest would still be free to compare unfavorably the product received with better ones (Helson, 1964). The Generalized Negativity Theory stated that any disconfirmation of expectations is perceived as less pleasant than a disconfirmation of expectations (Yi, 1990). In this theory it was stated that disconfirmation of expectations results in a hedonically negative state, which is generalized to objects in the environment. If guests expect a particular performance from a product, and a discrepant performance occurs, they will judge the product less favorably than if they had not had prior expectations. The elements and the process may be viewed as analogous to the Level of Aspiration (LOA) Theory's description of the evaluation of differences between expected and actual
performance and the perception of “success” or “failure” (Yi, 1990). Combining this idea from LOA theory, from Thibaut and Kelly, and from Sherif, one may suggest a model that calls attention particularly to some factors critical to the measurement of satisfaction.

Theories such as Hirshman’s (1970) Exit-Voice Theory explained the role of guest complaints to guest satisfaction and loyalty. Exit-Voice Theory explained that the immediate consequences of increased guest satisfaction are decreased guest complaints and increased guest loyalty (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1987). When dissatisfied, guests have the option of exiting (e.g., going to a competitor) or voicing their complaints in an attempt to receive retribution. An increase in overall guest satisfaction should decrease the incidence of complaints. Instead, overall guest satisfaction should also increase guest loyalty.

Another interesting theory that explains guest dissatisfaction and complaining behavior is called Equity Theory (Blodgett, Granbois, and Walters, 1993). According to studies (Blodgett, Granbois, and Walters, 1993; Goodwin and Ross, 1990), how individuals involved in conflicts or disputes perceive justice has been explained by Equity Theory. Complaint handling incidents, which are rated favorably, include compensation in line with the perceived costs experienced by the guest (Kelly and Davis, 1994), thus supporting an equity-based evaluation of complaint outcomes (Blodgett, Granbois, and Tax, 1997). A study by Tax, brown, and Chandrashekaran (1998) and Goodwin and Ross, (1990) addressed the concept of justice, as a comprehensive framework to explain people’s reactions to conflict situations. Three justice dimensions were discussed to explain complaint handling when guests encounter service failure. Dimensions include distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. How individuals involved in conflicts or disputes perceive justice has been explained by Equity Theory.
Thus, guest satisfaction is a psychological concept that involves the feeling of well being and pleasure that results from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from an appealing product and/or service (WTO, 1985). While there are a variety of approaches to the explanation of guest satisfaction/dissatisfaction, the most widely used is the one proposed by Richard Oliver who has developed the expectancy disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980). According to this theory, which has been tested and confirmed in several studies (Oliver and DeSarbo, 1988; Tse and Wilton, 1988), guests purchase goods and services with pre-purchase expectations about anticipated performance. Once the product or service has been purchased and used, outcomes are compared against expectations. When outcome matches expectations, confirmation occurs. Disconfirmation occurs when there are differences between expectations and outcomes. Negative disconfirmation occurs when product/service performance is less than expected. Positive disconfirmation occurs when product/service performance is better than expected. Satisfaction is caused by confirmation or positive disconfirmation of guest expectations, and dissatisfaction is caused by negative disconfirmation of guest expectations.

1.4. Components of Guest Satisfaction:

Unlike material products or pure services, most hospitality experiences are an amalgam of products and services. Therefore it is possible to say that satisfaction with a hospitality experience such as a hotel stay or a restaurant meal is a sum total of satisfactions with the individual elements or attributes of all the products and services that make up the experience.

There is no uniformity of opinion among marketing experts as to the classification of the elements in service encounters. Reuland et al. (1985, p. 142) suggest that hospitality services consist of a harmonious mixture of three elements: the material product in a narrow sense which in the case of a restaurant is the food and beverages; the behaviour and attitude of the employees who are responsible for
hosting the guest, serving the meal and beverages and who come in direct contact with the guests, and the environment, such as the building, the layout, the furnishing, the lighting in the restaurant, etc.

Czepiel et al. (1985) on the other hand, suggest that satisfaction with a service is a function of satisfaction with two independent elements. The functional element, i.e. the food and beverage in a restaurant, and the performance-delivery element, i.e. the service. To prove the independence of the two elements from each other, the authors claim that restaurant clients are quite capable of having responses to each element that differ one from the other: “The service was great, the food poor” or conversely... (p. 13).

Davis and Stone (1985, p.29) divide the service encounter into two elements: direct and indirect services. For example, direct services may be the actual check-in/ check-out process in hotels, while the indirect services include the provision of parking facilities, concierge, public telephones for guests’ use, etc.

Lovelock (1985) divides the service attributes into two groups: core and secondary. Airline service provides a good example, with guests first making inquiries and reservations, then checking in their baggage, getting seat assignments, being checked at the gate, receiving on-board service in flight, and retrieving their baggage at the destination airport. Each of these activities is an operations task that is secondary to the core product of physically transporting passengers and their bags between two airports. But these secondary tasks have a greater potential to generate guest dissatisfaction if performed poorly (p. 272). In a restaurant situation Lovelock’s core will be composed of the food and beverage, while his secondary will be composed of everything else, including service, environment, etc.

Lewis (1987), too, classifies the service encounter attributes in two groups: essential and subsidiary. The essential attributes are identical to Czepiel’s
functional, Davis and Stone’s direct, Reuland and colleagues’ product, and Lovelock’s core, i.e. the food and beverage in the meal experience. On the other hand Lewis’s subsidiary attributes are more comprehensive than either Davis and Stone’s indirect, Czepiel’s performance-delivery, or Lovelock’s secondary, and include such factors as: accessibility, convenience of location, availability and timing and flexibility, as well as interactions with those providing the service and with other guests. It is equivalent to a combination of the behavior and environment elements in the Reuland et al. model.

Yet, other researchers support the idea that the service encounter attributes are situation-specific and as such cannot be classified into universal elements.

1.5. Guest Satisfaction Measurement:

To date, service quality research has focused mainly on methods for measuring the gap between expectations and perceptions of the service by the customer, as an indication of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988). Although this and other work in the area invoke the disconfirmation paradigm from consumer behavior research, there seems to be considerable debate about the relationship between the core constructs of consumer satisfaction and perceived quality as well as about the appropriateness of the gap approach (Rust et al., 1993).

Parasuraman et al. (1991) concluded that customer satisfaction is distinct from service quality. Satisfaction is thought to result from the comparison between predicted service and perceived service, whereas service quality refers to the comparison between desired service and perceived service (Zeithaml et al., 1993). Another distinction between service quality and satisfaction has been suggested. The evaluation of individual service transactions has been termed satisfaction judgements. In contrast, the perceived service quality would be similar to an individual’s general attitude towards the service firm (Bitner et al., 1990). Also, similar direct determinants have been suggested for both customer satisfaction
(Liljander and Strandvik, 1992) and service quality (Boulding et al., 1993). This implies a close relationship between service encounter satisfaction and perceived service quality. Consequently, too little attention may have been paid to the measurement and nature of the satisfaction construct in service quality research as it also fits the description of an attitude (Claycomb and Mowen, 1992). For instance, marketers have tended not to conceptualize satisfaction as a cognitively-based evaluation of attributes found in other literatures but as an emotional response to a product or service use (Oliver, 1981).

It focuses on identifying the hotel’s attributes, which influence guests’ satisfaction. In order to measure the overall guests’ satisfaction in any hotel we need to evaluate various experiences, which influences overall satisfaction. It is important to identify and measure guest satisfaction with each attribute of the hospitality unit because the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one of the attributes leads to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with regard to a hospitality unit (Pizam, Neumann, and Reichel, 1978). With regard to the above-mentioned goals and taking into consideration the theoretical work in the field of guest satisfaction/dissatisfaction, a reliable approach for measuring guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry should meet five important requirements as follows (Hansen et al., 1998):

1.5.1. Differentiated Measurement of Guest Satisfaction:

The first step is to measure the overall satisfaction with a product, a service or a provider. As research shows, the measurement of complex constructs such as satisfaction with only one indicator (single-item approach) does not ensure optimal results. Measuring satisfaction with a multi-item approach leads to better results (Churchill, 1979; Homburg, 1995; Jacoby, 1978). Therefore, additional indicators should be used (i.e. the comparison of the product/service with the expectations and the comparison with an ideal product or service).
1.5.2. Identification of Preconditions of Guest Satisfaction:

Besides gathering satisfaction data the main *drivers for guest satisfaction* should be identified. The idea is to give first hints for improving the quality management by comparing the performances of hotels in special aspects (i.e. competence, friendliness, reliability).

1.5.3. Identification of Consequences of Guest Satisfaction:

Looking at the *consequences of guest satisfaction*, which means its effects on guest behavior and/or behavioral intentions should be examined (i.e. repurchase intention, cross-buying intention).

1.5.4. Identification of Causal Relationships:

A meaningful approach to measuring guest satisfaction should be able to analyze the *relationships between the included constructs*. Therefore, it is necessary to use a structural model. According to the multi-item approach such a model will include latent variables (exogenous and endogenous) and indicators as a basis for the conceptualization of a national guest satisfaction index.

1.5.5. Comparability of Results At Different Levels:

With regard to the benchmarking goal the results at the level of companies, industries and sectors (and even nations) should be comparable. Therefore, the structural model and the satisfaction drivers should be standardized as much as possible.

1.6. Guest Satisfaction Measurement Approaches:

Guest satisfaction constructs are concerned with describing the object of the satisfaction, i.e. *what* is the guest perceiving or from *what* is he/she deriving satisfaction. Currently, several guest satisfaction constructs exist, but as discussed
above they provide an eclectic and sometimes problematic basis for developing practical measurement techniques. The following section discusses three prevalent approaches, i.e. *attribute-based, process-based and incident-based approaches*, together with their influences on quality measurement.

1.6.1. Attribute-Based Approaches:

Attribute-based frameworks assume that quality consists of a series of sub-qualities, dimensions or aspects. In order to anticipate and capture guest requirements of complex offerings, attribute-type approaches aim to *break down* the guest’s perceptions in terms of a set of dimensions. Specifically they wish to extract those dimensions that play an important role in determining guests’ overall satisfaction with an offering. *Parasuraman et al. (1985)* present a comprehensive model of service quality, based upon previous contributions of *Sasser et al. (1978)*, *Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982)*, *Grönroos (1984)* and others. This “*gap-model*” specifies perceived quality as a function of four operational gaps (*positioning, specification, delivery and communication*) located in the service production cycle. These gaps contribute to a fifth, perceptual gap between expectation and perception, which represents the guest’s judgement of service quality.

*Parasuraman et al. (1988)* identified ten generic service quality dimensions along the four operational gaps through in-depth interviews with executives and focus groups with guests. These were subsequently compressed through factor analysis into five dimensions: *tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy*. These are claimed to be generic and applicable across all service offerings. However, despite the common definition of services as “*delivering benefits to guests through an action*” (*Bateson 1985, p. 5*), it is questionable whether general dimensions are equally valid across the various types of services. Is it really reasonable to relate services offered by shoe repairmen, politicians,
doctors, prostitutes, waiters and brokers to each other, in the name of “they don’t make things - they make things for you” (Silvestro and Johnston 1990, p. 206)?

Since its introduction in 1988, SERVQUAL has been used in hundreds of studies including numerous studies in the hospitality and tourism industries (Fick and Ritchie, 1991; Saleh and Ryan, 1991; Luk et al., 1993; Bojanic and Rosen, 1994; Lee and Hing, 1995; Ryan and Cliff, 1997). SERVQUAL was also used by Knutson et al. (1991) to create a lodging-specific instrument called LODGSERV which is a 26 item index designed to measure guest expectations for service quality in the hotel experience. LODGSERV, however, is not as popular among hospitality and tourism researchers as SERVQUAL and was used only in a limited number of studies (i.e. Patton et al., 1994; Ekinci et al., 1998).

But SERVQUAL has also been seriously criticized (Carman, 1990; Finn and Lamb, 1991; Babakus and Boller, 1992; Brown et al., 1993; Smith, 1995). The main criticisms of the model relate to the application of expectations and the gap scoring. First, the conceptualization of expectation as a comparison standard in the model is a difficult concept to quantify. Second, if the variables are difficult to quantify then, by implication, the gap score becomes that much less secure as a measurement. Third, some methodological issues arise. Finally, doubt has been expressed as to the universal quality of the dimensions. (Eckinci and Riley, 1998, p. 355)

One problem with applying these generic dimensions to the hospitality industry is that they collapse tangible aspects into one single category. In order to avoid this, tourism and hospitality researchers have developed several alternative and industry specific dimensional categories that would better fit the tourist or meal experience. For instance, Martin (1986) proposes procedural (system-related) and convivial (social) dimensions, Jones (1993) differentiates between three aspects: food and beverage, service attributes of staff, and the physical attributes of the restaurant.
environment. A similar break down can be traced in Nightingale (1985) and Collison and Turner (1988), who suggest a food-service-atmosphere model. Johnston et al. (1990) and Johnston (1996) suggest lists of twelve and eighteen dimensions that provide a more refined picture of service quality than the five generic dimensions. However, these industry-specific dimensional profiles are criticized as being too arbitrary, lacking both theoretical support and empirical confirmation (Johns et al. 1996).

Expectations are complex structures, based upon personal perceptions and cultural factors, which are difficult to quantify as comparison standards. Furthermore, they are unlikely to be formed in the same way as performance perceptions. Teas (1993) claims that the variations in dimensionality between individual expectations and perceptions are so large that it is not appropriate to use identical scale wordings to measure the perceptual gap directly. Cronin and Taylor (1994) suggest that performance alone is a more useful measure than performance-minus-expectations, arguing that actual experience and incidents have the largest influence on satisfactions. As the instrument rates service at a single point in time (post hoc), it cannot capture process aspects of services (Babakus and Boller 1992). The scale has been reassessed and refined (Parasuraman et al. 1991, Parasuraman et al. 1988), separating the screening of general expectations and actual perceptions, and changing the wording, but the conceptual problems remain unresolved. The universal applicability of the scale across all services has also been questioned, and it is demonstrated (Babakus and Boller 1992, Johns et al. 1998) that the dimensionality of service quality may depend on the type of offering under study.

A number of authors attempting to adopt SERVQUAL in tourism and hospitality studies also confirm that this instrument cannot be readily applied to all services. (e.g. Oberoi and Hales 1990, Knutson et al. 1991, Stevens et al. 1995) The latter two groups claim that a differentiated SERVQUAL questionnaire is an effective means of assessing accommodation or foodservice quality, but they had to alter the
original in significant ways. The five-factor pattern persistently failed in SERVQUAL replications (Fick and Ritchie 1991, Saleh and Ryan 1991, Johns and Tyas 1996). In a study of airline, hotel, restaurant and ski area services, Fick and Ritchie (1991) report several operational and methodological problems, and suggest that SERVQUAL may not be the most valid approach to defining the quality of service offerings in tourism, which are different from utilitarian transactions. Another tourism-related study (Saleh and Ryan 1991) criticizes SERVQUAL as being unable to capture conviviality, i.e. expressive performance, which is the essence of this type of service. Oberoi and Hales (1990) reconfirm that functional aspects influence guests' satisfaction of conference hotel services to the greatest extent, but at the same time find the five-dimension pattern problematic, as it collapses diverse tangible attributes into a single generic dimension.

Applications of SERVQUAL in contract catering (Johns and Tyas 1996), and restaurant services (Johns et al. 1996) fail to confirm not only the expected five-factor pattern, but also the dimensions proposed by other authors (e.g. Martin 1986, Khan 1982, Johnston et al. 1990). Johns et al. (1996) were unable to extract clear factors relating to the meal experience, although food and staff aspects seemed to be common to all the service offerings studied. The authors suggest that fundamental assumptions behind attribute-type approaches to service quality measurement may be inconsistent with the guest's more holistic and experiential impression of foodservice offerings (Johns and Tyas 1997).

Other techniques claim to define product attributes according to the guest's thinking and maintain that quality aspects may contribute to guest satisfaction in different ways. Bipolar evaluation structures originate from Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, suggesting that attributes can be divided into hygiene factors and motivating factors. Hygiene factors are only evaluated negatively, in cases where they were inadequate or missing, while motivating factors can be evaluated
both negatively and positively. This idea has been used by several authors to classify guests’ comments about received service (*Silvestro and Johnston 1990, Johnston 1995, Johnston and Heineke 1998*). These researchers identify service attributes as *satisfiers, dissatisfiers, criticals* or *neutrals* in relation to the guest’s experience and note that each quality attribute influences the global satisfaction of the offering in a different way.

This latter approach improves upon *SERVQUAL*-type approaches in the sense that it acknowledges the varying contributions of service aspects. However, it does not solve the practical problem of identifying common generalized service attributes. *Johnston’s (1995)* quality factors may affect individual perceptions in different ways, since an attribute may be a satisfier in one service experience, but a dissatisfier in another (*Johns and Howard 1998*). Hence, it can be argued that, however promising, this approach is difficult to adopt in hospitality operations practice.

1.6.2. Process-Based Approaches:

Process-based approaches aim to address the dynamism of lengthy service processes, which ideally should be monitored as they unfold (*Stauss and Weinlich 1997, Danaher and Mattsson 1994*). *Brown and Swartz (1989)* were the first to stress the temporal dimension of services, suggesting that the character of the process may play a greater role than that of the outcome in determining guests’ overall evaluations. Non-quantifiable functional or process-related dimensions may also influence perceived service quality to a much greater degree than standardisable, technical or outcome-related dimensions (*Brogowicz et al. 1990*). These authors propose a ‘synthesized’ model of quality that focuses on the gaps in the provision cycle (*Parasuraman et al. 1985*) as well as on the technical (*what*?), functional (*how*?) and organizational features of service (*Grönroos 1984*).
Process-based approaches may be particularly appropriate for addressing extended service experiences in tourism and hospitality, where the summation of all service encounters, rather than just one interaction, is thought to affect the guest’s evaluation (Danaher and Mattsson 1994). This thinking is also apparent in the net service quality model (Oberoi and Hales 1990), which includes guests’ comparative judgments of individual attributes as well as the cumulative effects of these judgments on overall satisfaction. The following section reviews studies that attempt to assess guests’ service quality perceptions from sequential guest evaluations evolving during service delivery processes.

In order to explore how guest evaluations are influenced by the structural content (complexity, duration and sequence) of extended deliveries, some authors (Danaher and Mattsson 1994, De Ruyter et al. 1997) take their point of departure in the service journey concept (Johns and Clark 1993), viewing the service experience as a journey through a series of distinctive events or encounters. Thus, the guest’s journey can be represented by a flowchart, indicating encounters with a few ‘main objects’ (Singh 1991) provided by the service system. Danaher and Mattsson (1994) describe service journey paths in hotels, using four ‘key’ service encounters (check-in, restaurant, hotel room and check-out), for which they measured cumulative guest satisfaction along three context-specific factors.

Instead of using atomistic, provider-based comparison standards (such as expectations of product attributes), Danaher and Mattsson and De Ruyter et al. apply intrinsic value dimensions based on Hartman’s (1967) axiological model. This model maintains that all human experience is assessed along three generic and comparable value dimensions. Mental matching processes between concrete (experienced) and abstract (inferred) properties may occur along emotional (E), practical (P) and logical (L) dimensions. Hartman proposes that these three value dimensions constitute a hierarchy with emotional values at the highest level (E>P>L). For example, the total evaluation of an offering includes gestalt feelings
and impressions (E), an appraisal of functionality, i.e. fitness for purpose (P) and rational judgements (e.g. correctness or value for money) (L). The advantage of these dimensions is that they are guest focused but, at the same time, can be related to provider attributes, such as functional/expressive factors (as E), technical/instrumental factors (as P) and sacrifice/cost factors (as L), respectively (cf. Swan and Combs 1976, Grönroos 1984, Bolton and Drew 1991, Zeithaml et al. 1988).

Mattsson and his colleagues report that different encounters in the service journey emphasize different quality factors and that satisfaction levels are influenced by both the nature and sequence of encounters, while the length of service processes seems to be less crucial. Despite the duration of the delivery process, the latest encounters always seem to determine overall satisfaction. Process-based approaches are arguably more appropriate for assessing the guest’s point of view, because they acknowledge the unequal importance of service episodes and aspects without applying long lists of provider-defined attributes to capture guest satisfaction. Furthermore, they are able to map extended service offerings as they unfold during the guest’s service journey.

1.6.3. Incident-Based Approaches:

Incident analysis is conceptually different from the two previous approaches to assessing guest defined service quality. Instead of making assumptions about the structure (attributes or stages) or process (i.e. involving some comparisons) of service perception, incident-based techniques are based on guests’ qualitative self-reporting of concrete service experiences. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) introduced to services marketing by Bitner et al. (1990) focuses on specific, abnormal service events. Instead of mapping guest perception of all service attributes, the CIT only examines service experiences with positive or negative outcomes (incidents) and aims to reveal underlying mechanisms, by analyzing the
behavioral and situational causes behind them. CIT has also been used to detect quality problems in hotel services and restaurants (Lockwood 1994). Incident-based techniques are held to provide a better picture of guest perceptions because they only capture quality aspects that are crucial for the guest.

However, traditional incident-based analyses have two major flaws. They only capture ‘critical’ episodes, thus guests’ evaluation of neutral situations and their effect on post consumption behaviour remain unknown. To avoid this, Stauss and Weinlich (1997) use an alternative “sequential incident technique” (SIT), which analyses non-critical episodes as well, during the entire period of service delivery. Another flaw of CIT may be that descriptive verbal accounts are difficult to standardize and cannot indicate the ways in which service is satisfactory or not satisfactory. Although Bitner et al. (1990) and Pieters et al. (1995) attempt to define dimensions by locating the causes and foci of critical incidents, these may be arbitrary for different guests, so the results are unlikely readily to suggest areas of operational improvement.

An alternative practical solution to some of the problems outlined above may be the Profile Accumulation Technique (PAT) (Johns and Lee-Ross 1996), which, like CIT is able to extract operational- and context-specific quality dimensions from verbal descriptions of guests. Using a free-response approach, Profile Accumulation collects guest perceptions of quality aspects and attributes by asking a few general and simple questions. The name of the technique refers to its ability to build up quantitative profiles of quality aspects as the number of responses increases. PAT has been applied successfully in hospitality operations (Johns and Lee-Ross 1996, Johns and Howard 1998), providing a relatively small number of quality aspects and attributes from a large verbal database, and hence immediate, relevant and precise information for proactive quality management.
In conclusion, all these approaches have their conceptual, operational and practical advantages and drawbacks, and the selection of measurement method should depend, first of all, on the particular characteristics of a specific product or service. In the case of integrated and extended offerings in hospitality it seems that a process-based approach may be most appropriate.

1.7. Overall Guest Satisfaction:

It is possible to say that satisfaction with a hospitality experience is a sum total of satisfactions with the individual elements or attributes of all the products and services that make up the experience. Though superficially the above statement makes sense, in reality the matter is more compounded. The question that we have to ask ourselves is whether when guests experience the attributes of the hospitality experience they form a set of independent impressions on each and compare those with the expectations of the same attributes. And, is the resultant overall level of satisfaction determined by the arithmetic sum total of these impressions? The answer to the above question is dependent on one’s belief about the process of guest choice. More specifically, it is related to whether one believes that guest choice behaviour could be explained by compensatory or non-compensatory models.

Non-weighted compensatory models presume that guests make trade-offs of one attribute for another in order to make a decision, i.e. a weakness in one attribute is compensated by strength in another. In a hotel stay example, if the guestroom was small and uncomfortable, but the service was good, the resultant overall satisfaction with the hotel experience might still be high; small and uncomfortable room was traded-off with good service, because both of them were of equal importance to the guest. Weighted compensatory models (sometimes referred to as expectancy-value models) also assume that people have a measurement of belief about the existence of an attribute, but that each attribute has an importance weight relative to other
attributes. Using this model in our previous example, we might conclude that because guestroom quality was rated higher in its relative importance than service was, the resultant overall satisfaction with the hotel experience will be dissatisfaction.

Non-compensatory models (no trade-offs of attributes) can take one of two forms: conjunctive or disjunctive. In conjunctive models guests establish a minimum acceptable level for each important product attribute and make a choice (or become satisfied) only if each attribute equals or exceeds the minimum level. In a restaurant example each of the three attributes of quality of food and beverage, quality of the service, and the ambiance of the restaurant will have to pass a threshold before overall satisfaction will occur. If ambiance did not pass this threshold, no matter how good the food and the service was, the result is overall dissatisfaction.

Disjunctive models are similar to conjunctive models, with one exception. Rather than establishing a minimum level on all-important attributes, in disjunctive models guests establish such levels only on one or a few attributes, e.g. the food in our restaurant example (Lewis and Chambers, 1989, p. 157). Research evidence conducted in tourism and hospitality enterprises (Mazursky, 1989; Cadotte and Turgeon, 1988) support the disjunctive models.

1.8. Attainment of Guest Delight:

The hotels now a days move from satisfaction to delight in an effort to obtain loyal customers and profitable operations. According to Patterson (1997) “guest delight involves going beyond satisfaction to delivering what can be best described as a pleasurable experience for the guest”. Delight therefore entails a stronger emotion and a different physiological state than satisfaction. Traditionally delight has been thought of a blend of joy and surprise (Kumar et al., 2001). However a recent study suggests that guests can be delighted without being surprised (Kumar et al., 2001).
Although joy remains an important element of delight, the study suggests that a greater number of people are exhilarated, thrilled and to a lesser extent exuberant (Kumar et al., 2001).

Whereas guest satisfaction entails delivering according to guest expectations, guest delight requires exceeding the expectations. Keinningham et al. (1999) propose that guests have a range of satisfaction referred to as the “zone of tolerance” and that going beyond the upper thresholds of such zone will produce guest delight.

Satisfied guests are not necessarily excited with a firm; they are merely at ease. Delighted guests on the other hand have greater appreciation for the firm and its services. Paul (2000) states that: Unfortunately, people don’t talk about adequate service. Instead, they tell anyone who will listen about really bad or really delightful services.

Paul concludes that delight is more likely to generate a positive word-of-mouth. Being satisfied with a firm’s product or services is not necessarily an expression of preference, nor rejection; it is simply an expression of acceptance. Delighting guests, therefore is about providing a service that is exceptional and stimulates guest preference towards a hotel.

When the guest is satisfied; the risk or danger is somewhat greater, since the competitor must be able to deliver a comparable experience. When the guest is delighted, the risk or danger associated with switching brands is very high, since they will expect the new property to meet and exceed their expectations. Thus the guest will have greater uncertainty whether the new choice will be able to deliver at this level; this will make the guest hesitate when faced with other choices.